

Listening to the Voices of the Displaced: A Study of Paro Anand's *Nomad's Land*

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Abstract:

The troubling issues of terrorism, war, communal hatred, genocide, religious conflict and the massacre have been a matter of concern in literature. These issues usually occur in the name of terrorism and religion, resulting in displacement, trauma, mental and emotional turmoil among individuals irrespective of their age. Authorities as circumstances force people to leave their places creating displacement. It is often an effect of socio-political or ethno-religious conflict. Paro Anand, a very prominent voice in children's literature and young adult literature often deals with these disturbing issues but from the perspectives of young individuals. The young adult fiction is chosen for close textual reading to examine the experiences of young adults after the traumatic experience of displacement from the perspectives of two young girls, Shanna and Pema. This research paper deliberates on Paro Anand's fictional work *Nomad's Land* which records the actual event of Kashmir Hindu Exodus and tries to examine how displacement moves and impacts adolescent characters and affects their mental and emotional health.

Keywords: Paro Anand, *Nomad's Land*, Childhood, Displacement, Trauma, Kashmir, Young Adult Literature.

I

Introduction

Kashmir has a history of militancy, which arises from various socio-political causes. Literature serves as a powerful medium actively engaging with a region's historical events. *Nomad's Land* (2020) is an important young adult novel by Paro Anand. She beautifully portrays the pain of displacement, conflict and also resilience in this work. The main themes of the novel are displacement, belonging, self-identification, trauma, and hope. She narrates the overlooked experiences of young individuals growing up in a war-affected environment. Their daily lives suffer from violence, grief, and uncertainty. Anand portrays harsh social realities with a courageous yet empathetic approach in this novel. The literary work highlights the fragility of innocence when confronted with violence. The traumatic experience of the past overlaps a young individual's present and future. Alan Robinson (2011) introduces the concept of the "the present past"(4) and argues that "at any given moment several dimensions of time coexist in present consciousness"(4).

Though the theme of displacement has been explored by many authors in Indian writing in English but from the perspectives of adults. The works of V.S. Naipaul (*A House of Mr. Biswas*, 1961), Salman Rushdie (*Midnight Children's* 1981 and *The Satanic Verses* 1988), Anita Desai (*Bye Bye Black Bird* 1971 and *Fasting Feasting* 1999), Amitav Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*,1988, and *The Hungry Tide* 2004), Bharati Mukherjee (*Wife*,1975 and *Jasmine*,1989), Kiran Desai (*The Inheritance of Loss*, 2006), each exploring displacement through nuanced narrative. Paro Anand has earned name and fame for writing children and young adults who have been stuck in difficult circumstances. Her works like *No Guns at my Son's Funeral* (2025), *Weed* (2008), and *Nomad's*

Land (2020) deal with the troubling issue of violence in Kashmir and its devastating impact on the psyche of the children and young adults.

Anand's *Nomad's land* talks about two ethnic groups: the Kashmiri Pandit community, who left the valley in the late 1980s because of terrorist violence that often targeted them, and the Qhushvaha people, who lived in the higher plateaus and were compelled to leave their homeland because of political unrest. Shanna from the Kashmiri Pandit community contrast with Pema, who belongs to the Qhushavans community. Pema wants to relieve her old grandmother, or Mola, of her agonising cough and let her die by an old tradition called "breathtaking." Shanna gets involved in this endeavour because a family member from Pema's family could not do this. Shanna realises that they all have a cough caused by pollution in the big city they had to move to. Shanna and Pema contemplate returning to Kashmir to gether herbs and roots from the higher Himalayas for Nanaji's medicines. These young protagonists, Shanna and Pema, work to make the society better in different ways by the end of the story.

In an interview with Deepa Alexander for the newspaper *The Hindu*, Paro Anand says:

“There are not many Indian plays that the kids or I wanted to do. Most were Western scripts. If Indian, they were drawn from the Mahabharata or Panchatantra with stories that often did not connect. So I started writing plays. Most literature for children is escapist, which is fun, but there is also a need for truth, a need to represent young people who are not represented or under-represented. It empowers children to find a commonality. So I wrote consciously on hard topics, always ending on an upswing; young people have the ability to be instruments of change” (Alexander).

Displacement and trauma share a complex and intricate relationship. The pain of uprooted communities results in traumatic experiences. Displacement overshadows the present because it carries the past with it. It brings with itself unresolved trauma, which dictates future actions and relationships of the characters.

