

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

12th Year of Open Access

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 12, Issue - 5 (October 2021)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Conflicts and Perspectives of Kashmiri People in Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*

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Article History: Submitted-05/10/2021, Revised-20/10/2021, Accepted-22/10/2021, Published-31/10/2021.

Abstract:

Today, in modern period with the advent of science and technology, life has become much easier but mechanical. As we all know that there are two aspects of every situation so as the scientific inventions also have their pros and cons. These scientific inventions have unfortunately contributed in wars and violence. As time passes, we all witness conflicts, violence and wars in our lives. The tendency of violence increases due to social and political issues and problems. As a result, the moral and ethical values of human beings are decaying day by day. The impact of the war situation is really bad. It ruins everything including roads, houses, malls, temples, bridges etc. It also destroys manufacturing sectors, infrastructure, hospitals and school buildings and the victims of these are mostly children and youth. The children suffer a lot, during such kind of violence and conflicts and being the most vulnerable section of society get easily influenced by the enemies. Children are manipulated and used by them for various purposes such as- porters of food, messengers, planting bomb, spying and robbing etc. There are many countries where children are actively involved in armed conflict activities such as in-Brazil, Africa, Kashmir, Myanmar, Nigeria etc. The unsocial elements actively design a set up to use children for war crime. Many of them get involved in those activities at a very tender age. The impact of war is really terrible on the children; they get affected socially and psychologically. In Paro Anand's work *No Guns At My Son's Funeral*, the novel revolves around Baramulla in Kashmir also known as the heaven on

earth. Life in Kashmir is not easy due to constant violence. This paper attempts to present impact of war on the children of Kashmir.

Keywords: Rebellion, Psychological, Adolescence, Distinguish, Insurgency.

Introduction

Paro Anand is a distinguished writer of child fiction in India. She is an eminent author of children who writes about children, young adults and adult. She has written many books including plays, short-stories and novels. She won Bal Sahitya Academi Puraskar for her well known work *Wild Child and Other Stories* in 2017, that was republished with the new title *Like Smoke* (20 teens 20 stories). One of her acclaimed works is *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* and it has been translated into German and French. This book has been listed on IIBY (International Board on Books for Young People) honour list. She also works with Rajeev Gandhi foundation and other NGOs and schools. She has also worked with different children having different stories. Her novels contain real stories of real characters. Some of her stories are based on Hindu Muslim conflicts while some other works of her project the scenario of Kashmir. As we all know that Kashmir is known as the heaven on earth but, unfortunately, this heaven of India has lost its peace as there are constant incidents of war and violence. The two generations of Kashmir have witnessed in insurgency in Kashmir. The people of Kashmir are always terror stricken from terrorists and sudden attacks among them, the worst affected are children, the most vulnerable section of society. Due to such kind of disturbance in Kashmir, schools get closed anytime and hardly open throughout the year. Children love wooden gun toys and pick up political slogan before learning alphabets. During the festival time, extremely popular toy guns are designed for boys in form of AK-47 and AK-56. In such kind of an environment, children face many difficulties at very small ages; they suffer from various mental disorders such as anoxeria nervosa (a psychological and eating disorder), enuresis (bed wetting) etc. As a result of all this, Kashmiri boys are no more immune to constant violent environment. This constant violence affects them on psychological level and it is visible in their behavioural changes as well. The government should take some actions to overcome mental health disorders of children. Schools should appoint counselors to the help the children in dealing with their psychological issues. This paper tries to reflect some of the issues and suffering of children who face this kind of violent environment.

Adolescence is that transition phase in the lives of children where they are neither in the category of a child nor that of an adult. There are frequent changes (hormonal and puberty) in their physical and behavioural attitudes and these changes are reflected in their duties, responsibilities and relationships with others. Under these conditions, their attitude entirely changes towards self, parents, friends and relatives. The term, Adolescence, is derived from the Latin word ‘adolescere’ which means “to grow” and “to grow to maturity”. Adolescence has its broader meaning in today’s scenario as it includes mental, emotional, social and physical maturity. It is further divided into early and later period of adolescence. In the recent studies, the later adolescent period has more rapid changes than early period of adolescent age. Early adolescence period is quite different from the later one. Early adolescence begins with individual sexual maturity and it reaches to legal maturity in later part of adolescence. This is the most tender age of children where they could easily get influenced by anything. So this vulnerable section of our society needs to be taken care of. In Paro Anand’s novel *No Guns At My son’s funeral* the life of an adolescence boy Aftab in Kashmir is vividly portrayed.

