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VOICES FROM A CONFLICT: MIRZA WAHEED'S *THE COLLABORATOR* AND SIDDHARTHA GIGOO'S *THE GARDEN OF SOLITUDE*

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Abstract

The armed conflict in Kashmir has now entered into its third decade and for the moment, it seems unending. The discourse on Kashmir and its discontents has resulted in a wide circulation of narratives in both the literary and non-literary realms. Most of these narratives fall in the line of two broad hegemonic discourses—Indian and Pakistani. Owing to these contending discourses, most of the narratives have come up with their own subjective perspectives regarding the conflict in Kashmir, especially in terms of experience and reality. It is the preoccupation of these writings with rhetoric that has resulted in many significant aspects of lived experience related to the conflict being unaccounted. However, with the rise of many indigenous voices now, we are witnessing new perspectives as these voices aim to portray their lived experiences of the conflict, and hence offer a discontinuity from the hegemonic narratives. Through the analysis of the two novels-- The Collaborator by Mirza Waheed and The Garden of Solitude by Siddhartha Gigoo, this paper seeks to argue that how these two narratives aim to reflect the many facets of experience of this conflict. The paper aims to examine how the two novels give prominence to the many complex questions like identity, justice, struggle, and oppression which are usually missing in the mainstream narratives on/of Kashmir. In doing so, the paper looks into the fact that how the two novels aim to re-draw the maps of reality about the conflict in Kashmir using the mode of literary imagination.

Keywords: Kashmir Conflict, History, Resistance, Oppression, *The Collaborator*, *The Garden of Solitude*.

The contentious historical, social, cultural, and political perceptions on the Kashmir conflict have evoked myriad responses and endeavours of exploration in both the literary and non-literary realms. Since the violent conflict in Kashmir, among many other factors, has its roots in political factors, any political approach to the event gives rise to the possibilities of

partisanship and partiality. The conflict in Kashmir is also seen as a site for two contending nationalisms—Indian and Pakistani. Therefore, any purely political interpretation or approach to the experience of the conflict might fall in the line within these contending parameters. The vast majority of writings on Kashmir, written from these positions, come up with their own monolithic projections regarding the realities of the conflict. However, with the emergence of many indigenous voices now, we are witnessing fresh perspectives as these voices aim to portray their lived experiences of the conflict, and hence offer a break from the previous narratives. This paper tries to argue, in the light of its analysis of the two novels--*The Collaborator* by Mirza Waheed and *The Garden of Solitude* by Siddhartha Gigoo, that how these two narratives offer a fresh outlook on the reality through literary imagination by attempting to resist the tendencies of bias and partisanship.

As the conflict and conflicting opinions, pertaining to Kashmir, continue to perpetuate each other, writing and research is likely to unfold new perspectives in the time to come. This can be stated with some certainty as it is now an established fact that narration/narratives—whether factual or fictional—do not describe reality in absolute terms only; rather, they attempt to present fresh perceptions and dimensions that offer new trajectories of reality. This is happening because history is seen as an ongoing cultural process characterised by a constant flux, and literature is considered a reservoir of nuanced reflections on these fluctuations. Georg Lukacs, in *The Historical Novel*, visualizes the progress of humanity as "a historical process" and asserts that "a true historical novel" is one which comes into its own "by virtue of artistically portraying the rising awareness of man's location in time … [is] conditioned by social and economic development" (42). Consequently, he argues that historical novelists do not need "the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events" (ibid.).

The writer of a work of literature does not aim at presenting historical facts in the same way that a historian does. Instead, he looks beyond facts to the spirit underlying those facts. This, however, in no way alters either the value of the facts or the reality concerning them. Ralph Waldo Emerson succinctly sums this up by stating that "Fiction reveals the truth that reality obscures'' (Wilson 10). This lends credence to the fact that an event, which might have a mere statistical importance for a historian or a journalist, could reveal many underlying angles of perception when presented in a work of fiction. To put it simply, what the historian finds irrelevant and unwanted, a writer might find fascinating and stimulating enough to transmute into literary creations. As Olive Senior puts it, "The purpose of literature is not to represent but to re-present, to hold up that mirror in a light that enables us to see reality both reflected and refracted" (Senior 2013).

