
Inheriting Exile: Transgenerational Trauma in the Works of Arvind Gigoo and Siddhartha Gigoo

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Abstract

Exile and displacement, as concomitant processes, have significantly shaped human history and resonate in contemporary global politics. Such experiences, frequently triggered by political repression, conflict, natural catastrophes, or economic disintegration, have caused people and communities to be displaced and seek refuge elsewhere. The human experience, recorded in history, has a shared thread: the displacement of individuals and groups. The literary motif of exile, ubiquitous in many cultural and historical contexts, provides a rich subject for exploring the intricacies of identity, belonging, and the human condition. The displacement has broad implications at the individual level and on the broader cultural, social, and political levels. As literature is the mirror of the times in which it is written, it cannot escape the representation of such tragedies through fictional and non-fictional narratives. These narratives provide the readers with an alternate reading of history, which had long been neglected. Modern Kashmiri literature is a contemporary and critical space of artistic production influenced by the eternally burning conditions of political unrest, militancy, and cultural decimation. Moreover, it is under the canopy of extreme violence that such literature has to carry with it the raw, painful human anguish and the state of existence brought on by the bitterness of long-standing strife in the region. The prolonged political crisis has deeply scarred the very fabric of communal tranquility and social cohesion, tending to dissipate the otherwise rich cultural and interreligious syncretism of Kashmir. Transgenerational trauma is an extreme psychological concept through which the consequences of traumas are transferred across generations, including those not initially involved in the traumatic events. Literary representations of transgenerational trauma,

such as those of Gigoos' portrayal of the Kashmir exodus, serve as both records of trauma and possible means of healing. Literature creates space for articulating experiences that might otherwise remain silent, breaking the cycle of trauma transmission. The recent Pahalgam massacre serves as a stark reminder of the profound transgenerational trauma endured by Kashmiri Pandits, intensifying collective wounds from decades of targeted violence and displacement that continue to traumatize successive generations. The present research paper is an attempt to explore the depiction of transgenerational trauma in the works of Arvind Gigoo and Siddhartha Gigoo, two prominent voices from among the Kashmiri Pandit community, whose texts bear testimony to the lasting impact of the 1990 exodus from the Kashmir Valley. The study examines how the writings of Arvind Gigoo and Siddhartha Gigoo represent the long-lasting psychological and socio-cultural effects of exile across generations.

Key Words: Displacement, identity, militancy, transgenerational, trauma theory, exile, successive generations.

"My dear Descendants, You are rootless. You belong to no place. The base of your life is a vacuum. The language you speak is not your own. You are lost in this world peopled with cold and callous half-humans..." (*Days of Parting*, Gigoo, Arvind).

"What we were made to go through in camps is a blot on the collective conscience of a nation whose constitution guarantees justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity to all citizens" (*A Long Season of Ashes*, Gigoo, Siddhartha).

These two excerpts-the first one from Arvind Gigoo's *Days of Parting* and the second one from Siddhartha Gigoo's *A Long Season of Ashes*-powerfully summarize the experience of Kashmiri Pandit exile across two generations. While Arvind Gigoo's quote reflects the sense of displacement, Siddhartha Gigoo's words challenge the national failure to safeguard and support his people during their period of refuge. Collectively, they describe both the individual devastation of losing one's home and the institutional betrayal that exacerbated their trauma. The Kashmiri Pandit displacement in the second half of the 20th century is perhaps the most contested and under-

