

Violence, Displacement, and Gender: A Study of Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* and Onir's *I Am*

Saadat Amin & Rekha

Abstract

The aftermath of the partition of India in 1947 had unwelcoming consequences that continue to resonate till now. The division is the most consequential of all the issues faced by any frontiers of Asia in the annals of human history. Though there is a huge blossoming of writings on the contemporary international literature on displacement issues and is still growing, but the situation of Kashmir's internally displaced people is almost unnoticeable. This is a rumination of the intricacies of the modern refugee discourse, the unsolved nature of the Kashmir conflict, and the diplomacy of international power politics. The flux has not only given rise to humanitarian issues but also has a straight effect on the development of Kashmir and the idea of identity issues of its people in general and women in particular. The present paper focuses on the precise experience of warfare by Kashmiri Pandit women in the stretch of insurgency. It also tries to find out how women are used as vulnerable targets by insurgents to employ political advocacy to displace the Hindu community. The study is based on the reading of Siddarth Gigoo's novel *The Garden of Solitude* and Onir's movie *I Am*.

Keywords: Conflict; Exodus; Identity; Violence; Vulnerability.

Conflict is always created by the division of territory which results in the formation of bordered frontiers, which turn out of control when it comes to certain resolutions. In such conflict-hit areas, violence becomes an integral part of residents' lives on both sides of the borders. The Israel-Palestine and India-Pakistan rive fall into these divisive fault lines. Conflict leads to migration, displacement, and demonstration. Eventually, some become 'refugees' across the border and some are displaced within the

frontier of conflict region called 'internally displaced. According to the report of *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1998) internally displaced is defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in part to result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border" (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008).

Since the partition of India in 1947, plethora of people has been forced to move out of their own houses. A large number of people got displaced during the conflict of 1948, 1965, and 1971, which subsequently led to the formation of a refugee surge. In 1989, the magnitude of the armed conflict along with the civil disorder in the state of Jammu and Kashmir increased the number of 'displaced' exponentially. Although most stayed within the state, yet some 'displaced' chose to be on the other side of the borders and are categorized as 'refugees'. In the startling movement of people in Kashmir, the biggest displacement is that of the Kashmiri Hindus (Kashmiri Pandits) compelled to move out of their dwelling habitat of Kashmir valley to the other parts within the country.

Competition over land, the role of competing identities, and the need for relevant and effective mechanisms for reconciliation directly or indirectly refer to structured violence and displacement. It is significant to recognize the role played by national governments in generating displacement and in turn resolving root crises in any subsequent transitional process. Unfortunately in the case of the Kashmir conflict, violence itself has become the justification for more violence. "Violence in conflict can be defined as protracted violence between groups resulting in significant human suffering" (Crawford 13). This definition envisions macro scale, national and international armed conflict; also as confined conflict systems wherein both lead to displacement and significant humanitarian predicament. In current times violent conflict has increased globally both in prevalence and intensity. Displacement is a general term that refers to the process by which people abandon their homes or are forced to leave their homes usually in response to a trigger event such as natural calamity, stimuli in our environment that cause stress like war and conflict, or victimization, to look for a more firm and strong position somewhere else. Populations can be displaced within state borders as internally displaced people or across international borders as refugees. "Violent conflict is a primary cause of displacement cross-country statistical analysis of both refugee and inter-

nally displaced people flows constantly show the importance of violent conflict as a direct driver of displacement” (Davenport 29). It is the right to say displacement is an indubitably testing trail for all those who are bound to abandon their homes to safeguard themselves, which also includes gendered effects on women. The experiences of women of conflict and displacement are extremely gendered. “Women often face particular challenges related to displacement. In the context of the wider conflict, levels of sexual and gender-based violence can increase” (Blair 4). “Data suggests that one in five displaced women suffer sexual violence. The prominence of sexual violence has been reported in camp settings as well as in sites of urban displacement, attesting to the widespread and pervasive nature of this threat” (Aubone 32).

