

Literary Representations of Terrorism-Induced Trauma in Jammu and Kashmir within Modern Indian Writing

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Abstract

Fictional narratives of trauma in the shadow of terrorism The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has contributed an unsavoury collection of literature- pages and pages filled with stories about death, destruction, rape and suffering. This study analyses the ways in which the psychological and emotional repercussions of displacement, violence, and exile suffered by Kashmiri Pandits are represented in recent writings published by Indian writers like Siddhartha Gigoo that form part of wider frames: current events such as the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and its subsequent Operation Sindoor. The Garden of Solitude is interpreted as a signposting novel chronicling the 1989-90 exodus and its afterlife. Drawing on trauma theory as a conceptual framework, this study examines how literary representations function as witnesses that recording collective memories and replicating the continuation of contemporary violence. It is based on qualitative textual analysis of leading literary texts in comparison with excerption from recent conflicts. Findings: The results imply that these stories genuinely reflect multiple layers of trauma (psychological, cultural and existential) which resonates with the contemporary issues from present-day Kashmir. The conversation also highlights how literary devices are employed to articulate the inexpressible pain (and) the validation of documentation of trauma that goes on through literature and real life events such as Operation Sindoor. This research finds that Kashmiri English literature is both artistic creation and documentation of history, as well as providing self writes 104 insight into the continuing human cost of long-term terrorism.

Keywords: Kashmiri literature, terrorism-induced trauma, displacement, Pahalgam attack, Operation Sindoor

1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir has been one of the most disputed and conflict-affected regions in South Asia due to protracted violence, armed rebellions, and political instability since India's partition in 1947. The period of escalating militancy in 1989-90 was a turning point in the history of Kashmir and with it changed the socio-political landscape, leading to mass exodus of Pandits from their homeland (Gigoo, 2010). The traumatic exodus, the seventh migration of Kashmiri Pandits' as it's often referred to left deep psychological, cultural and existential implications that manifest in generations to follow. This generational trauma's persistent legacy was underscored on April 22, 2025 when an armed

group attacked holiday makers in the Baisaran Valley of Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir. The attack killed 26 people, all Indian citizens except for one Nepalese national and it would become the deadliest incident in the region's last twenty-five years (Pakistan condemns India's strikes, 2025). That this attack in turn precipitated new military action, which was launched by India ("Operation Sindoor") and occurred in May 2025 - these incidents show that the cycles of violence recorded by Kashmiri literature are terrifyingly modern. Music and painting become essential tools among many others in this process of articulating such nuanced experiences through Kashmiri literature in English, offering a space for those left unsaid or unseen within the dominant narratives. Although Kashmiri, Urdu and Persian have had flourishing literatures, English has widened readership to international markets allowing writers to address issues such as conflict, dislocation (Gigoo, Gigoo and Ajit 2018), cultural memory and heritage. 20 List of Authors and Their Works In the works that followed, Kashmiri writers addressed that tumultuous past with writings about specific events, people or experiences through which countless men and women were utterly transformed.

Writers such as Siddhartha Gigoo, British-born Indian author Rahul Pandita and Basharat Peer have established a rich vein of literature with descriptions that document both the physical and mental hurt wreaked on those who live in trouble spots. These literary texts function not only as works of art but as memory archives and counter-narratives to official myths. Importantly, these works speak to the present by framing historical displacement within ongoing violence, as has now been made clear. This article discusses the representation of terrorism trauma in contemporary Indian writing with a special reference to Siddhartha Gigoo's landmark work, *The Garden of Solitude* (2010), and considers how this literary portrayal interfaces with the present day conflicts like Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor. Interrogates how literary texts serve as sites of trauma testimony, memory preservation and cultural resistance in the contexts of ongoing conflict Highlights new ways to understand human experiences in contemporary war zones Iconicity in Language and Literature Vol.