With the onset of the armed uprising in Kashmir against the Indian rule in the late 1980s, there were mass demonstrations happening in towns and cities which were often met with bloody force resulting in mass massacres such as Gaw Kadal, Sopore or Bijbehra. The cries of *Hum kya Chahtey? Azaadi!* (What do we want? Freedom!) reverberated across Kashmir. More and more Kashmiri youth took up arms against the Indian rule which resulted in the insurgency getting exacerbated during the early years of the 1990s. The response of

Indian government to the armed uprising of Kashmiris was disproportionally brutal. As the militants launched violent attacks against the establishment and the security forces, the Indian government took direct control of the state. The state Governor, Jagmohan, who was already known in India for his ruthless actions, was given full powers. Lakhs of Indian army and paramilitary forces, armed with draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, began massive operations throughout the state against the militants which resulted in more deaths and alienation. The state was now truly in the midst of a full-fledged insurgency which attained massive proportions once the Indian state replied with uninhibited suppression. Another tragic dimension brought about by the insurgency during those initial years was the mass exodus of Kashmiri Hindus, generally known as Pandits, from valley to Jammu and other parts of India after a spate of killings and threats. The community had endorsed the union of India and Kashmir but with the onset of armed movement against the Indian rule, it found itself insecure and embarked on exodus to protect its own religious identity. Until that point of time, the Kashmiri Pandits mainly constituted the upper class of the society and occupied the majority of the privileged positions in the state. As Sumantra Bose observes about the Kashmir of early 1990s, "During suspension of civil liberties, institution of martial law, widespread police killings, brutalization, and the automatic equation of Kashmiris with 'terrorists', Kashmir was now a society under daily siege'' (4). Bose further adds that by the mid-1990s, there was "demoralization and atrophy" in the state (135). Agha Shahid Ali captures this state of "atrophy" in the valley during those times in these lines:

> Death flies in, thin bureaucrat, from plains—
> A one way-passenger, again.
> In the Vale the children are dead or asleep.
> He descends. The Colonel salute: A Captain starts up the jeep.
> The Mansion by the lake awaits him with roses. He is driven
> Through the streets bereft of children: they are dead not asleep.
>
> (Shahid Ali qtd. in Zaidi 163)

This is the immediate historical backdrop against which the two novels are set as they endeavour to explore these realities by reflecting the perspectives of the people who face oppression from all sides. The attempt is to frame a voice which is both independent of the dominant discourses of India and Pakistan. In an interview, Waheed says: "The 90s were a dark, brutal decade with horrific levels of violence and nothing travelled to the outside world with [Pakistan describing] the conflict as jihad and India [describing] it as a law and order problem" (Waheed qtd. in Dawn 2011). These two nation-states had emerged as a sort of story-tellers of master narratives in the context of Kashmir. Just as Agha Shahid Ali refers to such panoptic states controlling the lives of Kashmiris in the following lines:

> Someone else in this world has been mentioning you,
> Gathering news, itemizing your lives
> For a file you'll never see
>
> (Shahid Ali qtd. in Sabitha 181)

According to Barbara Harlow, the writers of the resistance movements consider it necessary to wrest that expropriated historicity back, reappropriate it for themselves in order to reconstruct a new world-historical order (Harlow 50). Both the novels under study are both gripping histories as well as forceful tales of the human predicament in locales marked by violent conflict. Personal narratives have been unearthed, processed through the literary imagination, and re-crafted as the literary expressions of two writers. In a conversation, Mirza Waheed recounts his experience of the times of the conflict in Kashmir in the following words:

