

# Trauma Narrative and Existential Dilemma in Mirza Waheed's "The Collaborator": A Study of Traumatic Narratology and Desensitization

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## Abstract

The Collaborator by Mirza Waheed is a narrative trauma experienced by helpless Indian Kashmiri Muslims who are facing the tyranny of Indian Forces. The Kashmiri Muslims are considered traitors and tortured on and off without any justification. The dramatic disappearance of the Kashmiri youth has created an atmosphere of horror. The Kashmiri are scared and live a life of fear without any hope. The Kashmiris have no choice but to be complicit with the rulers in order to protect their families and avoid death and disappearance. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the trauma narrative and existential dilemma of the Kashmiri people. This will be a qualitative research and Traumatic narratology and Desensitization will be applied as a tool to analyze the text under discussion. By using the concept of Mary Cover Jones and Cathy Caruth the researcher will try to explore horrors and intensity of traumatic events in narration.

**Keywords:** Trauma narrative, Existential dilemma, Desensitization

## 1. Introduction

This research investigates the doleful situation of the oppressed Kashmiris through traumatic narratology and desensitization technique. The purpose of research is to make prominent the devastating conditions of Kashmiris and its destiny has been left in deadlock since 1947.

The scenario of Kashmir has never been told so evocatively and redolently as in *The Collaborator*. Waheed methodically builds an atmosphere of menace and despair, all the while interleaving doleful description. It is story about the narrator's prolonged dilemma over whether to cross the border in the training camps with his friends or to stay with his parents in Nowgam, Indians Kashmir. Whether his indecision is due to weakness of his character or the factual hold of the protestor's futility remains vague but stasis comes to dominate the novel and trauma, distress and demise help to highlight the spiting truth of Kashmir. The inhumation story of the annihilation of a clique depicts a devastating power that is appealing and lasting.

In 1990's when engagement between the Indian state and Kashmiris demanding Azadi (emancipation) resulted uncommonly bloodshed. This smudge and smeared mark of blood incident cannot easily be forgotten. "While thousands of boys from all of Kashmir were increasingly being drawn into the vortex of a euphoric freedom struggle....but what happened then? Nothing! Nothing but lootmar, rape...." (Waheed, 2011, p. 26).

The most prominent thing in the novel is the "nameless protagonist", a testimony in itself that Kashmiri writers are trying to establish a "voice" through written lingo. They are writing to be heard and giving Kashmiris a voice which is made voiceless for years now. The objectives of this article are to highlight the plight of the Kashmiri Muslims who are trapped in history and divided loyalties, to bring to light the trauma experienced by Kashmiris and to rehaul and explore the desensitization.

## 2. Literature Review

Traumatic narratology means the need felt by many late twentieth century theorists for the development of a narrative form that will be able to produce an effective version of trauma. This trauma narrative facilitates working-through and enable witnessing of trauma. However, it must strive to avoid producing a falsifying version of the trauma.

De facto traumatic narratology and desensitization argue that trauma can be achieved by acknowledging its own provisionality and therefore not only highlights the limitations but also the necessity of narrative representations of trauma. "Trauma" as Edkins argues, "is what happens when [what is] normally hidden by the social reality in which we live our daily lives, is suddenly revealed." (Edkins, 2003, p. 214).

Discoveries about the nature of traumatic experience as overwhelming, alien, amnesiac and often incomprehensible have necessitated new historiographic, testimonial and representational approaches to help interpret the enigmatic traces of evidence and memory. The traumatic texts tend to position their readers in ethical dilemmas analogous to those of trauma survivors.

The American and British writers have worked on trauma as a theme in their particular texts. These novels show brutality and violence often on general and individual grounds. The act of murder and individual loss is quite horrific in these novels. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994), Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* make the reader traumatized. The conceptual violence on the side of both victim as well as perpetrator is painful and pathetic. These trauma narratives and its overwhelming narration make the reader forget his surrounding world. These fictions are the reconstruction of the concept of trauma to realize the bitter realities of life.

Sigmund Freud has elaborated that trauma is not just the pain of body, it is uncontrollable emotions of shattered personality due to extreme terror and agony. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud accentuated the hysterical effects of world war on people. The effected people see traumatic dreams and do not live a normal life. They suffer from painful intrusive memories for rest of their lives. The implementations and consequences of war make people unable to adjust in society. This article proceeds to consider how recent literary and cultural representation of Kashmir such as Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh's "*Kashmir Pending*" (2007) and Basharat Peer's "*Curfewed Night*" (2008) document the crossing of the Line of Control by insurgents.

