War Trauma, Collective Memory, and Cultural Productions in Conflict Zones: Kashmir in Focus

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Abstract

Euro-American exclusivity has mostly been responsible for eclipsing the universalizing appeal of trauma studies. In a bid to cater for trauma accounts of the Global South, the present study attempts to look into the trauma of people living in Kashmir, a conflict zone in the middle of the third-world Asian countries. Kashmir is one of the disputed regions and a center point of conflict between India and Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The political turbulence as well as the resulting militarization has rendered the entire Kashmiri community listless and prone to traumatic experiences. Despite the serious nature of the traumatic experiences of the people living in Kashmir, and as depicted in the literature produced therein, little scholarly attention has been given to it to voice out these accounts, which are necessary for claiming the truthful depiction of the Kashmiri. This article uses Jeffery C. Alexander et al.’s Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity and Kai T. Erikson’s Collective Trauma as the theoretical framework to analyze the selected Kashmiri Anglophone literary text titled The Collaborator by Mirza Waheed. The study finds that the traumatic memories of Kashmiri people, as a community, are no different from the likewise traumatized people of the Global North. Here, the Kashmiri narrative takes the responsibility of presenting the reality of life. The investigation concludes that fictional narratives, through memory of the past, bring a compelling tale of eternal suffering, establishing the fact that it is not the individual that must bear the moral responsibility; rather, it should be the collective.

Keywords

Kashmir, traumatic memories, trauma, collective and cultural trauma, literary texts

Introduction

Since the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the issue of Kashmir has remained disputed and unresolved. The discord between the Maharaja of Kashmir, who favored India, and the dissatisfaction of the people of Kashmir, who opted for Pakistan but were denied the same, became the bone of contention between the two countries. The United Nations stepped in to restore peace and order in the region and made several commissions to resolve the problem. However, the resolution to the disputed status of Kashmir has still not taken place.

Upon reading the history of Kashmir, one can find the root cause that created this problem in the first place. The first of the reasons include the instrument of accession that India made with the then Maharaja of Kashmir. According to this instrument of accession, the Maharaja obtained India’s help against the insurgency of people, particularly Muslims, who wanted to join Pakistan due to their geographical, religious, and ethnic allegiance. The people of Kashmir, Pakistan, and even the organization of the United Nations did not consider this instrument. During the 1948 war between Indian and Pakistan, India took the dispute, between the two nations, to the United Nations which urged both the countries to resolve this issue. The plebiscite, which was suggested by the United Nations as a possible solution, has not been realized so far. Since then, the right to freedom has been demanded by Kashmiris. However, the efforts made for freedom have remained fruitless. Political and social unrest has been going on for decades. The Sikh rule has been nightmarish for Kashmiris since the 1930, but the then Maharaja gave way to, and allowed, limited democratic legislation after the formation of Kashmir’s first political party under Sheikh

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Abdullah’s the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. Since then, the effort to achieve peace in the region has been tried on numerous occasions, but the rising conflict has remained an obstacle to peace in Kashmir.

After the 1990s, there has been a new cycle of militancy on the rise as young Kashmiri boys have been joining the militants to fight for freedom. To control foreign infiltration, as it is often claimed by the Indian government, the Indian forces have always maintained an upper hand through the use of force in Kashmir. The majority of Muslim population of Kashmir has never accepted the infiltration of Indian troops into the region. To crush any militant insurgency or civil disobedience, the Indian forces have resorted to the use of force. The conflict and violence, going on in Kashmir, has left the region destabilized. The world community at large as well as the United Nations tried a number of times to resolve the problem, but the desire of freedom for the people in Kashmir has never been materialized.

By looking at the facts, one can analyze the international efforts made in this regard. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has intervened on various occasions by passing resolutions. The UNSC Resolution of April 21, 1948, which is one of the principal UN resolutions on Kashmir, stated that “both India and Pakistan desire that the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan should be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite.” Subsequent UNSC Resolutions reiterated the same stand. The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolutions of August 3, 1948 and January 5, 1949 also reinforced the UNSC resolutions (Pakistan Mission to United Nations, 2017), but nothing much has been achieved in this regard.

The violence that has gripped Kashmir since 1947 can be viewed from the perspective of the international media as well. Hunt (2016) asserts that CNN has reported that 47,000 people have so far been killed in separatist violence in Kashmir, whereas the number of missing people remains unnumbered.

