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Ordeal, Agony and Anxiety: Exploring the Pandit Exile through *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*

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Abstract:

The present paper tries to explore the trauma of Kashmiri minority community (Pandit), who were displaced from Kashmir valley during the political turmoil of 1990's, as portrayed in Rahul Pandita's beautifully written memoir *Moon Has Blood Clots*, lamenting the loss of home, the narrative of the book is in first person, and the author time and again narrates the experiences of his own as well as his family pre 1990's and post 1990's. This paper analyses the Pandita's memoir with a view to explore the thematic contours echoing the shared pain of Kashmiris (Pandits) in and outside Kashmir. But it is not that only one particular community suffered due to the turmoil but both suffered in their own ways, majority community of the valley suffered at the hands of Indian forces and the other group suffered mostly at the hands of militants. I chose this book for the study because literature is the best medium of exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions which are usually neglected in historical writings.

Keywords: Pandit Exile, Alienation, Homelessness, Trauma, Turmoil.

Introduction:

Literature is always a product of the circumstances and situations of the society in which it is produced, and has never been a separate entity. So is the case with the literature written by Kashmiri displaced Pandit community, their literature is mostly impregnated by the pain and agony of loss of homeland, from among the many genres like novel, drama and poetry, it is the novel which has competed with the 20th century mass media like T.V and Radio, novel has a great influence on present era, it is the easiest and effective medium for the oppressed to make their voices heard. And one of these voiceless groups is the Kashmiri Pandit community who were displaced during 1990's.

“The only environment the artist needs is whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost” (Stean). It is being said that to write good literature, it needs a peaceful environment, but the situation is contrary with the writers of Kashmir valley, being a conflict zone from decades the writers have produced a plethora of good quality literature, but its credit goes to Basharat Beer whose skillfully written *Curfewed Night* in 2010 was a torchbearer to other writers like Mirza Waheed, Siddhart Gigoo, Rahul Pandita. These writers write a Literary genre, based on the theory of 'Engaged Literature' developed by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, a theory committed to a better society and to the belief in the power of every human to make a social change or it has been given the name Human rights Literature a subgenre of 20th century literature manifests the belief in the enormous command of literature to drive change, and in the author's moral duty to their readers, both social and artistic.

Rahul Pandita is born in Srinagar, and migrated to Jammu with his family during political turmoil in Kashmir. Pandita has written several books like *The Absent State: Insurgency as an Excuse for Misgovernance*, co-authored with Neelesh Misra, *Hello Bastar – The Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement*, and *Our Moon has Blood Clots : The Exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits*. The important thing here to mention is that the members of migrated Kashmiri community have started writing about their lost homeland because their roots are actually in Kashmir and staying away from Kashmir means staying away from their roots. They may live in the best cities of India and outside India but the feeling of exile is always haunting them and sometimes this feeling is given outlet in the form of creative literature as many Pandits have started writing based on the themes on nostalgia, loss of home and the resulting pain.

Our Moon Has Blood Clots, a memoir narrates the painful story of people who migrated from Kashmir during 1990s. Pandita has firsthand experience of the tragic events happened with him and his family, by writing this book he tried to depict the suffering, pain and alienation of Kashmiri Pandits faced after their migration. He remembers the condition of his father when he finally decided to leave Kashmir, “It was quite sunny the day Father finally decide that we should move to Jammu” (Pandita 96), these are the memories which haunts Pandita, in 1990s he was about 14 years old, so young to help his father, so young to understand that they are becoming homeless “And I don't think we realized then that we would never have a home again” (Pandita 4).

The book starts on a very emotional note in the following manner, “They found the old man dead in his torn tent, with a pack of chilled milk pressed against his right cheek. It was our first June in exile...”(Pandita 1), this is how the tale of death, destruction and displacement is narrated by Rahul Pandita. The author writes about his experiences in Srinagar, in Jammu and in Delhi. In Srinagar he talks about pre and post 1990’s, in 1990’s Kashmir was echoed by the slogans of Azadi, by anti-Indian slogans, and the sound of guns and grenades, it was because of the militant uprising in 1989 which forced Pandits to leave the valley, but here one thing must be remembered that there are two dimensional narratives about the exile of the Kashmiri Pandits one is according to Kashmiri Muslims who believe that Pandits were made to leave the valley under a government’s design to discredit the Kashmiri Separatist movement, and the other is that after the exile of Pandits Jagmohan could deal with Muslims of the valley firmly. And according to the Pandit community it was because of the Kashmiri militants who are responsible for their exodus.