"*Curfewed Night*", a memoir of war in Kashmir is another novel which truly portrays the real dilemma and traumatic situations in Kashmir. It is a personal narrative conflict in trouble torn Kashmir. It seems awkward to use the words "brilliant" and "painful" together. But *Curfewed Night* is an exception which define both these words intermittently. This prose expresses the pain and pathos of the lay man who has to face the turmoil: survive or succumb. The vivid description of loss and lamentation disheartens the reader and makes him weep. It is actually a narration of damaged lives and lost homes.

I was thirteen. The war of my adolescence had started. Today I fail to remember the beginnings. I fail to remember who told me about azaadi, or freedom, who told me about militants, who told me it had begun. I fail to remember the date, the name, the place, the image that announced the war- a war that continues still. Time and again I look back and try to call from memory the moment that was to change everything I had been and would be. (Peer, 2011, p. 15).

They laid the Kashmiris out on the floors like rows of carcasses. The generation of Kashmiris were rendered impotent and lost their kidneys by the cruel and inhumane torture in Papa-2:

"They beat us up with guns, staffs, hands. But that was nothing....They took you out to the lawn outside the building. You were asked to remove all your clothes, even your under wear. They tied you to a long ladder and placed it near a ditch filled with kerosene oil and red chili powder. They raised the ladder like a seesaw and pushed your head into the ditch...It was the beginning...They tied copper wire around your arms and gave high-voltage shocks....But the worst was when they inserted the copper wire into the penis and gave electric shocks." (Peer, 2011, p. 138).

### 3. Research Methodology

Cathy Caruth has defined trauma "The originally meaning of trauma itself (in both English and German), the Greek *trauma*, or "wound," originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body. In its later usage, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind." (Caruth, 1996, p. 3) in these words: "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive experience of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon." (Caruth, 1996, p. 11).

Cathy Caruth has explained that continual sufferings of individuals are written in traumatic narratology or the narration of trauma. The dreams of tormentor are nightmares for tormented and tortured individuals which lead them to live catastrophic lives. Such catastrophic and disastrous lives, events and circumstances are the result of some individuals' possession and are presented in narrative form. Cathy's concept of Traumatic Narratology moves the reader with sensation and terror. The narration which leads the reader to mental derangement and mental instability is Traumatic Narratology and Desensitization.

The concept of desensitization and behavior therapy was developed by Mary Cover Jones. It is defined as the less emotional responsiveness to a negative stimulant after continuous exposure to aversive circumstances. It is a kind of behavior therapy and psychotherapy which makes the individual less reactive to anxieties, phobias and torture

The sorrowful and pathetic voice is present in the narration of trauma which makes the reader to cry. The moving literary story leads you to feel trauma, pain and torture. Cathy has also explained that trauma is not just a physical wound but it is also an excessive and irrational anxiety of mind. Traumatic Narratology is the pathetic and heart touching voice that cries out in the narration to make reader weep. It is the terrible situations and events in the narration which unfold the world over. Trauma and existential dilemma in the text makes the reader hear and feel the trouble.

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association finally officially acknowledged the long-recognized but frequently ignored phenomenon under the title "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD), which

included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes...it has seemed to engulf everything around it: suddenly responses not only to combat and to natural catastrophes but also to rape, child abuse, and a number of other violent occurrences have been understood in terms of PTSD, and diagnoses of some dissociative disorders have also been switched to that of trauma. (Caruth, 1995, p. 3).

The work on trauma narration creates sensation in the society and the whole society feels pain and anguish which is a part of trauma narrative. Trauma describes the disenfranchised pain and grief that cannot be integrated into individual's general meaning structure and belief system. The unspoken grief of minority subjects and their social abjection remain outside the realm of the social symbolic. This study analyzes the traumas of minority subjects portrayed in selected contemporary novel and examines the narrative functions of healing and defiance of Kashmiris.

#### 4. Text Analysis

History as a damage and distressing is indecipherable to bear evidence of but the past can easily be remembered and resurrected in the form of nostalgia. Waheed has tried to narrate the traumatic story through first person narrative who tries to live in the past for the present and existential painful hardships. The pathetic sufferings and tragedies which lead to madness pervade in *The Collaborator*, the traumatic narrative. The unfathomable losses and hallucination runs through the novel to highlight the existential dilemma and traumatic sufferings of Kashmiris.