The present study hypothesizes that memories of the traumatizing events of a war-like situation in Kashmir contribute to breed the feelings of collective and cultural trauma, where fictional narratives take the responsibility of presenting the reality of life as it is. Through such memories of the traumatic past, the factual tale of psychological sufferings is unveiled for the rest of the world.

**Literature Review**

Despite the fact that the line of control was established in 1972, conflict and violence still continue not only between troops from Pakistan and India but also between militants/freedom fighters and Indian troops. The line of control still exists, and so exists the violence. Initially, the conflict between India and Pakistan was an interstate affair between the two countries, but the 1988 militancy by certain militant and activist groups for the liberation of Kashmir initiated a cycle of events with the population caught between the opposing parties. As Jong et al. mentioned, “Officially, 20,000 people have died and 4,000 others have disappeared since the start of the militancy. In 2004 alone, 1,587 militancy incidents and 1,263 deaths, including 479 civilians, were officially recorded [1]—however, according to other sources these figures are substantially higher [2]” (de Jong et al., 2008, para 6). Looking at the occurrence and impact of traumatic events in Kashmir, nobody can escape the violence that has accompanied many events. The most frequent events cited have been firing, explosion, and exposure to combat zone that have rendered life at a halt. From the results of the related researches, it was found that almost 62% of the people reported to have witnessed at least four times the traumatic events. The nature of the violence included many facets such as torture, rape, firing, physical mistreatment, roundup raids, explosion of mines, damage to property, cross fire, burning of houses, arrests, kidnapping, forced labor, injury, and violation of modesty.

Kaul (2012) narrates the experiences of the 1990s, when individual and collective suffering was on the rise. Accounts of countless corpses as well as bodies and souls broken in interrogation centers, mushroomed graveyards coupled with every day’s humiliation at the hands of the army were on the rise. Estimated figure has been more than 70,000 people killed; but this is not the only number:

Many young men simply disappeared, and stories of unidentified bodies buried in mass graves circulated: these graves have only recently been confirmed by both civil society activists and a government agency empowered to examine the issue. Fear limited (and still limits) civic options, but determined groups, such as, for example, the families of the disappeared, kept up their vigils and demanded investigations. (p. 77)

The same can be viewed in The Collaborator as the entire narrative rests on the issue of missing people and bodies of unidentified militant boys. It is also noteworthy to consider that the stories were told by the young people of that decade, not as an aberrant experience but as an unsurprising normality:

Most militants were young Kashmiri men, who crossed the border to join one or the other of the many groups that formed, splintered, and reformed in the 1990s and they—as well as civilians caught in the cross-fire—bore the brunt of the casualties in their battles against Indian forces. (Kaul, 2011, p. 174)

Whenever, any militant was killed or caught, many Kashmiris were taken in by the army. They were tortured or imprisoned on suspicion of affiliation with the freedom activism. There were many who simply disappeared and whose unidentified bodies now lie in unmarked graves. This has been investigated by human rights groups in the last few years. “The numbers of the dead mounted: estimates range from 70,000 to 100,000 killed in the last 20 years. The
numbers of those maimed physically and psychologically by this conflict are correspondingly larger” (Kaul, 2012, p. 175). It is also found out that the new cycle of violence and bloodshed has turned Kashmir into a mass graveyard. Hospitals are full of mental patients. The new intifada of 2010 has created a nation of mourners in the form of a new generation that is only familiar with the brutality and cruelty of the state.

In the face of such violence, bloodshed, brutality, and death, literatures of the related region have an effective role to play. Kaul is of the view that today’s writers from Kashmir are writing with sensitivity and responsibility; it is not a mere literature of propaganda, rather the literary texts are voicing traumatic experiences of Kashmiris with a particular stress on the human and experiential relations. As Kaul (2012) states, “the particular circumstances of trauma demand an affective response that registers the emotional dimensions of the original” (p. 72). Trauma, as defined by American Psychological Association (APA), is an event beyond the normal human experience, and literature of trauma is written to retell the experience to make it real to community and individual.

