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AFFLICTION, TRAUMA AND AGONY OF THE WAR VICTIMS: A STUDY OF  
MIRZAWAHEED'S *THE COLLABORATOR*

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ABSTRACT

The survival of human beings depends on a number of factors like availability of food, shelter and proper clothing. A sound and peaceful atmosphere of the area where one resides is as important for survival as are the other basic necessities. If an area is under the influence of constant clashes and violence, then it becomes difficult for the residents to survive there. Moreover, the violent conditions can cause a threat to the basic necessities available to human beings. It causes mental imbalance as the conditions seem out of the control of the masses. Kashmir is inflicting with this ferocious atmosphere for the last so many years. People living in this area are suffering a lot and there seems no end to this vehemence. The paper deals with the effect caused on the physiological and psychological aspects of humanity due to the clashes between army and the militants. For this purpose, MirzaWaheed's debut novel, *The Collaborator* is taken into consideration. The feeling of alienation afflicted on the narrator, his family and the other characters of the novel due to the massive changes caused by the war, will be considered. The upheaval caused to the normalcy of the lives of these people will also be analysed. A glimpse will also be provided to the impact caused by the on-going war on the Gujjar- Bakkarwal tribes of the area.

**Key Words:** Alienation, Distress, Massacre, Normlessness, Violence.

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The Kashmir issue has arisen in 1947 between India and Pakistan over the absolute control of Kashmir. Since then a lot of turmoil has taken place between two nations including the two Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1975 resulting in an immense loss of life and property. The rebellious groups have arisen and they want liberation of Kashmir from India. So, the clashes are occurring between army and these militant groups creating disturbance and lack of peace in the area. MirzaWaheed's *The collaborator* deals with the agony and trauma caused on the 'paradise on earth' by the clashes between the army and the extremist forces. It has caused a trauma among the people affecting their lives severely and disturbing the normal routine. The novel is set in the village Nowgam of Kashmir during the early 1990's. During this period, the clashes between army and militants arose to the heights. The gruesome slaughter of humanity, the constant terror and the haunting fear creates a terrifying atmosphere throughout the novel. Life of the people is far from being normal and they

are living under the constant fear of death. The inhabitants of Nowgam village, mostly Gujjars, have abandoned their nomadic life only some decades before and have settled in that area but their life is turned upside down due to the enduring clashes between the Indian defence forces and the supporters of Kashmir's separation. Peace, happiness, love and relations are falling apart and a constant terror is prevailing.

The unnamed narrator of the novel reveals the story from his childhood and moves forward towards his present age of a seventeen years old young man. He talks about his family, friends, and the other residents of his village. The narrative brings forth the rampant changes that overtake their village and the effect it causes on the people including the impact on their relations among themselves. The incidents are viewed through the eyes of the narrator who has lost almost everything to the on-going war. His best friend, Hussain leaves him to fight for the 'freedom of Kashmir' and after him, all of his friends leave one by one. The place becomes an arena of death and violence and it becomes impossible for the residents of this village to continue living there. The news of the departure of the four boys to Pakistan ignites the army and they begin their encounter on the people of the area. The innocent people suffer the rebellion caused by the extremists and their lives become miserable. The army frequently inspects the area and young boys are taken away for interrogations who suffer without having a fault of their own.

It often happens in war affected areas that the residents have to bear the agony of both the opposing groups. Life of the youngsters is ruined and the children lose their childhood. The progress and welfare of the area is stuck, violence occurs ceaselessly and harmony is lost. Discussing the impact of war on the social conditions of people, Derek Summerfield, in a research paper entitled, "Impact of War and Atrocity on civilian Populations" says,

Meaninglessness leaves people feeling helpless and uncertain what to do. Frequently at stake are the cultural and social forms which for a particular people define the known world and its values. There are no socially-defined ways of mourning a lost way of life. When all the important structures are targeted community organizations, trade unions, health and educational institutions, religious leadership - the social fabric may no longer be able to perform its customary role. Suffering must frequently be borne in contexts where socialization, socially-managed mourning and adaptation are difficult or impossible.