The upsurge of political upheaval in the valley of Kashmir also eventually forced the ‘displacement’ of the Kashmiri Hindu minority community from its homeland. Balraj Puri in *Kashmir towards Insurgency* writes, “the mass exodus began on 1 March 1990, when about 250, 000 of the 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits fled the State” (20). What made Hindu families leave the valley, was violence unleashed by the independent militant organizations. They made Hindus their targets, harassed and threatened them, and killed many of them eventually. Books, movies, and various interviews held with Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave or displaced themselves, reveal a series of incidents connected to the mass exodus of Hindus from Kashmir.

Siddhartha Gigoo’s *The Garden of Solitude* is one such memoir related to the exodus. It is a narrative of carnage and extermination of Kashmiri Hindu women and children. It is about the forceful abductions of families together. It has the tales of ruthless mass suicides by women who wanted to flee the brunt of sexual abuse, tales of loot, tales of houses and business set on fire, and tales of the dead bodies streaming through its river Jhelum. The narrative centers around Sridar, a Kashmiri Pundit boy and his family driven away from the Valley in the wake of political turmoil and armed insurgency. The family is annihilated and forced to live in Jammu, in the wake of suffering, loneliness, alienation, and no place to call home. Sridar is the son of this annihilated family. The story comes to us from Sridar’s perspective. The narrative exposes the insurgent’s vivid indoctrination to dislodge the minority community by using their women as vulnerable targets. Women, helpless to protect themselves, become mnemonic of the Kashmiri Hindu community in general. Lassa says to his neighbours, “Our women and children should not stay here with us. Send your mother, wife, and son away from Kashmir. Do not wait any longer. Downtown

is no longer safe for us" (Gigoo, 23).

The *Garden of Solitude* showcases how at the acme of militant upsurge back in 1990, the militants succeeded in creating 'fear psychoses' among Hindus, the minority community at large, and specifically among its womenfolk. Kashmiri Hindu women are pre-owned as scapegoats by both the notorious native and foreign militants. The militants threaten the Kashmiri Hindu men-folk frequently to evacuate Kashmir with an order to 'leave behind' their daughters and wives. To safeguard the honor of their wives, daughters, and mothers, these pandit men get more and more worried. "Let the Pandit men leave Kashmir, but let them leave their women behind" (68).

Across the annals of history, particularly during war times, a woman is misused by the diktat of patriarchy. She is used as an important weapon of war strategically. Intentionally or unintentionally, a woman becomes an easy and a favourite target. Across the horror of wars, a woman has to pay the prize doubly. She is raped by one group to celebrate its power and is killed by her own people to safeguard their honour:

Mahananddju, early this morning at yarbal, a haenz (Hindu) girl drowned herself to death in the river," Janaki Nath began. "No one knows the truth. One woman told that the girl's father was taken away last night by two strangers. When he returned home in the morning, he found his daughter gone. Her body was found entangled in the weeds'. Upon hearing what Afgan had done, the girl's father strangled her and pushed her body from the window of the doonga into the waters of the Jhelum. How can a father kill his own daughter? Mahanandju shuddered in disbelief. (37-38)

The history of war is replete with stories of rape and sexual atrocities against women and young girls, as a woman is considered as an important contestant site of war. Barry S Levy and Victor W. Sidel in their book *War and Public Health* state, "As a strategy, public rape may be used to terrorize the whole community and to force it to flee, or it may be an expression of ethnic group hatred" (33). These Kashmiri Pandit women are the safe targets of insurgents and easy objects for their men to vent their feelings of anguish and pain. Patricia A. Weitsman in his paper "The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda" postulates:

In most militarized conflicts, rape serves as a tactic to intimidate,

humiliate, torture, and degrade the enemy. Rape is a harbinger of graphic pictures of torture and death. To propel the enemy out of a particular geographic region of a country to assert ethnic and political dominance rape is used as a strategy to humiliate, degrade, and undermine the enemy's morale. (563)