Narrative trauma of Kashmir is depicted in the literature as an eminent historian. Chitrakatha Zutshi (2016) states that it is not located at specific historical moments depicting historical wounds of that community, rather it is a trauma that unfolds in the aftermath of events and is unable to be captured or told. The narratives depict that it is unable for individuals to write about trauma or to record it. But this perspective has been denied by many other trauma theorists. In this respect, the postcolonial perspective of writing back to the empire has been analyzed by Rizwan (2013) in Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator. He discusses how the literary texts from Kashmir are “symptomatic of the changing poetic of resistance within Kashmir” (Rizwan, 2013, para. 4).

By writing back to the empire, the Kashmiri writers have developed a distinctive voice to show that resistance. As Kaul (2011) discusses how poetry with its various themes and literary tools speaks of the suffering of the humanity. Kashmir has seen the worst of human rights violations, and this is now being depicted in literature. Kaul argues that poetry is not the only medium that negotiates trauma; rather novels, short stories, memoirs, and journalistic writings are also used by writers as an effective tool of resistance. Even documentary makers are recording testimonials of torture and abuse, suffered by ordinary Kashmiris at the hands of security forces.

One dramatic enactment was a short film by Deepti Khurana (2012), which, according to Rizwan (2013), was based on Agha Shahid Ali’s poem A Country without a Post Office. It is the story of Rizwan, who is traumatized by the gruesome incidents in the form of rape and murder of his sister. Such is the extremity of trauma that it seems that his dead sister is still with him, and he starts conversation with her. The image of a man in conversation with the dead is a recurrent image that is also to be found in Waheed’s The Collaborator. This short film narrates the human tragedy as Rizwan, known as “the guardian of paradise,” tries to live up right in accordance with the meaning of his name. He is detained by the army in appalling and gruesome circumstances, yet he survives it all. Other fictional works, such as Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer, The Book of Golden Leaves by Waheed Mirza, and The Garden of Solitude by Siddhartha Gigoo, speak at length about the collective trauma that has been embedded in the psyche of Kashmiri (Shamsie, 2010). These fictional texts belong to the new generation of Kashmiri writers, who are interested in voicing out the trauma of their community. In this respect, Mirij Shahook and Sadia Waheed explain the concept of trauma narratology that is used by these writers.

Trauma is achieved by accepting provisionality and limitations as well as the necessity of narrative representations. “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” (as quoted by Shakoor & Waheed, 2016, p. 6). Anthony Collins (2015) reviews Jeffery Alexander’s book titled Trauma: A Social Theory by looking at how Alexander contributes to the theory by mentioning the act of narration as having a role to play in shaping the collective identity of communities. This legitimation is provided by traumatic events and their impact on those communities. Alexander believes that it is not the historical event, for instance, the Holocaust that creates trauma; rather, it is the meaning-making of that event that shapes the reality of trauma. This theory is further divided into enlightenment; and psychoanalytical theories are inadequate because their focus is on the naturalistic understanding of trauma. It is actually the carrier group whose interests serve the purpose of narrating the traumatic event as brutal. It is that carrier group that makes the narrative of trauma alive. Some can be said about the trauma narrative constructed by Kashmiri writers. Similarly, Kali Tal (1996) also declares that bearing witness to a traumatic event is an aggressive act that threatens the status quo; therefore, “the trauma survivor comes to represent the shattering of our national myths, without being able to shatter the reader’s individual personal myths as his/hers have been shattered” (as quoted by DeRose, 1997, p. 12). Analyzing Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator is an effort to hear such unvoiced voices from Kashmir.

Other fictional pieces coming from Kashmir, one way or the other, talk about the same issues Kashmiris are facing today. Many of the fictional narratives depict collective trauma of a nation that is still unheard by the rest of the world, today. Siddhartha Gigoo’s The Garden of Solitude is one such text. The novel follows the travails of a Kashmiri Pandit family comprising three generations, who find themselves in the middle of the chaos and turmoil that erupted in the valley of Kashmir in 1990 (The Garden of Solitude: An insight into life in Jammu’s migrant camp, para1). The Book of Gold Leaves, another narrative by Waheed, is a love in war story, written with the background of war. It is a journey of moving away from love but toward war, death, and decay. Waheed depicts the life of traumatized people, who are
gripped by daily brutality, death, torture, and violence. These people of Kashmir question the intervention of the brutal forces with an unbearable grief and anger (Ramaswamy, 2014, The Book of Gold Leaves review—Mirza Waheed speaks up for Kashmir).