> You look into it, the loss of collective conscience. You look into the moral landscape of these times and areas … what happens to normal behavior, the suspension of every day good behavior in a way which seems normal. We come to expect and then accept that this is how it's going to be. It's war, and these things happen in war. And then, as a novelist, as a writer, you do want to question that. And you want to explore … so how did we get to this place? What makes brutality banal? How do we come to accept violence as an everyday thing? And as a novelist, I want to explore those things and see … how do we come to a point where killing as many people as possible is a job? And what does it do to the person who's doing the killing and, obviously, also to the people who are getting killed in that manner. (Waheed qtd. in Guernica 2012)

About his experiences of the conflict and the subsequent migration of his community, Siddhartha Gigoo reveals in an interview:

> What happened in Kashmir in the late eighties and the early nineties had a profound impact on me. Events such as militancy, the migration of Kashmiri Pandits and their plight in exile. It was all bizarre and too real to be true. Some events refused to fade from my memory... Perhaps there are shades of me in the protagonist. But there could be shades of the protagonist in me too. Maybe I always wanted to be like the protagonist. But now that many people have read my novel, they all tell me that this is their story. There weren't any migrants whose share of misfortunes was less than the others. The same conditions, life in camps, the torment, the struggle, the shattering of dreams, the torment of the aged, and then the dementia... Many perished, longing to return to their homeland, Kashmir. The young generation still suffers from an erosion of identity and a sense of rootlessness. (Gigoo qtd. in Dawn 2011)

In their own ways, *The Collaborator* and *The Garden of Solitude* reflect on the situation of the Kashmir of the early 1990s when the era of a full-fledged militancy began there. The very titles of the two novels are significantly symbolic. On examining the title of Waheed's novel against the backdrop of its content, it becomes very clear that the word "collaborator" has been carefully chosen by the novelist to strike the first chord in the reader. It is an ambiguous, subtle pointer to the hidden realities that mark the militant phase of the Kashmir conflict. Seen from the perspective of the plot, the title is loaded with symbolic overtones that are ironic and also ambivalent in nature. This irony and the ambivalence are suggestive of the larger situation of Kashmir which was characterised by various complexities. From one

perspective, the narrator is forced by the Indian Army to become its collaborator and thereby play a role that is fraught with perils of losing his life. It is a role which is forced upon him as he has no choice; he is, therefore, a reluctant collaborator who understands the helplessness of an individual in the face of the might of a nation when he "knew" and his father "knew too... in that very first meeting with the Captain that we had to do exactly what we were told" (256). As time and plot progress, the narrator alternates between collaboration and resistance at a psychological level. Ostensibly, the narrator seems to be working for the Indian army Captain, but deep down, this boy nurtures a deep-rooted but inhibited desire to join the militants and their cause. There are times when he is shown to contemplate killing the Captain, and of breaking out from the shackles of a job forced on him. He thinks of ways of escaping his dreadful work, but quails at the enormity of confronting the Captain, and thereby the army. This awareness exacerbates his helplessness to the extent he becomes so hardened with the routine of identifying dead bodies on the Line of Control (LOC), the arbitrary border dividing the two Kashmirs, that he begins to interact with the dead. The narrator being forced to collaborate with his oppressors in an oppressive job underlines the larger dimension of the conflict. The gravity of the situation of the times is characterised by a clear inequality of engagement between the two opposing camps—the Indian state and the Kashmiri people. The Indian state, as represented by the Indian Army, appears as an all-encompassing structure of power against which the hapless Kashmiris, represented by the isolated villagers of Nowgam, are pitted. The balance of power is shown to clearly tilt in favour of the former as the latter live at the mercy of the former. On the one hand, the narrator symbolises an active collaboration with the state in the face of its might; on the other, his is also in a passive collaboration with the militants as he seems to agree with their ideology and methods. In comparison, the title of Gigoo's novel has a metaphorical significance which is also imbued with a subtle irony. It embodies a deep desire within a segment of a forcibly dislocated populace to yearn for and attempt to retrieve something that has been lost or snatched away. The "garden" comes to symbolise the longing of Kashmiri Pandits' for their lost homeland of Kashmir valley. Ironically, the "garden" of Kashmir has become a place of turbulence and upheaval during the militancy; it is no longer the tranquil "garden of solitude" known for its natural beauty. This transition is foregrounded in the word "solitude" which signifies the Kashmiri Pandits' sense of loneliness and isolation after being forced out from the valley. On one level, the "garden" stands for the joyful, intimate and harmonious milieu of the past in which the Pandits lived in Kashmir; on the second level, it signifies their present which is fraught with a psychological solitude that marks their existence as migrants driven away from their roots; on a third level, the "garden" symbolises their craving for a future in which they can return to their moorings after "Longing and nostalgia will keep [them] sane and rooted" (179). Both novels, thus, are able to bring out two very basic facets of the conflict—the Muslim and Hindu perceptions that have grown out of and also contributed to the Kashmir imbroglio.