researched topic in contemporary South Asian history. The human condition, written throughout history, presents a recurring pattern: the displacement of people and communities. Throughout history, exile has sparked changes in both individuals and societies. However, the physical displacement has been well documented in scholarly circles. Its psychological and cultural impacts across generations are relatively less explored. The trauma of forced migration is not contained in the act of departure but inhabits the emotional landscape of families, structuring the lives of those born far from the site they call 'home.' The forced exile of the Kashmiri Pandit community in the early 1990s has left an unprecedented mark on South Asian history, thus eliciting a literary response to safeguard memory, identity, and lost sense of belonging. Therefore, Kashmiri literary narratives serve as testimony to and condemnation of the socio-political churnings that have reshaped the identity of the region. These literary works give voice to the people who otherwise have been denied their due place in history and whose very roots and identity are in extreme danger of extinction. These literary representations not only chronicle momentous historical occurrences, but also facilitate the cultural transmission of trauma and resilience across generations, creating what scholars sometimes call "post memory"—the relationship of the second generation to powerful experiences that preceded their births. Among the most important writers to capture this experience are Arvind Gigoo and Siddhartha Gigoo, whose works provide diverse yet complementary perspectives on themes of exile, nostalgia, and cultural survival.

Literature has always acted as an effective prism through which the realities of society are reflected, and the same applies when examining the lives of refugees, providing in-depth insights into their struggles, displacements, and the intricacies of identity in exile. Exile literature gives an important space to document those combined experiences of displacement and cultural preservation, allowing the voices of those individuals who are in a quest to reclaim identity in the wake of geopolitical transitions. Edmond Jabès observes, "One has to write out of that break, out of that unceasingly revived wound" (Jabès 62). For Kashmiri Pandits, the experience of forced exile has had a strong effect on both individual and collective identities and has created narratives that express loss, resilience, and a strong attachment to their homelands. This experience reflects Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post-memory," where descendants of trauma survivors inherit the memories of events they did not directly experience, leading to a collective memory that influences identity and belonging (Hirsch 2012).

Trauma theory had become a core presence within clinical psychiatry, and it gradually attracted the attention of other disciplines. During the 1990s, literary and cultural critics began publishing on the topic of trauma theory at the point of convergence between clinical psychiatry and cultural theory. Cathy Caruth is an important scholar of trauma studies whose work has been immensely influential in developing thought around the interrelationship between trauma, narrative, and memory. Her seminal text, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), considers how trauma eludes representation and how literature can give voice to the unspeakable. Trauma theory is a theoretical field that emanated from Freudian psychoanalysis in the early 20th century. Sigmund Freud, in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), presents several key concepts of trauma theory, such as the metaphor of the shield, "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield" (Freud 29). Freud introduces traumatic neurosis as a way to describe the condition of the First World War veterans. He proposes an issue with these traumatised individuals relating to a repetition of the traumatising events, or an attempt to fully avoid them (Freud 13).

In literary studies, transgenerational trauma is a powerful tool to explore the intersections of personal identity, familial history, and collective memory. Writers often use it to investigate how memories endure in the absence of a firsthand account and how they will modify, distort, or even haunt the next generation. Transgenerational trauma, also referred to as intergenerational trauma, refers to the emotional, psychological, and cultural impacts of a traumatic event beyond those who initially encountered the trauma firsthand, transmitted across generations. Although trauma may be understood as historical—war, genocide, displacement, exile, colonization—its psychological and emotional echoes resonate across generations in narratives, silences, behaviors, and indelible memories. The 'aftershocks' of trauma—while seemingly invisible—are thoroughly ingrained in the psychological and cultural lives of families, communities, and nations. Writers engaging with this subject typically highlight how trauma warps memory, language, relationships, and a sense of belonging, particularly for those who were born subsequent to the break but remain thoroughly influenced by it. The concept is especially pertinent in the study of communities that have experienced collective violence, forced migration, genocide, slavery, or prolonged political conflict. In the context of Kashmiri Pandit literature, this theme becomes particularly urgent.

