

U G C MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT
Executive Summary of the Final Report
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**Writing the Insurgency, Expressing Exception: Contemporary
Writings from Kashmir (2000-14)**

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The exceptional state of affairs in Kashmir since India's Independence and particularly since the 1990s is a significant phenomenon. The Kashmir question is the most vexatious and distressing issue that has continued to plague the Indian subcontinent since the withdrawal of the colonial powers. It has been a cause of worry for others but for those in the Kashmir valley it has meant living through hellish conditions for the large part of the post-colonial times. It cannot be denied that in the colonial era and before that as well, there have been problems between the rulers and the ruled in the valley. However, post-partition and independence for the two nation states of India and Pakistan, Kashmir and the Kashmiris have lost a lot by way of lives, hopes, livelihood, identity, popular sentiments and aspirations. Various political forces have played their role and in turn influenced the masses towards their vision of Kashmir. So much so that the much flaunted and prided upon uniqueness of the Kashmiri identity and the concept of 'Kashmiriyat' itself has undergone a major change in the long, repetitive and turbulent history of the conflict; it is more than seventy years since partition of British India and the advent of the two nation states of India and Pakistan, however, Kashmir still erupts every now and then and burns claiming more lives.

Indeed, it is a conundrum which has persisted throughout the post-independence era of Indian history and it is an important part of this history. History is regularly evoked in this conflict always with some distortions, and the attendant misinterpretations which are engineered to suit one or the other section of those involved. Independence did not mean the same thing to all in British India; when it was achieved it did not bring same result for all. The promises that an independent country envisaged did not come to all people equally. Some parts of the country were empowered and could have a sense of achievement but there were other parts and people who were left at the margin and could not count many gains from being independent. Today, it is well accepted and documented that some of those things for which people of India sought independence such as freedom of various types, democracy, and identity may not truly be available to some sections of the populace, such as those in Kashmir.

In its chequered history the insurgency that started in 1989-90 was a watershed moment; in fact, as detailed in the final report it started with the mass-rigging of elections of 1987 in the Kashmir Valley and the resultant wave of discontent that encouraged separatist feelings. The biggest event came on 1st March 1990 when an estimated one million people gathered and marched in Srinagar to protest against police/army action and brutality. The conflict and the resulting insurgency had come to each and every home both Muslim and Pandit; no one was untouched. Historically, the Kashmir Insurgency of 1990s cannot be seen separately from what happened from the time of partition of India; in fact, it can be read as a culmination of many blunders, misadventures, unfulfilled promises and desire for territorial supremacy on the part of the two national actors. However, the effect of it is on the peace, development, identity, hopes, and aspirations of the common people of Kashmir. What brought the insurgency, apart from the fuelling from Pakistani side is the empowerment of the youth who were themselves getting educated and now had the sense of the raw deal that has been handed over to them; there was massive disenchantment and this is what a military dominated Pakistani establishment wanted; Pakistan tapped into it with the goal of re-writing partition and bring back Kashmir into Pakistani territory. Militancy and the accompanying Insurgency reigned almost a decade, the bloodiest time in the history of Kashmir, declining around 1998, with the high point of the bus journey to Lahore by then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. As it affected and traumatized an entire generation of Kashmiris, the insurgency resulted in construction of narratives and traumatic memories that yearned for some kind of a closer- that would help the masses make sense of what they had undergone. It is significant that a large number of such narrative, particularly in the English language, and their publication and distribution by renowned publishers has led to a body of texts based on these turbulent times.

For a student of literature for whom the object of knowledge consists in knowing ways of reading literature and asking very basic questions of it, it seems an essential task to read analyze and look at these narratives. It cannot be overemphasized that we construct our worlds in narratives and narratives are not just an expression of our world but they, many a times, perform this world making us understand and feel about it in one or the other way. Narratives construct our world. Literature exists at that intersection where what is known and experienced and generally expressed meets what is not known, though experienced but has never been said before. Although literature as a work of art may tell the story of individuals, it represents the consciousness of a community in a context. Hence, good literature is always a great record, a chronicle of its time as it is a critique of its own context. This study is an attempt at

understanding the way the writers from Kashmir expressed their sense of exception by way of producing literature as a response to one of the most disturbing times in the history of Kashmir and that of post-independence India. It hopes to provide insights into the psyche of Kashmir and into the unique location of the Kashmiri populace in the Indian subcontinent and provide an alternative reading of the situation. The final project report of this minor research project is divided into four chapters and this executive summary of the final project report discusses all the chapters and their contents very briefly: -