Basharat Peer’s Curfewed Nights is a memoir written against the backdrop of 1990 conflict in Kashmir between Indians, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris. It depicts the war of his adolescence that have lasted for 20 years and are still continuing. Shamsie (2010) asserts that the book accounts for the barbarism and the injustice that is directed against innocent Kashmiris. Peer does not only question who did wrong against whom but what is at the heart of this book is the demand for justice for Kashmiris and the need to tell the social reality of the place. Such narratives suggest how significant it is for the writer, belonging to any community, to narrate the stories of that community. Narratives leave compelling accounts through which the human dilemmas can be brought to the front.

Statement of the Problem

Considered as one of the most militarized area of the world, the people in Kashmir, as a community, have been suffering from collective trauma for decades. In this regard, the Kashmiri literary texts, as a collective group, have not been in the focus of the world to voice out the traumatic memories of the past. This research article is an attempt to analyze the selected Anglophone trauma narrative by bringing to the front the Kashmiri literary voices to claim the authentic experience of their collective trauma.

Research Objectives

This research endeavors to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To analyze the ways in which the collective trauma of Kashmiri community has been portrayed in literary texts, specifically, in Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator.
2. To represent trauma narrative of Kashmiri literature through the use of traumatic memories.

Research Questions

The research article attempts to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions 1: In what ways does the Kashmiri community suffer from collective trauma in literary texts, specifically, Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator?

Research Questions 2: How does the traumatic narrative claim the experiences of Kashmiris through the use of traumatic memories?

Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to only one Kashmiri Anglophone literary text, that is, Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator. The theoretical framework used for the analysis has only been taken from Jeffery C. Alexander et al.,’s Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity and Erikson’s Collective Trauma Theory.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology of the Study

This is a qualitative study that focuses on the textual analysis of the selected literary text. The theoretical framework used for this analysis is taken from American sociologist Jeffery C. Alexander’s Cultural Trauma Theory and Kai T. Erikson’s Collective Trauma Theory, which discusses how people, as collective entity, present the trauma of horrendous events that leave indelible marks on their psyche, changing their identities forever. Trauma is not just a naturally occurring event; rather, it is constructed by the society. It is a social act (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztopinka, 2004). He further illustrated that Trauma is a “socially mediated attribution . . . . Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred” (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 8). However, in such a traumatic situation, “social groups leave solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone” (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 1). This is applicable on Waheed’s protagonist who left to mourn his missing friends whose memories remain forever with him. When his friend Hussain leaves him, he questions this isolation: “why did you leave” (p. 39), but there is no answer.

In Cultural Trauma and the Collective Identity, Jeffery C. Alexander et al., propose various dimensions to cultural trauma theory. They discuss cultural trauma through three approaches, namely lay trauma theory, enlightenment theory, and the psychoanalytical theory. According to lay theory, traumas are naturally occurring events but a response to such events is immediate and nonreflexive. The traumatizing events interact with human nature and, as human nature needs love, security, order, and connection, therefore, the traumatic event undermines these needs. As a result, people get traumatized.

Linked to this aspect is the individual as well as collective trauma, defined by American sociologist Kai T. Erikson (1995), who has defined it as

a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that no one can react to it effectively . . . . By collective trauma . . . . I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds people attach to each other and impairs the prevailing sense of communality.

This works its way not suddenly but slowly and seeps into the individual psyche. Nonetheless, it is a form of shock, and
there is a gradual realization that community is no longer effective and a major part of the self is lost: “We no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body” (as quoted in Alexander et al., 2004, p. 4).

The above-mentioned point can be related here when the protagonist yearns for his missing friends, this “we” is no longer there in material sense of the word. During the course of traumatic events, a new governor is appointed in Kashmir. Since his approval, things took an ugly turn. The media depicts the picture as a river of blood:

There was a breakdown in law and order situation and the police were forced to open fire on the out-of-control mob; as a result, thirty-five people were killed. Imagine just one day after the monster takes over the rein of power, he murders scores of innocent Kashmiris, just like that. Young and old, men and children, dead, all dead, dead on the bridge . . . . (p. 117)

The psychoanalytic model presents the unconscious emotional fears and cognitively distorting psychological defense between the external shattering event and the actor’s internal traumatic response (Alexander et al., 2004, p. 5). Traumatic feelings are repressed by the anxiety of keeping it repressed. The psychoanalytic aspect of trauma has illuminated the role of memory, insisting on working backwards on the symbolic residue that is left on remembering events. Cathy Caruth (1991) in her work Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History discusses the role of traumatic reaction and reenactment of an event that a person cannot abandon. This event is like a breach in the mind of the traumatized. The traumatic symptoms in Caruth’s point of view emphasize objectivity and truth because it is only through these symptoms that reality of the experience can be established (Sadoff, 1997). Thus, the aforementioned three models are used to analyze the selected literary text.