A collaborator is the one whose job is to collect the weapons and identification cards from mutilated and vandalized dead bodies. The whole narrative is possessed by a temporal delay and waiting which is endless in its prolepsis. In the novel the reader waits till the end of the narration that the protagonist will gather courage to quit his job as a collaborator, leave his homeland and cross the border.

Waheed has divided the traumatic narration of the novel into three parts. The first part shows the incidents of past as well as present and weaving together the traumatic narration of unknown narrator whose family has to survive alone in the valley. All the villagers are left in the era of continuous skirmish and guerilla wars. His four friends Mohammed, Gul, Ashfaq and Hussain left him alone in the haunted valley where only phantom traces are present. The second part is about the reverberation of friends' insurgency and ferocious crackdowns in Kashmir. The last and final part of the novel explicits the relationship between Kadian, the captain and the unnamed narrator.

- "They just drop off the ridge like dolls...one after the other, ping, ping...Look, they are just dead meat and that's how I prefer them...a long window...covered with thick curtains, military blankets perhaps, so you can't see what's behind the office" (pp. 4-5).

The bloodthirsty Kadian shows his wickedness towards carcasses and the bravery of Indian army is judged on the basis of shooting militants at first sight. The army on the border has to stop the freedom fighters from continuous sneaking in their lands. The dead bodies in the trench for Kadian are just dismembered pieces of meat. The valleys in Kashmir are beautiful but sadness and "disquieting" (p. 4), darkness is prevailing in the small valley of Nowgam.

The existential dilemma is that principal figure of the novel has to collaborate because he will get "Five hundred per trip and a small bonus for every ID and weapon bring back"... "the money's good, bloody good" (p. 4) for Indian soldiers. Indian Forces always try to hide the realities in Kashmir and portray only what they want to portray through media and symbolically through curtains in the novel approve their hideous crime nature.

- "Why me?... when everyone fled for their safety- this was when they started shelling us day and night during the crackdown...." "My friends, all my friends, went away too, and God only knows if they will ever come back." (pp. 6-7).

The voice of protagonist is filled with frightened, resignation, desperation and even a sort of deadness. His alienation in the dark and devastated valley is overpowering him. He is the only person in the valley who has to do the work for army for survival of himself and family. His alienation and loneliness makes him believe that "people would surely be back at some point." (p. 6). His isolation and abandonment makes him fanatic somehow and enforces him to see day dreams. The forced displacement and inhumane logo of Indian forces "catch and kill. Catch and kill" (p. 7) is traumatic and heart rending. The solo valley enforces him to think about the pleasant past and his friends.

- "There are bare wounds, holes dark and visceral, and limbless, armless, even headless, torsos. A loan moan struggles, screeches inside...Bodies after bodies- some huddled together, others forlorn and lonesome - in various stages of decay. Wretched human remains lie like cracked toys. Teeth, shoes.....Macabre, horrid ghouls on either side of the brook watch me from their melancholic black-hole eye sockets. Carcasses with indefinable expressions on what remains of their faces-I hope I don't recognize anyone... The smell, the smell, the smell!.... You just stop breathing. That is it." (p. 8).

The traumatic description of carcasses is gruesome in narration and it is frenzy for the protagonist to see the pathetic conditions of dead bodies. He sobs and laments to see the dismembered pieces of bodies. A collaborator has given the rucksack to collect cards and arms. "It's not easy, picking stuff off dead people." (p. 8). When he touches his first ever corpse, he has taken bath twice on that day with burning hot water to clean himself. He narrates that the smell of carcasses faints and makes any normal human being neurotic but the existential dilemma and desensitization is that the protagonist's "beginning to get used to this. That's worrying." (p. 9). This is the consequence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which is alarming situation for him to live normal life. The traumatic and painful sufferings through traumatic narratology, desensitized the protagonist in *The Collaborator*.

- "These are erstwhile legs and arms and backbones and ribcages surrounded by sparkling swathes of yellow created by the thousands and thousands of flowers all across the valley... and decaying... it makes me cry, it makes me want to run away, to disappear." (p. 14).