The tactic of rape is thus used in 'ethnic cleansing' and the execution of mass exodus in the conflict-hit region. Rape becomes a powerful form of torture tool in patriarchal societies. Dorean Marguerite Koenig in a research paper, "Women and Rape in Ethnic Conflict and War," mentions how women specifically have been the targets of ethnic violence in recent years of global conflict. In the form of rape they suffer the worst forms of cruelty and indignity:

The world has heard of mothers and fathers being forced to watch their child-daughters raped and killed, of forced pregnancies, of rape camps, of humiliation, gross physical abuse, degradation and death imposed because the victim had been raped. Chastity is essential to family honor and a raped victim brings shame and disgrace to the entire family. (131)

The following incident from *The Garden of Solitude* befits this theorization of rape as a strategy:

Sarla Bhat was a Hindu girl from the Anantnag district of Kashmir. She was working as a Staff nurse in the renowned hospital Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Srinagar (SKIMS). On the night of 14 April in the year 1990, she was abducted from the hostel room of the Medical Institute by a group of JKLF militants. She was brutally gang-raped for many days. Sarla's body was subsequently thrown on the roadside. Her abandoned dead body wounded with bullets was later found on April 19, in the interiors of Srinagar. The post mortem report confirmed that she was raped before she was heinously killed. (43)

The rape followed by murder of Sarla Butt creates panic among Hindus who are compelled to send away their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers to secure places outside the valley. This is how the physical abuse of one woman is enough to terrorize the entire community.

Apart from entailing personal distress or trauma to the victims, 'sexual violence' also has some social stigma adhered to it. A physically abused

woman becomes a 'social outcast'. She is looked down upon as someone who has done something immoral and unforgivable. For no fault of hers, she has to bear severe penalization. None other than the men in power puts her in such dire situation. She loses her confidence, identity, and a sense of belonging. She is compelled to think otherwise and risk her life. An unmarried woman's worth corresponds to her status as a virgin. If she is robbed of her virginity, she becomes misfit for marriage and is considered socially non-viable. The shame of victimization is used as a parameter to assess her worth alongside her relationships with men. All this is very humiliating to her and even worse than committing murder. Gender politics pushes/affects the woman self. Degrading the rape victim rather than punishing the actual person responsible for the crime committed, connotes that a woman's significance is counted from parameters of purity decided by patriarchy. Gigoo's memoir becomes an explicit statement of this. In one of the conversations between Janki Nath and Mahanandju, one can easily witness the cruel victimization of women:

Some said that she was raped by a soldier and then murdered. Others said that she committed suicide after being raped. They raped her and then murdered her, destroyers of our women and girls; the occupants of our land! They will rape young girls and women too, and then murder them and throw them into the river, murderers and 'the boatman was heard saying to the neighbour.
(38)

Women, socially constrained, suffer the most. They are questioned even if they step out of their homes. On the contrary, men are never suspected and questioned for their outdoor activities. They can talk freely to anyone even to women and can express their desires and needs; while women cannot make even acquaintances with men and if they do so with men other than that of family, they are looked down upon. Rather, it is taboo. Lasa and Sridar throughout *The Garden of Solitude* are seen exploring the market places, meeting their fellow campmates. They keep on searching for faces and families with whom they can socialize and take decisions on the future course of action. Not even a single woman in Gigoo's memoir is shown stepping out from her house for any sort of waywardness and wandering:

Sridar explored the vicinity of the new locality; the houses, shops, shopkeepers, temples, narrow lanes, vegetable vendors, the dry waterless riverbed and the lone bridge over it, colour of the children, the dresses they wore, the smiles of young beautiful girls

who spoke a different language, and many new things unseen till today. Lasa made new acquaintances. A young woman disappeared only to return with wounds and seeds of shame. (82-86)

Displacement has impacted the social organization of the Kashmiri people, gender relations, family organization, marital status, and identity formation. As a whole, internally displaced women are more vulnerable and bear both physical and mental ailments. They not only face the brunt of trauma and torture, they also lose their family, acquaintances, dignity, and identity. B.R. Sorensen and M. Vincent in *Caught Between Borders: Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced* find that “for women, displacement gives rise to multiple emotions from anguish as to how they would be able to feed their family, to eagerness about their newly attained freedom and novel opportunities to disappointment about the new responsibility they must carry and the never-ending ‘obstacles’ fabricated by the surrounding society” (215).

