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**SURVIVAL AGAINST VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF MIRZA WAHEED'S
*THE COLLABORATOR***

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ABSTRACT

Mirza Waheed is a creative Kashmiri writer. He has published two novels *The Collaborator* (2012) and *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2014). *The Collaborator* is a story of an unnamed narrator who collaborates with Captain Kadian in collecting ID cards and weapons from the decaying dead bodies of insurgents. The novel narrates the conditions of Kashmir Valley during 1990's. It deals with the troubles of Kashmiri people along the LOC. It also focuses on the social inequality prevalent in Kashmir. The novel gives vent to the woes of Gujjar community, who are sandwiched between Indian military and terrorists. They are discriminated by Kashmiri Muslims. Gujjars are always treated with suspicion. They work as guides and have to face humiliated quite often. Representation of women in the novel also attracts the reader towards their inferior status in patriarchy. They are marginalized due to patriarchy as well as colonization. *The Collaborator* is all about the literary representation of common suffering and survival of Kashmiris. It keenly deals with different forms of violence prevalent in Kashmir. Mirza Waheed succeeds in portraying the predicament of Gujjar community and Kashmiri women besides the bigger issues of insurgency and terrorism.

Keywords: Survival, Violence, Terrorism, Kashmir, Gujjars

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Literature is a creative and sensitive social mirror originating in the sensibilities and creativities of socially conscious writers. Concerns of literature have always been complex and diverse as it exhibits the complexity of human mind and diversity of human world. Literature looks at the ongoing social and cultural events through writer's keen eyes. Understanding of social milieu provides the raw material; it is catalyzed through the creativity of a writer, and as a result a readable piece of writing is produced.

While living in harmony, in a peaceful environment, writer produces a volume of literature which contains the fabric of diverse individual themes. In absence of some unifying bigger issues, writers compose their individual fantasies and concerns. This kind of literature lacks permanence. But history of mankind has rarely been so peaceful. Throughout our past, humanity has been continuously shattered through wars, epidemics, and calamities. Every eventful period of war or calamity has created a body of literature of its own.

People in general get accustomed to happenings or recurrent natural calamities while scars of wars live for long in a writer's mind. But there are long-lasting and ever-going wars throughout the world where human psyche almost crumble down and every native writer seems to recollect the same story. Afghanistan, Algeria, Vietnam, Gaza-Patti, Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Kashmir are among the territories of the world where literature is a commitment to the common woes of humanity. While people around the world make plans to further development and betterment of their life, people in these territories plan survival strategies in their routine life. The dreadful things like guns, bombs, encounters and causalities are the essential part of their life and time has taught them to tolerate such things.

Literature from conflict-ridden territories has a kind of an attraction that arises from the fact that man is curious by nature. Exploration and explanation are always sought by man. Human mind always tries to look into the unknown through every source available. It tries its best to investigate until satisfied. In fact we have a kind of an infatuation with the tales of man's survival amid adverse conditions. That is why almost every great story deals with such journeys of man. In case of conflict-ridden territories, dissatisfied with the vision produced by media, we look at literature produced by native writers especially in the form of fiction.

This paper is concerned with the survival of common people in widely known war-ravaged territory of Kashmir. Kashmiri people are sandwiched between the interests of two nations India and Pakistan as depicted in Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011). Kashmir was known for its scenic beauty in its past but in the last six decades it has become infamous for the terrorism, violence, encounters, curfews, conflicts, atrocities, and controversies. For the past sixty years in this region Kashmir has been the focal point for media around the world. Media from different countries furnishes different versions of Kashmir conflict. Especially India and Pakistan always create propaganda through media according to their interests. Media only talks about politics, terrorism, infiltration, insurgency and defense activities. For real life of common Kashmiri people, we have to rely upon the literature produced by native Kashmiri people. Mirza Waheed's is one of those writers who express the unheard voices of their motherland. Mirza Waheed born in Srinagar spent his childhood in the valley of Kashmir and now lives in London, where he works for BBC. He keenly witnessed the rise of separatist movement and brutal militancy in Kashmir. Waheed's first and only novel *The Collaborator* (2011) deals with the life in Kashmir during the separatist movement especially in the villages along the Line of Control.