2. Literature Review

Academic criticism focusing on trauma and literature has advanced appreciably since the late twentieth century, when trauma theory emerged as a theoretical horizon for interpreting literary imagining of catastrophic experiences. Caruth (1996) describes trauma as "a shock that seems to act very much like a threat to life, and it is an experience different from the order of things — because traumatic events are not assimilated or fully experienced at the time they occur" (p.3): she highlights the temporal incongruity and belated understanding so often associated with traumatogenic incidents. This theoretical grounding is particularly pertinent to the study of literary responses to collective violence and displacement in Kashmir. Alexander (2012) pushes the language of trauma beyond individual psychology to include collective dimensions, contending that cultural trauma happens when members of a group come to believe they have lived through a traumatic event that fundamentally changes their group identity. Rather than focus on individual symptoms—like psychological treatments of post-traumatic stress—cultural trauma research considers how nations embody their traumatic pasts and install them in collective memory through public mnemo-technical practices like regular re-telling, art depictions, religious rites, and political discourse. This structure sheds light on the

fact that so-called "Kashmiri Pandit" writing indeed serves as cultural trauma testimony, as well as on its continuing engagement with present violence.

English writing in Kashmir has now acquired a certain gravity as an affirmation of the region's complicated socio-political truths. Contemporary Kashmiri English literature is overwhelmed by the themes of conflict and displacement, and much work such as *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (Pandita, 2013) and *The Garden of Solitude* (Gigoo etc. 2018) illustrates the human cost of high-profile Pandit exile. These stories are about identity, about memory and the fight to hold onto a sense of cultural self when displaced and they also paint a nostalgic image of what life was like before the insurgency. Ramzan (13-14) finds that these works narrate not only poignant stories of coerced migration but also illumine the serene camaraderie of the Hindus and Muslims, which was ruptured under waves of religious hostility catalyzed by abrupt political changes in 1989. What is interesting about this writing though, as I attempt to articulate, is that it still remains relevant beyond archiving history and increasingly the interface frequently comes up in contemporary analysis: recent events highlight how stains of terrorism continue to mark Kashmir.

The linkage between trauma in literature and actual events is especially clear when one looks at how the violence of 1990s is chronicled by Gigoo to resonate with attacks a decade into the twenty-first century. 2025 s Pahalgam anger and Operation Sindoor are the follow ups of violence that led to Kashmiri Pandits exodus from valley (India Today, 2025a). This process will continue and confirm the centrality of literary testimony in memory, coming to terms with terrorism's enduring human cost. Gigoo is a Kashmiri Pandit writer and large number of his community members were displaced from the valley. His first novel *The Garden of Solitude* (2010) depicts a Kashmiri Pandit boy from peaceful Kashmir to the state of confused traumatic life as an exile in his own country. The novel presented not only a poignant story of how Pandits found themselves displaced; it also focused on the psychiatric problems they suffered due to harsh and hostile conditions in refugee camps that included anxiety, neurosis, depression, nightmares, insomnia, delusions and phobias (Gigoo, 2010). In this context, these fictional portrayals acquire an added value as testimony of patterns of trauma that persist in the ongoing wars in Kashmir.

3. Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

- 1 To examine representations of terrorism-induced trauma in Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*, with particular attention to the psychological, emotional, and cultural displacement of Kashmiri Pandits during the 1989–90 exodus.
- 2 To analyze contemporary Kashmiri English literature as a testimonial archive that preserves collective memory and amplifies marginalized voices of conflict-affected communities amid ongoing violence.
- 3 To contextualize literary depictions of trauma within contemporary conflict, relating recent events such as the 2025 Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor to recurring patterns of violence represented in Kashmiri literature.

- 4 To apply trauma theory to explore narrative strategies addressing memory fragmentation, identity crisis, and unspeakable experiences, and to assess the contribution of Kashmiri English literature to South Asian postcolonial trauma discourse.

