

Postcolonial English Literature and the Writings of Kashmiri Pandits

Mr. Jitendar

Assistant Professor Department of English,

Ramjas College University of Delhi

Prof. Rekha Shrama

Department of English

Himachal Pradesh University Summer Hill, Shimla

Abstract: The evolving nature of globalisation, multiculturalism, and the virtual world has rendered literature, culture, and identity critical domains for investigation in postcolonial literary studies. The critical approach to postcolonial literature challenges the established conventions of literary and cultural studies. Post-colonialism is an umbrella term that encompasses, inter alia, cultural studies, multiculturalism, popular studies, feminism, subaltern studies, postmodern studies, and various branches of knowledge such as history, politics, sociology, and philosophy. Postcolonial literature provides platforms for individuals to manifest their identities through diverse modes of literary expression. This research paper endeavours to elucidate the struggle for identity by Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits) through their writings. Postcolonial literary theory has been employed as an analytical framework to evaluate the writings of displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Multiculturalism, Popular Studies, Globalization.

Introduction

Postcolonial literature presents a diverse range of research in postcolonial studies by scholars from diverse fields. The literature primarily focuses on writers and writings originating from previously colonised nations. Postcolonial studies encompass ethnicity, gender, race, religion, politics and culture. The adjective “postcolonial” refers to the theories and writings of post-colonialism and should not be confused with the term “post-colonial”, which denotes a period after colonisation. The postcolonial world of displaced communities globally became a subject of scholarly inquiry following the end of colonisation. This research paper endeavours to examine the culture and identity of Kashmiri Pandits within the postcolonial literary context and investigates how the ethnic identity and cultural affiliation of a group become contentious issues among the populace of a secular democratic country with evolving perspectives.

Resistance against the dominant forces in various aspects of society characterises postcolonial literature in the contemporary world. The postcolonial era challenged dominant knowledge systems in pursuit of identity and to establish independence in different branches of knowledge. Prominent voices of postcolonial literature emerge not from Western and American countries but from those nations which were once subjugated and dominated by the British, such as Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, V. S Naipaul, Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, Derek Walcott, Gayatri Spivak, Sam Selvon and others. Notably, from the 1950s onwards, numerous renowned intellectuals and literary theorists addressed the atrocities and discrimination individuals endured in colonised countries. Furthermore, the exile and migration of people from their native lands to adopted lands created new mixed, hybrid societies that clashed culturally and ethnically (Abdulqadir 5). The central premise is to examine postcolonialism as a literary discourse in India, where identity politics and the quest for belongingness establish their presence in

social and academic discourses. Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, and Chinua Achebe explore and define postcolonial literature, addressing issues about politics, globalisation, principles, its origins, and concerns, encompassing various areas and theories that influence the literary works of contemporary world literature. A seminal text that significantly shapes the field of postcolonialism is Edward Said's *Orientalism*, wherein Said, the scholar, coined the term "Orientalism" to define the ways through which non-European and non-Western culture, literature, societies, and people were portrayed by thinkers and intellectuals from the West (Kohn and Reddy 3).

In his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), French philosopher Frantz Fanon examines the dehumanising effects of colonisation on the psychology of colonised subjects. This significant text explores and provides a platform for discussing the shortcomings of postcolonial societies. The primary methodology employed in postcolonial literary theory is colonial discourse analysis, through which literary works are examined. Theorists endeavour to deconstruct and critique the discourses in which colonial relations are constituted, exploring colonialism's representational strategies and subject positions. "Within the field of postcolonial studies, diverse approaches and perspectives exist for examining literature, including postcolonial, postmodernist, structuralist, and post-structuralist frameworks" (Raja 2019). Peter Joseph in, "Man as a Victim of Alienation and Loss of Identity" (2012), talks about the dilemma that the postcolonial age is creating in front of the people who are on the verge of losing their identities

Despite striking and distinguishable progress in science and technology, the present age is characterized by moral debasement, godlessness, religious conflict, lawlessness and the loss of human values in society. This can be perceived in the breakdown of traditional, social, moral and religious values and the loss of one's self and identity. People suffer from religious loss, moral distress, social

discrimination, pessimism, domestic anguish and problems related to gender and race. Since advancement has become interchangeable with corruption and degeneracy of contemporary life conflict has become part and parcel of life (Joseph 2).