Exodus so far has curbed and killed human emotions to a greater extent. Married couples find it difficult to express their feelings to each other. *The Garden of Solitude* shows how people have lost love in their life, love a very important emotion in anybody’s life. There is disorientation in their love life. This feeling of love loss is so deep and intense that they have no sensation towards each other’s body, no urge to feel or touch their better halves. “Some couples have not shared an intimate moment ever since they left their home” (156). The loss of home which has forced them to live in tents has turned them into emotionless beings. They live in a state of oblivion thinking it unimportant to care for and give comfort to their respective partners. There is no longer any warmth of love felt by them. Their lives have become dull and devoid of any frenzy, desire, passion, or any sort of craving. Their bodies dread to sleep. It has become a routine to sleep tired and wake up worn out. They snuggle in the filthy spaces of the ends.

This ongoing Kashmir conflict which led to the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, has left its men, women, children, and old in dismay. Women are in deep depression; they are petrified with desolation and face psychological traumas. Sridar tells how his grandmother has turned into a moving corpse who has lost her senses, feelings, and even hunger. She also has lost her basic sense of recognition and differentiation:

She confuses a lizard for a plastic toy paralyzed on the wall. Her gaze is fixed at the crucified lizard. For hours and hours, she just gazes endlessly into a dark nothingness! It is a vacant gaze into a

world of oblivion and amnesia. Petrified with a sense of desolation, she does not even feel the presence of hundreds of mosquitoes circling her head constantly while she stares into blank space. I do not know if she is hungry or thirsty. (98)

The everyday humiliation and the uncomfortable life that exodus women are forced to live with, explain the magnitude of psychological trauma that they go through. The gendered dimension associated with it can be understood because exposure to such camp life makes its women folk more vulnerable to sexual harassment by its men and others in the camp. Levy and Victor W. Sidel in *War and Public Health* write, "Camps are often sites of corruption and violence, where rape and sexual harassment / exploitation are rarely documented or punished" (63).

Exodus cause several ailments, long-term psychological disorders to women which results in the development of anxiety, infirmity, and extreme helplessness. These after-effects eventually result in flashbacks, inability to maintain social and personal relationships, continuous fears, and curbing of vibrancy from life. Sexual harassment, depression, psychological trauma, and heart ailments are some of the effects of exodus in the women residing in the Jammu camp. Sridar in *The Garden of Solitude* talks about the mental status of his grandmother as described above. The inhuman conditions in camp life lead a woman to a state of 'oblivion' and 'amnesia'. She becomes numb; she has no feelings and no expressions.

These women, both old and young express their dreadful tales through the streams of tears in silence. In their old age when these elderly are supposed to stay indoors, they are seen tired and bewildered standing and waiting for a meaningless purpose. Cursing life, standing in never-ending queues to sustain and support their own lives becomes difficult:

Outside the registration center, an old man and his wife waited for their turn to get registered as migrants. The queue was long, and every moment seemed long and dreary. The registration process was fraught with perils. There were the queues, the documents, the paper, and the forms. The woman talked aloud to herself. She mumbled some inanities; signs of fatigue and disorientation. Others in the queue made gestures at one another. An old woman stood in the queue for registration. She went on mumbling how she lived in her old house in Kashmir. Here, I sweat blood and tears,' she said wailing. (83-84)