In the novel, *No Guns At My Son’s Funeral*, Aftab loves his motherland Kashmir but since he witnesses lot of bloodshed, violence, bomb blast and deaths. As a result of all this, without realizing the consequences he himself joins a terrorist group. His mother adores him and can easily notice that he is being manipulated by someone. She warns her son several times, portrays the real picture of Kashmiri people especially for young boys and girls. But Aftab is lost in his visions and ignores her suggestions. He sometimes sneaks out from his house to attend the meetings. Most of the time when he arrived late in these meetings, people cracked jokes such as, “Arre, ma ke lal, phir ma kee phiran mein m phas gaya kya?- Still mama’s precious little darling?”(1-2). Due to this, he feels bullied and humiliated every time. Akram, who is a good manipulator, is a leader of his group and can control the situation and knows how to deal with people well. He is not a Kashmiri; he has come across the border. Paro Annad projects the thoughts of different teenagers who unfortunately get involved in terrorist activities, these young boys are always willing to sacrifice their lives for their motherland Kashmir and feel themselves as a freedom fighter or liberators. Aftab as a teenage boy is energetic, enthusiastic and courageous and has respect for his motherland. He believes that Akram could give them a free nation where there would be no place for violence and conflicts and Kashmiri people could live in peaceful environment where they join their worn wings again. Aftab gradually develops interest to attend such kinds of meetings, planning and

plottings. Paro Anand describes Aftab's fascination and compares him to the actor Hrithik Roshan in Fiza – "Ak-47 in his powerful arms, muscles ripping, jaw clenched" (5). Aftab's mother keeps on telling him about atankvadis and their ill intentions. She also informs him that they could use anyone to fulfill their plans. She further says, "They've ruined their homeland and now they're hell-bent on destroying our beautiful valley, our jannat" (17). They doesn't have imaan, religion and roots.

Anand describes Aftab as a Kashmiri boy who belongs to a very simple family. His father is an honest school teacher and mother is a decent house wife. Innocent Aftab could not discover the true nature of Akram. Aftab wants to break all his relation and remember only one name that is 'AKRAM'. Aftab has only one dream to make his hero (Akram) proud and so he gradually started ignoring ill things against him. This paper throws light on how teenagers are misguided and easily get influenced, lose their own visions and follow their master blindly. Javed, Imran, Aftab, Feroze and Shazia they all are diverted by Akram. According to G.S. Hall, Adolescence is a period of heightened 'storm and stress'. We can observe that all teenage characters are facing their internal storm throughout the novel. Anand tries to project their perspectives in the novel. Like Aftab sneaks out from his house for his motherland Kashmir, he thinks his team could give us freedom. As a result, his mind is trained psychologically; he is taking advantages of his opponents. Aftab starts playing double roles in his active life. During day time he is an innocent boy who is plays cricket with his friends and during night, he becomes an activist. This paper also reflects the love and affection of elders, for example, in the novel, when Aftab visits Lalaji's shop with Akram, Lalaji tries to hide the reality and says, "Alone, saab... he was alone. Who would keep company with such a rogue?" (36). Moreover, Lalaji threatened his helper, held his arm tightly and instructed him not to speak anything in front of police about Aftab. Major Ramneeq, who has been handed over the case, doubts on the conscious behavior of helper. He wanted to know something more from them as "His instinct told him that something was not quite right. 'You're sure he was alone!' he asked again" (37). Lalaji tried to convince Major and said, "We all hate these foreigners who have made our lives a living hell" (37). Major was not convinced by the half-truth of both and he went from there.

Adolescence is an age of anxiety and confusion; where sometimes children become aggressive and violent. They only want freedom and social acceptance. Novelist highlights all

these issues in the present paper. A teenage Aftab also wants his family support and love because he considers himself as a freedom fighter. He becomes violent and aggressive when his Ammi tells ill things against Akram as is clear in the novel, “Why couldn’t she mind her own business? Besides, how was it that she got to know too much? She was in the house all day long”(13). And after attending his meeting with Akram in Lalaji’s shop, he was ordered Aftab to go home and wait for his further instructions. Aftab’s hold his breath, both legs are shaking but he tries to make it steady. Further, the whole family is worried due to the presence of the army and Major and Aftab is caught by them at his home. Aftab becomes confused and narrates a fake story, “The ‘f-Firangi’, Aftab shuddered with self- hate at what he was doing, at the hated word that he used now to describe his mentor”(43). It is painful for Aftab to lie against his Akram Bhai. His heart is crying and says numerous time – ‘Akram Bhai , Akram Bhai, I’m sorry’(46).

