

Situating Anglophone Kashmiri Literature within Indian Writing in English: Interrogating Nation, Narration and Dissent

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Abstract

Kashmiri Anglophone literature written in the aftermath of armed conflict in Kashmir valley has evolved as a significant corpus since 2002. Owing to Kashmir valley's status as a 'disputed integral', literary narratives from Kashmir contest/challenge the dominant ideological and discursive practices of the Indian nation state. Most of the Anglophone Kashmiri literary narratives, barring a few written by Kashmiri Pandit authors, are politically/ideologically supportive of the formation of a distinct 'Kashmiri' nation. Their accommodation within the larger rubric of Indian writing in English is possible only by accommodating dissent as a salient feature of the genre. This paper charts the trajectory of development of Anglophone Kashmiri literature and situates them within the broader rubric of Indian writing in English. It engages with seminal questions such as, what constitutes Kashmiri Anglophone literature or how contesting identity/nationalist discourses constitute distinct genres of national/regional literatures.

Though Anglophone Kashmiri literature emerged in the twenty-first century, they accord considerable narrative space to the foundational moment of cartographic reorganization of the Indian sub-continent. This paper critically engages with the representation of political events of 1947 as narrated in recent Anglophone Kashmiri literary narratives like *Curfewed Night* (2008) by Basharat Peer, *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed, *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (2013) by Rahul Pandita and *The Half-Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir. The paper dissects the narration of the 'Kashmiri' nation contra Indian nation in these literary narratives. The paper endeavours to cull out a 'Kashmiri' perspective on discourses foregrounding Indian nationhood within these literary narratives, thereby exploring the possibilities of accommodating dissent within the ambit of Indian writing in English.

Keywords: Indian English literature, Anglophone Kashmiri literature, Kashmir conflict, nation, narration

Let me cry out in that void, say it as I can. I write on that void: Kashmir, Kaschmir, Cashmere, Qashmir, Cashmir, Cashmire, Kashmere, Cachemire, Cushmeer, Cashmiere, Casmir. Or Cauchemar in a sea of stories? Or: Kacmir, Kaschemir, Kasmere, Kachmire, Kasmir. Kerseymere?

-- *The Blessed Word: A Prologue* by Agha Shahid Ali

I had a sense of the alienation and resentment most Kashmiri Muslims felt and had against Indian rule. We did not relate to the symbols of Indian nationalism—the flag, the national anthem, the cricket team. We followed every cricket match India and Pakistan played but we never cheered for the Indian team (Peer 11).

--*Curfewed Nights*

These two quotations, the first one from Agha Shahid Ali's collection of poems, *The Country Without a Post Office*, and the second one from Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* reflect the political ideology and predicament of Kashmiris in the aftermath of armed rebellion against the Indian state since 1989. These two literary works are also crucial in the context of literary representations of conflict ridden Kashmir since both the works precede a plethora of literary works in their respective genres. While Ali's poems reflect the anxieties and pathos of Kashmiri existence in the midst of a protracted armed conflict, Peer comments on the sense of alienation and disaffection subscribed by the Kashmiris towards the Indian state. In the context of Kashmir, cultural productions, including literature, have emerged as a site of contestation between stakeholders with conflicting interests. In recent times, Anglophone Kashmiri literature has emerged as a distinctive genre which strives to aestheticize the ideological moorings of the Kashmiri movement for azadi from the Indian state.

This paper primarily focuses on the narration of the Kashmiri 'nation' and the representation of political events of 1947 as narrated in recent Anglophone Kashmiri literary narratives like *Curfewed Night* (2008) by Basharat Peer, *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed, *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (2013) by Rahul Pandita and *The Half-Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir. It elaborates on the discourses of dissent/resistance that remains the hallmark of Anglophone Kashmiri literature thereby problematizing its incorporation within the broader rubric of Indian English literature. The paper interrogates the legitimacy of national literature as a valid category of distinct genre and the modalities of its formation in the context of Indian English literature.