Identity is what one takes oneself to be; whether one perceives oneself as man or woman, young or old, white or black, rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim. Kittrie N Nicholas in his paper "The Crisis of Identity at the Dawn of the Third Millennium" defines identity in the context of conflict. He says, "Identity Formation in the shadow of conflict is thought to be the means through which individuals understand themselves in their social context. From ancient times to the modern period, the theological categories of families, articulations, lands, and nations have remained at the nucleus of identity studies" (2). For Kashmiri natives, the question of 'identity, 'honour', and social status are very important and are incorporated in their strategies of survival. The irony is that Kashmiri pandits question their own belief in *Kashmiriyat*. *Kashmiriyat* has merely remained a term that has lost its functionality. The fear psychosis has gripped the valley to such an extent that it tells upon the identity of the minority class. Gigoo feels that to be a real self and to practice the basic rituals / customs of religious identity, become challenging for Kashmiri Pandits. They fear that their distinct identity is under threat. From physical appearance to practice religious beliefs, the Kashmiri Pandits have to prison their identity. "The Pandit women stopped putting tilaks on their foreheads to mask their identity" (39). In a letter to his son Sridar, Lasa, the father writes: "Our identity is imprisoned in a ration card. This should change, or else we will be forgotten forever" (157).

Voice reinforces identity but a woman of exodus is denied even this liberty. She even has to pay the price for taking a stand for the principles and values she believes in. Her boldness to perform duty costs her, her very life:

The last seven Pandit families at Mattan fled their homes out of fear and terror after Leelawati, a doctor, who practiced at a clinic, was found dead one morning. The news on the radio did not give the details of her death. Dr. Leelawati had paid price for not obeying the diktat of the militants. The militants had sent a letter to her, threatening her with dire consequences if she charged any fee for treating the injured militants. Leelawati's consultation fees were very reasonable. Even the poor could afford treatment at her clinic. She had ignored the warning. (Gigoo, 40)

Kashmiris are very traditional and staunch practitioners of cultural de-meanors. They are devout. The whole saga of the exodus made it very difficult for men in general and women in particular to live a culturally sound and comfortable life. The camp life of Kashmiri Pandits as represented in

The Garden of Solitude, evidently explains the atrocious living forced on the human race. The everyday humiliation and uncomfortable life that exodus brings to these Kashmiris, explain the magnitude of psychological trauma that they go through. Traditional values and mutual respect (commanded and demanded), which make the core of Kashmiri culture, take a toll. Women particularly prefer to do household work under-protected covers. When Kashmiri Hindu women move to camps in Jammu, it becomes very difficult for them to cope up with the new traditions and culture of an alien land. Even daily house chores like washing clothes and utensils openly in a filthy narrow stream of water though close to their tents make mothers and daughters feel awkward:: “The women washed utensils in the grayish waters of a canal. An old Dogra woman witnessed the unfolding of events from the window of her house, unmoved” (73).

It becomes very embarrassing for these women to queue for hours together in the morning to use the temporary toilets made of rags, pieces of cardboard, and a tatter of cloth. They not only have to wait for their turn at the filthy and stinking toilets but poor women have to protect themselves from the lewd gaze of loitering men around who wait and watch to see women relieve themselves. Many women choose to go to the reeking toilets in the middle of the night so that they can avoid the male gaze. Their helplessness is evident from this fact that they cannot even cry in public. The women at camp often scream, then fall silent, sigh, and then cry in comforting solace behind the filthy tank to avoid public notice.

The height of their discomfort and suffering can be sensed from the situation where young girls have to change their clothes in front of the male members of the family, be it father, brother or grandfather: “The old man looks at my sister change clothes at bedtime. She puts off the light. There are no curtains to hide behind. She sleeps in snatches, sandwiched like an insect between her mother and her grandmother. She dreams of crawling insects in the sun and the shade” (98). There is an awkwardness these girls have to live with. They don’t feel safe with their men. There is unusual tension between exodus women and their men. Grandfathers smell the garments of their granddaughters and relish their putrescent odour: “The old man wants to touch her clothes hanging from the hook. He smells the clothes of his granddaughter” (99). Thus women’s vulnerability makes them easy targets to physical, sexual, emotional, and cultural harassment inside the camp or outside by outsiders or by their men.