Postcolonialism offers a broader framework to understand themes and perspectives in Kashmiri literature, mainly as it explores the layered experiences of conflict, migration and identity. While Kashmir was not conventionally colonized, it endured many forms of political control, from Mughal and Dogra rule to the complex dynamics post-Partition. “This history is reflected in literature that captures the fractured identities and the quest for self-definition” (Zia, 2019). The displacement of Kashmiri Pandits and subsequent diaspora have led writers to explore exile, the pain of separation, and the alienation of cultural fragmentation, echoing postcolonial themes of diaspora and tormented identity. “Hybridity is an unavoidable characteristic of postcolonial literature, where traditional and modern identities intersect in tension. It is a recurring theme that reveals how characters grapple with community versus individual belonging” (Bhabha, 1994). “Literary narratives and storytelling emerge as an act of resistance, allowing Kashmiri writers to “write back” to dominant discourses on issues like militancy and marginalization, reclaiming agency over their identity and challenging stereotypes” (Rushdie, 1991). The anguish of conflict is a recurring motif, with literature capturing collective memories of violence, mirroring postcolonial explorations of collective trauma and the struggle to protect identity and memory. Spiritual and cultural identity also play significant roles, with writers drawing on native philosophies and folklore to reaffirm their cultural identity, much as postcolonial literature worldwide reclaims native traditions. Postcolonial literary theory, therefore, enriches the understanding of Kashmiri literature’s complex interplay of trauma, displacement and migration in a broader postcolonial context.

The Kashmiri Pandit community has played an essential role in preserving and promoting Kashmir's rich literary and cultural heritage, especially in the face of challenges posed by them during insurgent movements and displacement. The community, well-known for its intellectual achievements, has worked hard to revive its language, history, and identity through literature. Works ranging from historical records to spiritual writings, oral traditions, and contemporary literature exhibit their dedication. In the past, Kashmiri Pandit authors have painstakingly preserved their society's traditions, culture and important historical events. One of the most significant contributions is Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. The book offers insights into the kings and society of medieval Kashmir through a unique fusion of literary style and historical narratives.

The Pandit community's efforts to conserve Kashmir's historical narratives are highlighted in this paper. Kashmiri Pandit writers have carried on this tradition in the contemporary era, examining the beauty of the Valley and hardships while addressing socio-political upheavals. The Kashmiri Pandit group has played a significant role in maintaining the Kashmiri language and conserving history. To keep Kashmiri alive, many Pandit writers have continued to create plays, essays, and poetry in their language. In their writings, well-known poets and authors like Dina Nath Nadim, Rahman Rahi, and Moti Lal Saqi, Manav Kaul have encapsulated Kashmiri philosophy and culture, showing their commitment to promoting language and tradition. Kashmiri Pandits have preserved Hindu and Shaiva spiritual works essential to their religious and philosophical legacy. Kashmiri Pandits have preserved texts such as the *Neelmath Purana* and other Shaivite traditions, interpreted, and frequently translated for a wider audience by community academics. Kashmir's literary and artistic legacy has been enhanced by the community's continued adherence to its spiritual and philosophical foundations. The experience of relocation and loss became a significant theme in Kashmiri

Pandits' literature following their departure from the Valley in the 1990s. The anguish of losing their nation and a strong desire to maintain their identity are reflected in this work corpus, frequently referred to as the literature of exile. By highlighting the hardships of the Kashmiri Pandit community in their novels, memoirs and poems, writers like Siddhartha Gigoo, Varad Sharma, Rahul Pandita, T. N. Dhar, and Bill K. Koul have made sure that future generations become aware of the difficulties their community faces.

Rich oral traditions, such as folklore, folk songs and legends that express their mythologies and cultural values, have been preserved by Kashmiri Pandits in addition to written writings. As we go back through the millennia, the Vedic era signifies a significant turning point in the ancient history of Kashmir. The Sarasvati River, which some scholars believe shares the same name as the Jhelum “River that runs through the heart of Kashmir, is mentioned in the Rigveda, one of the oldest sacred texts in ancient India. The Vedic hymns hint at the earliest religious ideas and rituals developed in this abundant valley and provide insights into the socioreligious environment of the region” (Mehrdin et. all 193). Recording and enacting these oral traditions has preserved a collective memory of Kashmiri Pandits before exile. Documenting elders' oral histories and tales is one of the most important steps in maintaining and transferring this cultural legacy to future generations.