Anglophone Kashmiri Literature

Kashmiri nationalist struggle began in the early twentieth century organizing resistance against the economic exploitation of Kashmiri Muslim peasants by the Jammu based Dogra regime. The movement gained momentum by the 1930s and made political alliance with the Indian National Congress, then spearheading Indian nationalist struggle against the British colonial regime. With the British Empire retreating from the subcontinent, the Dogra kingdom was dissolved and the state of Jammu and Kashmir

became a part of the Indian Union in 1947 through the Instrument of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir. The mass leader Sheikh Abdullah of National Conference was in support of Kashmir's inclusion during the foundational moment of cartographic reorganization of the Indian sub-continent. By mid 1950s Kashmiri nationalism spearheaded its resistance against the Indian state. Kashmiri nationalism took a turn towards violence with the establishment of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) by Amanullah Khan and Maqbool Bhatt in 1977. Since 1989 Kashmir's movement for self-determination turned into a full scale armed rebellion with massive popular support in Kashmir valley. Though militancy waned in the valley by the turn of the century, it led to novel forms of civil disobedience in the form of massive street protests as well as stone pelting directed against symbols of Indian state such as Indian army personnel etc. The political ramifications of the recent abrogation of Article 370 and article 35 A of the Indian Constitution in August, 2019 and demotion of the state to a union territory is yet to unfold. In a bid to carve a distinct territory and identity for itself, Kashmiri nationalism got enmeshed in the power struggle of the two embattled nation states—India and Pakistan and their different, almost contradictory brands of official nationalism. Eminent scholar, Ashutosh Varshney stated that, "At its core, the Kashmir problem is a result of three forces: religious nationalism represented by Pakistan, secular nationalism epitomized by India, and ethnic nationalism embodied in what Kashmiris call Kashmiriyat (being a Kashmiri). Internal inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes mark all tree" (127). Kashmiri nationalism is not a unified movement spearheaded by a single organization but a diversified movement with varying political strategies not always working towards a common goal. In this highly politicized socio-political scenario, Kashmiri literature has evolved as an "arena of struggle" where Anglophone pro-azadiⁱ Kashmiri literature bolster Kashmiri claims of *azadi* while literary narratives by Kashmiri Pandits, non-Kashmiri Indians and Indian army personnel validate Indian claims on Kashmir. The politics of the embattled valley almost always overwhelms the aesthetic quotient of Anglophone Kashmiri literature. Kashmiri Anglophone literature has to undertake the difficult task of representing an armed conflict in medias res catering to a polarized public sphere and a widely dispersed reading public comprising of stake holders with conflicting interests and political/national affiliations.

Kashmir conflict has produced Anglophone literary corpus of its own. The Kabaili invasion of 1948 led to fictional rendering of the event by both Indian and foreign authors. British novelist H.E. Bates wrote *The Scarlet Sword* (1950) commemorating the destruction and desecration of St. Joseph's Mission in Baramullah. According to Andrew Whitehead, *The Rage of the Vulture* by Alan Moorehead (1948) is also based on Kabaili invasion of Baramullah, though Moorehead's novel is set in Kandahar. Mulk Raj Anand wrote *Death of a Hero: Epitaph for Maqbool Sherwani* (1963) eulogizing Maqbool Sherwani's efforts thwarting the invaders from entering Srinagarⁱⁱ. *Death of a Hero* is a significant literary moment since it is the first Indian English novel solely devoted to the task of representing Kashmir as a constituent part of post-colonial Indian state. Krishna Mehta's *Kashmir Per Hamla*, published in Hindi by the Sasta Sahitya Mandal, Government of India was translated in English and published by Signet Press, Calcutta in 1954. It is the only literary account of the Kashmir situation of 1948 written by a

Kashmiri and has been recently resurrected in 2005 as *Kashmir, 1947: A Survivor's Story* by Penguin. Though the corpus is not voluminous yet it is significant for political reasons. These literary narratives remain the only fictional rendition of Kashmir at the cusp of political transformation and its incorporation into the Indian nation state. This corpus is negligible compared to the literary rendition of the armed struggle since the 1990's by Kashmiris, non-Kashmiri Indians and foreign authors. *The Srinagar Conspiracy* (2000) by Vikram Chandra precedes a plethora of Indian English novels representing armed insurgency in Kashmir.