In the present novel, Anand projects teenager Shazia who is clever and bold and knows well to handle difficult situations. She secretly gets involved in terrorist activities. She instructs Aftab what to say in front of army and Major, without using his own mind and so Aftab narrates the fake story. He tells Major that he was forced to meet Firangi in order to save his sister (Apa). He said that as his Apa is beautiful and was continuously watched by Firangi. So, he had to meet him to fix the deal and save his sister from that traitor. Shazia is really sharp and smart; she admits her relationship with Akram. She loves her beloved Akram and her younger brother Aftab. She is broken into the pieces when she finds her little brother dead because of Akram as she says, “ Oh Aftab, Aftab, my brother. I’m sorry. I’m sorry that I let you go alone”(167). Shazia blindly loves Akram but apparently, he is playing with her for his dirty mission, she realizes these things after losing both (Aftab and Akram). She hides her pregnancy from Akram ; she punches her belly and couldn’t bear the voice of mourning of the families of the deceased persons. She finally decides that her baby would not choose the path of violence and war. She only wants peace and calm.

This paper also reflects the dark experiences of Akram. When he was in his adolescent age, he left his own family and got involved in terrorist activities. Akram searches for his own identity from his adolescent period. He wants to become famous but unfortunately his own militant group throws him out. Akram hides himself in a secret place after the incident in Lalaji’s shop. Akram feels safe but somewhere also feels worried as he was with Aftab. Aftab is a local boy and

could be easily found by the police. Although Akram has full faith in Aftab; he is loyal and honest. Akram tries to sleep throughout the night but his unconscious thoughts have become conscious after that incident. He closes his eyes and gets lost in his thoughts of his past where he wore a militant outfit. During his adolescent period, Akram was young, enthusiastic and full of passion but he had only one credit to his fame that of rescuing Feroze. He wanted to become a known person and there were constant changes in his behavior. His impatient behavior and restlessness were not noticed by his group of militants. His mind gradually becomes unkind and cruel towards human beings. He condemns to death many innocent people specially women and children. Akram himself has been humiliated by militants, slapped by them and hit hard on his mouth and nose. He could not forget the word 'Coward' and he feels humiliated and shameful and his eyes get tears. He loses his second home too and then he forms his new group, Kashmir Azadi Group or KAG. Akram has always fought all his battles but this time his mind controls and gives him instructions about the danger. His mind murmurs to him "Let the boys do the fighting now. Let the boys do it" (71). He doesn't have strength to fight but this time he is not alone, he has a team who will fight for him with good strategy. Then people would want to know him and regret on themselves. They might think "If only he was a part of our team. Our I a part of his" (72). And then his aim is fulfilled to give him a good lesson.

The novelist also highlights the issue of identity crisis in all the teenage characters. For example, Aftab is ready to die for his motherland; he wants to make everyone feel proud. The other character, Feroze left his home when he was only nine and sacrifices his life for his team. Javed and Imran are part of Akram's team but after his disappearance, join the other group and plan IED blast to become famous.

This novel also depicts the psychological changes in almost all the teenage characters. Aftab is depressed and feels as if everything is finished for him so his morning becomes dark and gloomy. Aftab's best friend, Angad, told him about his neighbor, Laxman Kachru, who recently leaves Kashmir with his family. Unfortunately, Sonu's mother is no more; his car has been blasted by IED, as it passed near the cantonment area. It is really horrible and scary for Aftab, he thinks who could be behind all this; that planned these terrorist activities, if Akram is planning all this then Aftab could stop him because he is now worried for his own family and friends. Aftab knows that there are various groups in Kashmir who often operate these terrorist activities. Aftab wants

to find out the real culprit and inform Akram. Apparently, Feroze is completely broken after the sudden disappearance of Akram. He is confused and suspicious about IED's blast near contentment area in the last few days in Kashmir. He thinks that Akram could not be behind all this because it is not his style. He always makes big plans with great impact. Feroze is sure that these activities have been done by known persons and has doubt on Javed and Imran. Feroze feels extremely angry because they have been trained under the guidance of him and Akram and now those gadders have joined the other group. Meanwhile, Army investigates that hillside area. The Major suspects Aftab after the incident of garden and orders him to sit next to militant (Feroze) in the military jeep. He wants to find out the connection between them and also notices how Aftab holds Feroz's shaking hand. Suddenly, everyone hear the loud sound of blast and look at the smiling face of Major who says with pride that we have done it. After all this, Aftab faints and when he regains his consciousness, he finds himself at his home. This paper also reflects the love and attention of parents towards their children. The present novel depicts the helplessness of parents who try their level best to protect their children from various problems. Aftab's Ammi is extremely concerned about him but decides to ask about the incident later.