The Kashmiri Pandits have founded many literary and cultural groups nationwide to promote its literature and legacy. These platforms serve as venues for disseminating and discussing literary works that represent the experiences and goals of the community. The literature can flourish despite geographical distance. In addition to helping to preserve the literary legacy, this accessibility exposes readers who are not Kashmiris to the distinctive stories of the community. “Pluralism and tolerance are apparent in the teachings, sayings, writings and

behaviour of Sufi saints from Lal Ded to Shaikh Noorudin” (Lone 27). In order to keep traditional Kashmiri stories exciting and current in modern settings; several writers have also adapted them for digital media. The community upholds Kashmir's literary heritage while promoting a feeling of continuity and identity among generations by bringing fresh viewpoints that reflect historical origins and contemporary resiliency. Some Kashmiri Pandits' writings have tackled the problem of lost identity in postcolonial literature. The issue of identity in modern society is clarified by the growing number of migration and exiled groups, discussions on hybrid governments, and laws in different nations with heterogeneous ethnic and socio-cultural populations. The difficulties that exiled populations face today were discussed in the report. Postcolonial literature elucidates the marginalization of a nation, class, community and society that Kashmiri Pandits manifest in their literary works. An attempt has been made in this research paper to study the writings of Kashmiri Pandits and their statelessness in the post-colonial world.

In their book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bill Ashcroft and Tiffin define the role that postcolonial literature and writings can play in asserting the identities of marginalized ethnic groups. They further said, “Postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of indigenous cultures in an effort to restore pride in practices and traditions that were systematically degraded under colonialism and after the independence of colonial countries. Revising history to tell things from the perspective of those colonized is thus a major preoccupation of postcolonial writing” (Ashcroft et. all 5).

Since the inception of its civilisation, India has integrated individuals from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. In the era of globalisation, as the contemporary world faces numerous challenges, ethnicity and identity are becoming significant phenomena globally. The Kashmir valley in India saw a dramatic rise in

communalism in the 1990s, which led to the forcible eviction of more than half a million Kashmiri Pandits by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. The terrorists are thought to have forced between four and six lakhs Kashmiri Pandits to flee the valley amid an increase in inter-communal violence. Women were sexually assaulted, their homes were looted, and hundreds were killed in the middle of the day. This essay examines the physical and psychological suffering that Kashmiri Pandits face both in their native country and in the places they have adopted around the globe. Postcolonial theory was used to examine the subjugation and oppression of Kashmiri Hindus who were stateless and in exile.

Postcolonial theory is prominent in literary studies as a huge part of it involves looking into the ways in which representation in literature and cultural practices continue to uphold and reproduce colonial thought when it comes to discourse about the non-West. Postcolonial literature includes not only literature by writers from colonized regions and diaspora writers but also readings and interpretations of canonical western works through a postcolonial lens (Quayson Web. 22 August 2022).

Novelists like Salman Rushdie, Maya Angelou, V.S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon and Wole Soyinka depicted the dilemma of exiled and migrated communities, picturing the quest of those migrated people and their identity. In his book *The Mimic Men* (1967), V. S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon, in his book *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) explores, “how stateless individuals struggle for the creation and resistance of their threatened identity” (Halloran 27). Postcolonial theory believes that “the world we inhabit is impossible to understand except in relationship to the history of imperialism and colonial rule” (Elam, 2019). It also takes the form of opposing colonized knowledge production systems in all areas of life, which upholds Western viewpoints as superior and universal and disbelieving in all other viewpoints and knowledge systems. Because identity issues are prevalent in all

postcolonial communities, they might be regarded as the most significant and complex questions and conversations in postcolonial literature. This dilemma came to light due to the post-colonial era's changed environment and the difficult circumstances that newly freed nations and countries faced as they sought to define their identities. Mercer asserts, "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (Mercer 43).

Concerns about survival, safety, security, nationality, opportunity, identity, and a feeling of belonging are just a few of the many difficulties these people face when forced to leave their native country, whether for planned or unexpected reasons. At a time when the Valley was in ruins and the majoritarian population dominated a supposedly secular state, it was necessary to look into and understand the condition of a minority in the state. In a multicultural country like India, where a person's identity is shaped by their culture, which is a combination of their beliefs, customs, values, laws, and preferences, it is crucial to make sure that everyone, from majority to minority groups, is fairly represented in all spheres of life, including scholarly, political, and everyday discussions. This study uses Kashmiri Pandits' literary works to examine how a marginal community in the valley manifests itself. These life stories of pain, identity crises, and threatened existence in the postcolonial world are examined in this research article. Additionally, it provides insight into the lives of Kashmiri Pandits, whose status is unstable, ambiguous, marginal, and seemingly non-existent. Crowds began congregating and throwing stones at the homes of the valley's minority communities on the chilly winter evening of January 19, 1990s, as pro-Pakistan sloganeering began to come from the mosques around the valley. Posters urging Hindus to leave their homes and women or convert to Islam and join the separatist movement surfaced.