Onir’s film *I Am* is about issues and dilemmas bruising modern Indian society. Exploring these tribulations, *I Am* unfurls four tales of four different

people who struggle to find their respective identities, and endorse the right status in a world that is inimical, indifferent, and insensitive. *I Am* is a fusion of stories shot in four different cities of India, where the protagonists yearn for a common dream to repossess their lives, to retrieve their identities that have been misplaced, displaced or lost. In one of the four segments of the intermixed narrative of the film, the story of "I Am Megha" attempts to capture the bitter memories of exodus and shows the transitory visit of Megha, the female protagonist, to Kashmir to sell off her ancestral property. Simple, sensible, and heart-rendering *I Am* problematizes the issue of identity, displacement, and belongingness. There is an identity crisis both as self-realized within and as stimulated from outside. One's own dilemma/ confusion blinds one to see the surroundings in totality. Onir explores the facet of identity crisis and belongingness through the story of Megha. She feels disowned by her birthplace.

Megha: "*Shuru shuru mein sochti thi ki yahan wapis aa jayeingay lekin ab settle ho gaye hain delhi mein.*" 'Initially, I used to believe we will return to the valley. But now we are settled in Delhi.'

Rubeena's dad: "*Gharliya Delhi mei?*" 'Did you buy a house in Delhi?'

Megha: "*lena hi pada, kitne saal rishtedaaron key yahaan rehtey.*" 'We had no other choice. How long could we live with relatives.'

Rubina's dad: "*Sahi hai apna Ghar apna hi Hota hai.*" 'You are right. There is nothing like being in your own home.'

Megna: "*Shuru mein toh papa maan hi nahi rahe the, 'Delhi koi rehne ki jagah hai'.*" 'Initially, dad was reluctant. He would say Delhi wasn't fit for living.'

Rubeena's dad: "*Mattu Sahab ko Delhi kab pasand thi. Ek hafte mein vo aajatey the bahane bana ke. Vo Delhi mein kab itna tiktey.*" 'Mr. Mattu never quite liked Delhi. He would always return in a week, making up excuses. He could never stay in Delhi.'

Megha: "*lekin jab Vikas chacha ko maar diya papa ne haar maan li. Wapas aane ki aas hi toot gai. Kaam nahi ghar mein baithtey the sara din. Chinta kartey the. Massive heart attack Hua.*" 'But when they abducted and killed Vikas uncle my father gave up. We lost all the desire to return and decided not to. With no job in his hand. He sat at home all day, worrying. He had a massive heart attack'. (my

trans; 31:39)

The narrative sensitively touches upon the concern of belongingness. Aggrieved and not willing to forget about impulsive 'loss of identity, Megha seems to have inured with time. She is the epitome of long-harbored melancholy and suppressed vulnerability. Her anger speaks and expresses the pain of violence that she feels deep within and which had been simmering inside her since willing/unwilling migration. With tears in her eyes and anger on her face in a telephonic conversation with her brother, she blurts:

Megha: *"Srinagar is finished. It is over damn it. Tum nahi, mein nahi, maa nahi*

Koi wahan par wapas nahi jayega." "Srinagar is finished. It is over damn it.

Neither you nor me, not even mother, none of us is going back to Srinagar'

"Kaun jayega Kashmir?" 'Who will go back to Kashmir? "Arey rehne daingay

Wahan par?" 'Are they going to let us live there?'