4. Methodology

The study is qualitative in its nature using textual analyses and contextual analysis as the main methodological instruments. Grounded in an interpretative paradigm that transverses trauma theory, postcolonial literary criticism, and cultural memory studies, the study interrogates representations of terrorism-induced trauma in Kashmiri writing. The chosen text for analysis is Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2010), which have been considered as a landmark work in Kashmiri English literature articulating the issue of Pandit exodus and post-exodus. Secondary sources are Gigoo's collection of short stories in print, *A Fistful of Earth*, *An Anthology on Kashmir* and Gigoo's co-edited *Once We Had Everything: Literature in Exile*. The work draws on close reading analysis to detect trauma-related themes, narrative strategies and stylistic features. The analysis is guided by Caruth's (1996) theoretical work on trauma and its temporal rupture, as well as Alexander's (2012) theory of cultural trauma. For the data the researcher critically analyses narrative sections on displacement, refugee camp conditions, psychological breakdown, memory and crisis of identity. Explicit and implicit trauma representations (in the form of literary metaphors, symbolism, and narrative fragmentation) are a subset of the analysis. The study also includes observation of modern-day events the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor to contextualize literary representations within contemporary violence in Kashmir, relying on news reports and documentation. Contextual details about the past, such as the 1989-90 Kashmir militancy and followed up by migration of Pandits, adds on to the backdrop. The analysis includes academic articles and critiques, to place the results within a wider corpus of academic criticism on literature of conflict and trauma texts..

5. Results

1. Portrayal of Physical and Psychological Trauma in *The Garden of Solitude*

In *The Garden of Solitude*, Gigoo presents a thorough record of the trauma faced by Kashmiri Pandits before and after forced migration. For the first time, we have been shown, both in its bleak physical and mental vigour, Each truck had a home and a homeless on board" (Gigoo, 2010). Every truck drudged to its breathless end; and there was despair in the pitiful gazing faces on all sides" (p. 66). The image encapsulates the paradox of displacement: carrying your life with you and still rendered homeless. The harsh living condition at the camp wear is described as worse than a slum, with families residing in tiny one-room flats. Gigoo (2010) presents the horrific paradox in character of Pamposh: "My mother and sister wash their clothes and utensils in a puddle of water outside our tent. They wait for hours in the morning to use the improvised shithouse holes drilled into broken strips of canvas, chunks of flattened cardboard and tin" (p. 98). The daily funeral processions became grimly routine, as did the haunting question "Snakebite or sunstroke?" depicting the appalling conditions inside camps.

2. Psychiatric Disorders and Mental Deterioration

Psychiatric symptoms developed by refugees are covered in detail in the book. Characters experience anxiety, neurosis, depression, nightmares, insomnia, delusions and phobias. The state of Mahanandju is the epitome of this decline, 'He has lost his memory to a certain extent. "He confuses dreams with reality and in his mind he tries to make it real, Alzheimer's! (Gigoo, 2010, p. 171). It's a powerfully motivated image, as an echo of the deep psychological tolls displacement and trauma take on individual lives becomes alternately a macro-echo of the broader more sweeping erasure ironically titled "identity" "stabilizing factors" (even hope) that many are encountering. The trauma took not only a psychological toll, but weakened people to other ailments that wore them down mentally and physically. Gigoo (2010) recounts that "unable to make sense of their lives, the older generation succumbed to despair, dementia and other psychological disorders and withered away into flimsy old age. As Pamposh reflects, "We lap the hours that sag at our half-sleepy elbows, and we trudge on huffing into another long chain of bad dreams" (99).

3. The absence of intimacy and emotional detachment

I think about the loss of intimate connections as one of the more crucial dimensions in trauma representation. Marry me "Earlier, Lasa writes in a letter to Sridar: "(T)here were husbands who had fallen out of love with their wives and wives who no longer found it necessary to hold hands with their husbands. "Some spouses have not seen each other for even a single night of love since they set out from home" (Gigoo, 2010, p. 189). It reads like devastating emotional asphyxiation--a silent disaster of intimacy and warmth, tender places lost in the bleakness of exile.

4. Memory, Nostalgia, and Identity Crisis

The role memory plays in the construction and preservation of identity in exile is examined at length by the novel. And the heaviness of memory begins to cripple Mahanandju's sense of time. He wishes to reverse the current of life, back to the world he lost. His thoughts drift to the Kashmir of yore crying willows swaying hesitatingly; saffron buds bobbing up and down in frolic, the abundance of rich rice fields as far as one's eyes can travel (Gigoo, 2010). It is this haunting loss that Sridar confronts when he meets Raghav in Allahabad. When people ask, "Where are you from? Is there a river near to where you live?" Sridar hesitates for a moment before replying: "I left my river far away in a place I used to know as home. The river belongs to someone else now" (Gigoo, 2010, p.172). This is a highly illustrative statement that summarizes the diasporic problem, where home's reverberations can be heard in foreign lands but never, fully regained.