Analysis of Waheed’s Collaborator

Summary of the Novel

Waheed’s The Collaborator is the story of a young Kashmiri boy, who is assigned the job of collecting the identity cards and other things from the dead. He encounters dead militants on a daily basis. He eats, sleeps, thinks, and feels with them. Such is his traumatized condition that he has lost any sense of his world. His account of the past shows how his friends, one after another, crossed the border to become militants or freedom fighters to win the war that was started by the neighboring countries in their quest for Kashmir. Throughout the narrative, he laments the loss of his friends and, at the same time, regrets for not being there with them. The collective psyche of Kashmiris is represented through the voice of this young Kashmiri boy. His way to survival lies in being a collaborator. Where people, out of fear and prosecution, fled the village, he does not abandon it and, in doing so, retains the memory of what is left behind as a residue. Through this individual trauma, the writer depicts the collective and cultural trauma of Kashmiris as a community using the past as a tool.

Trauma, Kashmir, and Dichotomy of Victim and Perpetrator

The models mentioned in the theoretical framework section are significant to study trauma in the The Collaborator’s case because it presents cultural as well as collective trauma. At the same time, Eyerman (2013) defines trauma as holding the impact of an astounding event on the life of an individual. The inner catastrophe leaves wounds and scars on the memory that cannot be erased and later on influences the later behavior in much unexpected ways. This can be seen in the protagonist’s case, who tries to seek refuge in the memory of his lost friends. The entire Chapter 6, titled “Hussain and I,” is based on the past memories of his friend Hussain. It depicts the era since childhood when both were together. Even the valley was at peace as the soldiers showed respect even toward children. He remembers the time when both of them would enjoy walking up the hills. “It’s so calm here, we should come here more often, no . . . ? you can’t have a thing except for the grass or the trees,” and then a few lines below, the protagonist narrates, “we carried on a bond of togetherness, of closeness—having been made the only confidant” (p. 84).

These memories of Hussain pinch him in the present because now where he is standing is the ground bearing freshly piled masses of bodies, bodies of the dead militants, the freedom fighters, and the fear and uncertainty of finding his friend in those corpses makes Waheed’s protagonist dejected:

. . . this is the place, this place that you have turned into a ghostly graveyard, it glowed with the warmth of my friends around the aalaawa of our childhood. . . Where I now stand surrounded by men departed long ago and recent: fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers, sons, cousins, and uncles and friends and mates, all dispersed rubbish-like in your playground, . . . (p. 299)

The aforementioned account from The Collaborator is true to what factual accounts of Kashmir portray. This traumatic situation can be triangulated through the following excerpt from a research that is based on factual data. In one of the articles on conflict and health, de Jong et al. (2008) carried out two surveys in two districts in the Indian part of Kashmir to assess the experiences of the populations with reference to conflict and violence and to see how it has created an impact on the mental and physical health of Kashmiris. In total, 510 interviews were taken from respondents that reported:

cross fire (85.7%), round up raids (82.7%), the witnessing of torture (66.9%), rape (13.3%), self-experience of forced labour
(33.7%), arrests/kidnapping (16.9%), torture (12.9%), and sexual violence (11.6%). Males reported more confrontations with violence than females, and had an increased likelihood of having directly experienced physical/mental maltreatment, violation of their modesty and injury. Males also had high odds of being arrested/kidnapped. (de Jong et al., 2008, para 5)

One of the main tenets of collective trauma is that “one can speak of traumatized communities as distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons” (Erikson, 1995, p. 185). Trauma at individual level shows crises at collective level. Like individual trauma, a societal crisis is both a shock to established routines and taken-for-granted experiences. Although at the individual level trauma is inclusive, it is also a process in which old collectivities can be reaffirmed. There are, thus, two sides to a cultural trauma: an emotional experience and a probative reaction. Steensland (2005) emphasize that shocks arouse emotion by breaking everyday routines and, as such, demand interpretation, opening a discursive field in which individuals can play a determinate role.