The portrayal of the protagonists is also significant as it embodies different facets of the conflict. In *The Collaborator*, the protagonist has two important characteristics—he is

anonymous and he is isolated; yet at the same time, he is at the centre of all action. He observes everything very carefully and then forms his perceptions which, in turn, inform the reader about the complex realities of his situation. His anonymity and isolation run through and beyond his individual story. His seclusion and namelessness symbolise the loss of individual voice and identity of a larger society living under the repression of the gun. There is a touch of ambiguity about him as well as he is unable to decide anything on his own; he seems to have lost the individual will to take any assertive decision. For instance, even after harbouring a desire to join the militancy, he constantly wavers; he has a violent aversion to the Indian army and is conscious of his humiliation in working for it, yet he risks his own life in carrying out the army's diktat. He attains the characteristics of both hero and anti-hero as the enormity of his oppressive circumstances renders him helpless, and survival is the only thing that drives him in his bizarre job as a collaborator. In *The Garden of Solitude,* the protagonist is both participant and observer in the events of the novel. He acts and observes, all the while sensitively reflecting on the conditions that Pandits faced prior to and during their unfortunate exodus or exile as migrants. In the second half of the novel, he shifts attention away from himself, concentrating on the people around him. He thus plays an individual role of struggling to come to terms with his own life which then morphs into the telling of the story of his people and their inter-community experiences. Sridar as a protagonist is looking for meaning in his world which is riddled with chaos. Taken together, the two novels portray protagonists who symbolize the complexities of identity and community in the Kashmir conflict. It is a conflict that has been marked by the inter-relatedness of the participant / observer dynamics, both of which the two protagonists highlight.

In *The Collaborator*, we see two phases of community life reflected in the lives of the people of Nowgam—the pre-militancy phase and the post-militancy phase. Before the rise of militancy against the Indian state, there prevailed times of relative peace for Nowgam villagers who went through their daily routines treading the traditional path. The sense of community prevailed as the village had a well-knit socio-cultural milieu in which patriarchy ruled as solidarity and consensus of elders, and deference to them by the younger generation. Religion was restricted to rituals and cultural practices, as the novel asserts. But with the outbreak of militancy, and its concomitant pressures, there could be seen radical alterations in the traditional way of village life. In this vitiated atmosphere, where the primary concern of people was survival, the traditional values of community consensus and solidarity were cast to the winds. All except the headman want to leave their village after the Indian army launches severe operations against militants and their local sympathizers. The village tradition of consensus breaks as the people of Nowgam, without paying heed to the advice of their sarpanch or headman (the father of the protagonist), decide on leaving the village. The narrator's mother shares their sentiments of wanting to leave for the safety of her family, but the patriarchal setup of her family and society prohibit her from doing what she wants. The sarpanch, to whom patriarchal values mean more than anything else, insists on their staying and eventually gets his way; deference rules. But when the gun becomes the weapon that