5. Communal Relationships and Fractured Bonds

The book tells of the way terrorism, and then displacement, shattered once good relationships among communities. Prior to the exodus, "Mahanandju was held in great repute by the Pandits as well as the Muslims of the locality" (Gigoo, 2010, p.2). But that trust turned to fear and suspicion. This pain is evident in the conversation Lasa and Qazi have in Delhi: "Pandits azaadi pyaavun, manz na gotum, sath me gayem," we are made to feel that "we were trading our own community" and hence responsible for their exile. They believe we are all fighters. Without Pandits, we are not happy at all" (Gigoo, 2010:171-172).

6. Modern Confirmation: 2025 Pahalgam Attack and Operation Sindoor

The patterns of trauma explored in Gigoo's fiction are disturbingly echoed in the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. On April 22, 2025 an armed force attacked some pilgrims in the Baisaran Valley killed twenty-six people making it one of the deadliest incidents in the last quarter-century (Pakistan condemns India's strikes, 2025). This attack proves that the cycles of trauma caused by terrorism chronicled in literature during 90s are yet again alive and well. The operation was intended to bust bases belonging to groups including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reaction underscored India's determination: "I want to tell the world that the identity of those who are attacking our country, as well as its protectors I am saying this with caution will be known by everyone. The cultural allegory of Operation Sindoor and literary representations of terror Pointing to a direct expression from culture to even create literature, the isomorphic interface between terror as form in Kristeva (2001) and the symbolic can be made through this representation. Dedicated to the Pahalgam widows, it turned on Hindu civilizational ethos and justice. Widow of martyr Kaustubh Ganbote welcomed the name "Operation Sindoor" saying that the Operations had "respected women" (NDTV, 2025). It is from these affects that Gigoo's account of displacement trauma records the emotional and symbolic components of dispossession. Coordinated bombing strikes on nine jihadi camps were conducted within a span of 23 minutes during the military operation (The Times of India, 2025a). The operation was described by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as a "symbol of India's political, social and strategic willpower" (The Times of India, 2025b). This government response reveals the enduring power of terrorism, documented for decades in literature. It is important to note that the families of Pahalgam victims were considerably relieved after Operation Sindoor with great thanks to Prime Minister Modi and the armed forces (The Economic Times, 2025). This current trauma's call for justice and resolution by state action parallels the psychological needs of exiled Kashmiri Pandits highlighted in literature who also, not unsurprisingly, demanded recognition and justice.

6. Discussion

Trauma Theory and Literary Representation

The implementation of the trauma theory framework by Caruth (1996) to the Garden of Solitude will demonstrate how the novel conforms to the key aspects of trauma in delayed understanding, fragmentation of memory, and distortion of time. Characters have difficulties in conveying their experiences in coherent manner and tend to describe the trauma in disguise, using either disjointed narratives, silence, and symbolic images instead of addressing it straight. This is consistent with the assertion given by Caruth (1996) that the trauma survivors might not be able to verbally convey the experiences and this results in tardy and disjointed narratives. The very structure of the novel resembles traumatic experience in non-linear temporality, flashbacks and alternating between the past and the present. The story of Sridar shifts between the memories of Kashmir and the current exile, which is an indication that traumatic memory breaks into the consciousness of the present. This literary device is a realistic reflection of trauma in time and time organization of memories.