Arvind Gigoo is an eminent voice in the narrative of exile and displacement, particularly in the context of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus. His writings engage deeply with the critical themes of exile, displacement, and homelessness, especially as experienced in the wake of the Kashmiri Pandits' forced migration from the valley. His writings stand as significant literary testimonies to the long-lasting effects of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus across generations. His own experience of the trauma of forced migration serves as a lens through which he explores intersecting issues of pain, cultural erosion, and the contested identity of the Kashmiri Pandits. His works—*The Ugly Kashmiri: Cameos in Exile* (2006), *Gulliver in Kashmir: A Book of Cameos* (2017), *From Home to House: Writings of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile* (2015) and *ONCE WE HAD EVERYTHING- Literature in Exile* (2019) employ sharp, fractured narratives to articulate the complex realities of the Kashmiri Pandit experience in the aftermath of displacement. His oeuvre not merely addresses the physical displacement experienced by those uprooted from their native land but also the profound, enduring psychological and cultural alienation that accompanies such forced migration. During the early 1990s, the Pandit community was forced to leave the Kashmir Valley, and Arvind Gigoo, a Kashmiri Pandit himself, had firsthand experience the anguish of relocation. His work revolves around the 1990 exodus when Kashmiri Pandits left the Kashmir Valley in violence and threat. This disruption cut them off from homes, culture, and community on the whole, and the trauma has lasted across generations. As he mentions in *From Home to House: Writings of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile*,

This was the ethnic cleansing or migration of the worst type in independent India. The effect of this migration devastated the mental makeup of Pandits. Migration created health and psychological problems of great magnitude for them. Not knowing how to cope with the heat, many Pandits died due to heatstroke. Alzheimer's, amnesia, and dementia affected many. A sense of insecurity, fear, suspicion, mistrust, alienation, apprehensions about the loss of identity, new diseases, adverse effect of climatic conditions, and feuds and acute tensions invaded their lives (Gigoo XIV).

While the transgenerational trauma of Kashmiri Pandits is a common theme in Arvind Gigoo's writings, his co-edited collection *From Home to House: Writings of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile* (2015) provides a compelling and straightforward look at this phenomenon. The volume includes essays, short stories, and other works by a number of Kashmiri Pandit authors who were displaced during the exodus in the 1990s. It

eloquently illustrates the different degrees of trauma that forced migration has caused, not only to those who experienced the disaster firsthand but also to later generations who were either born or raised in exile. His anthology, *ONCE WE HAD EVERYTHING- Literature in Exile*, is a compilation of works that reflect the burden of history borne by the exiled Kashmiri Pandits and their deep longing to return to their homeland- themes that are inextricably connected with the concept of transgenerational trauma. As he states,

The young generation of Pandits, born and brought up in exile, is living off an inherited memory. Children born in camps are growing up rootless. What memories will these children inherit and what history will they remember? What will they think of as 'home'? (Gigoo 4).

Memory serves as the foundation for the understanding of transgenerational trauma, particularly for groups that experience some form of conflict, displacement, genocide, or sustained persecution. While trauma operates on an individual level, mostly understood as a psychological and personal experience, trauma is also being more widely defined as collective and in many instances inherited, such that trauma is passed along generations by means other than words, but through silences, actions, rituals, and cultural memory. Survivors of displacement may not always articulate their trauma in some expressive way, but their experiences are transmitted to subsequent generations through cultural practices, like the replica shrine described by Ankur Datta. His observation with respondents viewing a shrine replica as a memorialization point shows that memory is not only an individual practice of recollection; it is also a collective, embodied practice that defines identity and belonging through time and space. "...memory constitutes a significant component in studies of societies affected by displacement and violence. In the discussion to follow, the fact that some respondents speak directly of the replica as a form of memorialization is important. Even those Pandits who are critical of the replica rely on a sense of the past as they compare it with visits to the shrine in Kashmir" (Datta, *That Was Natural* 7).

The concept of trauma is trans-historical, that is, "one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth 4). When a whole group or community is traumatized, it is referred to as collective trauma, and it can be even deeper, reaching into the social and emotional lives of the whole group. The trauma in such a scenario settles into the collective memory, becoming an emotional inheritance shared by all. Such deeply embedded pain

can be inherited over generations through stories, remembrances, and the residual fears of the survivors. This condition is referred to as transgenerational or intergenerational trauma. Suvir Kaul argues,

Scholars who study traumatic responses, particularly to mass and sustained political violence, have learned that the symptoms of stress linger long enough to shape new realities. Even when they are repressed, their effects are profound, and they exert a structuring force on the present (Kaul).