The polarity and disparity between perpetrator and victim is what distinguishes trauma as discourse. In this sense, cultural trauma is a contentious discursive process that shows the dichotomy between perpetrator and victim. In Waheed’s *The Collaborator*, it is the Indian captain, named Kadian, who represents Indian Army as a collectivity that acts as a perpetrator. Alongside the Indians, Pakistani training camps or people associated with these camps are the perpetrators. The victims are innocent Kashmiris, who are a papier-mâché in the hands of these opposing parties. This is how Waheed depicts the situation: “there was talk of dead bodies in the ditches and nallahs, the Army has started capturing and killing hundreds of boys attempting to cross over Azad Kashmir. They saw, they shot, they saw more, they shot more” (p. 117). It is this discourse between the victim and the perpetrator that can be seen reiterated by the writer. The voices of innocent Kashmiris demanding freedom are denied by the perpetrators.

**Erikson’s concept of collective trauma and The Collaborator.** Trauma is defined by Erikson (1995) as a blow that produces disordered feelings and behavior. It is produced when a number of collectivities produce a series of events. It damages the basic fiber of the society by damaging social bonds and creating a social culture of trauma. Erikson depicts traumatized communities as a group that act as the collective sufferers from trauma. Erikson specifies the sense of danger to the society in the form of traumatic experiences. These work effectively in the affected society and provide the prevailing mood and temper. Collective trauma manifests loss of community bonds, distrust in the future, and one’s neighbors. At the same time, it presents mood of fear and depression.

The magnitude and collectivity of the trauma in Kashmir can be well judged through factual accounts as well. de Jong et al. (2008) provide a statistical portrayal of casualties since the start of militancy in 1989. They says that

"Looking at the occurrence and impact of traumatic events in Kashmir, nobody can escape the violence that has accompanied many events. The most frequent events cited have been firing, explosion, and exposure to combat zone that has rendered life at a halt. From the results of the related researches, it was found that almost 62% of the people reported to have witnessed at least four times the traumatic events. The nature of the violence included many facets such as torture, rape, firing, physical mistreatment, roundup raids, explosion of mines, damage to property, cross fire, burning of houses, arrests, kidnapping, forced labor, injury, and violation of modesty.

This provides a perfect case for Erikson’s (1995) concept of collective trauma. Waheed’s *The Collaborator* presents the same picture as outlined in the above paragraph. Erikson’s model can be aptly applied to Waheed’s Kashmiri community which has developed a kind of resentment, anger, and distrust. At one point in the text, the protagonist describes that condition:

"Not very far from here is the other side, the Pakistani side, a place where these guys came from, after months of God knows what kind of intense training . . . . turns out, around here, the Indians kill about everyone. Who will know and object, leave alone and protest, in this remote, cut off wilderness. You know, sometimes. I wonder - because for Kashmir, there is always Indian and Pakistani version of everything. (Waheed, 2011, pp. 14-15)"

**Buffalo Creek Disaster and Waheed’s The Collaborator.** It must be kept in mind that Erikson studied the Buffalo Creek disaster that presented collective trauma as characterized by perseveration on the traumatic occurrence. It consisted of illogical fear of the event accompanied by agitation and sleeplessness. The occurrence was over, but the feeling and the collective mood stayed. Days passed on, but the collective trauma lingered on. There was waiting and uncertainty. People were not sure when the death-like condition would end. Same is the case with Waheed’s community of Kashmiris. Once there was a crackdown by the Indian army, they brought a dead body to the place where they had assembled everyone from the village to make them learn lessons from those who rebel but are ultimately captured and killed. The protagonist’s fear of finding a relative or a friend heightens with each passing moment as the people are not allowed to see the man, but the narrator mentions the death-like condition in the form of “deathly silence, endless yawns and grief-bearing whispers” (p. 220)."
Collective trauma is an emotional state, whereas cultural trauma is an emotional and cognitive process that is involved in meaning-making. Cultural trauma focuses on narratives that specify the victim, perpetrator, relationship between them, and suffering. Social actors and perpetrators question the traumatic experience and the responsibility that is associated with the entire act. Many a times, during the course of the novel, the perpetrator or its group questions the traumatic experience and puts blame on someone else.