In Indian sub-continent everyone is well acquainted with *Masla-e-Kashmir*. The Kashmir dispute dates back to 1947. Basically it is a multifaceted territorial dispute between India and Pakistan with the involvement of many Kashmiri insurgent groups or sects. Every party wants the complete control of the state (Jammu and Kashmir) giving their own explanations and justifications. Pakistan claims that Kashmir is Muslim dominated territory hence it should be a part of a Muslim nation. India claims that documents prove that Kashmir is an inseparable part of India since 1947 hence Pakistan's claim is an offence. It is an interference with the internal affairs of a democracy. Insurgent groups make the issue more complicated with their demand of complete freedom.

The novel is set somewhere deep in the mountains of Kashmir valley in the early 1990's. This was the time when Kashmir was under severe terrorism. The long-forgotten ghost of freedom suddenly gripped the common Kashmiri. The dream of freedom has wasted thousands of lives in Kashmir valley. Mirza Waheed starts the novel at the peak of separatist movement in 1993. The story comes through an unnamed 19-year-old young boy from an imaginary village Nowgam. Waheed intentionally chooses the location of a recently settled village near the Line of Control on the Indian side. The thoroughfare for militants is very easy through the mountains near the Nowgam. As a result the village is surrounded by Indian Army, and Pakistan frequently launches attacks to aid infiltration. This is a stream-of-consciousness novel as the story alternates between flashbacks and present. Chronologically novel is divided into three parts; Now and Then, Then, and Now. When the story starts, the village has become a ghost village. Most of the families have left for safer places and young boys have crossed the border for training in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (Azad Kashmir in extremists' terminology). The only family that lives in Nowgam is narrator's family. The narrator remembers the peaceful days of his village and compares it with his present ghostly life quite mournfully. Narrator's four friends Hussain, Asfaq, Gul and Mohammad one by one quietly cross the Line of Control to be part of freedom

movement without informing him. He feels cheated, abandoned and betrayed. Yet in his loneliness the narrator misses them desperately. He is also keen to join his best friends in 'Azad Kashmir'. He tries his best to cross the border but his plans go haywire when Khadim Hussain, his best friend's father, betrayed him. The reason behind the betrayal was that the narrator is the son of the headman of the village and he was not supposed too loyal to join the holy war. The families of disappeared boys are tortured by Indian Army; consequently all families leave the village for good. The narrator being the only young man in the village is forcibly employed as a 'collaborator' by an Indian Army officer, Captain Kadian. He is assigned the duty of collecting weapons, ID cards etc. from the decaying dead bodies scattered in the valley near the village. The dead bodies are of those terrorists who are shot dead while infiltrating from Pakistan. The dead also include those captured, tortured and killed by Indian Army. Narrator is afraid of finding his friends among the scattered dead bodies. This dirty job has shattered his psyche completely. He harbors an unconscious wish to kill the Captain but eventually fails. With his unstable mind, the narrator ends up performing the mass cremation of decaying bodies to purge the sin of collaborating with the Captain.

Waheed makes the story more complicated by depicting Gujjar community. Gujjars in Kashmir are nomadic Muslim people. They settled in villages only after 1947. This community has always been seen with suspicion by other Muslims of Kashmir, Pakistan and India. India views them as Muslim while Kashmiri people and Pakistan do not view them as 'pure Muslims'. But Gujjars being nomadic people have their own importance as they are the best guides in Kashmir. Insurgent groups use them to find the hidden ways for thoroughfare. Indian Army uses them as informers to trace infiltration, hide-outs and ammunition of insurgent groups. Kashmir as depicted by Mirza Waheed is surely horrific and shocking. In fact it seems a kind of a challenge for human beings to survive in such a ghostly world. It naturally gives rise to the fundamental question of survival.

Survival is a natural and biological impulse of every living being. Almost every activity of living beings is biologically calculated for survival and evolution of life. Struggle for survival is universal but humanity is unique as it strives beyond the mere physical existence. Struggle for survival sharpens human intellect and leads to further invention of various strategies for survival. A survivor is a determined and committed self to thwart any threat to his life and dignity. An elevated notion of identity and morality busts a survivor to fight the debilitating and destructive forces. A survivor does not mean a superman or heroic warrior; he may look silent and weak from outside but he keeps on employing various strategies against the anti-life surrounding without losing his identity and human character.