Trauma of the Culture and Group Identity

The idea of cultural trauma offered by Alexander (2012) sheds light on the fact that Gigoo works as a collective testimony, and not a pure narrative. The records in the novel reveal that Kashmiri Pandits enjoyed a common faith

that they had gone through a catastrophic incident that had changed their identity permanently. The community as a whole feels that they have been subjected to gruesome incidents that cause permanent imprints to group consciousness that will remain in the memory forever, and alter future identity in some basic aspects (Gigoo, 2010). This cultural trauma model assists in comprehending the reason as to why the literary presentation of the exodus is not insignificant in preserving the identity of communities. Besides, even modern incidents such as Pahalgam attack indicate that this cultural trauma is not something of the past but still present as new generations are affected the first-hand effects of terrorism. The fact that Pahalgam attack took place thirty-five years after the Pandit exodus but generated the same pattern of trauma proves the literature which indicated the existence of prolonged cycles of violence.

Literary Testimony as Resistance and Preservation of Memory

The writing of Gigoo is testimonial archive, where the experiences would otherwise be forgotten, or swept aside in the mainstream historical accounts. As it is written in the novel, Sridar devotes his time to the writing of personal histories of old Pandits: "We will all forget soon. Everyone will be invaded by forgetfulness. This will result in collective amnesia which will create permanent vacuity of the mind (Gigoo, 2010, p. 218). Making oral histories written witnesses, the author confirms that the remembrance is not just nostalgic but also political, cultural and existential. This appeal to authority acquires extra urgency in the light of the consequences of Operation Sindoor. It revealed the vulnerability of the Pakistani defense network and made some strategic review necessary (The Economic Times, 2025). Nevertheless, in addition to military-strategic aspects, the naming of the operation and the reaction of the families of victims of the operation show the role of literature in the formation of the way communities cope with and remember trauma. Literary works such as *The Garden of Solitude* give guidelines to the experiences of the present-day victims by recording historical patterns of trauma.

The Continuum of Violence: 1990 to 2025

An important conclusion of this study is to see Kashmir violence as continuum and not discrete events. Gigoo reported exodus of 1989-90, the 2025 Pahalgam attack, and Operation Sindoor are some of the variations of the sustained terrorism affecting the region (India Today, 2025a). Literary imagery is therefore effectively two-fold, documenting the past and being relevant in the present-day. The targeting of the Pahalgam attack against civilians reflects the subject of violence against the Kashmiri Pandits recorded in literature. Both contain terrorism aimed at spreading terror, displacing groups of people, and breaking social connections. In the article *The Last Haircut* (2015), Gigoo (2015) narrates the atrocious persecution of Kashmiri Pandits, and he is describing the dehumanizing nature of terrorism that is still evident in the modern-day attacks. The execution of Operation Sindoor, which entailed targeted attacks on terrorist targets, is an action of the state against the cycles of violence. The operation as reported in the news reports showed how India was ready to attack deep within Pakistani borders sending clear signals that geographical depth can no longer provide safe havens to terrorists (India Today, 2025c). This military reaction is an expression of decades of frustration over terrorism known in decades of Kashmiri literature.

Making Conflict Human: Literary Representation

Among the main contributions of the works done by Gigoo is humanizing abstract political conflicts, as it is based on human experience of ordinary people. The novel transcends the world of statistics and political speech itself to offer

the detailed images of human sufferings, strength, and adjustment. Other characters, such as Mahanandju, Lasa, Sridar, and Pamposh, stand in as the representatives of a larger community trauma without being simplified in any way. This humanizing style establishes sympathetic relationships between readers and communities stricken by conflicts. When the current readers read about the Pahalgam victims twenty-six people with families, dreams and futures literature works give contextual frameworks to understand their experiences. According to Ramzan (2023), *The Garden of Solitude* was a generally good reception in all categories of readers who could relate to stories and their close context. Such a reception implies literature as the ability to establish common ground between people despite any communal boundaries, which could induce a sense of empathy despite the existing conflicts.

Psychological Effect: Literary Documentation and Modern Expression

The psychiatric disorders reported in the Gigoo (2010) novel anxiety, neurosis, depression, nightmares, insomnia, delusions and phobias are the psychological aspects of trauma, which ignores time. The same disorders are likely to be present in survivors of the Pahalgam attack and witnesses, which shows that trauma has permanent trends in all the cases of violence. The value of literature is that mental health professionals and policymakers can be ready to expect and treat the psychological aspect of trauma. Literary works hold the blueprints of how to comprehend the trauma response of the present by showing how displacement created particular psychiatric issues within the Kashmiri Pandits of 1990s. The outcomes of Operation Sindoor must have caused similar psychological effects on both Indian and Pakistani people, who were subjected to violence, and literature about the cyclical qualities of trauma is confirmed.