The aftermath of armed insurgency witnessed the efflorescence of Anglophone Kashmiri literature. Some of the significant autobiographical/fictional works ideologically in favour of a separate nationhood for Kashmir include *My Days in Prison* (2005) by Iftikhar Gilani, *Curfewed Night* (2008) by Basharat Peer, *The Collaborator* (2011) and *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2014) by Mirza Waheed and *The Half Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir, *Life in the Clock Tower Valley* (2021) by Shakoor Rather. Kashmiri Pandits have also contributed to the stream of Anglophone Kashmiri literature though they are primarily critical of the Kashmiri movement for self-determination and includes *Firdaus in Flames* (1995) by H.K. Kaul, *Under the Shadow of Militancy* (2002) by Tej N. Dhar, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* (2002) by Sudha Koul, *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) by Siddhartha Gigoo, *Kashmir: Nativity Regained* (2011) by Ashok K. Kaul, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013) by Rahul Pandita, *Residue* (2014) by Nitasha Kaul, *A Bit of Everything* (2020) by Sandeep Raina. Many edited volumes have also been published which comprise of essays and short fiction including *Until My freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* (2011) edited by Sanjay Kak and *Of Occupation and Resistance: Writings from Kashmir* (2013) edited by Fahad Shah. It also includes pro-Azadi Pandit writings by Suvir Kaul compiled in *Of Gardens and Graves. From Home to House: Writings of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile* (2015) edited by Arvind Gigoo et al. and *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits* (2015) edited by Siddharth Gigoo and Varad Sharma. The list of literary works is merely illustrative and not exhaustive since it is a heterogeneous and ever expanding corpus of literature with diverse thematic/political concerns.

Narrating the Nation

It is the intellectuals – poets, musicians, painters, sculptors, novelists, historians and archaeologists, playwrights, philologists, anthropologists and folklorists – who have proposed and elaborated the concepts and language of the nation and nationalism and have, through their musings and research, given voice to wider aspirations that they have conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols.

--Anthony D Smith (93)

Theoreticians of nationalism like Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson have stressed the importance of intellectuals and literary authors in the propagation of nationalist sentiments. Nationalism is not only a movement for political autonomy but also entails cultural reorganization. Through cultural reorganization, nationalism brings about an ideological space for the nationalist struggle and creates legitimacy for the putative nation. Imaginative literature has played a crucial role in imagining the category

of nation. The role of the genre of novel in the spread of nationalism has been elaborately dealt with in *Imagined Communities* by Anderson. In the context of Kashmir, life writing as a genre has been the most effective narrative medium for the putative Kashmiri nation. Anglophone Kashmiri literature in favour of a separate nationhood for Kashmir has played a crucial role in providing wider visibility to the predicament of the Kashmiris and their movement for self-determination. Challenging the official discourse of the Indian state, expressing dissenting/radical political views and highlighting the atrocities perpetrated by the Indian state in order to quell the armed resistance are some of the major thematic concerns of the genre. Kashmiri Pandit authors have taken the onerous task of narrativising the predicament of the community in the context of armed resistance and state repression in Kashmir valley.

Kashmiri nationalist writers create a distinct national space, both geographically and culturally, through their writings. Nationalist writers like Nitasha Kaul demarcate the geographical and political space of the nation of Kashmir as distinct from India, Pakistan and China in her writings. In “Kashmir: A Place of Blood and Memory”, she writes:

Parts of the present-day Kashmir are occupied by India, Pakistan and China. When you try to locate the territory of Kashmir on a world map, you will find it partitioned into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK, called ‘Azad Kashmir’ and ‘Northern Areas’, in Pakistan), India Occupied Kashmir (IOK, called ‘Jammu and Kashmir’ including ‘Ladakh’, in India) and areas such as Aksai Chin and Shaksham Valley under Chinese control (part of ‘Xinjiang autonomous region’ in China)... Kashmir is not India. Kashmir is not Pakistan. Kashmir is not China. Kashmir is the boundary zone of India-China-Pakistan. But it is distinctively Kashmir. And its people—whatever their religion or national identity—are Kashmiris (Kaul 189-190).

