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A Revolution is a Struggle between the Future and Past: Mapping Kashmir Through Multiple Narratives

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Abstract

Kashmir existing in a state of turmoil since 1947, portraying religious conflict cocooned in whirlpool of bloodshed, gives this study, a chance to investigate its core issue; Kashmir conflict. Kashmir has always been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan while the Kashmiris (referring to Muslims in Kashmir) have simultaneously been relegated to the margins in their own home. Since time immemorial Kashmir has been on thin-ice; an abode of conflict where India, Pakistan and the Kashmiris lay their claims on the land without anyone appearing as the victor. Over the years, this conflict has culminated into unrest among the Kashmiris, leading to the desire for revolution. This paper underpins the various aspects and consequences of this state of conflict and desire for revolution in Kashmir through multiple genres and therefore, multiple narratives. Building on Karl Marx's conflict theory, gingerly chiselling the theoretical framework, the paper intends to analyse the chosen short story, novel, film and folklore.

Keywords: *antithesis, conflict, Kashmir, synthesis, thesis*

Introduction

Derived from the Latin word 'revolvere' meaning to roll back or turn, the term 'revolution' was first used in the thirteenth century to elucidate matters of celestial concern. From the revolutions of the earth, the turn of the calendar concomitantly introduced a fresh dimension to the term; signifying defiance and rebellion of the masses. Wherein, the stand against the unjust monarchs, aristocrats or the colonial masters, revolution, comprehensively, was then referred to as the fire which soldered together states and countries into the creations of the people rather than that of the masters. David Motadel in his article "Waves of Revolution" published in *History Today* magazine notes that the earliest wave of revolution began with the American Revolution of 1776 (n. pag.). However, John M. Gates in his paper titled *Toward a History of Revolution* states, "revolution has no coherent chronological history... . Despite volumes written on the subject of revolution by historians, political scientists,

sociologists, and others, one searches in vain for a comprehensive history” (535). So while revolution is the history students study, its depths, its beginnings are lost to time.

Building on the contemporary connotation of revolution, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines ‘revolution’ as being “a sudden, radical, or complete change” and also “a fundamental change in political organization”(n. pag.). While both the definitions stand true, the essence of revolution is lost in the schematics of language. Confined within the chains of definitions, the words fail to illuminate the years of passion, frustration, struggle and conflict that the term ‘revolution’ encompasses. It is not merely a change but the struggle of the present to overcome the past and ultimately create the envisioned future. It is, hence, a struggle betwixt the future and the past, the thesis and the antithesis, the oppressor and the oppressed. Apparently, hooking on to the various contours of revolution enmeshed in conflict theory, this paper intends to study Kashmir. By metaphorically studying Kashmir, much beyond its territorial boundaries, the paper attempts to examine Kashmir via multiple genres. Such that, Kashmir is explored as a locale of consistent conflict over limited resources, hence, the perpetual clash of thesis vs. antithesis.

Kashmir is an abode with clashing identities – one of beauty; aptly embracing tourism while the other of violence; viciously embracing ferocity. The paper sets its tenor by tracing the trajectory of revolution; the key term in conflict. Palpably, through contemporary writers, the paper proposes to metaphorically investigate Kashmir via multiple genres: a short story, a novel, a film and folklores, theoretically cocooned in conflict theory.

Conflict Emanating Shades of Oppression in Shafi Ahmad’s *Shadows Beyond the Ghost Town*

Based on an interview with Muhammad Nadeem, Ahmad responds to his concern behind writing *Shadows Beyond the Ghost Town* – “He who writes his story inherits the land of that story.” (n.pag.)