dictates, disagreements arise between the young and the old on the issue of violence. The elders disapprove the use of violent means to achieve political goals; they prefer a more pacifist approach as is suggested by sarpanch and elders who very emphatically denounce the militants and their violent methods. The young, however, prefer to choose gun over the way of peace as they are fascinated by the immense possibilities that weapons open up. So the youth of Nowgam are shown, like other Kashmiri youth of the time, picking up guns and joining the militants despite the strong disapproval of their elders. The novel speaks of a man who is a member of a mainstream political party inclined towards India, but his son prefers to join the militants, only to be ultimately killed in an encounter. As these generational gaps begin to exert an overt influence on the dynamics of the armed movement, there is shown to emerge a need of affiliation rather than traditional norm of filiation. In *The Garden of Solitude,* too, we see two phases of community life—the pre-migration phase and the post-migration phase. Before the onset of the militancy, the Pandit community appears to be socially vibrant. It is a literate community that occupies top administrative positions in the state, and thus forms the upper crust of society. Historically, too, the Pandits have invariably held positions of privilege and honour in Kashmiri society, and take pride in inherited traditions, values, and the unique Kashmiri way of life. These values emphasize toleration, deference, learning, and a harmonious blend with the Muslim majority. However, the outbreak of the militancy and the subsequent exodus of Pandits from the valley had a large impact on their collective and individual consciousness. The mass exodus of Pandits gradually destroyed the social fabric of a people based on traditions of harmony and syncreticism. Forced into utter desolation of living as migrants, the social life of the Pandit community received a big jolt. Though they felt secure being among co-religionists in other parts of India, they were apprehensive of getting assimilated and subsumed into cultures not really their own. Their distinct community identity was under threat and they felt betrayed and victimised both by militants and the Indian government. Even years after migration, they saw memory and remembrance as the only way to maintain continuity with their past. But memory became fragmented, and the new generation of Kashmiri Pandits felt deprived of the traditions that their community upheld. They were not fluent in the Kashmiri language and were greatly influenced by cultures in which they had grown. For them, Kashmir was just a place of beauty from which their parents had chosen to move. All else of culture, heritage and tradition was lost to them. In presenting two phases and two outlooks that mark Kashmir and Kashmiris, both the novelists are able to highlight the losses that are born out of the conflict.

Both novels can be seen as historiographies created against the backdrop of historical events and personages. In *The Collaborator*, the Indian state and its establishment is evident through the army and a "cruel Governor". The reference is to Jagmohan, who was made Governor after militancy began and the state was brought under virtual military control. The Indian state is portrayed as a massive military power which rules through a strong army acting in a civilian domain. The army is shown to rule every one—the bureaucrats, the media, the politicians as well as the commoners. The hapless villagers of Nowgam symbolise this rule in *The Collaborator*. They see the Indian state as a hostile and confrontational entity

which has no sympathetic corner for the Kashmiri Muslims. This gives rise to the siege mentality of a populace surrounded by a powerful, hostile oppressor. Militants and their organizations are no match for its might in terms of numbers, capabilities, weapons, or laws. In *The Garden of Solitude*, however, there is no single uniform opinion regarding the Indian state and its role vis-a-vis the predicament of Kashmiri Pandits. Their suffering is addressed in ambivalent terms. Some Pandits are shown praising the Governor and the Indian Government for the timely action of saving their lives by advising them to leave the valley when the situation took a turn for the worst in terms of militant violence. Kashmiri Muslims, on the other hand, are shown to be inclined towards taking up arms against the Indian state which responds forcefully to quell the uprising in a bitter confrontation. In these circumstances, the Pandits, who are a minority in the Kashmir valley, find themselves in a delicate situation. For centuries, they had lived with Muslims in the valley in peace and brotherhood, forming a plural social fabric that had thrived on shared values. Many Pandits also feel that they have had to bear the brunt of militant violence as well as state violence; more specially, they see themselves as victims at the hands of Indian state which used them as a tool to validate its claims over Kashmir, and then gradually neglected them. Then there are other Pandits who hold the view that the state could have done more—first, to avoid their exodus, and then to ensure their return to the valley. Yet some others also condemn the Indian state for its excessive use of military force against the dissenting Kashmiri Muslims. Taken together, both these novels are sensitive portrayals of the varied opinions that have emerged from the rise of militancy and its forceful suppression by the state machinery.