Kashmir has witnessed a lot of disorder and turmoil during the on-going war. People have suffered endlessly on account of the constant clashes between the militant groups and the army forces. The agony and wrath of both the groups has been afflicted upon the people of the place. The common people of the area suffer a lot as their activities are stuck due to the frequent shutdown in the area. There is no normalcy and people feel like living in some alien place where the condition of life is entirely different from the rest of the world. The narrator of the novel feels the same as there is a general change in the social conditions of his area. He remembers how his time used to pass hanging out with his friends, playing cricket, and reading books. His friends have been an important part of his life and their sudden departure without him leaves him all the more isolated. Initially, he decides to follow them and go across the border but he soon realizes that he does not belong even there and thus cannot leave. Hussain's father makes him realise that he is not capable of undertaking this expedition as his mind is occupied just by his friends, books and cricket. This analysis of the narrator by Hussain's father disturbs him and he thinks himself to be less accomplished creating the initial of the later alienation into which he is going to experience himself.

The gruesome incident of Farooq's brutal killing leaves the whole village shattered. The bond that has kept the people connected with the village begins to break and it becomes difficult for the people to continue living there. The narrator's father, the headman, tries his best to convince the people but they do not listen and make the decision to leave. The whole village becomes deserted and the narrator's family is the only household that is occupied there. Estrangement occurs even among the family members as they do not communicate much with each other. The mother spends most of her time in the kitchen garden and the father listens to the radio. The narrator is forced to work with Kadian, a callous and hard-hearted officer who engages him into the job of taking away the weapons and IDs of the dead militants. The narrator has to spend the

whole day in the company of the dead and it inflicts his mind in many ways. "Slowly and steadily I realise that I have become used to everything,...as if it were my destiny; and if goes on like this I won't even be able to tell whether I am mad or sane. What if I am already crazy?" (260). The narrator is so much disturbed on witnessing the rampant loss of life that he even decides to kill Kadian. "In Kashmir, the general public particularly the youth face psychological and social dejection because of the living under incessant siege in their homeland wherein the situation is characterised by military repression, indiscriminate violence, and the loss of life in the on-going violence"(Parveen).

Violence, war, bloodshed, have become a part of the life of the people of Kashmir. Each day passes with the news about the constant clashes among the opposing groups which has affected immensely the daily life of the people. The education of the students is suffering and their future is at risk.

Political violence...has gradually become a way of life for people in Kashmir since the end of 1989. Political violence is part of a larger congeries of events called armed conflict that has plagued the world community efforts towards peaceful coexistence. Kashmir has been recognised as a situation of armed conflict in South Asian region primarily because of India's International dispute with Pakistan over control of Kashmir, which has twice escalated into war in 1965 and 1975(Singh 201).

The narrator is facing utter isolation both at his home as well as at the work. He has never wanted to work with Kadian; in fact, he hates the job of collecting id and weapons of the dead people of his own place. But no choice is left for the narrator as he knows that he must submit to Kadian's proposal who can otherwise make him accept it forcefully. "I knew and my father knew too, in that very meeting with captain, that we had to do exactly what we were told" (256). The work of the narrator is really horrible and he wants to leave it as soon as possible. It's becoming unbearable for him to go on searching the things from the dead people. "I don't want to count the number of unburied boys remaining to be searched, don't want to pick guns of dead people and hand them over to that evil man, don't even want to see this ruck sack and its contents any more" (259). The isolation has afflicted the entire family of the narrator as is visible from their day to day conduct. Their communication with each other has lessened and they do not spend much time together. Speaking about the effect of isolated atmosphere on the narrator's mother, Doop Singh Chahal says, "She has seen her husband gone through humiliation and she also keenly observes the psychic confrontation of her son....To keep herself sane she confides herself to her vegetable yard. She finds her way to survive through 'silence' and denial of reality"(Chahal).The narrator himself says that his mother, who used to speak too much earlier has limited her communications and spends most of her time in her kitchen garden. "Ma doesn't talk much now, except for the rare occasion when she's angry. In fact, she has said so very little for such a long time that I don't even remember—two years, three, forever...."(49). The lack of contact with the rest of the society has created isolation among them; there being no one with whom they can share their experiences. The narrator has not gone anywhere else except his college that seldom functions and his mother has not seen any other women for a number of years. Both narrator and his mother want to leave the place and go away with the rest of the villagers; but narrator's father cannot be convinced. He is unwilling to leave his home and as a result they are left alone.