Transgenerational trauma is the passing down of trauma over generations, impacting those who did not have a direct encounter with the original traumatic incident but are affected by the shared recollection and narratives of that trauma. In the Kashmiri Pandit community, the 1990 exodus has created lasting psychological wounds that continue across generations. Even individuals who were born post-1990 carry the psychological baggage of their ancestors, preconditioned by communal memories, collective narratives, and inherited anxieties. Satish Bhat, in K.L. Chowdhury's short story *The Survivor*, reminisces about the return of panic attacks after discontinuation of medication. His dependence on medication and the recurrence of panic attacks upon withdrawal indicate the chronicity of such trauma,

...I felt fine while I was on the medication you prescribed, but when I stopped, the panic episodes came back with greater intensity than before.'... I stopped in the belief that I was cured. But the episodes of tremor, palpitations, and suffocation returned. I am back on the medication, and I feel a lot better again. I hope I don't have to take these drugs all my life. This is my worry now (Chowdhury 32).

Siddhartha Gigoo is an acclaimed Kashmiri author whose writings illustrate poignant themes of exile, memory, identity, and the uniqueness of the Kashmiri Pandit experience, all shaped by the author's own displacement during the turmoil of the 1990s. The legacy of exile, as beautifully examined by Siddhartha Gigoo, extends beyond generations. His grandparents yearned to go back to their homeland, clinging to whatever memories they had left. His own generation and that of his parents exist in an odd suspension between a pleasant, tranquil past and an unsure present. His recent book, *A Long Season of Ashes* (2024), is a memoir chronicling the Kashmiri Pandit exodus, blending personal letters, reflections, and diary entries. Though the

memoir is based on the author's lived experiences as a sixteen-year-old Kashmiri Pandit boy who fled his home in Srinagar due to the targeted killings of the 1990s, it offers insight into the community's collective trauma, the psychological toll of exile, their collective longing for a homeland, and the erosion of cultural identity. Gigoo reflects on all of this to share and give voice to silent suffering, and to trauma, of many Kashmiri Pandits who were exiled from their homeland during the exodus of 1990 and who have lived with that experience ever since. Siddhartha Gigoo condemns the government's neglect, abandoning Kashmiri Pandits to wander without refuge in their own country, "What a shame it is to have nowhere to go in your own country? Where shall we go now? We have gone from one end of the city to another. There isn't an inch left for us to rest our tired limbs..." (Gigoo 5).

Siddhartha Gigoo in *The Garden of Solitude* and *A Long Season of Ashes* conveys the extreme trauma marked by displacement in the psyche of the Kashmiri Pandits. The narratives take us through the immediate trauma of sudden exile and how the violent severing from one's homeland takes away not only the physical structures but also the foundation of identity and belonging. This initial shockwave resonates across generations, leaving a lasting legacy of loss and alienation. Even those who are born into exile carry with them a tangible desire for a home they've never experienced their lives quietly but irretrievably influenced by the unresolved sadness and broken stories of their displaced ancestors. His grandparents yearned to go back to their homeland, clinging to whatever memories they had left, "I want to die a happy man... I don't want to die... Take me home, please... Do something... They won't take me home, but I have faith in you... Go right away before I die... Take me home... I don't want to die here..." (Gigoo 28-29).