Expansively, to Ahmad, he has inherited the land who’s story he writes and what he writes is of beauty entangled in the chokehold of conflict. A civil engineer by profession, his love for Kashmir and the controversies surrounding it led Ahmad into the world of literature as he found it a loyal friend in his quest to demystify Kashmir. *Shadows Beyond the Ghost Town*, published in 2014 is his second novel. It narrates a tale of power, corruption, love and humanity by focusing on the rich and influential Ganaie family as well other passing characters including not only the local Kashmiris but also the Indian army and the Mujahideen. The conflict takes shape through microscopic glimpses within the lives of various characters. One would expect the final picture to be that of a war-torn Kashmir; a place where much of the local population struggles against the army occupation of their home and consequently, against the Indian government. While this remains true, Ahmad also reveals the numerous shades that this major conflict takes. The rest of the country may simply see it as India vs. Kashmir but the image of Kashmir that Ahmad creates is far more intricate. The Indian perspective of the conflict is incomplete, for it does not take into account or even understand the warring emotions of the Kashmiris about the Mujahideen and the consequences of conflict they face regularly, something Ahmad ardently elucidates.

Karl Marx, the proponent of the conflict theory believed that the struggle for power is the driving force behind conflict, subsequently causing revolution and societal change. He

also noted that humans naturally desire power and the benefits that follow it. However, every thesis has an antithesis and therefore, someone in power refers to the other as powerless simultaneously. Rummel (October 21, 1932 – March 2, 2014), a political scientist reinforces this structure in his analysis of the conflict theory. He lucidly states :

Incumbents of authoritative roles benefit from the status-quo, which grants them their power. Those toward whom this authoritative power is exercised, and who suffer from it, however, are naturally opposed to this state of affairs. (n. pag)

The opposition naturally causes upheaval, resultingly making conflict a cyclic pattern over linear one. There is a power imbalance which causes conflict followed by revolution and then a social change. With power as the motivator, this pattern repeats itself and becomes the constant state that humanity lives in – conflict. This conflict has two main elements – thesis and antithesis; two opposing ideas where one, that is, thesis is more widely accepted and thus dominates the other element, that is, antithesis. However, there is a third, little known element to conflict. This is called synthesis. As stated by Barkley in his article titled “Thesis-Antithesis and Synthesis in Sociology” published in *The Academic Papers*, synthesis helps “overcome the conflicts that are created by the thesis and antithesis”(n. pag.). In order to do so, it evolves as an amalgamation of its preceding elements and becomes an idea that can assimilate both thesis and antithesis within itself. Thus, synthesis appears as a solution to the existing conflict. However, over time it too can turn into another thesis and the cycle goes on. Subsequently, observing Kashmir from the lens of this conflict theory, Kashmir becomes the ground for the constant conflict, plainly stated by Ahmad in *Shadows Beyond the Ghost Town*, “Even the weakest can’t be silenced for long, The frightened can’t be suppressed into subjugation. The powerful have to face revolt and resilience” (Ahmad 59).

Conflict takes place at three separate but interconnected levels. The first is the most obvious and visible one i.e., the conflict between the Indian army and the local Kashmiri population that has existed for years now. The army fulfils the role of the bourgeoisie in that it is so competently powerful and fear striking that it has become the sole rule maker of a society it does not even belong to. The novel is filled with instances evidencing this relationship of power and suppression. Like any class that rests at the top of the social hierarchy, the army seeks glee in massive display of power in the form of raids, illegal murders and unlawfully vengeful torture. Religion too bows its head before the army’s might as is consolidated in the novel, “People had installed amplifiers in the mosques which were used for Azan, a call to the faithful. These amplifiers were subjected to alternate use by the forces. Search operations became the order of the day” (57). As the highest order of power, the army establishes control over religion, the one aspect of society that brings people together, and turns it to its own use. At other times, it becomes a tool of humiliation and violence in their hands as mere cracker bursting at Eid is used to label the people as terrorists – “Aatankwadi kidhar hai jo blast karte hai? (Where are the terrorists who blast grenades?)” (131), rages a soldier at a mother who tries to protect her children from their misdirected rage. The army embodies the Indian perspective of the Kashmir conflict - the view of Kashmir as their own land and thus, subject to their whims and domination regardless of the wishes of Kashmir’s own citizens. With the rest of the country backing it, the army creates a thesis that stands starkly against the antithesis provided by the Kashmiris in their opposition of this suppression. This polarity manifests itself in speeches by resistance leaders – “Government may try to place a wedge among various groups of the nation to safeguard

its own interests, but we have to exhibit that we are one and in unison. Beware and India shall have to go, leave this territory despite its huge military power” (54). The ‘us vs. them’ outlook stands out and makes Kashmir’s opposition to the army, the ‘government’ and consequently, India, impossible to miss.