The dreaded and brutish act of forces is in the form of stink valley which is full of the poor Kashmiri people. The bodies are scattered like old and wasted furniture in a warehouse. The bodies are mostly eaten by dogs, rats and other wild animals and birds. "Some of these boys have entire arms missing, half-legs astride from their torsos." (p. 15). This heap is "a man-eating mela day and night" (p. 15) for brutal Indian forces. They don't bother to look at this heap and feel happy to exploit and torture the Kashmiris. "The rabid man-eating wolves" (p. 16) means Indian forces are expert to gnaw, pull and to peel the bodies.

- "All the boys...are gone, gone, no one left in the village, it's empty now, all empty! It's all happening, dear, happening everywhere...the story of the sixteen boys (some said twenty, some thirty) who had apparently disappeared together...soon after all the women there had been raped in a night-long raid by Indian soldiers." (p. 24)

This is pathetic, frightful condition which is prevailing in the wretched Kashmir where continuous skirmish war has demolished their personal and public life. The people are leaving and become refugee to take breath freely. All the women of Kashmir are raped, molested and maltreated more than men. The mental condition and psychology of people of Kashmir enforce to leave or desensitize the unfortunate happenings. The authority has never accepted any illegal and unfortunate happenings and they let people know through media that these are just "spiced up rumors." (p. 24). Their purpose is to spread anarchy and make the Kashmiris identityless forever.

- "Hundreds of us fall to the bullets of the oppressor, to the guns of the kafir every day. We die in hundreds, no, thousands...the cruel infidel us, tortures us, insults us and treats us like dirt...you are dragged out of your houses at night by stinking drunken soldiers...while your women, your mothers, your ready-to-wed daughters and sisters are still in bed! Crackdown after crackdown, from dawn to dusk, for days sometimes...." (p. 33).

It is common in Kashmir to vandalize, to debase the religious places by racy Indian forces. They enjoy to urinate in the graveyards and on the walls of mosques. They enter into the holy places of Muslims with their unclean shoes to irritate and mentally torture the pitiful Kashmiris. They feel proud to hurt and traumatize the poor people in Kashmir. They are just ants for the sovereign ruler in Kashmir and they are suppressed, debased with each passing days. The women in Kashmir are no safer, they are just puppets in the hands of inhumane Indian soldiers. They have no rights to enjoy the private life and curfew and crackdowns make them destroyed.

- "Young and old, men and children, dead, all dead, dead on a bridge; blood, washed with fire-brigade hoses, ran down copiously into the muddy waters of the river...they saw, they shot. They saw more, they shot more." (p. 117).

The protest of Kashmiris on Gaw Kadal Bridge results a hundred of people are murdered in the centre of Srinagar. In the broad day light, numberless Kashmiris lose their lives on the river Jhelum. The main headline of *The Daily Sun* after that day is "The River of Blood." (p. 117). It is mournful and heart wrenching incident in which every eye cries on the savagery of Indian forces. "All the soldiers they send to Kashmir are trained to be killer dogs." (p. 117). Their purpose is to just spread the terror, maul and anxiety in the beautiful valley of Kashmir which is now known as mournful valley. The protest of people and the acts of cross over make the Indian soldiers a mad dog.

- "Why can't they just have another war instead – a proper, proper war – and get it over with. This ikka-duka gola baari, this damned sporadic shelling on the LoC, I'm sick of it." (p. 129).

The Indian soldiers take the boys as flammable material who are caught up in fight. They make the LoC a firework place where they compete who has the better ability to destroy and demolish militants. There is always a kind of heavy shelling gunfire goes on in Nowgam near LoC. They do not bother to distinguish between the river and the blood of Kashmiris and always ready to commit murder and massacre to flow their blood like water in the channel. The cold war is responsible to grasp the peace of the people in Kashmir and traumatic circumstances and sufferings of innocent one. It makes the people awake in mid night and suffer them from mental as well physical sufferings. The Indian soldiers have dreadful business to continue this war to demolish the identity of people in Kashmir and Kashmiris spend half a sleepless night with swollen and red eyes.

- "He was made to pee on an electric heater while they threw ice-cold water over him; they pierced a red-

hot knitting needle through his penis and then gave him electric shocks; they stuffed a bamboo cane with hot chili powder and thrust it up his anus and then broke the cane; they made him drink their collective urine after keeping him thirsty for days; they ran a cricket roller over his feet and knees; no, they let loose their big dogs on him and that was the point when he broke, for he had always been scared of dogs.” (p. 186).

