



### METAPHOR OF NOSTALGIA AND LAMENTATION OF EXILE: A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF *THE GARDEN OF SOLITUDE*

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#### Abstract

The present paper tries to explore the trauma of Kashmiri Pandits, who were displaced from Kashmir valley during the political turmoil of 1990's. This paper would seriously ponder over the writings of Siddhartha Gigoo, whose main concern in the novel is to illustrate the story of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, who have lost their voice and identity. As we know that migrations are in two ways, one is forced and the other is voluntarily. Forced migrations may have various reasons, like war, oppression, killings, atrocities, crop failure and voluntary migration may be for seeking job or better life. The forced migration lays a psychological trauma to some extent when it is done in a repulsive way. In this context, the memories of past, recollections, feelings, thoughts lead to the process of deep loss and lamentation and bring another side of history when one gives it a shape of a book. Writers in exile always try to recreate the broken images of the past world in order to keep it alive. Keeping in view, Siddhartha Gigoo depicts the portrayal of Kashmiri Pandits in his maiden novel *The Garden of Solitude* which I am going to discuss and delineate in detail. The present paper would be an attempt to discover the voice of Gigoo in which he has artistically depicted the haunting memories of Kashmiri Pandits. This book is a very powerful discourse of the narratives of Pandits, as he himself was the victim of forced exile. Siddhartha Gigoo is a Kashmiri Pandit writer who wrote about the pain, sufferings and oppression of Kashmiri pandits. There is a consistent overflow of past memories and ardent zeal of nostalgia pervading throughout his narrative.

**Keywords:** Lamentation, nostalgia, exile, Kashmiryat, broken images

Over the last few years, we have observed that the Kashmiri Pandits have started to contribute in the cultural, linguistic and other social fields. There is a long list of Writers in exile who gave their voice of sufferings to the world through their works. The list includes: Arvind Gigoo, Taj N Dhar, Pran kishor, Rahul Pandita, Santosh Kumar, San and Siddhartha Gigoo. Their works portray the relationship between the imaginary homeland and the real homeland which they have left years back in Kashmir.

*The Garden of Solitude* which was published in 2011 is the debut novel of Gigoo, who is considered as the widely known writer of Kashmiri Pandits. The novel focuses on the plight of Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to either leave their homes or to join with Muslims. Gigoo has personally witnessed the devastation and destruction of the Kashmiri Pandits. The novel depicts the violence that has been done to Kashmiri Pandits by many insurgent parties in the 1990s. The novel is partly autobiographical, as the protagonist presents the painful story of Kashmiri Pandits which represents Siddhartha Gigoo

himself. The Novel also shows the history of turmoil that has affected the lives of Pandits to a large extent. Soon after the Pandits left the Kashmir, many houses were taken over by the security forces and some houses were taken over by the insurgents for their hideouts and were razed to the ground by the military forces. Life did not remain same after the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Many people and young boys were taken away by the military forces and were killed for no reason. Many disappearances took place. Everyone was considered as a terrorist in the eyes of Indian forces.

In the dedication page of the novel, Siddhartha writes "*All I dream of now is a garden of solitude, where I get a morsel of rice in the morning and a morsel of rice in the evening*" (Gigoo, V) with these lines, the writer sets the title and tone of the novel and makes it clear to the reader that the book will revolve around the loss of garden. Nostalgia of pandits is scattered throughout the book. He finds the culture, tradition, ethos, brotherhood, peace and the beauty of his beloved homeland torn violently. Throughout the novel we find that Gigoo looks on

the issues of alienation, discrimination, loss of memory, recovery and recollections of the home of his childhood. Kashmir has been called as the most beautiful place as “Paradise on Earth” due to its magnificent views with its natural scenes, unspoiled forests, high mountains, beautiful lakes, greenery, the chinnar tress, the snowy mountains, the orchard Gardens, the shadow of willow trees. It always offers a panoramic view to the writers. In spite of panoramic beauties of Kashmir, the scenes we find in the novel are almost fully loaded with emotions, tortures, blasts, and killings.