Kaul’s detailed delineation of the regions comprising the putative nation of Kashmir is historically significant, politically expedient and opportunistic. Contrary to the clarity and vehemence expressed by Kaul, there is a significant amount of confusion and obfuscation regarding the term ‘Kashmir’ and ‘Kashmiris’ depending on political/national/regional affiliation. For Kashmiri nationalist authors such as Kaul, Peer and others, it encompasses the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan administered Kashmir, while for people residing in Jammu and Ladakh, ‘Kashmir’ refers to the Valley, and depending on the context, non-Kashmiri Indians refers to the valley as well as the state of Jammu and Kashmir when they use the term ‘Kashmir’. While the Dogra regime is criticized vehemently by Kashmiri nationalist politicians and authors, the putative nation imagined denotes the geographical extent of the Dogra Kingdom. Kashmiri nationalists, both ideologues/authors and armed militants draw their lineage from the anti-Dogra protests of 1931, prior to Kashmir’s incorporation in the Indian union. Scholars like Ashutosh Varshney and Sumantra Bose have severely criticized the ahistorical incorporation of disparate regions like Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit and Baltistan with heterogenous ethnic population as a singular political entity. The major driving force behind Kaul’s cartographic feat is to challenge the official narrative of the Indian state which projects Kashmir as an integral part of the Indian Union.

Another mode of representing ‘Kashmir’—the putative nation—is through the use of cultural and natural symbols unique to the valley. Repetitive descriptions of the scenic beauty of Kashmir; the beautiful gardens of Srinagar; Chinar leaves; the references to Kangri, Pheran, kahwa, the Kashmiri tea and Papier Mache artists and patterns evoke a distinct cultural identity for the ‘Kashmiri’ nation—distinct from India which is represented as the tyrannical occupying force and an alien space. Basharat Peer describes his first journey outside the valley as entering an alien and harsh space,

Everything –from the railway station to the train berths to the people around us—was different. I was uneasy, awkward, and conscious of my ignorance of simple things like closing a train window or unfolding a berth. And the weather was brutal: hot and humid. My face burnt and my sweat-drenched shirt stuck to my back (62).

Kashmiri Sufism is also highlighted with frequent references to Charar-e-Sharif, the six hundred years old shrine of Nooruddin Rishi, the patron saint of Kashmir, in most narratives. Frequent references to Lal Ded, Nooruddin, Kalhana and others evoke the rich cultural heritage of Kashmir. Pro-azadi authors project a syncretic history of Kashmir with special references to the contribution of Islam in Kashmir. Kashmiri nationalist writers like Kaul and Peer construct Kashmir as a distinct geo-cultural space and simultaneously portray India as an alien space in order to validate the nationalist claims of separate nationhood for Kashmir. On the one hand, these nationalist resistance narratives negate any heterogeneity and inconsistency with the putative ‘Kashmiri’ nation and on the other hand, they also create a monolithic representation of India, primarily represented through Indian soldiers, bunkers, torture centres and army cantonments. The Indian state and its functionaries have been repeatedly described as monsters in Mirza Waheed’s novels. Waheed conceptualizes Indian state as a hydra-headed monster capable of stifling the insurgency without much unease in *The Collaborator*. He writes,

India, my dear, is a sisterfucking giant, a colossus with countless arms and limbs and tongues and claws and hands and mouths and fucking everything else....Even if you have these small ulcers festering in various places and crevices, they don’t matter to it; it uses one of its many hands or claws to scratch at the sore, soothing the irritation, and then waits until the ulcer dies on its own, or just plucks it off and throws it away. It is a huge fucking jinn, small ticks and scabs and cuts don’t harm it much, it just carries on, sometimes waving a hand and blowing, crushing to pieces, whatever it is that’s bothering it (Waheed 278).

This is in stark contrast to the Indian nationalist imaginary which considers the Indian nation state as a nourishing mother providing succor to its children-citizens. Ironically, the Pandit narratives, though, politically inimical towards the armed resistance for self-determination also evokes a distinct cultural space while describing Kashmir as opposed to Jammu or other parts of North India. Even in this mode of representing “Kashmir”, cultural markers and symbols of the valley get preponderance though Kashmiri nationalist authors claim separate nationhood for Kashmir, with Jammu, Ladakh and Pakistan administered Kashmir as constituent parts.

