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The Politics of Historical Consciousness in Dystopian Homeland: A Critical Overview on Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*

Pritam Basak

JRF Ph.D. Scholar,
Department of English and Modern European Languages,
University of Lucknow.

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Abstract:

This paper engages in the discussion of the Kashmir Insurgency through the lens of Historical Consciousness and Memory-history. It features how the memory of the past is the driving force to revisit the insurgency to retrieve and restore it in the memoir. It sets against the backdrop of socio-cultural-political-religious and psychological phenomena. Therefore, there operates the multidimensional forces like militant forces, militia-militant forces, and religious forces behind the exodus. It drives the narration from present to past to present, drawing space for the prospect. Ultimately, all actions and reactions presented in the narratives are vehicled through memories in memoirs like *The Garden of Solitude* (2010). It chronicles the picture of the imperialistic exploitation of Kashmiri Pandits, expressed in the collective experience of mass exodus, strikes, conflicts, spatial displacement, alienation, abuses, refugeehood, and identity crisis. It also highlights the tragedy of dehumanization. It does not shed the democratic decadence. It also unveils the historicity of particular upheaval situations and the hidden religiosity. It captures not only the socio-political turmoil but also the religious-psycho dynamic demography. Through it, history becomes an emotion embedded universally over time-immemorial. Thereby, it de-historicizes history and settles the memory of history.

Keywords: Kashmir Insurgency, Dystopia, Historical Consciousness, Memory-History.

Introduction:

It seems to be disagreeable that history is archived not only in the books of history but also in literary narratives. For, Hayden White in his pioneering essay "The Historical Text as

Literary Artifact” (1974) dismisses the closed definition of history, that is, it is the record of the past. Instead, he argues that anything (including history) written in language becomes part of literary artefacts. Therefore, history is a fictional entity. This deconstructive idea of history is followed by the multidimensional area of studies, such as memory studies, which include the metaphysical discussion of history. Through this, history move one forward, proclaiming that it is a transcendental entity. Stephanie Levesque, a Canadian historian, talks about two different ways of apprehending history: 'memory history' and 'disciplinary history.' Memory history is marked as a matter of transmitting historical knowledge. It becomes intergenerational and maintains the spatial trans-locational.

The general idea of Historical Consciousness is the temporal link between the past, present, and future. In 1979, the German historian Karl-Ernst Jeissman defined historical consciousness as a notion that '[incorporates] the connection between the interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future” (Jeissman 40–42). It also explores the intersection of private and public narratives. This consciousness is further manifested in three ways: a) Narratives, b) use of history on an individual level, and c) historical culture on the societal level. Jörn Rüsen, one of the most prolific historians, defined historical consciousness as making sense of the past. It is the sense where the “past is interpreted for the sake of understanding the present and anticipating the future” (Rusen 45-7). His typology of this consciousness serves as four methodological narratives of history: First, a traditional narration makes use of history to maintain or uphold tradition; secondly, An exemplary narration uses history to generate rules of conduct; thirdly, the critical narration uses the historical example to criticize historical and contemporary societies and cultures; fourthly, the genetic history is used to explain continuity and change in historical and contemporary societies and cultures (Rüsen 52-54). The very past is movable in its action and adequate sensitization. Its impact sensitizes the present to bricolage the future. It is used for sense-making and identity formation. This typology of historical consciousness corresponds with Lévesque's idea of memory-history.

The idea of this consciousness is formed and contextualized on different grounds, such as socio-political turmoils, slavery, colonization, hegemonic religious conflicts, and boundary discourses. Kashmir Insurgency, which took place during the 1980s and 90s, is one such space that preserves its liminal history through its ground-rooted authors. Those who have experienced

the tragic incident bring up artistic crafts such as memoirs and autobiographies. Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2010) is one such memoir that unfolds the picaresque picture of Insurgency and its generational prevalence. Sridhar, a representative of the third generation victim, narrates his story curved by two subsequent generational stories - the deadly story of grandfather Mahanandju and the traumatic story of father Lasa. These stories are symbolic because 'Grandfather' stands for the past, Father stands for the present, and Sridhar for the future. They are tied up in one traumatic history by memory. Their shared disappointment recalls Kierkegaard's philosophy of anxiety. He also believes, "the more consciousness [of despair], the more intense the despair" (Watts 179).