While the army stands for India and thereby, the thesis of the situation, the Mujahideen represent the antithesis. The Mujahideen are revered for they fight for the Kashmiris and yet they establish the second level of conflict; one that is separate from their opposition of the army. Undeterred by their same goals, a relationship of power and suppression develops between the Kashmiris and the Mujahideen. Their activities are a double-edged sword as their fight for freedom brings the wrath of the army upon the locals regardless of their participation. As the lowest rung of society, the local Kashmiris find themselves sandwiched between two powerful bourgeoisie forces that exercise control over them – the army and the Mujahideen. The army retains its position as an outsider and enemy, but the Mujahideen, though Kashmiris themselves and supported by many demand strict adherence to their own ideals too. Those who stray face humiliation and abuse for being ‘un-Islamic’ even for something as simple as producing music. The same oppression occurs politically too. While the army threatens the locals into casting vote, the locals also report – “Sir, militant threats are there. They have declared anybody casting vote will be killed” (168).

The only one who is initially untouched by these transgressions is Ama Ganaie - a rags to rich story protagonist who loses his morals and turns on his own people in pursuit of more money and ultimately, more social power. The army aids and abets him by managing to finagle Ama Ganaie into their schemes as well and helps create the basis for the final level of conflict; one between the rich and the poor. Ama Ganaie exists within two separate worlds at once. As a rich businessman, he mingles well with the army whom he supports in their oppressive endeavours for the sake of his own materialistic greed; from smuggling precious wood to arranging bribes from the poor locals in exchange of their illegally detained loved ones. At the same time, as part of the Kashmiri population, he makes efforts to appear nationalistic or more appropriately, to exhibit *Kashmiriyat*; a term used to illustrate the feelings of selfhood harboured by the Kashmiris for their land in addition to their commitment to resistance. He sends his son, Farooq, to be trained to become a Mujahideen but only because – “Mujahid was the buzz word and everyone who had a gun hanging down his shoulder was a hero” (52). While he does harbour the desire for freedom like most Kashmiris do and is wary of the army, these things do not hold him back from grabbing the opportunity for monetary gain. His loyalty is conditional and thus, a situation of internal conflict is created. Therefore, although a Kashmiri, Ama Ganaie’s new found wealth and social status along with him being in cohorts with the army creates a sense of animosity toward him within fellow Kashmiris. His position in the social hierarchy and more importantly, with the army becomes another oppressor to them and thereby, a point of internal conflict between the two. The distance between them widens and so does resentment of the Kashmiris against one of their own as Ama Ganaie becomes one of the forces holding them back and keeping them down. In league with both the army and the Kashmiris, the thesis and the antithesis, he is the amalgamation of both and asserts himself as the synthesis to the two. Despite this, the unconscious attempt at a synthesis fails as he gets caught in the ripples caused by his own actions where his high seat in the social hierarchy becomes his downfall rather than his support. With his downfall, society reverts back to its gnarled vision of order.

Oppression from all sides abounds and the only constant victim is the proletariat who finds no true representative and continue under their wretched conditions – too strong to give up but too weak to win. The sparks of the revolution exists but under the multiple oppressing parties and their failure to wholeheartedly connect with the Mujahideen who are meant to be their saviours, the tide remains unchanged even at the end of the novel.

Conflict Emanating in Shabir Ahmad Mir's "Crack Down"

Shabir Ahmad Mir is a Kashmiri poet, short story writer and novelist. His tryst with fiction began when he participated in the FON South Asia Story contest, and became the first runner-up winner for his story titled "The Djinn who fell from the Walnut Tree" in 2016. Since then, he has focused his creative energy upon writings that reveal the entanglement of life and terror in Kashmir. His short story, "Crack Down" (2017) deals with the complexities of the conflict in the region through a short account of a crackdown, narrated in the voice of an unnamed narrator.