So, there is an utter feeling of alienation among the characters of the novel. Alienation refers to the feeling of aloofness and an estrangement from the outside atmosphere. The familial circumstances as well as the outside conditions create a traumatic atmosphere. The narrator's job is too agonizing, dealing with the dead bodies throughout the day. He frequently encounters heaps of dead people whose possessions he has to take out. He fears to find the dead bodies of his friends who have left to join the freedom movement of Kashmir. The stinking smell of the dead bodies makes him feel sick and there seems no way out of this. He tells his mother that it no longer possible to live at that place and they should ask father to leave. Lack of connection with his friends and other villagers is tormenting him. He is ready to become a separatist for the sake of reuniting with his friends. The spectacle of the gruesome slaughter of mankind is also provoking him to do this.

The condition of normlessness prevails through-out the place and the general codes of conduct are no longer applicable. There is rampant killing and massacre in the area and normalcy is far from being visible. Normlessness as defined by Seeman is "a situation in which the social norms have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior" (Wikipedia). This normlessness has created alienation among the people who can no longer bear the trauma and violence prevailing ceaselessly. Seeman has defined five concepts regarding alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement ("On the Meaning of Alienation"). The different characters of the novel, particularly the family of the narrator are suffering from these aspects of alienation. The people are powerless before the cops as well as the militants and their life has become meaningless. Their children are taken away for interrogation and when they are returned back half dead, they don't dare to do anything. The norms of the society have been smashed and all the schedules are broken due to the constant violence prevailing. People, who earlier considered the area as their own, begin to desert the abode which they called their home. They prefer to carry on their nomadic life in order to save their lives from this massacre. It has resulted in the general movement of the people causing isolation and estrangement to those who still occupy the deserted area.

The social and cultural atmosphere as depicted in the novel is totally devastated. The sounds of gunshot and explosions have become a daily routine and loss of human life is taking its peak. People are suffering due to the lack of the basic necessity that is food which is falling short due to the constant curfews and crackdowns. People are gathered in fields and are made to stay there the entire day till the enquiry is completed. There is no usual routine of waking up in the morning, having breakfast and going to work; instead there is no work, no school for children and no college for youth. The scene of the mothers begging milk for their infants is really pathetic depicting the utmost demolition caused by the war on the civil population. "Our breasts are barren now, nothing left for our children, nothing. We have eaten all the grass in our gardens and finished all the pulses we had and cooked every grain of rice there ever was" (181).

Gujjar community is the particular group represented in the novel and this community has suffered a lot as a result of the chaos going on in the state. This community is doubly suppressed by both the conflicting groups. On one hand, the guerrillas consider them the informers of army and on the other hand, army suspects them of supporting militants. The example of Shaban Gujjar and his son is typical in consideration to the novel. Army tries to take him away forcefully to find out the weapons hidden somewhere by a militant but afterwards find the weapons without his help. But the militants suspect Shaban of having helped the army and is assaulted brutally along with his son and innocent wife. Kavita Suri and Deepshikha Hooda have made the following analysis:

There have been a number of selected and targeted killings of the members of these two tribal communities [Gujjar and Bakkarwal] besides several massacres in the mountains. Gujjar Bakkarwals were killed for various reasons including the allegations that they acted as informers- the Mukhbirs- to the army and also for not obeying their diktats. Whenever a militant was killed, the finger of suspicion fell on the Gujjar family living nearby (Suri).

In *The Collaborator*, the novelist has depicted the utmost agony and distress caused to the people living in the war afflicted areas. The severe living conditions, constant fear of death of self as well as the loved ones and the impending dearth of the necessities of life has created havoc in the lives of the people. The narrator loses everything to the war including his peace of mind, education, friendship, and his budding love for Asma. He is grieved when his friends abandon him and the villagers leave the place to go somewhere else. Alienation afflicts him and his family and they are beyond any hope. By joining Captain Kadian in his work, his life only deteriorates and he gets aggressive to such an extent that he plans to kill him. The sight of the dead bodies lying without any proper burial torments him and he becomes restless. He gets solace only when he is able to burn down all the dead bodies and offer prayers for their souls. Thus, the novel shows the impact of war on the ultimate sufferers that is the common people. The cruel clutches of the war snatch away everything of the people leaving them estranged, isolated, and restless.

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