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AFTER DISPLACEMENT: CHILDHOOD, FAMILY MEMORY AND THE UNSETTLED MEANING OF HOME IN SIDDHARTHA GIGOO'S *A LONG SEASON OF ASHES*

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Abstract: This study explores the description of Kashmiri Pandit exile in Siddhartha Gigoo's *A Long Season of Ashes* by evaluating how displacement shapes experiences of childhood, family memory, belonging, and the meaning of home. The study aims to extend the meaning of exile beyond physical displacement and further explores its continuing emotional, cultural, psychological, and familial dimensions. It adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology along with a close textual analysis of Gigoo's narrative on exile, human development, memory, and belonging. The main area of attention is the disrupted childhood, the idea of homeland is preserved through memories, and negotiation of habitation and belonging. Therefore, the study argues that exile has emotional and psychological dimension which contains long lasting side effects on the understanding of belonging, home, cultural attachment, and tradition. The findings contribute to literary discussions of displacement by highlighting the endurance of unsettled home after physical departure.

IndexTerms: Memory, exile, childhood, unsettled home, displacement.

Introduction

Exile is generally understood as a condition where one has to take physical departure from his own homeland. And he is compelled to develop a new lifestyle somewhere else. But exile is not limited to physical departure rather it is the first stage of it. It is followed by more painful and unsaid stages of life; emotional attachment with the homeland, psychological affects after separation, and cultural connection through memories, traditions, everyday practices, and family history. Therefore, exile should be analysed beyond the movement of physical displacement as it is a continuous condition affecting their identity and belonging. As Edward W. Said observes in his discussion of exile, separation from one's homeland produces a continuing condition of estrangement in which the relationship between the individual and the lost home remains deeply consequential (173–74). In a related direction, Avtar Brah's conceptualization of diaspora and "the homing of diaspora" complicates the relationship between displacement and home by demonstrating how attachments to home may persist within diasporic experience (190).

The life of Kashmiri Pandits offers the wider dimension to study exile. The displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley has changed the relationship between homeland and belonging yet it is impossible to make geographical separation inseparable from questions of identity, cultural continuity, loss, and memory. Family narratives, everyday acts of remembrance, and memories may continue serve to shape their values for homeland has been snatched. These things do not simply let them forget about the loss. Exile begins with the situation of physical displacement and does not end with resettlement as it carries more of somatic emotions.

Exile becomes a part of negotiation between past and present, belonging and alienation, memory ad empirical knowledge. A shift in literary representation has been taken as earlier the question was; where the displaced subject is. But now it is more complex as it deals with questions like; where the displaced subject feels at home, how lost homeland is shaping the identity, and how memories are part of their family and cultural life. *A Long Season of Ashes* by Siddhartha Gigoo comes with providing an expanded space to discuss exile in this way. The two main representations lie in the contrast between being displaced from the homeland ad how one remains connected to it after displacement. Less visible dimension is introduced in latter condition and it becomes more relevant with the time. The meaning of physical exile is extended with emotional attachment able

to preserve sense of belongingness, cultural practices are still followed at new place, and family memories keep introducing the history of their nativity to those who have not directly experienced the loss. These dimensions extend its meaning beyond geographical displacement but also do not replace physical exile.

Therefore, *A Long Season of Ashes* represents the concept of multidimensional nature of exile. It examines the intersection of physical, emotional, psychological, cultural, and familial representation of Kashmiri Pandit exile. Silence is considered one of the important aspects of a child's understanding of homeland through remembrance and narration. It also further examines how the responsiveness of homeland is sustained and constructed within familial spaces. Through the perspective of childhood and the structure of family memory and silence, Gigoo exemplifies that there can be absence of homeland while the presence of emotions, cultural values, and psychological problem is felt. Thus, Exile unfolds a condition where one is connected to home, being away from home physically.

Exile, Memory, and the Transmission of Trauma

Exile is studied as a movement of uncertainty and chaos as one feels insecure about any assurance of future. The moment of physical departure disrupts their social relationships, familiar surroundings, everyday routine, and the security of the house. There are no immediate answers to their questions such as; where will they go, will they ever return, who will live in their houses? The moment affects them psychologically.

Such moments are full of fear, loss, uncertainty, and terror. The forced departure endures established recollections because the experienced emotions remain attached. The memory of locking the doors of their own home and witnessing the disbandment of an organized way of life; it is present in the consciousness mind after a longer period of time also. Such traumatic events belong to historical moment, but the emotional consequences are not limited to that moment.