This notion can be linked with Erikson’s mentioning of a condition when the traumatized community blamed others for their suffering. Kadian, representing the Indian army and government, has more or less the same point to emphasize. He believes that it is the jihadis who must be held responsible rather than the state. “This is an insurgency, my dear, and I didn’t create it. It’s your fucking movement for Azadi. Your frigging freedom struggle, isn’t it?” he says, sneering at the desk. If there was no problem here, no impediments to the restoration of normalcy, if you didn’t take this anti-India shit so far, none of this would happen,” and then in this same tone, he question the accusation that is leveled on them: “you think we kill them for sport, isn’t it?” (p. 277). However, this is not the only discourse that can be seen here, the actual traumatized public groups also question and reflect on the nature of community. They seek meaning with reference to experiencing suffering and uncertainty. The religious representatives in the form of Mullahs and Molvis also question the nature and the act of perpetrators. They persuade the people to act against heinous crimes committed by Indian Army or state.

Although Kai T. Erikson talks about natural disasters as traumatic in nature as in the case of Buffalo Creek, where an individual feels as if having no defense other than to make himself small, to take his inner self out of the field of combat, so that there is less of him being wounded and less of him implicated in the insanity of what is happening. Waheed’s protagonist does the same. In the face of death, as put by Erikson, death seems to be the ultimate reality. There is a close encounter with the dead. As the protagonist’s job is to collect things from the dead militants, who are killed in an encounter with the Indian army, piles and piles of dead bodies can be seen in the valley. The Indian Army has turned the valley into a massive graveyard.

The graphic description is given by the protagonist in these words:

I look at the first few corpses and am immediately horrified at the prospects of what my new job entails . . . ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman, postures and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs make me dig my teeth deep, and hard, into my clenched fists. (p. 8)

He calls them “macabre, horrid ghouls, bodies after bodies . . . forlorn and lonesome . . . carcasses with indefinable expressions . . .” (p. 8). Death seemed everywhere, piles and piles of dead bodies everywhere. People have had a close encounter with death. They lose their relatives, friends, and the village people.

The condition was almost like what Erikson depicts while analyzing the situation of people in Buffalo Creek disaster, “so death seemed to be everywhere, overhead, underfoot, couched in every pile of wreckage.” Erikson explains the traumatic nature of death which is different on the battlefield, but here at home death reminds the survivor how vulnerable and uncertain life is. People punish themselves for not being able to protect their families. There is a guilt accompanied by these survivors. Same can be observed in the case of The Collaborator. He exhibits this guilt of being helpless toward his friends. At one moment when he feels alone and fearful of what might follow, in the middle of the night, he expresses his regret in these words, “. . . oh, oh! I wish I had gone across too then, wish I had stayed close to Gul Khan (his friend). It wouldn’t have been my business now, none of this would have happened. And whatever happened, we would have been in it together. I wouldn’t have been trapped here with this hideous man” (p. 296).

All these instances express the classic symptoms of pain, mourning, and bereavement, according to Erikson. When one of the village boys named Farooq is killed by the army, everybody is so shocked by the incident that no one has the energy to even say words of consolation to others. That is how they show numbness and loss of feelings. This might be a way to cope with the entire situation as the protagonist narrates, “that day . . . no one talked in a normal voice. Everyone whispered or appeared to whisper; even Baba seemed to have lost his tongue” (p. 194).

Erikson, while describing the traumatic experiences of the survivors, also describes that during the entire process, a euphoric stage also comes in the life of a community. It is basically an outpour of communal feelings. The ritual carried out at the end of the novel symbolically expresses the community’s feeling and sympathy for the dead. The dead are in such a mass number that it is impossible to put them at peace by giving them burial. The protagonist, however, uses the funeral rites in an effort to properly provide peace to the dead. It is more like a symbolic rescue, in which it is the dead that is saved from the wrath of further decay and damage. He believes that the stories of these dead would not be told by anyone because no one cares. The possibility of grave is not possible; therefore, the only solution is to put them on fire. “It must all end” (p. 301). He calls it the alaawa—the bonfire of his childhood, when everything was promising and full of warmth and glow. He is determined that he must pay fateha to these lost ones “whose stories I shall tell one day. I should pay my respect to hundreds of unknown dead, to these unsung, unrecorded martyrs, to these disappeared sons . . .” (p. 303).