Apart from the modalities of narrating the ‘Kashmiri’ nation, Anglophone Kashmiri literature also expresses dissenting political ideologies while engaging with the events of 1947. The foundational moment of the Indian nation state in 1947 has emerged as a central thematic concern in Anglophone Kashmiri literature. In the context of Kashmir, a polarized public sphere ensures that perception about political events is always narrated through the prism of communal predicament/interest, occasionally leading to diametrically opposing modes of representation. For Anglophone Kashmiri literature, which is ideologically in favour of a separate Kashmiri nation, the moment of decolonization for the Indian sub-continent is not that of jubilation but a moment of lost possibility. Occasionally, 1947 is also represented as the moment of Kashmir’s colonization by the Indian state since Indian army was sent to thwart the advance of the Kabaili raiders from the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. This is in stark contrast to the sense of euphoria which characterizes cultural representations of India’s independence from colonial rule in literary cultural productions in general and Indian English literature in particular. Instead of being celebratory, reference to 1947 is mired in political claims and contestations and marked with despondency and frustration. Shanaz Bashir’s politically sensitive novel, *The Half Mother*, represents this through the discontent expressed by Ab Jaan in his youth:

In his youth, he had been a radical sher, an ardent supporter of Sheikh Abdullah. Ab Jaan had even gone to jail once, for six months. But then, one evening, after listening to Abdullah’s speech on the radio—in which the Sher-e-Kashmir expressed a willingness to support the accession with India—Ab Jaan was disappointed. In a bout of anger, he threw out the larger-than-life portrait of Abdullah of his bedroom (Bashir 12).

This discontent anticipates events of 1990s with the radicalization of Kashmiri nationalism when Sheikh Abdullah’s legacy was delegitimized and National Conference was discredited as a pro-India political organization. Discontent with the Indian state became the dominant political mood in Kashmir after Abdullah’s incarceration in 1953 and took a turn towards violence with the establishment of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) by Amanullah Khan and Maqbool Bhatt in 1977. Most Kashmiri Anglophone literature is extremely critical of Kashmiri politicians in support of status quo in Kashmir and glorifies the militant figure.

The Instrument of Accession of 1947 signed by Hari Singh remains the most contested historical document in the context of Kashmir. India’s claim over Kashmir is based on the Instrument of Accession executed by Maharaja Hari Singh, while Pakistan claims Kashmir on the basis of its overwhelming Muslim majority population. Kashmiri populace demands *azadi* from Indian state on the basis of India’s failure to conduct the plebiscite, recommended by the United Nations and promised by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister. While these claims and counter claims have some truth in them, the evolution of Kashmiri nationalism since the 1930s remains thoroughly neglected. Fictional rendition of this moment also negates the contingent nature of nation, nationality and international borders. In 1947, both the Maharaja and the popular leader Sheikh Abdullah supported Kashmir’s inclusion into the Indian Union and Pakistan was deemed as the aggressor because of Kabaili invasion. The present political

leadership of Kashmiri armed resistance and their followers ignore Sheikh Abdullah's role and popularity during the 1940s and consider Indian presence as colonization of Kashmir. The general Kashmiri populace taking cue from the massive military presence in Kashmir since the onset of armed resistance conceptualizes India as a colonizing force. There is general amnesia regarding India's beneficial role during Kabaili invasion in the public psyche of Kashmir. Kashmiri nationalist authors try to sideline historical facts and provide a skewed representation of history.