The experience of Gigoo's father of buying a house in Palam acts as a reappearance of a pain related to home. Initially, he finds a possibility of stability after displacement. But when after buying the property, the registration finds no legality. It recalls the earlier experience of displacement and becomes a form of renewed anxiety. The trauma of a forceful displacement triggers once again as this time also, it was not only a financial loss but hope goes into vain. The pain and memories are reactivated when such circumstances occur in front of them.

Similarly, the psychological consequences of exile are revealed by the mental condition of Gigoo's grandfather after displacement. He could not bear the separation from Kashmir as he never stepped out from the valley since he was born. But after this forced displacement, he unable to accept or integrate the separation from home. His grandmother's last desire was to return to the native place before death. And die there only. But the family could not fulfil this last desire as well. It becomes again an experience of trauma for those who remain, representing it as an inability to return to homeland.

Trauma cannot be defined only as a belonging to the precise moment of displacement. Rather, it reappears through later experiences, acquires new meaning, and adds more moments of loss and pain. Present reactivates the past as the memories of past are still shaping their current everyday life. The emotional life is again disrupted as no cultural practices and traditional values are followed in the same way which their forefathers had originated in this new environment.

Therefore, exile produces fear, loss, uncertainty, and dislocation. Such lived experiences become a part of their permanent memory and allow the emotions to be active again in the present life. Trauma neither should be studies as a closed response to an ended historical event. So, the meaning of exile is extended beyond the physical displacement because the trauma produced by displacement influences their understanding of home, security, family, belonging, and cultural identity.

Childhood as the Site of Experiencing Exile

The childhood of Gigoo reveals that exile can also be studied through the transformation of everyday childhood apart from the loss of homeland. "From a cold winter dawn at home to a scorching night in the camp, it has been the longest day of my life (Gigoo 9)." It is the description of his initial days of camp life where he finds the displacement is not a matter of hours, it has long lasting emotional and psychological consequences. It is not merely a change of location rather it is the transformation of his whole childhood. "It has taken just a day to turn us into refugees (10)." When a child has no full-fledged information about the problems of life. At that time, a condition is imposed upon him, describing his identity as refugee. Within a single day, the home is changed and the identity is changed. This is unsettling from the perspective of childhood. Exile establishes an extension of emotional and psychological life of a subject's subsequent. It is not a single day journey where just physical location is changed. It is an abrupt

change of the environment through which a child understands safety and belonging.

His recollections of camp life reveal that they were forced to live in a world where the basic necessities are difficult to have. A child who is from a place full of fresh air, fresh water, and a garden full of apples; but now he has to live in tents where no water and food is available. He has to fight for every single thing. Human development occurs between the growing person and the environment in which he lives. "The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner 21)."

The disruption of privacy is equally important. Families are forced to live in a congested area where the boundaries between private and public life becomes difficult to maintain. All of sudden, a child is exposed to the adult's private life aspects as Gigoo hears some unusual sounds. "Strange sounds of touching and licking, hushed whispers. I insert my fingers into Hina's ears. She could not hear any of this (Gigoo12)." Another dimension of trauma has been disclosed through this that it is not always the act of violence which leaves an impact on child's psychic. It can also emerge with exposing the everyday personal adult life in front of a child. And his attempt to protect his sister exemplifies that there is a need to reconstruct a sense of privacy in an environment where privacy has lost its essence.

In an age, where a child throws tantrums on parents to facilitate him different types of books, games, and clothes. But displaced children are facing problem such as using washroom is a task which takes a whole day. "There is only one latrine bathroom for the entire building. It would be best if you could wait until the afternoon. Let the elders go first as they need to go out and get on with their day (90)." Exile becomes a part of their body as they are living in highly bodily discomfort, no sanitation, lack of basic facilities, and a dependency upon communal arguments. Exile is studied as a deprivation of ordinary privacy and comfort as the consequences of loss is seen through child's relationship with time, identity, privacy, family, and security.

Family Memory and the Making of an Imagined Homeland

The experience of displacement does not erase the before memories of childhood. On the other side, present life is full of discomfort, uncertainty, loss, and

memories of previous life has more significance. Remembering home becomes a way to return to the world that is physically not accessible. Family memory is more than a recollection of past as these memories become a mean through which the meaning of home is preserved.

Gigoo's memories of Kashmiri home are full of efforts and sacrifices of family members. The construction of home in valley is the constant memory that keeps hitting his mind even when after decades, he selects a house to buy. Memories of his mother selling her jewellery and father is investing all his savings to build a house that later was snatched. The way his grandmother asks him to accompany her to temple and then both discuss the family cultural values to be followed since ages. The belonging was defined by the cultural practices, education, family, and the ordinary routines.