The term "conflict theory", propounded by Karl Marx purported that society is in a state of perpetual conflict, the polarity between powerful and the powerless being the main cause behind it; a competition for limited resources such as money or property exists between these two sections leading to bitterness and eventually giving rise to conflict. However, in the case of Kashmir, the resource being fought for is Kashmir itself. The government wants the land because it is a strategic location for defence and can also boost travel and tourism. On the other hand, the Kashmiris lay their claim because it is their homeland and they want to live independently. Therefore, the division between two classes occurs between the people who want Kashmir to be a part of India, even if it is by force and the other class, whose objective is to live freely on their land. The army, representing the government assumes the role of the powerful with its political backing, military power and the support of much of India; it suppresses the Kashmiris to such an extent that they are reduced to the antithesis in their own homeland while the army takes up the mantle of the thesis.

Mir's "Crack Down" illustrates the consequences of conflict; the effects of having a thesis and an antithesis in a volatile situation, the way each section is affected as well as how they affect each other. The Indian army and the people of Kashmir are the two sections that make up the conflict in "Crack Down" and the story sets up the relationship of hierarchy between the two immediately. Beginning with the unnamed narrator musing about his existence and yearning for disappearance, the story picks up pace with the announcement of a crackdown, "All males – young, adult, old" (Mir n. pag.) are to assemble at a school. It is apparent that the order comes from the army that occupies Kashmir. Everyone is made to appear at the school regardless of their status in society.

It is also notable that the announcement is made by Kabir Muqdam through the use of the loudspeaker in the mosque. The mosque, a symbol of religious and communal unity is thus monopolised by forces which the Kashmiris view as hostile for their own purpose. A part of the life and culture of their home becomes a tool of incoming violence in the hands of the army. Its consolidation of the religious institution is evident of the extent of power that the army has. As the all-powerful antithesis, the army has rendered the Kashmiris powerless and they have lived under the army's suffocating hold for so long that retaliation has begun to look futile. This sentiment is illustrated in a single dialogue by the unnamed narrator. While he debates not appearing at the school as ordered and the deadly consequences that would follow, he thinks to himself, "They [the army] would be well within their rights to shoot him

dead, then and there. And even he would not blame them for it.” (n. pag.). Violence and murder committed by the army is thus, seen as something logical even by the people it hurts.

The school scene that follows is one that concretizes the presence of the army and the Kashmiris into their roles of the thesis and antithesis respectively. Foul curses and free violence are served to the collected Kashmiris by the army for no reason other than an imagined offence of disrespect from an addicted man. Rashid, called *shouda* by the locals meaning a drug addict in Kashmiri, can barely take in his surroundings much less adapt to better encompass the mindless subservience demanded by the army officers.

As the story winds to an end, the powerful and powerless dynamic is established and thus, the thesis and antithesis make themselves known. The light upon the army is one of tyranny while the Kashmiris live in the shadows of oppression. Simultaneously, another aspect of conflict is also discernible. Both sides of the conflict fear and mistrust the other. The unnamed narrator is afraid of the threat posed by the army and wishes to disappear. On the other hand, the army too exhibits the same fear when a simple grab for balance by Rashid is mistaken for purposeful violence and an intent to hurt, resulting into a mass shooting. Trust is non-existent as both sides expect the other to mete out unmitigated brutality. While the thesis and antithesis exists and one undoubtedly has more power than the other, the conflict means that no matter the position in the social hierarchy or power held, everyone exists in a state of terror. Power or powerlessness; the position of thesis or antithesis, do not ensure safety or warrant violence. Both sides are equally vulnerable and thus, live in a cycle of violence and terror that they are unlikely to get out of.