Kashmiri nationalist scholar, Arif Ayaz Parrey puts forward a historically faulty and politically banal argument in his otherwise well written essay entitled, "Kashmir: Three Metaphors for the Present", "...the country Jammu and Kashmir, in its current form, was born in 1846 when the British sold it to Maharaja Gulab Singh; while the country India, in its current form, was born only in 1947. How can the struggle for ending the occupation of a country by another country which is 101 years younger to it be a secessionist movement" (Parrey 238)? Such assertions are not uncommon in many of the pro-azadi literary narratives with staunch Kashmiri nationalist characters. These hyper nationalist assertions are ahistorical and merely propagandist in nature. They are reiteratively strewn in literary writings in order to counter and delegitimize the official narrative of the Indian state which considers Kashmir as an integral part of the Indian nation state. In response to the official position of the Indian state, Nitasha Kaul, a diasporic Kashmiri Pandit scholar labels Kashmir as India's 'disputed integral'. Basharat Peer provides a more balanced view of the historical events in Kashmir leading to its accession to India:

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, preferred India to Pakistan and an independent Kashmir to both. When India was violently partitioned in 1947, both Singh and Sheikh Abdullah sought time before deciding Kashmir's fate. In October 1947, however, tribesmen from the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, supported by Pakistani army, invaded Kashmir, forcing their hands; Singh decided to join India, and Sheikh Abdullah, who was a friend of the new Indian Prime Minister, Nehru, supported him. In January 1949, the fighting stopped after the UN intervened. The UN endorsed a plebiscite for Kashmiris to determine which country they wanted to belong to and created a ceasefire line (Peer 12-13).

While the version of political events of 1947-48 differs in different literary narratives, the seminal importance accorded to the events cannot be denied. The year 1947, though not celebrated, holds significance for the region and is represented in Kashmiri literature. Rahul Pandita writes about the pride of the Kashmiri Pandit community owing to the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru, a Kashmiri Pandit became the first Prime Minister of the newly minted nation state of India. The Pandit narratives primarily focus on Kabaili invasion while narrating the events of 1947.

The cataclysmic political events of 1947 may be a lost opportunity for Kashmiri nationalist ideologues, authors and the majority of Kashmiri Muslims in favour of a separate nationhood for Kashmir; for the Kashmiri Pandits, it was a moment of profound fear, dislocation and loss of pre-eminence in Kashmiri society. The significance of the period may be surmised from the narrative space devoted to the delineation of events

from 1947 in literature published in the aftermath of the armed conflict and Kashmiri Pandit exodus from the valley in the 1990s. Rahul Pandita devotes a section on the events of 1947 in Baramulla, a town in Kashmir devastated by the Kabaili raid. He documents the predicament of Kashmiri Pandit families who were forced to flee from their homes in search of security and to safeguard their valuables. During the Dogra period (1846-1947), the Kashmiri Pandit community constituted the most privileged section of Kashmiri society as the landed aristocracy and was commonly inducted into the Dogra bureaucracy. The decolonization of the Indian sub-continent coupled with the dissolution of Dogra monarchy saw the advent of democracy in the Kashmir valley when the Kashmiri Pandit community lost their pre-eminence and the majority community of the Kashmir Muslims reaped the benefits of socio-political events of 1947.

Situating Anglophone Kashmiri Literature within Indian English Literature

Indian English Literature, a genre that began as furtive literary attempts by the miniscule section of Anglicized elite during colonial period, variously termed as the “Perishable Empire” or “slender sapling from a foreign field” has developed into a flourishing genre with global reputationⁱⁱⁱ. It has developed into a heterogeneous body of literature with significant divergences in their thematic concerns as well as sites of production, publication and dissemination. International accolades and global fame have increased its prestige at home and abroad, thereby encouraging writers to take up divergent themes for their literary explorations. The trajectory of the genre has been interesting from the point of view of literary historiography as clearly stated by Hans Harder,

English literature written by Indians comes as a challenge to Indian literary historiography. The basic problem any history of this literature has to come to terms with, and cannot help dealing with even after the great recent successes of Indian writers in English, is the somewhat paradoxical status of the English language in India. On the one hand, there is no way to avoid the claim that English is originally not an Indian, but a foreign language...On the other hand, English is the only language that can at present claim the status of an all-India language; furthermore, it is English rather than any particular Indian language that became the medium of the Indian national struggle for independence (324).