Paro Anand depicts displacement as a serious social and psychological state that affects people's identities, memories, and connections. The novel brings to the forefront two young characters, Shanna and Pema, whose lives are drastically altered by the forced exile from their original places. Shanna, a Kashmiri Pandit, is uprooted by the political violence in Kashmir, which makes her family leave their home forever and live as strangers in a new place. The girl's displacement cuts off her emotional connection to the land, causing her to have a persistent feeling of loss and homelessness. Through the character of Shanna, Anand depicts how removal from one's native land leads to loss of culture and feelings scattered over a large area, particularly in the case of young children who are forced to grow up with the painful memories of a place which they can never visit again.

The character of Pema represents the Qhushavans race, which is not a historical race or tribe but a symbol of the displaced, oppressed, and culturally erased nomadic and indigenous groups in India and other parts of the world. Through the story of the Qushvahans, Anand portrays real human experiences like losing land, forced settlement, and identity crisis—without locking the story to one particular group, thus making the issue more massive and universal. The author creates a language for the unique chants and rituals performed at the deathbed of a member of the Qhushavan's community. She makes Pema the "Everyman of Nomad's Land." Pema's story of displacement is symbolic of the history of and the structural process of the marginalisation of the nomadic communities. Pema, unlike Shanna, is not ripped off her land all at once and with

violence. Rather, her displacement is gradual but just as terrible. The entire tribe is eventually forced to surrender their wandering lifestyle and relocate to an urban area devoid of the basic rights and respect they once enjoyed. The forced migration results in a decline of traditional practices, social structures, and collective identity, thus making the process of displacement a never-ending state of confusion.

The novel deals with the lives of two young girls who come from displaced communities, Shanna is a Kashmiri Pandit who deals with the aftermath of a violent act as she is directly affected by it. Pema belongs to a nomadic tribe whose people called the high mountains beyond India their home as she is born in the city so she is not directly affected by this traumatic experience of displacement but she finds it very troublesome that the people around her cling to the old customs and traditions. Anand takes the example of Pema to show that the displaced people are made to change their ways in order to fit in the place while their cultural heritage is being looked down upon. The pairing of Shanna and Pema in the author's work illustrates the idea that displacement is a universal human. Paro tries to show how courageous and vibrant young people can resolve their issues in their own lives. The storyline develops into the major political and social dynamics of Kashmir and other conflict regions. Anand defies the rules of war novels by making children the central characters of the book. She emphasizes the need to heed the voices of children, who are often the most vulnerable.

II

The psychological and emotional reaction to an upsetting incident is known as trauma. It always leaves a profound effect on the life of a person and changes an individual's perspective on life and the outside world. The traumatic experience of displacement is an injury to a person's psyche. It leaves a deep imprint on the person's mind. The event that leads to trauma does not affect the

individual immediately instead the effects are seen much later. Cathy Caruth, in her groundbreaking work *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), defines trauma as “ In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other uncontrolled phenomenon” (11). Paro Anand always tries to bring in socio- political conditions of her time in her works. The writer has focused on the devastating impact of displacement and its traumatic impact on the lives of young children. In *Nomad's Land*, Paro Anand sensitively depicts trauma as a long-term psychological and emotional condition rather than a single moment of pain. The novel tells the story of trauma through displacement that comes from political violence and social marginalisation, and how the loss of home affects the young people's identity and belonging.

Socio-cultural forces beyond their control displace young adult highlighting the trauma of this experience. Each moment of displacement shows as simple geographic removal but is intensifies the trauma and leaves profound social-emotional effects. The text of the novel highlights that these two young girls Shanna and Pema are from displaced communities. Circumstances force their families to abandon their original communities and relocate elsewhere. The action of forced movement impacts characters differently but each character appears to understand their own identity in response to their displacement, as well as experiencing moments of resistance.

Shanna gets first-hand experience of displacement. She is a Kashmiri Pandit and her father does not want to leave Kashmir at the time of conflict as he shares a deep connection with this place called Kashmir, his homeland. But when his shop is bomb-attacked and he is killed, Shanna and her mother have to leave this place so she is the direct victim of this violence. The author states

about these two girls, “These were girls of forever skies and snow-clad mountains, yes, but that was long ago. One remembered it. Some of the time. Although she tried but not to” (Anand 3).

Pema is not the direct victim of this violence, as her family was forced to leave their homeland before the Pema born. As the novelist says, “ The other girl had no memory of her homeland. For she was born after her family had fled their homeland. When the genocide began. She was born in this ‘foreign land’ and only knew of ‘ home’ from the memories of her mother and others” (Anand 4).