The Contribution of state Response to Trauma Processing

The cultural framing of Operation Sindoor and its reception by the public can reveal how the state reactions react with the collective trauma processing. The name of the operation, which was named in honor of Pahalgam widows, realized the suffering of the victims and vowed justice (NDTV, 2025). This symbolic act indicates more general societal requirements of recognition and confirmation that have been recorded in the trauma literature. The fact that families of the victims of Operation Sindoor were relieved when they thanked Prime Minister Modi and armed forces shows how the military action can bring the psychological closure to the trauma survivors (The Economic Times, 2025). This reflects the needs of Kashmiri Pandits, as stated in the literature, to be recognized and acknowledged and to receive justice. But it is also in literature that we learn about the dangers of vengeance cycles and the futility of violence, and complexly sees the world in terms of the depth of literature that we would have found only in political or military accounts.

Nationalism and Violence Literary Critique.

Although Operation Sindoor was represented as being an inevitable step in counter-terrorism, Kashmiri literature can provide a more subtle way of looking at violence and nationalism. Even the simple description of Shabeer, the friend of Sridar who is dreaming of the independent Kashmir where Muslims and Pandits will co-exist as they had before (Gigoo, 2010, p. 187), can be seen as alternative solutions instead of military ones. The literary fantasy of non-violence is opposite to the military nature of Operation Sindoor, and this marks the importance of literature in maintaining other forms of political options. According to Gigoo et al. (2018), Kashmiri English literature is critically involved in the political problems, and it threatens the prevailing discourses about nationalism and self-determination. This decisive

role is crucially important in the modern wars. Although there might be military-strategic reasons behind Operation Sindoor, literature will be a reminder to audiences of the human effects of violence no matter the perpetrator or reason.

7. Conclusion

This study illustrates that literary portrayals of trauma related to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*, yield important conclusions on the psychological, emotional and cultural aspects of displacement even as they hold firm relevance for conflicts today. The analysis demonstrates that English language Kashmiri literature is anchored as a work of art, archive of testimony and a mode of cultural resistance, which sustainedly remains relevant to the continuing cycles of violence such as 2025 Pahalgam axing or Operation Sindoor. It is by examining how literary texts articulate experiences that resist dominant narrative comprehension, maintain collective memory while at the same time undermine hegemonic political narrative through close readings informed by trauma theory frameworks advanced by Caruth (1996) and Alexander (2012), that this project seeks to demonstrate these assertions. The conclusion is that these narratives express an authentic image of multi-faceted trauma unfolding among displaced communities in the wake of genocide, with pathologic psychiatric conditions, divorce, memory burst and identity confusion as some salient elements—plays to follow for today's victims of terrorism. The nexus between historical literary record-keeping and current events reaffirms the important role of literature as a means to comprehend the lingering effects of terrorist violence. The fact that the Pahalgam attack took place thirty five years after the Pandit exodus, and left similar emotional scars speaks volumes about these recurrent cycles of violence as we come across in literature. The cultural coverage and families' responses to Operation Sindoor also indicate how literary representations of trauma offer frameworks for making sense of contemporary violence. Gigoo's literature does exactly what literature is meant to do – make abstract political conflicts human through lived experiences of everyday people trapped in an extraordinary situation. Toward the end of her book, Hussain argues that Kashmiri English literature is vital to a larger conversation about trauma, displacement and postcolonial identity in South Asian literary studies by providing counternarratives to hegemonic historical accounts that are so essential for ethnic survivors while recovering the voice of the marginalized survivors for posterity. As the sound of conflict continues to reverberate through Kashmir, including following attacks such as that in Pahalgam, these literary representations are indispensable for translating human costs of violence to which we pay no attention towards processing collective trauma and imagining options for healing and reconciliation that extend beyond military measures.

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