The history of the Kashmiri Insurgency lays bare the collective consciousness of humanitarianism represented in *The Garden of Solitude*. It records that there existed a golden past. Two communities such as majority Muslim and minority Hindu was having a tight bond. One became the part and parcel of another. For instance, the friendship of Lasa and Ali celebrated Kashmiriyat, that is, the union of the diverse religious community in Kashmir. They participated in each other's occasions, used languages, and ate food. They celebrated the perfect brotherhood and togetherness, what was once upon a time a call for the country by Mahatma Gandhi, the leader and path-maker of Independence. Their celebration for equality is equated with the motto of the French Revolution held during 1789-94- "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". Even in separation, their intimacy vehicles through the epistles-

Ali: Our Kashmir is no longer the paradise on earth. The smile on the face of a poor Kashmiri is false. Kashmir without the Pandits is no Kashmir. (139)

Lasa: We yearn for our homeland but will not return. Longing and nostalgia will keep us sane and rooted. (140)

The chain of internal bonds breaks as the atrocity of communalism flights high. Government interference and the militant clash plant the seed of inhumanity that sprouts relentlessly. The murder of militants infuriates them more and more. As a result, abuses, strikes, curfews, and massacres are common spectacles. The face-to-face conflict happened to be a witness to the socio-political turmoil. "This is how militants are interrogated by the military,"

Tulmul's father said. "You need to be careful in future. Never go inside the military area. The military has special powers here" (99).

The militant-militia conflict enlarges itself. Qazi, a Muslim neighbour, repents that everyone in our community is suspected of terrorism and slaughtered mercilessly by militia (104). Qazi informs Lasa that they are considered the cause of their futile situation and Hindu migration. As a consequence, doubt is forcefully poured in the majority of Muslims who start disbelieving their Hindu friends, suspecting them as Infidel or betrayals or the informer of the Indian military. This lets them disassociate themselves and sign in to the separatist group. They demand conversion into their religion or a new land of their own. For this purpose, they impose more power and threat. The age-old bond is now either smashed down unwillingly or loosened by itself. Kidnapping and murdering Pandits grow up. Minority Hindu Pandits realize that pretension harbours their opponent. An old man states:

There was no beauty at all. It was a wretched darkness. Pandits were living on borrowed time. This had to happen one day. There was no trust between the Pandits and the Muslims; only pretence. Exile has always been our destiny. I lost my old house ages ago, but I gained my freedom outside Kashmir. (75)

Their situation gets out of control. They are helpless and suffer from an existential crisis. They feel agitated for the militant. Fear and nightmare consume their thoughts. Therefore, expulsion from their land is their ultimate destiny. Subsequently, They exile as they are the victim of discrimination. Prem Nath speaks: "We are exploited in our own country. The people who we trusted drove us away from our land, and this land will drive us mad. We are victims of discrimination" (84). The Muslims are accused of all discrimination and expulsion. Qazi on behalf of Muslims, tries to convince them that without Hindu friends there is no Kashmir. It is only a barren land. Lasa in a reply agrees and consoles Qazi by the speech - "one day there will be freedom for us, freedom from slavish mentality. Not for our generation. Perhaps, for generations to come! Till that time, let us pretend to be happy. Let us smile and rejoice" (107).

Besides socio-political upheavals, it has psychological ground rooted in the exiled life. It leaves their life in an uncertain condition where adjustment to the changes in food, language, and culture is chaotic. They thought that migrating to another place would bring a utopian career

and liberation. However, all hopes get ashed. Despair and loneliness are all-pervasive. They feel alienated and displaced. They are cursed by the identity crisis. Lasa's letter to Sridhar makes him aware—"the migrants 'tomorrow' bring no hope and 'today' is a burden weighing heavy on the souls... A community is on the verge of extinction... Our identity is imprisoned in a ration card. This should change, or else we will be forgotten forever" (124).

