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History as adaptation: Narrativization of memory in Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*

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Abstract:

An individual's memories of events of historical significance, often narrated as memoirs, have the potential to expand human perception from personal history and trauma to collective historical consciousness and collective trauma. Studies on autobiographical narratives involve various approaches in investigating self, narrative identity, emotional valence, and construction of meaning. This study attempts to elucidate the role of autobiographical memory and narration in connecting subjective-level history and trauma with national history and collective trauma through textual interpretation of Farah Bashir's memoir, Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir. The memoir narrates the author's disturbing memories of the insurgency in the 1990s and her experiences of psychological trauma that followed it. The insurgency of the 1990s holds greater importance in Kashmir's history as many significant events like the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, the Gawkadal Massacre, and the Kunan Poshpora incident happened during this period. This article employs the theoretical framework of Roger Brown and James Kulik's flashbulb memories to construe the role of narrative technique in exhibiting the perceptual transformation from personal level to collective level by discussing aspects of history and trauma. Through the study, the article attempts to signify the importance of self-narration in historical revisionism and in tracing collective trauma.

Introduction

History features ideas of truth about every aspect of society which includes politics, social relationships, and culture. Thomas Leich delineates the evolution of history from being the usual documentation of facts to a record of style. This is interpreted as “history as adaptation”, which marks the representation of facts in the form of art, literature, and film. It is constructed through the means of language accentuating the meaning of the events rather than a verbal imitation of the events. Robert A Rosenstone opines, “that history itself is a construction, not an observation, because ‘language is not transparent and cannot mirror the past as it really was; rather than reflecting it, language creates and structures history and imbues it with meaning’” (as cited in Leich, 2015, p. 8). This argument necessitates an improvisation of historiography with the inclusion of art forms, oral narratives, epics, and autobiographical narratives. The inclusion of literary documents in the study of history emphasizes the importance of documenting memory narratives of national and historical significance. UNESCO, to preserve the cultural heritage of regions around the world, introduced the concept of intangible cultural heritage, implying the initiative of making those intangible cultural forms like collective memory into tangible cultural structures like memorial sites and narratives. Memories are intangible cultural elements that attain tangible forms through the narratives of life stories.

Life stories are primarily expressions of history and memory. Laura Solanilla considers memory institutions as manifestations of intangible cultural heritage and states that “Life stories are so important, and can justifiably be considered significant manifestations of the heritage, because they form part of a much more complex construct related to the collective memory of a particular community or human group and are part of their identity mechanisms” (2008, p. 105). Life stories, presenting realistic events of society, act as a reference for history. Narrativization of realistic events includes various kinds of historical records such as annals, chronicles, and personal history (biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs). The notions of history and memory are interconnected despite their operative differences. Narratives of historical certitudes are written in the process of reflecting the memory of the important events of society objectively. Silke Schmidt in his book, *(Re)Framing the Arab/Muslim: Mediating Orientalism in Contemporary Arab American Life Writing*, validates the extensive function of self-reflective writing by mentioning that “the writing of self always involves the writing of society at large” (2014, p. 49). Inclusive of sociohistorical concerns, the traditional and hybrid models of self-reflective writings apprehend the relational existence of human and non-human entities, demystifying their monofunctional characteristics (Ní Dhúill 2020; Dix 2018; García 2020; Batzke et. al. 2021; Jensen 2019). In modern historiography, subjective historical content

is considered a reflection of realistic events without the influence of personal intentions and fantasies. According to Hayden White, a historical text of personal narratives “summons up a ‘substance,’ operates in the domain of memory rather than of dream or fantasy, and unfolds under the sign of ‘the real’ rather than that of the ‘imaginary’” (1980, p. 13).