Second-generation writing is based on borrowed memories, which are securely held by them like a tainted inheritance passed on to them by the survivors. The guilt of absence, along with the inadequacy of language to express their emotions and comprehend the effect of the event on their lives, usually leads to what Miri Scharf calls 'secondary traumatization,' an 'indirect psychological impact' that engulfs the generation and simultaneously opens a channel for empathetic identification with the survivors. It is the third generation who are born in exile with taut memories and an unattainable faith in a home that will struggle to comprehend their fractured identity. As Charlotte Delbo asserts, "Auschwitz is so deeply etched in my memory that I cannot forget one moment of it. So, you are living in Auschwitz? No, I live next to

it... Unlike the snake's skin, the skin of memory does not renew itself... Thinking about it makes me tremble with apprehension (Delbo 115). Siddhartha Gigoo contends,

There are other humiliating incidents from those days that we shudder to even tell ourselves, let alone others. They should never be revealed to anyone. Such is the nature of those dark things that we were made to go through and endure. Their remembrance—the most painful thing in life. But they shouldn't be forgotten either. They are the truths of our history. They are the only evidence of the inhuman and degrading acts done against us and the only evidence that some of us survived against all odds. These truths are also the sentries which will guard our future generations against civilizational obliteration and oblivion. Three generations later, in our very lifetime, the third-generation mercenaries are back with unimaginable vengeance. They are as deadly and full of hate as their predecessors. (“Pahalgam Terror Attack”)

Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* provides an in-depth analysis of how children inherit parental trauma. This inheritance follows through a number of interlinked channels that significantly affect Sridar's development and identity. Sridar's father, Lasa, suffers a profound psychological breakdown after displacement. Unable to process the trauma of exile, he retreats into memory and despair, “Lasa was not able to make up his mind whether such an act of mass migration was a sign of cowardice or great strength and courage. Even years later, he would not be able to fathom the depth of the wounds the migration inflicted on a generation” (Gigoo TGOS 72). The novel indicates that the children of traumatized parents tend to develop early caretaking skills and give up their own basic requirements. Sridar watches his father becoming a ghost himself, present in body but inhabiting a vanished world. This breakdown compels a role reversal in which Sridar has to become emotionally responsible for his father. Siddhartha Gigoo's own generation and that of his parents exist in an odd suspension between a pleasant, tranquil past and an unsure present. As he mentions in *The Garden of Solitude*, “We have found our new home now. Maybe our children will return to our old homes as tourists and stay in hotels” (Gigoo TGOS 134). It is the third generation who are born in exile with taut memories and an unattainable faith in a home that will struggle to comprehend their fractured identity. As he narrates,

We have to pass the time somehow, live a quiet life, grow old and pretend to laugh. But we must remember our ancestors; remind ourselves who we are and where we came from. We must pass on the stories of our ancestors from one generation to another. You must remember to look back and reflect on our journey. Someday, you will have to search for the shreds of your identity, your essence and your own history (Gigoo 158).

In the context of forced migration, loss is not merely physical but deeply psychological, transmitted across generations as inherited grief. Siddhartha Gigoo freezes the appalling fact of intergenerational trauma, in which loss of homeland dissolves current life as well as future hope. This inherited suffering, transmitted from one generation to another, makes sure that the trauma of exile is never a closed book but a living scar transported across generations. "For the migrants, 'tomorrow' brings no hope, and 'today' is a burden weighing heavy on the souls. There is nothing to look forward to... A community is on the verge of extinction... Our identity is imprisoned in a ration card. This should change, or else we will be forgotten forever" (Gigoo TGOS 157). Displacement is never static. Kashmiri Pandits who were brutally pushed out of the valley in 1990, trauma about loss and estrangement continue to haunt generations. Susan Martin writes,

Forced migration often involves trauma, dislocation, and abrupt change in life. At a minimum, the displaced may face emotional problems and difficulties in adjustment resulting from the loss of family and community support. More serious mental health problems may arise from torture and sexual abuse prior to or after the flight (Martin 65).