Conflict Emanating Shades of Power in Vishal Bharadwaj’s *Haider*

Originally purported by Karl Marx, Conflict Theory was limited to strict economic classes, but the theorists of later 20th and 21st century extended it beyond the economic sphere. According to the German sociologist Max Weber’s perspective “there were multiple layers of conflict existing at any given moment,” and that proclamation holds true for Vishal Bharadwaj’s *Haider*, where conflict exists both intrinsically and extrinsically and both within and without (Hayes, 2020, n.pag.). Weber has also identified ‘power’ as a primary resource that leads to conflict in a given society, which again, is apt for a movie with the backdrop of Kashmir, where the Indian state has extensively used military power to assert its dominance. The most apparent conflict in the movie is of the protagonist, Haider, who is caught up between avenging his father’s enforced disappearance and subsequent death and his mother’s overtly apolitical stance that “revenge only breeds revenge.” The phenomenon of enforced disappearances in Kashmir is estimated to be around ten-thousand, who have been victims to torture at the hands of the Indian army.

In the film, however, when Arshia asks the Brigadier if law allows the army to use ‘torture’, he simply negates her claims: “The Indian army is one of the most disciplined armed forces in the world. We train our officers to interrogate; nor torture” (01:00:21-01:00:33, *Haider*, 2014). In a Foucauldian sense, the statement is ‘knowledge’, a form of power, that dominates as a narrative to shun light on the atrocities committed by these armed forces in Kashmir. Additionally, a 2016 report by *JKCCS* on ‘torture as an instrument of control by the Indian state’ iterates that “most of these enforced disappearances can be related to state efforts to dispose of bodies of victims of custodial torture” and “hundreds of bodies were found...bearing marks of unnatural death or routinely used torture methods like electrocution, mutilations and burnings” (p. 43).

‘Torture’ bears the connotation of a ‘body as text’ and can be interpreted as an “instrument of state power in an authoritarian system which applies all means to silence the political opponents” (Haq, n.pag.). In Kashmir, the Indian army exercises this instrument of power under total impunity under many laws such as the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), which allows “arrests, search, seizures, and destruction of arms and ammunition to be carried by the army in civilian areas... in order to maintain law and order” (JKCCS, p. 27). In the climactic scene of the film, shot at the Clock Tower in Lalchowk, Srinagar, Haider delivers an exterior monologue, comparing ‘AFSPA’ to “*Chutzpah*”, which literally means ‘audacity’ and ‘insolence.’ The comparison insinuates the kind of treatment people of Kashmir have received at the hands of the Indian State ever since partition in 1947. It ends with a chant for Azadi, almost like a synthesis to Hegel’s thesis and antithesis: “What do we want? Freedom!” (01:25:57-01:28:14).

The Marxist understanding of ‘capital’ is in reference to power but in an interview entitled *Capitalism as a Mode of Power*, educationists Shimson Bichler and Jonathan Nitzen argue that capital “should be understood not in relation to or in association with power, but as power.” (n.pag.). The notion of capital as power can be best viewed in the scene with Khurram Meer and Parvez Lone, where the former asks the latter about the benefits of turning surrendered militants into *Ikhwan-ul-Muqbireen*, a counter insurgency task force that operated in Kashmir in the nineties. Lone replies with “Delhi” and goes on to add that “even a dead militant is worth one lac rupees these days.” (00:42:34-00:46:29). The scene asserts the dominion of ‘capital as power’ in conflict zones, where loss of life is a capitalistic opportunity for those at the top of the power hierarchy and those associated with it.

On being asked in which camp or prison the protagonist is going to look for his father, Haider succinctly replies, “All of Kashmir is a prison. I will look for him everywhere.” (00:36:49-00:37:09). It ties in with Jeremy Bentham’s idea of a Panopticon (a prison), which Foucault argued, aimed to induce a sense of ‘constant surveillance’ or the idea of being watched at all times among the prison inmates. It is best exemplified in the scene where an unknown man refuses to enter his house without identification; Roohdaar makes the statement that “people are so habituated to being frisked, that they expect it before they enter their homes.” (01:03:31-01:04:25). Power and, thus, oppression not only occur on an external level, it is internalized as well. The psychological conundrum that one is always watched over instils the idea that the oppressor is always present, never to leave, such is the ‘power’ of constant surveillance or ‘the panopticon’.