Life stories with social relevance about a specific region often substitute historical discourses and also act as a tangible document of memories which certainly develop into collective memories. Maurice Halbwachs remarks about the construction of collective memory in his discussion on generational memory as “family quickly acquires a history, and just as its memory becomes enriched from day to day, since the family’s recollections become more precise and fixed in their personal form, the family progressively tends to interpret in its own manner the conceptions it borrows from society” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 83). With the assistance of concepts borrowed from society, individuals and family construct their memory narratives. Reflecting on this socio-cognitive process, David Herman states, “cognition should be viewed as a supra- or transindividual activity distributed across groups functioning in specific contexts, rather than as a wholly internal process unfolding within the minds of solitary, autonomous, and de-situated cognizers” (2007, p. 319). This way, the foundation of historical discourses can be traced back to the life stories of the members of a society. Subsequently, the history of Kashmir is considered to be a reflection of the collective memories of its society. The land of Kashmir is the prime focus of an intense geopolitical conflict that prevails in the Indian subcontinent. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 gave rise to a political and religious crisis in Kashmir resulting in some remarkable tragic incidents of national importance. The resultant permanent memories of the people of Kashmir play the role of primary sources for the documentation of historical discourses. Consequently, the people of Kashmir are concerned about the past because its reflection in the present has resulted in the prevailing conflict and militarization. The political and religious disruption in the region is triggered by debates over primordial ethnic settlements and administrative policies practised in the past. The people of Kashmir often produce tangible narratives of cultural and individual memory recorded in the form of personal history that are passed down from generation to generation.

This paper attempts to interpret the importance of personal narratives in conveying historical consciousness among the people of Kashmir concerning the events related to the insurgency of the 1990s through literary interpretation of Farah Bashir’s memoir, *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*. Farah Bashir, the protagonist, documents her memories of being a 12-year-old girl in disputed Kashmir during the turbulent times. The author narrates

her experiences of girlhood in Kashmir as episodes during her grandmother Bobeh's funeral which act as the cue for a memory retrieval process developing a parallel narrative. The account of Farah Bashir's memories includes events of historical importance like the Gawkadal Massacre, the Kunan Poshpura incident, the kidnap of Dr Rubaiya Sayeed and certain details inseparably associated with the social and political conditions of Kashmir. The novel's primary concern of portraying the subjugation of women and secondary victimization in a warzone has been discussed by many researchers. Shikha Sharma emphasizes the fracture of female identity in the conflict-riven Kashmir as "trauma could be either individual or collective which leads to identity change" (Sharma 2021). Anupama Bandopadhyay, on the other hand, in her article describes Farah Bashir's navigation of womanhood in the restrictive spaces of militarization by analysing the feminine consciousness in public and private spaces (Bandopadhyay, 2023). Though research mostly focuses on the experiences of women in a war zone and their encounters of double marginalization, they overlook the significance of autobiographical narratives in constructing historical and social consciousness. Therefore, this article attempts to discern the memoir's narrative structure from the perspectives of Brown and Kulik's concept of flashbulb memory, examining the parallelism between personal narratives and individual cognitive progression. Considering trauma as an aftermath of the remembrance of events of high consequentiality, the article focuses on personal trauma and its transition into collective trauma in the context of Kashmir.

Flashbulb memories

A flashbulb memory is a special classification under autobiographical memory where it accounts self-related memories of events – historical and personal. Initially, memory researchers Roger Brown and James Kulik referred to this peculiar memory case, subsumed by autobiographical memory, as the "special memory" of an individual. In the seminal work, "Flashbulb Memory" (1977), the theorists through empirical research introduce a new phenomenon in memory research, demonstrating the snapshot of a moment. As Brown and Kulik remark, flashbulb memories are perceptual representations, reporting the "memory of one's own circumstance on first hearing the news" (1977, p. 74). Important elements of the memory structure include: "Place" in which he learned of the news, the 'Ongoing Event' that was interrupted by the news, the 'Informant' who brought the news, 'Affect in Others' upon hearing the news, as well as 'Own Affect' and finally some immediate 'Aftermath' on hearing the news" (1977, p. 80). They signify the factors involved in building a subjective memory through an emotional arousal caused by the news input of an idiosyncratic event. The event