Indian army has crossed the limits to do torture on Farooq, Gul’s brother. They suspect that Farooq involves in freedom movement and will also involve in sending his brother Gul across the border. The commandos of Indian army come at Gul’s home for investigation and the loud hurried steps of army has horrified all the people in Nowgam. The parents of Farooq scream and shout after seeing his son Farooq to be taken away by soldiers. All the people outside listen the frantic, wild and demented scream of Farooq’s mother. Gul’s father stand motionless to see his son to be led away by Indian army. The mother is in uncontrolled and panic-stricken condition and cries to look at the sky.

- “It was like a mourning procession... There were people dying everywhere, getting massacred in every town and village, there were people being picked up and thrown into dark jails in unknown parts, there were dungeons in the city where hundreds of young men were kept in heavy chains and from where many never emerged alive, there were thousands who had disappeared, leaving behind women with photographs and perennial waiting, there were multitudes of dead bodies on the roads...scattered casually on the snow of mindless borders. So what was a little village exodus in comparison to all that.” (p. 250).

It is painful for the protagonist to see all his villagers to leave their own place. The severe back-breaking curfew has enforced Nowgamians to give up, to quit and to leave their village. They don’t want to see their children like the beheading Farooq, they want their family alive. The mournful, tired and agitated procession or “Kafila” (p. 240) is now on their way to find no other way to survive in their own village. The curfews, crackdowns, sounds of bombardment and continuous skirmish war make them enforce to leave Kashmir. The search operations during crackdowns make people restless and mentally traumatized. The large number of people in Kashmir forget to sleep due to the sound of shelling and gunshots. They always fearful to loss their children, women, honor and their own lives. They don’t want to listen to the headman’s voice to stay in their occupied land where there is no hope to get independence.

The conundrum and dilemma which is present in Kashmir is to make people indefinite and unsettle for their own life in their occupied land. The people have forgotten to live their own lives and they are always in midstream to decide anything. The traumatized circumstances, crackdowns and cold war make them neurotic and indecisive like the unnamed protagonist in the novel who has no identity.

- “Boys – they all burn in the big fire I’ve cooked up, the fire I watch now, my fire, my only act, my only decision in years, my fire. The flames leap up and burn everything inside them, they leap out from limbs and groins and heads and backs and chests and faces and faces and hands, and everything burns; the feet burn too, those lonely dismembered feet in their boots...dark eyes of eternal sleep! I burnt all that ever was there. (pp. 298-299).

It is the time when the protagonist decides to quit and feverish anger enforces him to do one major act of his life. Kadian is ready to leave Nowgam and he has called his religious Pundit for idol’s worship, to clean himself from all the sins. It is not acceptable for the protagonist to see Kadian’s decision to leave peacefully who has converted his village in devastated shape. He is in commotion state and then decides to unflame his anger for Kadian. He summons up his courage and tries to be normal in front of carcasses. Kadian and his soldiers are busy in their pyramid tent for prayer.

The protagonist plans to throw kerosene oil on the dead bodies of all boys lying there and lights the fire. He does not leave the carcasses for vultures and for rabid, man eating vampires. All the parts of body burn with yellow grown flowers on the side of the bodies. He has put all his anger and frustration to light the fire in dark and stink valley of his militant brothers. The anguish which is frozen on the faces of militants has started to diminish with fire. Their eyes, grieved lips embraces the fire and ready to finish with bonfire. In the end, he just hymn the prayers for Muslim dead bodies with his dried and burnt eyes and decides to leave that burnt valley. He has narrated the traumatic condition and dilemma of Kashmiris through excruciating narration to highlight the realities.

## 5. Conclusion

“Devastating...haunting...gripping in its narrative drama.” (Shamsie, 2011).

The researcher has tried to explore the novel *The Collaborator* from the theoretical perspective of Traumatic Narratology and Desensitization. *The Collaborator* is considered as metafiction novel which makes the practical use of narrative technique to let the people know about the strategies of narratives in an extensive way. Through this article it has been tried to raise awareness through the trauma and existential dilemma in narratives. Like many other metafictional narrative novels, *The Collaborator* has disrupted the standard realist

techniques and focus on the provisionality, contradiction, difference, an irresolvable internal contradictions over coherence and homogeneity. In the novel, the purpose of article is to draw the attention towards poignant traumatic events which is narrated in terms of amplifying interpretation of the trauma. This amplifying interpretation of the trauma and existential dilemma is a continual process in the novel to highlight the individual and social traumatic realities.

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