This paper also shows the critical and pathetic condition of Kashmiri Hindus. It is clear when Aftab receives a letter from his friend, Laxman kachru, who had to leave Kashmir with his family. He informs him about his sudden decision to leave his home town. Since they are Kashmiri Pandits so are no more allowed to stay in Kashmir. He further informs Aftab that according to militants, they are refugees and plant bomb so they do not have right to live in Kashmir. The condition of Kashmiri Hindus are not good, they are forced to leave their homes. Therefore, he warns Aftab to be aware of them because they look like us but, gradually try to cut our roots.

Akram finally executes his plan with Shazia and Aftab, he does not rescue Feroze, rather, gives him poison to fulfill his mission. Shazia can use woman's charm on the guards as Akram says in the novel, "She's a woman and a beautiful one," a pause for an endearing, persuasive smile, "She has a woman's weapons, no one can say no" (130). These teenage characters are always ready to die anytime as Feroze learns about the truth of poisoned sweet and he accepts to die by having Akram's sweet rather than getting torturous punishment and may be death by the army. He further says, "Tell Akram Bhai I'll wait for him in jannat but not to hurry there" (141). And the next morning, the rumors of Feroze's death comes in every newspaper, either he was killed by his

own group or was probably encountered. Shazia wants to meet Akram for further plans but she finds nothing except some pieces of paper with instructions, "11:30 tonight Aftab was ALONE" (149). Now she is worried for Aftab because they are moving for their big mission, Aftab reaches Lalaji's shop with his school bag and that place is decorated for the marriage ceremony of Manpreet Singh's daughter. There is a big crowd and meanwhile, Police jeep arrives with a body that belongs to Akram who killed himself in the self-planned blast. Aftab feels shattered, he just wants to listen from Akram, 'Shabash' again and again but his hero is no more and so he pressed the button as instructed by Akram. There are many people around him, such as- his friend Angad, Lalaji, Manpreet Singh's family and his relatives; everyone gets vanished in just a single second. Aftab's mother feels ashamed because his son is responsible for all these things. Some females become widows, few of them lose their whole family; mothers were cried for losing their sons. Aftab was just a fourteen-year teenager, innocent and pure but was misguided by Akram. His mother bitterly cried for her son but could not face anyone as somewhere she felt guilty. The military men while paying their gratitude to the innocent people drew their weapons next to the bodies but suddenly Aftab's mother cried and said loudly, "No! There will be no guns. There will be no guns at my son's funeral" (169). Thus, the pathetic condition of people in Kashmir has been vividly presented in the novel.

In the present scenario, Kashmir always come-up with war headlines such as terrorist attacks, violence and bomb blasts, and such kind of violence disturb their daily life. Although Kashmir is known as a paradise on the earth but, unfortunately this place is constantly under the terror of jihadis and terrorists. The Kashmiri children are continuously used by firangis or terrorist (atankvadis) for their foul purposes. Children are involved in various activities like stone pelting, bomb planting. Generally, they lure boys for money and martial art's training and girls are influenced to become their brides or sex slaves. Children are the future of any nation but, Kashmiri children are affected by the terror situation and at times, knowingly or unknowingly, get involved with terrorists and their activities and sometimes, also lose their lives. They are easy targets for terrorist and are exploited and manipulated by them for their negative objectives. Children must be aware of these war activities and its outcome. As there should be a proper training for all this, so it has been started in homes and schools. The school curriculum requires certain changes for the early awareness of children towards such activities and environment so that they could gradually mould themselves into sensible and responsible citizens. Today, people of Kashmir do

not feel safe for their children as their houses are being raided even during nights and their boys are taken away and girls are molested. The present government is paying attention on these problems so citizens of Kashmir can also live a normal life. Now Kashmir has been taken under presidential order. We hope that we could enjoy in the paradise of India at the earliest.

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