Psychologically violence, anxiety and survival are closely connected. Human life is not smooth; it has to tackle frustration, tension, loss of identity, alienation, trauma, fear, dissonance and despair. Along with physical struggle human mind always fights these odds conscious and unconscious level. This fight may be termed as defense mechanisms. Some of the common defense mechanisms are; suppression, repression, regression, projection, reaction formation, fixation, rationalization, intellectualization, compensation, emotional insulation, sublimation and violence. These defense mechanisms may also be called strategies of survival. Coleman asserts that in extreme threat to life we resort the primitive strategies of denial of reality or escape. Sometimes denial or escape are not enough, in that case, human mind creates an illusory world of its own. To our surprise indulgence in violence is also a survival strategy as Erich Fromm explains, "... life has an inner dynamism of its own: it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. When this tendency is thwarted, the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposition and changes into energies directed towards destruction. In other words, the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually independent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards the life is thwarted, stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destruction" (158).

Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* followed by an 'Afterword' which summarizes the intensity and impact of Kashmir conflict on the common people as, "More than 70,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989; around 8,000 people have disappeared; At least 25,000 children have been orphans, and over 4000 people are in Indian prisons. Thousands of women have been widowed in the conflict including 2000 'half

widows' whose husband remains missing." (Source: Jammu & Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society. Indian government disputes these figures).

Through the 'Afterword' Waheed asserts that violence is everywhere in Kashmir valley. Novelist's concern in this novel is to portray the psychological and physical journey of Kashmiri people this he successfully describes. Violence is not simply in the form of armed encounters. It is there at every step of routine life and it is in every form it can be perpetrated.

Kashmiri people are not wealthy who can wait for peace to come and later start their normal life. They have to struggle even for their livelihood which multiplies their woes. Terrorism has shut their ways to feed themselves and in search of bread sometimes they eat bullets. Kashmir is an amalgam of various communities which benefits the insurgent groups as well as Indian Army. Mirza Waheed chooses Kashmiri Gujjars to pose the complex communal equation of Kashmir.

In Kashmir everybody has to struggle even to breathe; men, women, girls, young boys, older ones and children from different communities and localities. They struggle in different ways to keep their life intact. Even within the same family different persons have to apply different strategies to survive. First of all, the state of Kashmir has been struggling to survive. Different organizations and groups execute their plans in different ways. Some people, especially living along the Line of Control, favor Pakistan. Some groups suggest independent status to reach peace. Some other people and political parties observe that being an inseparable part of India is the only and best solution to end this conflict. In fact these solutions and observations are nothing but the survival strategies employed by different groups. Along with group strategies people in Kashmir have to implement strategies at family level and individual level.

Waheed traces the psychological and physical journey of an unnamed young narrator. The journey starts with the insurgency in Kashmir around 1993 which leads to the loss of harmony in Kashmir especially deep in the valley and along the Line of Control. Novelist deliberately presents the childhood vision of upheaval created by terrorism in Kashmir and it seems to validate the real experience of Mirza Waheed. Amid the violence all social and cultural bonds crumble down that leads to alienation and frustration. Slowly and surreptitiously insurgency tightens its grip over the routine life. Narrator's dear friends leave one by one to join mujahedeen groups which lead him to severe frustration. He becomes restless and keenly wishes to join them in training camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. His life becomes a dilemma; at one hand his parents wish him to stay safe in the village while on the other his inner-self forces him to join the insurgent groups. He witnesses army raids, roll calls, curfews, armed encounters, predicaments of mujahedeen's families, army interferences, trials and tortures. Survival becomes very hard in such harsh conditions and eventually the narrator feels psychic disequilibrium. Impulsively he decides to deceive his parents and plans to cross the border. This decision seems an attempt to prove himself as brave as his friends. In fact his ego is deeply hurt on being so weak indecision making. Narrator does everything to survive with dignity and character. First of all he tries to deny the fact that his friends can deceive him and later on he creates an illusion that someday he will join them or they will be back safely. But Khadem Hussain shatters him by declaring him unsuitable to join his friends as he is headman's son who gets grant from India. Through rationalization his psyche reaches emotional insulation and consequently he becomes the 'collaborator' to Captain Kadian. To survive he pretends to hand over his *ghairat* to an army officer. By suppression of his utmost wish to kill the Captain he becomes inactive. Later on, he sublimates this violent wish by performing the cremation of decaying dead bodies of 'freedom fighters' (terrorists). The narrator holds all the essential characteristics of a survivor. He is silent but there is rebellion in his mind. In such adverse conditions he does what suits him best to survive. His collaboration with Captain Kadian is the only possible strategy to survive. The narrator is no way a selfish person because he loves his parents. He has seen the consequences that a family has to face after a young boy crosses the border. He survives individually as well as a symbol of young Kashmiri Gujjars. It happens to most of the boys like him who have to suppress their wish to join insurgent groups for the safety of their families. Such boys also face the humiliation from other communities and insurgent groups.