The only way left to express themselves is none other than memory. It helps them to revisit the past, which was a metropolitan space. "This is our end. We have only the past to seek refuge in" (65), Lasa laments. It also relieves them of the cultural plus collective consciousness. An individual becomes part of the collective group. Past reappears in the present. They get victimized by the possessive memory of that traumatic night—"To be traumatized is to be possessed by an image" (Caruth 4-5). They recall the great histories of exodus such as the Holocaust, Partition, Tibetan Lamas, and so on. The historical repetition of exiled history seems as if historical cultures themselves are retrospective, repetitive, and associative. Peter Aronsson, the Swedish historian, notes that historical culture is "the artifacts, rituals, customs, and assertions concerning the past that offer manifest possibilities to connect the relation between past, present, and future" (Aronsson 189).

The interchangeable temporal vision runs 'multi-chronological' (Ammert 56). Sridhar's American cab driver recalls him of Kashmir once again, which was once his belonging and the buried place of countless memories such as his grandfather's grave (145). With memories, he sets out his journey back to India where he suddenly has met with Dr. Zadoo, who activates him saying—"You must not be silent Sridhar. You must not let the memory fade. Don't think of Kashmir as a beautiful valley. Think of it as a drop of your ancestral blood; remember that our community went through genocide; remember that we were uprooted from our homes and made to wilt in an unfamiliar land in our own country. You must try to rediscover and regain what you lost" (148). His memory of loss is also balanced by his Muslim school friends, who couple together. The hope of 'becoming' the same paradise installs in his mind. One friend Shabeer optimizes him by mentioning the fact that Kashmir will become an 'Independent country', which will occupy its constitution indifferent to India and Pakistan. He adds that it will be a Kashmir in which Muslims and Pandits will live in harmony like before" (121). This voice of free Kashmir is reechoed in the social gatherings of four friends such as Sridhar, Nagraj, Faud, and Gowhar.

They are communicating about independence where they can resettle their inhabitation and cherish the rest of their life collaboratively. But the illusion of freedom demotivates them-

Sridhar: There is no hope Gowhar. We are the last of our generation to have lived in Kashmir with Kashmiri Muslims as our friends and neighbours.

Gowhar: Real stories will never die. (179)

Living in that dilemma of hope and despair, memory exalts him day by day. He contemplates that after these fifteen years of passing, the situation in Kashmir may have changed look. It is peaceful. In quest of an answer, he comes in contact at last with an old man, his grandfather's friend, who cools his fire down with a futuristic vision- 'I know the Pandits will return to their homes soon (183). Thus, till the penultimate point of the story, it weaves the temporal history multi-chronically through their hegemonic and intertwined memories of the trauma event.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, it sums up that through this memoir the historical consciousness of the Kashmir insurgency is remoulded by the tangibility of memories of different characters. Through this diachronic nature of memories, we encounter the polyphonic voices of history. Within their consciousness, memories of such tragedy are irremovable. Therefore, the self gets fragmented. The only thing that keeps them alive is the hope to return. In such a situation, though forgetfulness invades us over the due course of time, the 'chunking in'(associating subjects) of memory inspires us to revisit and recreate. Sridhar comments- "Soon, we all will forget. Forgetfulness will invade everyone. Collective amnesia will lead to permanent vacuity of the mind" (149). Thus, the history of one individual becomes the history of a community through shared memories, memorization and story-telling. Halbwachs (1992) calls collective memory a 'socially mediated' one. He also extends that collective memory made of collective history forms the collective identity. Pierre Nora (1989), a French historian and philosopher, agrees that the non-linear pattern of memory challenges the fixity of history and strengthens temporality. Rothberg and Yildiz (2011) propose that memory has operated as 'ethnic property' in the multidirectional archives of Migrant discourse. Thus, this memoir presents itself as a perfect blend of history and memory where national identity, though terminated by political and

religious influences, maintains its essence of what Ian Maclonich terms 'Temporal Immortality' (Seixas 68). It exemplifies a perfect interfusion of Belonging (Past), Longing (Present), and Becoming (Future).

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