Notwithstanding creative employment of the erstwhile colonizer’s language, the genre of Indian English literature has shown impeccable nationalist credentials. Beginning with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio’s poems on India like “To Indian—My Native Land” of the 1830s to the Gandhian nationalist musings of Indian English novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan of the 1930s—40s and thereafter. Contemporary writers such as Arundhati Roy, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry or Upamanyu Chatterjee, to name a few from the illustrious pantheon, have all dealt with the theme of nationalism and the Indian nation or its critique in some sense or the other in their creative and polemical writings. In fact, Indian English literature has done justice to its nomenclature, being primarily about India in the broadest sense possible since English, apart from its constitutional position as the associate official language of the country, is the only language intelligible across the length and breadth of the nation unlike other regional Indian languages. This attribute of national reach accorded a national character to the literature produced in the genre which according to critic

Meenakshi Mukherjee is characterized by an “anxiety of Indianness”. According to her, Anglophone Indian literature, “pull towards a homogenization of reality, an essentializing of India, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community” (Mukherjee 172). The ever burgeoning corpus of Anglophone Kashmiri literature certainly exudes an “anxiety of Indianness” though of a very different nature than the one elaborated by Meenakshi Mukherjee. The primary concern generally expressed in the corpus is non-existence/ambiguous sense of belonging to the Indian nation-state as illustrated earlier in the paper.

Any literary production in English originating within the territorial boundary of India should ideally be incorporated in Indian English literature. Due to the preponderance of diasporic authors in Indian English canon, any literary work written by authors of Indian origin is generally considered as belonging to the genre of Indian English literature. According to Aijaz Ahmad, the unity of Indian literature “resides in the common national origins of its authors and the common civilizational ethos of the Indian people” (256). In fact, defining a national literary tradition like the Indian English, one is always going to be an untenable one due to the heterogeneity of the corpus and the contingent nature of what constitutes the category of nation and national literature. By the simple logic of territoriality, Anglophone Kashmiri literature is certainly a constituent part of Indian English literature since Kashmir continues to be a part of the Indian nation state irrespective of the dissident political aspirations of the majority of Kashmiris.

The problem of inclusion is more apparent in the thematic and ideological considerations of Anglophone Kashmiri literature. Meenakshi Mukherjee enumerates the common thematic concerns of Indian English literature in her article, “The Anxiety of Indianness”. She writes that,

...novelists in English had for a long time remained predictably pan-Indian: the national movement, partition of the country, the clash between tradition and modernity, faith and rationality or similar time worn clichés of east-west confrontation, disintegration of the joint family, exploitation of women, etc. In this project they were in a way defining ‘Indian’ concerns as against local or regional issues (Mukherjee 173).

If themes recommended by Mukherjee are taken into consideration then Kashmiri Anglophone literature does dwell on some of these. Anglophone Kashmiri literature deals with themes that are pan-Indian in scope since the primary concern of the genre is to muse about the Indian nation state and legitimacy of its presence in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in general and the Kashmir valley in particular. The foundation of the Indian state and the political events leading to the inclusion of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 remain the central focus of this politically radical genre. Kashmir has remained central to the nation building process in India and its inclusion not only augmented the territorial extent of the Indian state but also bolstered its secular credentials since the state of Jammu and Kashmir is the only Muslim majority state of the Indian Union. Anglophone Kashmiri literature ideologically in favour of *azadi* for Kashmir is virulently critical of the Indian state and advocates secession from Indian

union. It is rather problematic to include a corpus of literature within a national literary tradition which ideologically advocates secession from the national body politic.