need not necessarily be a socially significant one; it can also be caused by personal jolts. There are certain conditions for a memory to be considered a flashbulb memory, but it boils down to two determinants — “high level of surprise, a high level of consequentiality” (1977, p. 73). A high level of surprise and emotional arousal contribute to greater impact for a long-lasting memory. To be specific, the process of the constructive memory mechanism of a consequential memory involves frequent rehearsal which often results in overt rehearsal, i.e. verbal narrative. Narratives present life stories in the form of storytelling, autobiography and memoir, representing the human act of remembrance and its consequences or aftermath of memory revisionism. Individual memories are often doubted for their inconsistencies and distortion in the process of remembrance. In this regard, successive researchers of flashbulb memory added the missing element, “perceptual image” (Muzzolini et.al., 2020, p. 3), in coordinating the consistency of the memories in the reception context. The focus being laid on the structure of memory construction and narrative structure of memoir identifies similitude in the progression of memory and plot in the case of Farah Bashir’s memoir.

Narrativization of flashbulb memories

Memoir as a personal narrative reflects an individual’s memory and even sometimes replicates the cognitive progression of the character’s mind, as is the case of Farah Bashir’s memoir. Memory, thus made tangible fulfils “the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity” (White, 1980, p. 8). The narrative of the memoir, *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* reflects the protagonist’s memory retrieval process which constitutes the elements of a retrieval cue, recollective experience and memory performance. The memoir is composed as a compilation of chapters titled “The Day I Was Dead”, “Memory of the Scalp”, “Do Wishes Come True?” and a few more, each narrating an episode of the author’s memories with traces of the characteristics of flashbulb memory. Furthermore, the chapters are categorized under subtopics: “EVENING”, “NIGHT”, “EARLY HOURS”, “DAWN”, “MORNING”, and “AFTERLIFE” referring to the parallel sequence of Bobeh’s funeral – metaphorically indicating the mood shifts in Farah Bashir’s narration of her memories. The protagonist’s memories are preceded with retrieval cues and their aftermath, replicating the structural elements of flashbulb memory.

For instance, the first chapter in *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, titled “The Day I Was Dead”, documents the author’s confrontation of terror and trepidation caused by Kashmir’s militarized situation on the day of Eid in 1989. Farah Bashir recalls that incident

from her memory once she sees her dead grandmother's face which resembled the one on the day of the Eid, 1989, "Pale, silent and stiffened" (Bashir, 2021, p. 6). The similitude in the action and expression acts as a stimulus in providing a cue to the "stored episodic information" (Tulving, 1983, p. 46). Endel Tulving, an Estonian-Canadian psychologist remarks, "A retrieval cue can be thought of as the especially salient or significant part of retrieval information, those aspects of the individual's physical and cognitive environment that initiate and influence the process of retrieval" (1983, p. 171). With the retrieval cue, Farah Bashir narrates her past, especially the day of Eid, as it was then she got her first salon visit for the upcoming celebrations. For the protagonist, the celebration turned out to be a nightmare as it was her first experience of walking in the deserted streets of a curfewed locality, and the curfew was caused by the gunfight between the security forces and militants. Returning home, Farah Bashir learns the details of the incident:

Ramzan Kaak came to the room and said that there was news of multiple shootings, and the city was under curfew. Barely a kilometre from where our house was, next to father's shop in Boher Kadal, there was a shooting incident involving a well-known militant, Mushtaq Latram. Absorbing the news from all around made my hands shake. In a moment of confusion and fear, I plucked a chunk of my hair from right behind my ear. It hurt to pull the hair out, but my hands needed to clutch at something. (2021, pp. 11-12)

These lines manifest a glimpse of the protagonist's experience of remembering a flashbulb memory with the elements of place, ongoing event, informant, affect in others, own affect and aftermath. Subsequently, Ramzan Kaak who informs about the prevailing situation in the locality acts as the "Informant", while Farah Bashir returning home and her family's reactions explain the "Ongoing event" and "Affect in others" respectively. Furthermore, the instant fear and confusion as emotions experienced by the protagonist can be interpreted as the element of "Own affect", and as for the "Aftermath", the girl's action of pulling out hair is an expression of experiencing trauma. Narrativization of this chapter as an episode of the protagonist's memory follows the structure of flashbulb memory and the event satisfies the conditions of high level of surprise and emotional arousal. Throughout the memoir, each chapter follows the same structure of the overt rehearsal of a flashbulb memory, with retrieval cue, recollective experience and aftermath as memory performance. The author adopted the structure of flashbulb memory to document her personal history in the form of a memoir attempting to impart an insight into the personal connection in reading a historical discourse. Memoir, as a