Pramod K. Nayar defines Exile in his book, *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary*, “as a condition of being physically distanced from one’s motherland ... The term includes both forced migration, say during wartime, as well as voluntary migration”. (Nayar, 75) The exile Literature always focuses on hostile atmosphere, brutal killings, fears, day-to-day problems, protests, gun fires and feeling of nostalgia.

Siddhartha Gigoo has produced a tragic story of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The protagonist of the story, Sridar who is born in Srinagar before the uprising had started. He along with his family was forced by the insurgents to leave Kashmir. Sridar is not only the protagonist of the novel, but the voice of all Pandits in whole, who became the victim of loss and lamentation like Sarider. In the beginning of the novel, the protagonist enjoys his life in a cool and calm way. He shares his love, peace and tranquility with his fellows. Before the Pandits were asked to leave the Kashmir, there was a strong mutual bond between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. They were living happily and used to share their pleasantries with one another. Sridar, the protagonist of the novel, along with his family, leaves his old home of Kashmir under the condition of repeated threats by the insurgents. The family of Sridar was not willing to leave Kashmir but due to the changed circumstances they were compelled to leave, because they have seen many killings before their eyes. On leaving, they were so scared that they even forgot to inform their friends. This forced exodus has left scattered marks of hatred on the psyche of Kashmiri Pandits.

In 1989, a series of protests, demonstrations, strikes and attacks on Indian government began the Kashmir insurgency, which led to the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits. As a result, Kashmiri Pandits were targeted. Many people were killed; more than three lakh Kashmiri Pandits migrated from Kashmir to Jammu due to the political turmoil in the valley. The whole Kashmir was engulfed by the insurgents. Hit order lists were glued on the walls and the doors of the Pandit families. Announcements were heard from the loud speakers, like: “*Pandits, leave Kashmir or perish forever*” (Gigoo, 41). All the supporters and agents of India were called as “mukbirs, informers”. As the night would fall, the feeling of terror would grip the Pandit families while hearing the slogans through the loudspeakers from the masjid, “*o informers, agents and kafirs, leave this land. Leave Kashmir, leave Kashmir... pandits must leave. Freedom is ours! The land must be purified!*” (Gigoo, 43) These threats had not allowed them to sleep properly. They became very hopeless and were not able to choose the better option except leaving Kashmir. Their voices were not noticed by anybody and they were compelled to choose an alien destination.

The most terrific scene as described by the Gigoo is the truck scene as: “*Each truck carried a home, and hopelessness. Each truck trudged on inexorably, with terror-stricken faces looking pitifully all around.*” (Gigoo, 66) one can understand the broken images of past that Gigoo has portrayed in a terrific way. When the Pandit families boarded the trucks, they wept as most of them left without informing their Muslim brothers. Their love for Muslims was not fake. The beginning part of the novel deals with the stories of Kashmirayat, in which many characters in the novel share their anecdotes. They were speechless and have lost their voices while leaving their native place. Even Kashmiri Muslims were not in favor of their exile. They also cried for their love, when they left in trucks, one Muslim shouted, and pleaded to them like:

*Pandits, do not leave your motherland. It is a conspiracy by our enemy to separate brother from brother. We will all be slaughtered like sheep now. It will rain bullets on innocent Muslims. Jhelum will turn red with the blood of your*

*brothers... I speak from my soul. Pandits do not leave this place. Without you, how will we exist? (Gigoo, 67-68)*