The resolution to this political conundrum embedded in the literary-aesthetic domain lies in gauging the reception of Anglophone Kashmiri literature in the Indian public sphere. In a bid to depict the conflict ridden situation in Kashmir valley, Kashmiri Anglophone literature has invented new idioms and language giving a new lease of life to the domain of Indian English literature. Words like Kalashnikov, light machine guns, militant, soldier, military, army, crossfire, cease fire have become indispensable to represent Kashmir and are liberally scattered in these narratives. The normalization of violence in Kashmir, thus, depicted is so very different from the sophisticated, elite world of Anglophone Indian literature emanating from diasporic locations in United Kingdom or the United States or from the metropolitan cities of India primarily aestheticizing the globalized urban mise-en-scene. The 'charm' of this novel along with its linguistic/political experience was not lost to the Indian reading public leading to the popularity of writers such as Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Farah Bashir and Shakoor Rather. Basharat Peer went on to win the Vodafone-Crossword Book Award in 2008 in the non-fiction category. Anglophone Kashmiri literature has been extensively reviewed in widely circulated and respectable newspapers/magazines like Outlook, India Today, Literary Review of The Hindu etc. It is also interesting that the Sahitya Akademi library of New Delhi holds copies of popular Anglophone Kashmiri literature notwithstanding its politically fissiparous ideology. Sahitya Akademi, the National Academy of letters, is funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India. Therefore, in terms of reception, acceptance and popularity of this literary category, there is no problem in its inclusion in the broader rubric of Indian English literature.

The basic argument in this political conundrum is the feasibility and degree of dissent/secessionist politics that Indian national literary tradition is willing to incorporate in the literary-aesthetic domain. Dissent is defined by Romila Thapar as "the disagreement that a person or persons may have with others, or, more publicly, with some of the institutions that govern their patterns of life" (3). In fact, Anglophone Kashmiri literature began with the purpose of dissenting against Indian official discourses and Indian nationalist imaginary. It is also noteworthy that freedom of expression guaranteed by the constitution of India is not an absolute right and comes with checks and balances. Besides, another pertinent question is to what extent dissent may be allowed in the context of democracy as a political institution and its literary-cultural traditions. Nation, theorized as an 'imagined community' by Benedict Anderson has the political necessity of survival once the nation has formed a state. If a literary tradition seeks to delegitimize the nation/state in a bid to validate a new political community or form a new nation how may it be considered a part and parcel of the national literary tradition? The question is more political in nature and beyond the scope of the literary-aesthetic domain.

Conclusion

Indian English literature has categorically validated the Indian nation during the anti-colonial nationalist resistance and continued to aestheticize the Indian state thereafter. In spite of various authors critiquing different strands of Indian society as well as modus

operandi of the Indian state (the fictions of Emergency era etc) they have more or less remained pre-occupied with India as the central theme in their creative endeavours. Similarly, Anglophone Kashmiri literature has been steadfast in creating cultural legitimacy for the Kashmiri nationalist movement and in the process vehemently critiqued the Indian state and its mode of operation in Kashmir. The genre is primarily geared towards highlighting Kashmir's distinctness vis-à-vis the Indian nation state. The question of its inclusion is beyond the domain of the literary-aesthetic and primarily remains a political one. Anglophone Kashmiri literature may be considered as a sub-genre of Indian English literature since it has shared concerns, though, with diametrically opposing ideologies and political goals.

Notes

¹The primary texts emanating from Kashmir have been categorized as 'Pro-azadi' texts in the course of the paper. The nomenclature of the categories may seem a bit arbitrary. It is primarily undertaken since characterizing Kashmiri authors supporting the movement of *azadi* as Kashmiri Muslims would appear communal. It is also unviable since there are a few Kashmiri Pandit authors and intellectuals who have written in support of *azadi*.

²*The Rage of the Vulture* (1948), *The Scarlet Sword* (1950) and *Death of a Hero* (1963) have been mentioned in Andrew Whitehead's book *A Mission in Kashmir* (2007). Krishna Mehta's *Kashmir Per Hamla*, translated into *Kashmir, 1947: A Survivor's Story* (2005) has not been included by Whitehead. The exclusion of a crucial survivor's narrative belonging to the genre of life writing from the corpus of literary narratives of Kashmir situation during the late 1940s stresses the importance of Anglophone literature in the context of Kashmir.

³The epithet of 'Perishable Empire' has been derived from the title of Meenakshi Mukherjee's influential book, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. The phrase "slender sapling from a foreign field" has been used by M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan in their book *Indian English Literature 1980-2000: A Critical Survey*. Indian English literature gained global reputation with Salman Rushdie winning the Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1981. Thereafter, a string of Bookers and Pullitzers catapulted Indian English literature into the limelight. International fame also provided increased popularity and readership for the genre within India.

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