Arun Anand in one of his article talks about exile of Kashmiri Hindus, “Thousands of Hindus left through the night. According to a report by Jammu-Kashmir Study Centre, a Delhi-based think tank, by March 1990, more than 90 per cent of the Hindus residing in the Valley had left their homes. They were living in inhuman conditions in camps in Jammu, hoping to go back, but then gradually the hope faded away and a large number of them shifted to other parts of the country. Meanwhile, most of the Hindu’s houses were burnt down in the Valley and whatever was left of their movable properties was looted. 19 January is considered among the blackest days in post-independence India” (Anand 2).

Accordingly, the current paper provides an analysis of the conditions of Kashmiri Pandits, who left their homeland and live in a condition of uncertainty, through their literary works. Postcolonial theorists and critics consider the issue of homelessness as important part of literary studies. Kashmir’s history, or the Kashmir dispute as a continuation of India-Pakistan's foreign relations dispute, has been an essential topic of literature. Writers have tried to go beyond and depict the human side of the story, i.e. the agony and trauma which Kashmiri Pandits experienced in their homeland during the phase of militancy in the 1990s. Kashmiri Pandits, writings are on various issues, looking into the migration of their community from the valley. Different writers elaborate the various aspects of migration, pain, nostalgia about their past, life in Kashmir, plans and life in various migration camps, ultimately resulting in identity crises. Kashmiri Pandits' Writings describe the conflict's human experience, an artistic fusion of personal and historical perspectives. The collection of writings by Kashmiri Pandits presents an extraordinary exploration of memory, loss, and migration. The narratives delve into the themes of belonging, identity, and the pain of exile, vividly illustrating the trauma experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community. Through their stories, authors like Siddhartha Gigoo, Somnath Dhar, T. N. Dhar, M.L. Bhatt and Bill K.

Koul paint a sombre picture of persecution, cultural estrangement, and a longing for a homeland that defines the lives of countless exiles. In this context, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* (2015), by Siddhartha Gigoo, captures this painful nostalgia as characters attempt to rekindle fragments of their past and resurrect memories of a homeland now lost in the past. In his collection of sixteen stories, Gigoo explores the Kashmiri Pandits' deep-rooted connection to their homeland and their alienation in their adopted lands. Burdened by their past, his characters reflect the collective suffering of a community whose dreams and memories of Kashmir are gradually eroded by time. With sensitivity and depth, Gigoo invokes the essence of heritage in peril, reminding younger generations of their ancestors' sacrifices in the face of violence and displacement.

M.L. Bhatt describes his experience as a Kashmiri Pandit exiled from his native land in his 2017 book *The Odyssey of Kashmiri Pandits: Destination, Homeland and Panun Kashmir*. Bhatt incorporates the Pandit community's commitment, customs, and broader cultural fabric—all of which became sources of conflict in a divided valley—and in his own story. His writing explores the hardships and acrimonious experiences of Kashmiri Pandits living in migrant camps. The story gains depth from Bhatt's observations on Kashmiri Shaivism and the vibrant Hindu culture, which show how these components created a unique identity that migration could not eradicate. Similarly, Bill K. Koul's *22 Years: A Kashmir Story* (2018), which tells the story of Billu, a Kashmiri Pandit who returns to his birthplace after two decades of migration, offers a moving, fictionalized account of his belongingness. His early years in the valley, where his identity was originally developed but subsequently abandoned due to violence, left him with severe scars that are revealed by his journey through memory and nostalgia. Billu's return is marked by disillusionment despite his renewed love for Kashmir, highlighting the terrible

effects of persecution and the deep sense of loss experienced by displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

The tales of twenty-nine Kashmiri Hindus and Pandits are woven into a tapestry of shared grief in Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma's 2015 book *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits*. These accounts exposed how the minority Pandit population, whose lives were permanently altered by the violence of the 1980s and 1990s, was affected by social unrest and political conflict. The book eloquently depicts the disintegration of a formerly diversified social fabric and the eerie memories of Kashmir that remain in the hearts of those compelled to flee via stories of mistrust, violence, and shattered communal harmony. *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir* (1991) by Jagmohan Malhotra is another significant work highlighting the situation of the Kashmiri Pandits. It offers a more comprehensive, critical perspective on the area's history, political unrest, and inter-communal conflicts. Former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan describes his personal experiences during two pivotal times during his term in office. His narrative explores the religious and political conflicts that resulted in the exile of Kashmiri Pandits, emphasizing how different sociopolitical factors influenced these developments. He offers an unbiased viewpoint on Kashmir's turbulent past while reflecting on the pervasive problems of marginalization and discrimination faced by Pandits.