Waheed and Gigoo's creative imagination is able to capture the different facets and perceptions of people caught in a situation marked by contestation and confrontation. In *The Collaborator*, the predominant image is that of a lost paradise where peace, tranquility and coexistence of a society have vanished. The narrative is structured round and alternates between the present / "now" and the past / "then". The narrator remembers the Nowgam of the past in which the stream of life flowed smoothly, when militancy did not exist, and when life flowed along an even tenor. During the days of militancy, peace departed, and honour and security of life also took their leave. With their departure, a besieged people learnt to live under the shadow of the gun. The life and honour of people were at the mercy of the gun-toting armed forces and the militants. The sense of loss is especially made palpable through human loss that is defined and depicted in terms of killings, tortures, rapes, injuries, and other forms of physical coercion. These losses are mostly the result of the oppressive actions of the military and compounded by the armed militants and their supporters. However, those militants, who claim to be the liberators of oppressed people, are also guilty of playing their part in perpetrating brutalities on innocent people. In *The Garden of Solitude*, the suffering and angst of the Pandits is rooted in their loss of home. The dislocation and exodus from their soil is not only a loss of home but also underlines disconnection and discontinuity with their roots, their past and their culture. This loss affected the unique cultural ethos of Kashmiri Pandits as also their social relations. As a result, the loss of home has the older generation of Pandits experiencing trauma, depression and dementia. Forced to stay away from their

ancestral homes in the valley for a long span of time, and having to re-settle in unfamiliar places, the uprooted Pandits are overcome by fragmented memories. These are the conditions that Gigoo portrays in his novel when one reads of the severe effect on their elders like Sridar's grandfather, Mahanandju, who becomes a victim of trauma and depression. This trauma pushes him towards lunacy as he takes to blaming his unsettled circumstances on an unavoidable migration. Like most Pandits, Mahanandju's lunacy emanates from a yearning to maintain links with his traditions and his past so as to preserve the identity of his community which is in imminent danger of getting lost forever.

Waheed's *The Collaborator* and Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* foreground two basic features of the Kashmir conflict. They respectively concern the views of the majority community in Kashmir—its Muslims—and the views of the minority community there—its Hindu Pandits. While the aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslims are focused on gaining freedom from the yoke of India, the intense yearning of the Kashmiri Pandits is to regain their lost homeland after their unwanted exile. *The Collaborator*'s plot is structured around the aspirations of those involved in the movement for Azaadi and a reinstatement of autonomous nationhood for Kashmir. Discontent and alienation festering over time manifested itself in the form of armed uprising. At the turn of the twentieth century, the harsh responses of the Indian government exacerbated this situation, and led to aversion, alienation and estrangement among Kashmiris and countless Kashmiri youth took up arms with little care for future prospects. India was seen as a military aggressor and occupier and this finds echo in Waheed's narrator, who refers to mass demonstrations in villages and towns calling for Azaadi. Gigoo's novel also refers to these reverberations of Azaadi. However, the term is shown to have two connotations—for some, it means merger with Pakistan; for others, it means complete independence from Indian rule. The unanimity shared by the novels is the response among contending groups and this is the notion that Indian interventions in Kashmir must cease. This finds succinct expression in *The Garden of Solitude* when Gigoo writes of an uprooted Pandit's thoughts: "Kashmiri Muslims, the militants and their demand for freedom from India are only half-truth; the other half is us, struggling to survive, rootless and homeless in the hot sun, begging the world to see our wounds and to hear our shrieks" (190).