Chapter One: The first chapter is introductory in nature and is divided into five main parts. The first part tries to locate the research problem and provide the rationale for the research work. It lays out the research problem as the analysis of the voice of exception that emerges from the texts that were produced as a direct consequence of the traumatic experiences of the insurgency. The second part provides, in brief, a historical account of Kashmir since the struggle for independence. It argues that the development of the special political nature of Kashmir valley is rooted in the pre-independence times and is intertwined with the fact that it was a princely state and hence was different from colonial India. Further it delves into the counter-claims of India and Pakistan on Kashmir and how they later saw it as an unfinished task of partition. It also provides an assessment of the way succeeding Indian governments have seen Kashmir with the lenses of short-term political gains and have even indulged in rigging of elections; all of which in turn created a sense of dissatisfaction in Kashmir and led to the insurgency of the 1990s. In the third and fourth parts the chapter discusses the treacherous nature of the insurgency and analyses the way that it had a great impact on the lives of a large number of Kashmiris in the valley. These parts also discuss how it was almost a compulsion for many of the writers to write their first book on the experiences of the insurgency. The main rationale for them expressing themselves and becoming writers was to somehow relieve the traumatic times and in some way come to terms with it; there was no other way except revisiting the memories of the turbulent times. The fifth part of the chapter provides a schematic chapterization and the way the final report of the research project was written.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides a detailed literary analysis of the two works of fiction which talk about the Kashmir conflict, and written by those who have grown up in the time of the conflict; The first one is "The Collaborator" [2011] by Mirza Waheed, a Muslim writer from the valley, and the second is "The Garden of Solitude" [2011] by Sidhartha Gigoo, who is a Kashmiri Pandit. The chapter brings out first of all the commonalities of the narrative, the

authors and where both come from. It discusses how it has been two distinct ‘truths’ for the two sets of people in the valley and presents a case for how the difference between the truth of one and that of the other is not what is of significance in the novels but the commonalities are what are the strength of both the novels. Secondly, the chapter takes up a detailed literary analysis of both the novels individually as well as in a comparative manner. Thirdly, the chapter brings out the need for these stories to be told felt by both the writers; the sense of some kind of a closer that such a telling offer. Finally, the researcher, in this chapter focuses on analysis of the trauma, sense of betrayal and the great human tragedy suffered by both these communities and the attack on the Kashmiri identity and syncretic Kashmiri society as a whole as represented in both these novels. Other work of fiction on this issue also finds a mention.

Chapter Three: This chapter focuses on the two works of non-fiction, again written by those who grew up in these troubled times: “Curfewed Nights” [2009] by Basharat Peer, and “Our Moon Has Blood Clots” [2013] by Rahul Pandita. It also takes a look at other memoirs such as “The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir” [2007]. Whereas peer’s book is a chilling account of life as it was for a child who was growing up in the atmosphere of the Insurgency in Kashmir, Pandita’s book is an expression of the horrifying times that the Pandit community faced when they were forced to empty out from the land of their ancestors, the Kashmir valley. First this chapter focuses on building a contemporary theoretical understanding of the wider field of life narrative and within it that of the memoir as a genre. The importance paid to the memoir as a genre in writings from conflict situation is dwelled upon. Secondly, the chapter undertakes a detailed analysis of both the works by looking at the narrative structure, the way truth and the other side of the divide is presented and the main themes of both the memoirs. Thirdly it brings out how the authors have been successful in telling not just their individual, personal stories but that of the larger community that surrounds them and of which they are a part. Fourthly, the chapter also discusses other works of life narratives from Kashmir.

Chapter Four: This concluding Chapter goes back to the objectives of the study and presents what the study has achieved as the result of the study. This also draws conclusions regarding the contemporary writing emerging from Kashmir. This part includes what the researcher could not achieve in this research. Pointers on further lines of enquiries into this subject area which has not been covered in this study as also the further possible areas of research work which emerge from this study are suggested.