The aforementioned collective trauma of the people in Kashmir can be fully triangulated through factual data from independent sources. What Waheed’s collaborator is attesting
is something that has been confirmed by international rights groups as well. The issue of Kashmiri civilians who simply went missing has been investigated by human rights groups in the last few years (International People’s Tribunal, 2009). Kaul (2012) asserts that “The numbers of the dead mounted: estimates range from 70,000 to 100,000 killed in the last 20 years. The numbers of those maimed physically and psychologically by this conflict are correspondingly larger” (p. 175). This is emblematic of how collectively the people in Kashmir have been traumatized.

The Collaborator and Alexander’s Theory of Cultural Trauma

Viewing this in Jeffery C. Alexander et al.,’s (2004) theory of cultural trauma, there are five distinctive conditions applicable to the traumatized community. These include people being subjected to horrendous events. This can be seen when Kashmiris are subjected to horrendous events in the form of encounters, abduction, killing, rape, mass graves, and piling of dead bodies, and so on. Events are recognized by members of collectivities and leave indelible marks on group consciousness. Furthermore, Vertzberger (2005) argues that it influences the memories of the group forever, and the effect of the collective memory changes the future identity of the victims. The episodes in the novel represent these five conditions of cultural trauma. The dead are called freedom fighters and martyrs by the protagonist. The village people, despite the fact that they are called terrorists and antistate agents by the Indian government and Army in The Collaborator, will remain martyrs who will continue fighting against injustices.

Claim making in cultural trauma. Linked to these conditions are other features such as the fact that trauma does not occur because a group experiences the pain, but it is a kind of discomfort that enters a collectivity’s sense of its own identity. Collective actors represent social pain as a threat to their identity. He mentions certain social processes that form the identity. The trauma narrative must be a compelling framework, based on cultural classification. A carrier group must engage in a successful meaning-making act. Trauma is akin to a speech act. In a speech act, the speaker and the audience have a role to play. The speaker persuasively projects the trauma claim. The member of the audience belongs to the speaker’s carrier groups. The illocutionary success determines that the members can convincingly believe the traumatic suffering they are experiencing. In this respect, the religious representative in the form of Mullahs defines the nature of the traumatic experiences in the form of suffering, torture, rape, murder, and what not. He explains to them the reason behind this all. The majority being Muslims must submit before God. As God is unhappy with them due to their sins; therefore, the molvis persuades them to think about these problems. Whatever is happening to them is because of moving away from religion.

In a way, one can say without doubt that these religious representatives, as one carrier group, present the traumatic experience before the rest. “These are testing times, troubled times, indeed . . . , everywhere you can see there is death and destruction! . . . hundreds of us fall to the bullets of the oppressor, to the guns of the kafir everyday. We die in hundreds, no thousands . . . all across the land . . . crackdown after crackdown . . . our patience is put to ultimate test, my dear brothers” (p. 33). And then the molvis make them believe that whatever is happening is because of the sins. “Allahtala is punishing us for our sins . . . ” (p. 34).

Meaning making in cultural trauma. The trauma narrative must be a compelling framework, based on cultural classification. A carrier group must engage in a successful meaning-making tool to bring forth the memories of the trauma that has been in activation since 1947.

In one of the related studies, Anjum and Varma (2010) observe that there has been a shift in the resistance of Kashmiris since 2008. They are waging a new form of rebellion against the perpetrator in the form of “second revolution.” They express their demand through public protests, launched through a massive, sustained, and predominantly nonviolent, civil disobedience movement in the streets. These show widespread dissatisfaction with reference to violations of human rights that have been quite persistent for decades (Parrey, 2010). The Kashmiri literature can be viewed as a tool to bring forth the memories of the trauma that has been in activation since 1947. The Collaborator expresses the nature of the pain Kashmiris have been experiencing.
Conclusion

In establishing the role of media, state bureaucracy, and in attributing responsibility, the collective memory is evoked which is connected to the sense of identity. Kashmiris, as a collective force, only think about how to end this atrocity, how to defeat death. Before leaving, the lonesome Kashmiri says that “I burn all that ever was” (p. 299). In burning the dead bodies, he is resolving not to see all this again. He wants to leave no traces of the valley I: Exposure to violence. Conflict and Health, 2, Article 10. doi:10.1186/1752-1505-2-10 DeRose, D. J. (1997). Lifetime of anger and pain: Kali Tal and the literatures of trauma. Postmodern Culture, 7(2). Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved September 6, 2017 from Project MUSE database.

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