Shanna forced to left Kashmir after the terrorist attack, which took life of her father. She is the one who represents the trauma of sudden violence and an irreversible loss. Her grief does not only come out in the open but also through fear, silence, and emotional withdrawal, indicating the presence of the traumatic experience in a person's life. Shanna's trauma experience runs parallel to that of Pema, whose trauma is rather cultural dislocation than a single violent event that takes place in a non-violent way.

Pema, a girl from a nomadic community, is the one who takes the burden of the collective trauma of the people who have undergone a great deal of suffering due to the extinction of their culture in the process of systematic elimination of their lives. The forced settlement to the city causes the loss of passing down of traditional knowledge of community and also deprive them of the freedom of movement with cultural dignity. Although this kind of trauma is quieter, it is very persistent and deeply rooted, thus shows the oppressed communities slow, structural disturbances that creates psychological scars that lasts for long. Through the character of Pema, Anand portrays the difficulty of the child in coping with the formal education and urban lifestyle. Anand, in terms of structure, places these two narratives side by side to reiterate that the trauma has no limits

concerning the social and cultural aspects, despite the fact that Shanna and Pema belong to different cultures.

III

Nomad's Land central themes are justice, inequality, and human rights. It reveals the writer's commitment to tackling both the social and political aspects of conflict. The novel's young characters prompt the reflection of readers to their ethical duties, the consequences of ignoring the situation, and the importance of supporting the weak. Through these themes, *Nomad's Land* shows the suffering of the child in war from several angles at once. This allows the readers to see conflict and resilience but also points to the novel's connection with such issues as empathy, human rights, and the role of literature in bringing about change.

The work shows how optimism and compassion can be used as tools to heal the people from suffering and rebuilding the society. The story of two displaced girls is just one among many. Paro Anand does not just tell the readers to accept these ideas, but she openly requires that a shift in the society be made by the spreading of compassion and taking actions across the divides. The work thus serves both as a loud call for humanity to unite in the midst of differences. This allows readers to experience the social and psychological repercussions of displacement and conflict from a variety of perspectives. Anand's realistic depiction of daily life during times of violence enhances the story's emotional impact.

IV

The title has got a multi-layered meaning; the first is "Nomads" suggests being uprooted and rootless, and the other meaning is, while "No Mads Land" conveys the longing for a place free

from madness, where people overcome hatred. This dual interpretation can be aptly captured from the continuous conflicts between hope and despair within the novel. It rejects the misconception that writing for young readers must be "safe" or "simplified." Instead, Anand argues that literature should equip young adults to engage with the world critically and to face harsh realities. *Nomad's Land* is a work of fiction and also serves as a literary intervention. It ties together activism and storytelling by encouraging readers to understand the human costs of conflict.

Paro Anand gives a powerful and conscience-ridden image of the children in this work who emerge victorious from both the war and the exile. Shanna, the main character, is a courageous and flexible person who never ceases to fight for her identity and community in the midst of sadness and insecurity. *Nomad's Land* is famous for its truthful and heartfelt illustrations of young individuals suffering from war. The novel is a landmark in Indian Young Adult Literature because it deals with subjects like suffering, uprooting, and moral toughness. Anand widens the scope of themes in the literature for young adults. She makes it more powerful by rendering the future generation with a sense of social awareness, empathy, and the ability to think critically.

The current world situation with migrations, community conflicts, and mixed-up identities makes the message of *Nomad's Land* very timely. It creates empathy and social responsibility, and it helps young readers understand the consequences of displacement by having them read about it through the eyes of young characters. Anand always finishes her stories on a positive note to keep her young readers away from feeling stressed, anxious, or sad, though she portrays the harsh realities of life.

Conclusion

The pain of an uprooted community results in trauma which passes across generations. This traumatic experience of displacement gets reflected in the lives of these two young girls namely, Shanna and Pema. The literary work exhibits clearly how displacement moves and impacts these two young characters like Shanna and Pema. The novel is a story of dispossession, forced migration from one place to another, segregation and isolation, destruction of friendly relationships, loneliness and unforgettable violence to the body and mind especially to the young individuals. The novel *Nomad's Land's* exhibits a very cheerful message of the pleasure of acceptance, the restoration of silence, and the light of hope. It is not only the tale of two displaced girls but it also acts as a narrative map on how hope and reconciliation can aid in rebuilding communities and healing the damaged lives. Anand underscores the necessity of listening to the voices of young children, who are often the most vulnerable. She illustrates the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of uprooted communities on developing brains. She highlights through the novel that how young children deal with fear, anxiety and uncertainty when they encounter violence and shows the serious implications of displacement on young minds.

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