All these issues pinpoint bring to the fore the crux of the matter, that is, the issue of identity. In the context of the situation in Kashmir, the concept of identity is extremely crucial, complex and intriguing. Here identity has multiple facets and also a differential composition; it operates also on many levels—the individual, collective, regional, and above all, religious. The complexity of the issue of identity becomes all too evident in the way events unfolded in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Both the texts under study bring to prominence the fact that it would be fallacious to assume a homogenous conception of Kashmiri identity. In both the novels, the protagonists seem to struggle for their identity at the individual level, but they find that it has a close bearing upon the larger collective identity. For centuries, Kashmiri culture was defined by its plurality and scope for tolerant practices of diverse faiths and ideas that wove people together in harmony. This interfusion

of distinctive practices of belief led to the articulation of a new cultural identity which came to be known as "Kashmiriyat".

Kashmiri Muslims, despite being the majority, found themselves at a disadvantageous position in contrast to the minority Pandits. This was because of the disproportionate division of socio-economic privileges that favoured the minority Pandits. The construct of Kashmiriyat was manipulated to overlook the growing political and economic demands of Kashmiris. With the outbreak of the armed uprising against the Indian rule in late 1980s, the nature of discontent and resistance changed and Kashmiri Muslim aspirations aligned with the appeal to the religious identity. To bring this out, Siddhartha Gigoo, in his novel, alludes to the "reinforcement of a new cultural identity" (36). Mirza Waheed, in *The Collaborator*, also recounts the surge of people's religious passions with the onset of the armed movement. The new Kashmiri identity is thus shown to recast itself in religious terms, and this has put Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits at loggerheads and relations between them appear ambivalent as of now.

By sensitively bringing to fore many unknown or unexpressed dimensions of the Kashmir conflict, Mirza Waheed and Siddhartha Gigoo's novels delicately draw attention to a long-neglected human story. In doing so, they represent a stream of writing which has grown out of the realities of armed struggle and conflict. Though the two texts being examined grow out of a specific and critical historical reality, they convey a multiplicity of versions and facets that armed conflict in Kashmir has engendered. They are not mere accounts of victimhood; rather, their power lies in them being testimonies of humanity which forms the basis of literature. In this context, Olive Senior argues:

> Literature is above all, storytelling. And, as Chinua Achebe has said, storytelling is a threat. Storytellers, poets, writers, have always found ways of confronting tyranny, especially in spaces where such actions are dangerous and deadly. Throughout the ages, writers have developed and employed myriad literary devices and explored the fullest limits of language through satire, magical realism, fantasy, fable and so on. Writers over the ages have found ways of talking about issues – like politics – without seeming to talk about them. The function is not to present the world as it is, but to present it in a new light through the narrative power of art. Literature does not ask "What is it about?" It asks "How do we tell it to make it real?." (Senior 2013)

By offering a discontinuity from the dominant discourses of India and Pakistan, the novels can be said to reflect Salman Rushdie's view on how literature can contest the contorted truths of power structures in the contemporary world:

> It seems to me imperative that literature enter such arguments, because what is being disputed is nothing less than what the case, what is truth is and what untruth. If writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdications... there is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world. (Rushdie 5)

Through the art of fiction, the two writers have attempted to give an outlet to the suppressed aspirations and collective memories of violence and loss of home. In their narratives, memory, identity and time play a very significant role. Against their backdrop, the two works under study, *The Collaborator and The Garden of Solitude* give an indirect account of the oppression and violence, the immeasurable pain of dislocation, and the agony and human loss arising out of a situation in which society is fragmented, home and homeland are lost, the immeasurable consequences of conflict are delineated, and yet the profound and humane dimensions of a violent conflict are brought out. The novels' fictionalised stories flow from the creative pens of Mirza Waheed's and Siddhartha Gigoo's lived experiences in the Kashmir conflict. The individual and collective conscious are made to merge in their narrativisation. Their stories can also be seen as testimonies documenting the horrific conditions dictated by life in areas of conflict. In this respect, literature can be said to approximate history. The special merit of the two novels lies in evoking the two most significant standpoints of the Kashmir conflict—the majority Muslim and the Pandit minority. In doing so, Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* and Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* re-draw the map of reality, and re-define political fiction by approximating history and experience.

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