The remembered world is experienced with abundance, familiarity, privacy, and security which is now encountered by insecurity and uncertainty. An emotional attachment with the garden of house, the streets, the school, the house, the equation with friends; and they become more meaning as they are absent in present life. Memory is more like a compensatory thing which allows to retain an internal relationship with physically interrupted life. "But now, here, away from our home and in exile, many of the things we had followed for years have come to an end and many others things still alive are ending (118)."

The idea of imagined homeland defines what it would mean recover the lost homeland. Every child has a hidden desire to provide his family, a life of security where they can recover the sense of home. And even it is also imagined that is there any possibility to become a part of lost life again? The remembered homeland conserves living world of childhood that has been broken by displacement.

Family memory maintains a relationship with lost homeland which is inaccessible in the same manner. Memory keeps a track of internal landscape that reconstructs the idea of home.

The Unsettled Meaning of Home

The question of home is not resolved by having a new geographical location. Having a new home, establishment of employment, the continuation of education, and the reconstruction of family life may provide the stability in materialistic situation, but these facilities do not avail the emotional attachment that they used to have with homeland. There is no association of new life with the

life before displacement as no reproduction of same cultural values and emotions. Home remains an unsettled concept as every displaced person want to occupy their imagined homeland. Exile separates habitation from belonging.

Gigoo's attempt to rebuild a life in Delhi cannot replace the earlier definition of home. The life is reconstructed but the meaning of life is always influenced by what has been lost. At the moment of entering the new home, the already lost home's geographical structure as well as moments spent there become unforgettable. The new house may provide stability as they are not roaming from one camp to another. But this stability does not weaken the significance of the house left behind.

There is a distinction between a house and a home. A house is a physical structure whereas, a home is developed with the familiarity, relationships, cultural practices, security, and personal history. It is seen with the emotional response of his mother when they settle down at a new house. There is always a comparison of that new building with the old one.

A homeland is not limited to landscape or architecture. Rather, it also includes neighbourhoods, language, customs, religious practices, food, festivals, traditions, and everyday routine. But with displacement, these things are also removed from one's life and preserving them at new place does not give the same experience. Performing cultural practices at an unfamiliar place gives different experience even. Memories are preserved but cannot be recreated. But new life is open to adapt as materialistic comfort is also a need. And adaptation and attachment to homeland can coexist. A new setup of life becomes familiar, but it does not necessarily mean replacement.

Therefore, the concept of unsettled meaning of home complicates that there is a temporal endpoint of exile. The emotional question of home remains unresolved. There is a negotiation between what has been lost and what can be constructed. The end of physical displacement cannot restore the emotional belonging of displaced people.

Conclusion

Exile is extended beyond physical departure as represented in *A Long Season of Ashes.* Gigoo's own childhood experiences strengthen the definition of affected childhood with disrupted insecurity, traumatic memory, fractured cultural continuity, and no sense of belonging. The experiences of childhood do not remain confined to past only; rather they influence the present understanding of family,

privacy, security, and identity. Memory becomes a negotiating part between lost homeland and current scenario of life.

A new house may provide shelter, security, privacy, and comfort. A new city may provide good education and employment. Life can be improved on materialistic basis but none of the changes can produce the emotional, cultural, and historical meanings attached to homeland. Gigoo unfolds the concept of continued unsettledness of home after resettlement. The main question arises here is that whether the new place provides emotional meaning of lost home or not.

Homeland survives in multiple forms; as memories created in Kashmir valley, as traumatic childhood experiences, as family recollection, as cultural practices, as psychological attachment, and as a hope to return. There is the possibility of coexistence of new adaptation with the attachment to what has been lost. But the hopes and desires of returning back are unresolved in nature and it is considered as one of the important aspects of the present paper. Memory and remembrance play a significant role in generating emotional meaning of home.

Desires are unresolved in nature as it is not about having a life away from homeland, rather the question is more intense as it is about whether the survival and belonging can ever become interchangeable completely. Siddhartha Gigoo's description does not support this interchange. As the idea of home is full of memories and possibilities. Exile is ended geographically but emotionally it is not fully settled.

The concept of unsettled home is a result to a condition that produces a continue difference between where one lives and where one feels at home. Exile becomes a part of negotiation of belonging. Physically, homeland is distant but emotional presence remains active. Therefore, the end of displacement means starting era of a lifelong negotiation with the concept of having a home.

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