Rahul Pandita’s memoir *Our Moon as Blood Clots* depicts the pain and agony of its homeless author, how his community has migrated from Kashmir to Jammu in the 1990’s how they spend their life in a refugee camp. The book is a tragic tale of an individual, of a family and a community. The writer most of the times compares his present condition i.e. homelessness with that of his good days in Srinagar, in Jammu living in a rented room Rahul Pandita says, “it was barely a room. Until a few months ago, it had been a cowshed” shows the pathetic condition of life in exile. The author shows how difficult it is to leave one’s home, one’s homeland and one’s relative, narrator once said, “In constructing the house, my father had exhausted his entire Provident Fund; whatever little jewelry my mother possessed was also sold to help finance the construction”(Pandita 21).

The author and his family is so much nostalgic that after having their own two room flat in Delhi, they are not satisfied and feel that they do lack something, “that is the habit my father’s generation has: calling Srinagar ‘Shahar’- the city that is home. And when I gently remind father of his mistake, he smiles an embarrassed smile...I can only imagine what images the mere mention of Shahar evokes in him. Shahar was our home. Shahar was our *shahrag*- our jugular. Shahar was us”(Pandita 33-34) After being exiled from Kashmir, Rahul Pandita has migrated to Jammu, then to Chandigarh and finally to Delhi, but nowhere has he found the peace and solace which he has at his ancestral home i.e. Srinagar. The writer writes, “We have been in exile for

more than two decades. Kashmir is a memory, an overdose of nostalgia. But beyond this, there is nothing.” Most of the time in the book the writer seems to be pessimistic, he didn’t saw any hope in the future to return to his homeland, thus he says:

Over the last few years, I have often thought about exile, and about the displaced Pandit families, especially those living in big cities like Delhi. I began to worry that the story of our community would be lost in the next few decades. It was only because of the previous generation that our customs and traditions were being kept alive. It is people from my father’s generation who know how to consult an almanac and keep track of festivals and the death anniversaries of ancestors...we are losing our tradition, our links to the place where we came from. (Pandita 211)

The writer talks about his alienation in a host land, and also talks about the preservation of his own identity and culture in an alien land, Pandita says about the migrated people that “the created mini Kashmirs wherever they settle” (Pandita 211). They listen to the Kashmiri songs, and cook Kashmiri recipes to remain attached and to preserve their culture. Although the migration is within the borders of the country i.e. India, this is not that kind of migration in which people migrate from one country to other country, the scene is very different, they are refugees in their own country, living in the periphery, Pandita speaks thus, “It has been almost thirty years since that trip, but I still hold my bag when I visit Delhi. Though it does not matter where I live now. Delhi or the Deccan, it is all the same to me. No land is my land...Sixty years later, I am a refugee in my own country” (Pandita 155).

Rahul Pandita not only talks about the exodus and suffering of his community but he also shows how the two communities lived peacefully before 1990, how the people of one community visited the other community on festivals and marriages, people of one community doesn’t have any prejudice against the other, writer said, “At our marriages, Muslim women celebrated with us by linking their arms and singing traditional songs to welcome the groom and his family and friends. My mother’s best friend was Shahzaad” (Pandita 39-40).The writer shows the brotherhood (Kashmiryat) between Pandits and Muslims, they help each other, invite each other,

On Eid-UI-Zuha, we would go to our neighbours' homes to wish them happiness. One of my father's Muslim friends lived nearby and when father would be out on long official tours, he would stop by, knocking gently at our door, refusing to come inside, and asking if we needed anything. My sister sometimes taught his children, and on Eid-UI-Zuha I would slip out and visit his house to watch their family sacrifice sheep. A piece of lamb's meat would later be sent to us... Our neighbours wished us on Shivrarti, and we would offer them walnuts soaked in sweet milk and water. (Pandita 34-35)

To conclude, the author from beginning till end seems very pessimistic about the present and future of Pandit community, he says "For me, though, exile is permanent. Homelessness is permanent. I am uprooted in my mind" (Pandita 224) but there is a ray of hope that one day Kashmiri Pandits will return to their homeland, and the lost glory of the valley will be restored again. A garden is most beautiful when there is not one but different kinds of flowers grown in it. The brotherhood which is already there between the two communities will be strengthened by the coming of Pandits to the valley. There are various steps being taken at state and national level for the return of Pandits to their homeland.

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