The lives of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir are also briefly described in Somnath Dhar's 1997 book *Jammu and Kashmir*. Many people have been particularly fascinated by "the earthly paradise," as the Mughals called Kashmir. The area and its inhabitants, who are renowned for their talent, knowledge, and tolerance, are the subject of the novel. It facilitates comprehension of the coexistence of Kashmiri people and the evolution of Kashmiri society both during and after colonization. The writings of Kashmiri Pandits expose the profound sorrow and longing for a

lost identity experienced by their community. The erasure of their heritage, the breakdown of social structures, and the scars of communal violence are central to their narratives. Examining these works through the lens of postcolonial literature reveals how colonization's legacy of displacement and loss persists as individuals and communities grapple with divided loyalties and a fractured sense of self. In essence, these works collectively form a powerful testament to the resilience of the Kashmiri Pandits. Their personal, fictional, or historical stories reflect a shared memory that defies time, preserving the cultural and emotional ties to a homeland that is, for many, now only a dream.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the most critical themes in Kashmiri Pandits' works is the look for identification and a sense of belonging. The authors, novelists, and theorists explore different arguments regarding identity difficulties in postcolonial literature. The writings of Kashmiri Pandits have been analyzed by situating them within the framework of postcolonial literary studies. As a summary of the entire debate, it is widely accepted that postcolonial politics is driving the idea that crises are one of the consequences of colonialism. The crises had something to do with the reality that people and communities that had been colonized were now struggling to discover who they truly were in the face of polarizing politics in their states and nations.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Abdulqadir, Saman. "The Crisis of Identity in Postcolonial Novel." Proceedings of INTCESS15- 2. Istanbul, 2015. pp. 1-9.
- Anand, Arun. "31 years on, 19 January is still a dark day for Kashmiri Pandits as they wait for exile to end." The Print, Web 12 December 2021, p. 1.
- Bhabha, H. K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994.
- Bhabha, K, Homi. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bhatt, M. L. The Odyssey of Kashmiri Pandits: Destination-Homeland-Panun Kashmir. Chennai: Notion Press, 2018.
- Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Gigoo, Siddhartha Varad Sharma. A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exile and Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. New Delhi: Bloomsbury India, 2018.

- Gigoo, Siddhartha. *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2015.
- Halloran, Thomas F. (June 2007). —Postcolonial Mimic or Postmodern Portrait? Politics and Identity in V.S. Naipaul's *Third World*. *Literary Criticism*. pp. 27.
- Jagmohan. *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir*. New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1991.
- Joseph, S. John Peter. "Man as a Victim of Alienation and Loss of Identity: A Critical Assessment of Chaman Nahal's *The Womb*." Dr. M. F. Patel, Dr. B. K. Sharma. *New Aspects of Indian Writing in English*. Jaipur: Sunrise Pub. & Distributors, 2012. p. 2.
- Kaul, K. Bill. *22 Years A Kashmir Story: One Lakh Pandit Families May Have One Lakh Stories*. New Delhi: Vitasta Publications, 2017.
- Lone, Mudasar Ahmad. "Role of Sufi Philosophy in the Formation of the Composite Culture of Kashmir: An Analysis." *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* Vol. 8, Issue. 3, 2020, pp. 27.
- Mehrdin, Nadia, Hina Kanwal, and Qadeer Anjum. "Exploration Of Ancient History Of Kashmir And Prevalled Literature Under The Hindu Rulers." *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture* 35 (2023): 192-207.
- Mercer, Kobena. *Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics*, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1995.
- Quayson, A. What is postcolonial literature? The British Academy. Web 2 January 2020. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk>.
- Raja, M. (2019, April 2). What is Postcolonial Studies? Postcolonial Space. <https://postcolonial.net>.
- Rushdie, S. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta Books, 1991.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Ed. Patrick Williams and Luara Chrisman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

☆☆☆