Siddhartha Gigoo in *The Garden of Solitude* masterfully depicts the transmission of trauma through silence, capturing the emotional burden of what is unspoken in displaced families. In his nuanced storytelling, the ordinary home spaces are loaded with tension of suppressed memory and unresolved loss. As he mentions, "The past was too beautiful to be left behind. The past evoked a longing to be re-lived. The past aspires to race past the present and the future. The present was just a crippled memory, a child's play, a bubble" (Gigoo 70). In their new home, certain subjects became forbidden territories. Friends left behind. The house they had abandoned. Yet these silences spoke louder than words, and Sridar learned to navigate the topography of his parents' unspoken grief. As he says, "Each year in exile brought merciless delusions and forgetfulness. For Sridar, tracing people meant tracing the dead" (Gigoo 203). Warsan

Shire, in her poem *Home*, portrays the raw reality of the intergenerational trauma caused by wars and displacement. She personifies the trauma that refugees have to endure when the security of their homes transforms into a hell of a tragedy. For refugees and displaced communities, trauma is simply not an event of the past; it gets embedded in family stories, silences, and inherited fears.

I want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore

The Pandits initially believed that exile was temporary, expecting that they would return to Kashmir following the re-establishment of law and order. The Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in 1990 had even stated that the Pandits were to return to their homes with the restoration of normalcy (Kashmir Times). Siddhartha Gigoo also writes, "We thought that our exile was going to be temporary and that we would be able to return to our homes in Kashmir. Little did we know that our fate had been sealed" (Gigoo ALSOA xiv). The trauma of forced migration is not confined to the act of departure but rather seeps into the emotional landscape of families, forming the lives of children born far from the home they call 'home.' The artifacts taken by the survivors are meticulously preserved by the following generations, who also conserve the network of memories, tales, and experiences that are kept in these quiet storehouses. Their inheritance inspires the coming generation to not forget and narrate the stories of their families and communities to keep their individual histories alive. "For the migrants, 'tomorrow' brings no hope, and 'today' is a burden weighing heavy on the souls...A community is on the verge of extinction... Our identity is imprisoned in a ration card. This should change, or else we will be forgotten forever" (Gigoo TGOS 157).

For Kashmiri Pandits, exile has been not just the loss of a homeland but has generated a deep sense of hopelessness that pervades all aspects of everyday life. Dispossessed from their ancestral villages and transported into nasty camps or unfamiliar cities, most of the Kashmiri Pandits speak of being suspended between the past and the present, never quite able to belong to either. The writers, while narrating their experiences, not only keep the memories alive but also provide younger generations with a lexicon for their own suffering and a template for collective identity. These narratives turn

homelessness from an unspoken affliction into a shared story, creating ties of compassion and opening pathways to communal healing. Siddhartha Gigoo writes, "A sense of homelessness ignited their hearts with love for one another. A sense of loss made them embrace each other and seek solace in grief. Each one had a story to narrate" (Gigoo TGOS 67)

To conclude, the writings of Arvind Gigoo and Siddhartha Gigoo bear eloquent witness to the lasting effect of transgenerational trauma, conveying not just the inherited pain and silence passed down through generations but also the resistance and resilience that arise from it. By providing a voice for those whose tales have been silenced or misrepresented, their writings do more than recount suffering—they serve as acts of healing and reclamation. As we continue to grapple with the afterlives of past violence and inherited grief, their writings provide essential pathways for compassion and resilience. Their work reminds us of literature's crucial role in witnessing and fostering understanding across time and generations. The latest attack in Pahalgam is a grim reminder that even years after the first exodus, the community continues to be vulnerable to fresh wounds opening up old scars of historical trauma. Such attacks not only reinforce a shared memory of loss and fear but also highlight the imperative need for systemic intervention. The trauma borne by the Kashmiri Pandit community over generations is a keen indictment of successive government's failure to provide justice and facilitate healing. It is the moral duty of the state not merely to safeguard the physical security of its people but also to mend the historical wounds with authentic restitution, sincere acknowledgment, and compassionate psychological support. Without this unwavering commitment to action, the unaddressed trauma of one generation becomes the silent legacy of the next, perpetuating cycles of fear, mistrust, and division that risk tearing apart the very core of society. Rahul Pandita contends, "This won't be the last humiliation we will witness in Kashmir, or elsewhere... For how long do we keep facing these blows to our collective psyche and call it resilience?" (Pandita).

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