The violence in Kashmir is manifold in case of women. Ishrat Bashir says that the women portrayed in the novel are not real suffering human beings. They are just ghosts and shadows. They are voiceless, tongue

less and deeply oppressed. Patriarchy, terrorism and Indian Army seem to collaborate in inflicting violence on women. Bashir further explains the plight of women in Kashmir saying that they are not armed freedom fighters, informers or guides, but the torture and suffering is inflicted on them too. In fact women have to go through more horrible conditions as they also have to pay with their sons, brothers and husbands as it happens in case of Shaban's wife. Throughout the narrative, we find many tales of women who in such conditions of extreme violence find ways to survive.

Narrator's mother does not talk much after army raids, mass escape of villagers and narrator's collaboration. She has seen her husband gone through humiliation and she also keenly observes the psychic confrontation of her son. She does not feel for herself only but she is being burdened by the woes of the whole family. In such over-burdening conditions she creates a world of her own. Surprisingly her world is not illusory. She does not fantasize something heavenly. To keep herself sane she confides herself to her vegetable yard. She finds her way to survive through 'silence' and denial of reality. In her sympathy towards her husband and son she suppresses her wishes.

The scene of milk-beggars, women from Poshpur, uncovers an extreme case of struggle to survival. When life is at stake human being fails to differentiate good or bad. At this particular time dignity and character are pushed to the edge and a human being struggles like an animal. Women from Poshpur are unable to feed their children because of a long-term curfew. There is lack of food and their breasts are dry of milk. Unable to see their children dying, they leave their *Ghairat* and come to Nowgam to beg. One of the women is even ready to sell one of her daughters for milk so that she can save the others. This kind of struggle to survive employed by milk-beggars is beyond the common defense mechanisms as they are on the edge of insanity. The mothers of Hussain, Asfaq, Gul and Mohammad are silent on the outside but they are full of rebellion inside. They wish to survive in freedom. This is the reason they allow their sons to cross the border. In fact they project their strategies to survive freely through their sons. They opt for the extreme defense mechanism of violence. Their silence is their revolt against the humiliation. Their sons symbolize their suppressed wishes to breathe freely.

Older people react differently to the horrible environment of Kashmir. These people are not only concerned with their individual problems but also have the responsibility of their families hence their decisions affect a number of people. Older ones have to care for young, children and women. Narrator's father becomes very concerned when some boys disappear. He is quite sure about the ill fate these boys and he tries to explain this to his son. In solitude he becomes silent and allows his son to join Captain Kadian as it was the only way to survive in this ghostly village.

Another man Shaban lets his sons to work as infiltration guides. He compromises with the fact that his sons are the only ones who lead the boys across the border. But he has no option as there is no way to earn their livelihood. The strategies to earn fail when an insurgent group gets enraged with Shaban's family and treats them brutally. He and his wife are severely beaten; their ears and noses are chopped-off, but they have to live even after such a terrible catastrophic experience.

Compounder Chechi is the village doctor who plays his tricks on the villagers to keep them out of hallucination and trauma. After Farooq's death whole village feels extreme fear and anxiety. Chichi treats them with sleeping pills which he knows can't work for long. This is the temporary solution of the problem but it gives them enough time to invent a long-term strategy to survive. Later Chechi advises to leave the village as he knows the psychic wounds of the villagers. Sandwiched between Indian Army and insurgent groups, the villagers finally decide to escape to survive. It is not easy for them but they know that this is the only way that the families can survive.

In view of the discussion it can be said that Kashmiri people are living in intolerable conditions. This novel vividly unfolds the layers violence, and individual as well as mass survival strategies employed by common people. Young men become militant or collaborator, women, children and older ones have to live a life of destitute.

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