Foucault has maintained that power exists everywhere and it can be attached “to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance” (Diamond and Quinby, 1988, p. 185). Marx’s theory of Conflict is based on the disparity of power; hence, where there is power, there is always conflict. In *Haider*, the notion of conflict and power and so heavily intertwined that it leaves little to no scope for a resolution. It’s a testament to the radical struggle of the people of Kashmir, living amidst the strife of conflict, with a constant back and forth between the thesis and antithesis, the oppressor and the oppressed, and a utopian dream for a synthesis.

Conflict Emanating in Kashmiri folklore; Ladishah

The word Ladishah is composed of two words, wherein, “Ladi” means a row or line and “shah” refers to a line of Muslim rulers of Kashmir. It a satirical, allegorical composition by which the evil doers of the society are criticized. The singer composes the Ladishah and he

is called by same name, that is Ladishah. The folklore dates centuries back in Kashmir valley, where Ladishah would visit villages carrying an iron rod with rings called Dhukar, singing the folklore, while criticizing the power holders. The songs of folklore are different every time and are created on spot, and would reflect the truth of times, both political and non-political. Throughout the years the folklore of Ladishah started to diminish in the valley, however, got revived by social media influence and young artists taking up the art.

Researchers, Reashi and Lubna construct their argument on Ladishah in their paper 'Folklore as an Alternative Historical Discourse: A Perspective of Ladishah as a Dominant Folk Narrative' as, it can be considered to be a form of protest or dissent narrative due to its stance against establishment. During every oppressive regime, Ladishah has raised its voice. It acts a mirror and reflects antithesis. Government policies and treatment of people were often criticized by Ladishah. Karl Marx (1818-1883) created a model which proposed that a society where one group exploited other group would actually contain the seeds of its own destruction. He as the proponent of the conflict theory believed that the struggle for power is the driving force behind conflict, subsequently causing revolution and societal change, wherein, the conflict gives rise to a thesis and an antithesis. Based on the main conflict of Kashmir, the general thesis exists as central govt. of India believing Kashmir to be an integral part of their country, however, Kashmir has been a home to more than just a single antithesis, varying from the mixed feeling towards occupation, government policies and others.

Ladishah uses tools of humiliation and satire to represent the antithesis against the ones in power. Aptly visible through the writings of Areeja Syed, A psychology Student and Ladishah artist hooking on to the scene as Ladishah, narrates the folklore in leadership as, "siyasat daano paan yethroomut, Qoumas seanis zan baddua oosmut" (politicians have just filled their bellies, feels like a bad omen of our nation). Syed also writes, "aaftab eas te wochhon, Keasheer wean nou subhe wichten" (I wish Kashmiris would rise to a new dawn and witness a new sun). Similar to these, the Ladishahs earlier would visit every village repeat about the same, acting as a broadcaster. This helped in process of creation of an opinion, later antithesis. The arrival of Indian army has been broadly narrated by Ladishah and can be considered as the earliest known antithesis. Rolling on the contemporary events, "Ladishah hawai jahaz aav Mulki kasheer, yemav wuch team kor tobi takseer", (an airplane containing Indian army has arrived in the nation of Kashmir and who ever saw it repeated prayers.)

Apart from the main conflict, the other common conflicts between bourgeoisie and proletariat have been narrated by Ladishah. Under the Dogra regime of Sher Singh, a draught hit Kashmir which was criticized in folklore "sher singun draag as, Mulki Kashmir Kyah Wanith aav, Sher singh drag mokul banith aav" (Sher Singh came to Kashmir as a bringer of drought.) The conflict has remained constant between the bourgeoisie and proletariat class of Kashmir, however, a synthesis has rarely been formed. The proletariat have been failing to find any relief in the administration, and Ladishah as proletariat art acted itself as a protest against the ruling class demanding a revolution.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study stands characteristically afresh, with unravelling the politics of power structure in Kashmir. The researches done so far on these novels explore the droning agenda unending nature of conflict for limited resources. However, this study meticulously

draws a trajectory of Kashmir conflict through: short story, novel, film and folklore, seamlessly examining the thesis and anti-thesis in each. Thus, the paper rings a clarion call to revolution in Kashmir as a struggle between the future and past, mapping Kashmir through multiple narratives.

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