With the above lines, we came to know the connection of love between the two communities. Gigoo recounts the image of peaceful time that was prevailing in the Kashmir before 90's and then recounts the onset of the armed insurgency that compelled the Kashmiri Pandits to migrate from its original habitat towards the place that was not comfortable for them. People were living a peaceful life in Kashmir. The old men and women looked confused in the trucks as this was their first journey towards the Jammu. They were not willing to even cross the tunnel of Banihal. Their faces looked gloomed and some of them have lost even their voices. They were urging their sons, to leave them on the way of journey. "Why can't you leave me here to my fate" (Gigoo, 67). This was the bond of love between the Muslims and the Kashmiri Pandits. They were fully acquainted with one another. Even they used to invite one another on their festivals and would spend the late nights for discussion on different issues. But when in 14 September 1989, Pandit Tika Lal Taploo, who was a lawyer and a BJP member, was murdered by insurgents, all of a sudden the whole scenario of Kashmir changed, a look of hatred spread between the two communities. Gigoo presents the image of Muslims, Pandits, rebels, armies, and hosts on different levels. When after the gap of fifteen years, Sridar got a chance to see his ancestral house back in Kashmir; he recognized the desolate houses that were of Pandits in 1990's. He met his entire Muslim friend's like, Juma Saecz, Qadir Goor, Tota, Ali, Gani, and Nusrat. Here, Gigoo explores the relationship between the two Kashmiri communities, the Pandits and the Muslims, by showing how Sridar got warm welcome everywhere from Muslims in Kashmir. When we critically analyze the text of Gigoo, we definitely find the pain of only Kashmiri Pandits. However writers of exile have only painted the pain of self. They failed to understand the pain of Kashmir as a whole and were not able to project the sufferings of all Kashmir's as a whole. After 1990's, Kashmir as whole has been targeted to suffer. Unpleasant moments have engulfed the

valley with tortures, harassments, kidnappings, disappearances, killings and gave a life of nostalgia to every Kashmir's. The whole scenario of Kashmir has changed from heaven to hell. Every day life style changed, people came from distant homes would assemble in a one place and used to spend hours to share their anecdote of incidents.

In 1991, the families of Pandits reached Jammu and were allotted tents. A tent was allotted to the single family who would share it with many family members. Pandits, who were owned lands, houses, shops and properties in Kashmir were made to accept the refugee camps in Jammu, where living conditions were pathetic. Living in exile has forced them to accept many unwanted things. They have lost the privacy between husband and wife that has seriously affected to the birth rate of the Kashmiri Pandits. "For months together marriages in the Pandit migrant community did not happen at all. No birth took place in any of the families living in the camps there were only deaths"(Gigoo, 101). These scares of life have ruined their lives as a whole. With these tragedies we came to understand the plight of Kashmiri Pandits when they were in Jammu. There was always a feeling of nostalgia in the construction of their minds "The houses here seem to have lost their roofs" (Gigoo, 71) an old man said to his wife. Seeing the roofless houses in Jammu, they were always reminded of the tin roofs of Kashmir. Gigoo presents a consistent image of loss and depression among the people of valley, both who were living outside the valley and those who were living inside the valley. It is a novel about the memory of pandits who have lost their houses in back 1990's. The author has aptly narrated the history of their lost memory and identity. Gigoo, in the very middle of the book writes:

*Every day I lead the life of a centipede. I crawl. I lick. I hide. I sting... I wake up hungry and go to bed hungry. I lead the life of centipede, I crawl. All round the camp, there is stench of human excrement and waste...The water in the water tankers smells foul, and children lie whole day in their vomit... When we are asleep, we cannot even stretch our arms and legs...*

*Centipedes, millipedes and spiders are our companions. We must learn how to live with them.* (Gigoo, 97-98)

The reflection of past would always haunt them terribly. They found themselves at loss and loneliness. Mahanandju "*I am a man without a reflection ...each day brought new problems and difficulties. The calendar on the wall lost its meaning. No one looked at it. The dates seemed meaningless...He longed to live life backwards*" (Gigoo, 85) Now the Kashmiri Pandits have lost their voices and were standing at nowhere. "*Life teaches us that there is beauty in ugliness*" (Gigoo, 96) Saridar said.

People still wait for justice after spending lot of years in exile. The nostalgia of memory did not even fade away from their minds. They were still hopeful that time will come when they would be given their lost homes. Living in exodus the old men of their community would seriously plead their children to let their last moments spent in Kashmir. They were eager to die in Kashmir. They used to say, that we want to go back to Kashmir and must die in our lost houses.

#### **Conclusion:**

Thus, the novel, *The Garden of Solitude* examines the struggles of peripheral identities within the spectrum of diasporic dislocation through the central protagonist, Sridar who reaches to the state of confusion and ambivalence and becomes a mimic man, exhibiting dual characteristics of mixed identity. The crux of the paper was to show how exile becomes a metaphor for traumatic experience and how the novel reflects the nostalgia and lamentation of these peripheral characters, oscillating between the ashes of history and memory, struggling to explore the alternate space for their mixed identity at the edge of print.

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