"Ghar baitch do khatam karobaat." 'Sell the house, close the matter'

"Lekin nahi koi nahi suntta." 'but no one listens to me'. (my trans; 14:30)

Megha returns to Kashmir valley, her own home on a momentary trip to finalize some paperwork to sell their home thereafter almost twenty years of migration. She is in a dilemma whether to call her 'own home' a 'home' now. Forced migration for Mega has resulted in her identity crises that consist of numerous outlooks and convoluted relationships with the place. Her physical and emotional separation and reunion from her homeland show the neglected materiality of the lives of migrant women as a whole. She disagrees to accept Kashmir as her home. Though she disagrees to call it her own home, she implicitly shows her inclination and belongingness in disagreement to this place. Her choice of dress which is Kashmiri crafted suits, being nostalgic about childhood memories after looking at old showpieces in the almirah of her Kashmir home, and her

willingness to stay with Rubina's family, once upon a time her neighbour, exhibit the fact that she still longs for her home and love for her land has not died in her. She still in her heart of hearts, finds herself belonging to this place. Though exodus has left her with bitter memories as she holds the Muslim community responsible for her displacement and is unable to forgive them; on her return to Kashmir, she finds that her childhood friend Rubina and her family suffered too. Her friend's plight is no different, she is perceived as a 'terrorist' in her homeland. Repeated raids from police and interrogation of her family members make her life very difficult.

Rubina: "*Megha I am sorry. Mujhe pata hai tum pe kya beeti hai par hamare*

saath..." 'Megha I am sorry. I understand the painful strife you have gone through but do you know our plight...'

Megha: "*Please cut it out, Rubina. Army tumhare saath bura sulook kar rahi hai?*

India tumhara haq cheen rahi hai? Ya fir koi bhoolne nahi de raha ki tumhara bhai ek trained Mujahideen hai? Kiss baat se problem hai tumhe Rubina?" 'Please cut it out, Rubina. Is Army mistreating you? Is India depriving you of your rights? Or no one lets you forget your brother is a trained Militant? What

is it, that you have a problem with, Rubina?'

Rubina: "*Iss jannat mein jeenay ki saza se.*" 'The punishment of living in this

Paradise!' (my trans; 52:50)

The narrative of "I am Megha" shows how both communities are suffering from the aftermath of the exodus. It questions the divide between ethnicity and religion in the background of a militancy-torn state Kashmir. The perspectives of Megha and Rubina are thrown against each other and what materializes, are the two different stories but with the same sense of suffering and pain. Women suffer the most during any given crisis, be it domestic indifference or any national, international combat. They become the objects of national prestige and a sort of barter pawn between states:

Sarhad par jayengay Kalashnikovs layengey. 'We will cross the border and bring Kalashnikovs.' Zalimo, kafiro Kashmir hamara chod do.

'Infidels and tyrants, leave our land!' We want freedom! We want freedom! Nareiytakbeer. 'God is the greatest.' *Asi gatch Pakistan bata vrus t batniyo saan*. We want Pakistan without Hindu Pundit men with Hindu pundit women.' (my trans; 40:50)

Their lives are controlled by a patriarchal political mechanism. Their identity is dictated by the men in power. They can only show their resentment through words of anger. Megha reiterates how the female body is imagined as a repository of communal honour. Both Megha and Rubina become bodies on which power is contested through the narration of their woeful tales, resentment, and absorption of savagery.

The women of Kashmir have borne the brunt of armed insurgency and counter-insurgency to an extreme extent. They are the worst hit victims who suffer at threefold levels gender (feminine), region (Kashmir), and religion (Kashmiri Pandit/Muslim). The chosen texts present narratives that successfully portray the painful epoch that Kashmir and its exodus Hindu community experience. *I Am* and *The Garden of Solitude* delves deep into the explicit issue of woman suffering and gender identity along with a longing for home. They enumerate the problems from physical torture to psychological trauma. The select narratives show a woman as a victim of rape, physical abuse, mental and emotional torture, and social displacement. It shows that combat leads to alienation and disempowerment. Also, it is about identity and resistance how women of exodus show great resilience by bearing the pain thrust upon them, adapting to the new cultural transitions, and living with the memory of beloved home and everything associated with it, and the forced essentialism which snatches their identity.

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