genre, exemplifies the exploration of history through an adaptation. Since, this memoir explicitly illustrates the cognitive progression of the protagonist providing a comprehensible sense of the first time of hearing the death of the then American President John F Kennedy to analyse permanent memory for incidental concomitants and the biological significance of the memory mechanism. The development of impactful memory requires a greater level of consequentiality, which is exemplified by national events – idiosyncratic, significant and capable of infusing shared memories, leading to powerful construction of flashbulb memories. Here, the theorists emphasize that nationally significant events are more likely to create flashbulb memories. They write that the President's assassination "seems to have precipitated the effect in greater strength, and for a larger number of persons . . . However, it is not the only events in our recent national history that have had this effect for some: the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and of Martin Luther King and the attempted assignation of George Wallace and Gerald Ford" (Brown and Kulik, 1977, p. 75). Similarly, Farah Bashir's memoir mentions a few subjective experiences and emotions related to nationally significant events exemplifying flashbulb memory. For instance, the text *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* deals with historically and socially significant events of the territory of Kashmir. Kashmir's political instability was caused by the political and social upheaval after the partition of the Indian subcontinent into two nations. The partition gave rise to the demands of self-determination in some sections of society. The protests for self-determination which began as non-violent movements later turned out to be violent. Intervention by foreign elements further escalated the situation, and as a consequence, the state resorted to military intervention. This move drastically affected the security situation and resulted in conflicts between militants and security forces which created high levels of consequentiality, personally and collectively. Concisely, certain conjunctures in the pages of Kashmir's history after 1947 include Dr Rubaiya Sayeed's kidnapping, the Gawkadal Massacre and many more involving the militants, security forces and common people of Kashmir.

The previously discussed instance of Farah Bashir's memory, which she describes as "The Day I Was Dead", involves a famous militant, Mushtaq Latram. He is a notorious separatist and operates with a few terrorist organizations. His involvement in various militant activities in Kashmir like the hijack of Indian Airlines Flight 814 in 1999 (Telford, 2001) marked a serious threat to the national security of India. Latram's involvement caused serious casualties at the shooting in Boher Kadal, minutes before Farah Bashir and her sister's journey in the curfewed streets of Kashmir, illustrating an event of a threat to national security. High levels of surprise and emotional arousal thus caused the construction of permanent memory of

the protagonist. Similarly, in the memoir, the event of Dr Rubaiya Sayeed's kidnapping also represents Farah Bashir's flashbulb memory of national significance which implants the consciousness of the serious consequences of life in a conflict zone. RK Jerath's *Rajatarangini of Composite State of Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh* marks a distinguished mention of this event in the pages of Mufti Mohammad Syed's political reign as "In 1989, within few days of taking over as the Union Minister for Home Affairs, his third daughter, Dr. Rubaiya Syed, was kidnapped. She was released in exchange for the release of few militants" (2023, p. 525) indicating its national importance. Farah Bashir's instincts regarding this kidnapping are expressed as,

the terror Laxmisree must have felt when her college senior Dr Rubaiya Sayeed was kidnapped by militants as she was coming out of Lal Ded Hospital, where she worked as an intern. The militants, who were released in exchange of her, near Father's shop in Boher Kadal, received celebratory gunfire. . . . I hoped to catch Laxmisree's eyes one day and ask her if she knew Dr Rubaiya Sayeed well, or if she knew anyone who had seen the militants take her hostage. But the truth was that I was too terrified myself to ask such questions. (Bashir, 2021, p. 87).

Through this, the author briefs her recollected memory related to the kidnapping, a nationally significant event. The linguistic articulation of Farah Bashir's fear of militants in the excerpt elaborates the intensity of the psychic detriment defining the high level of emotional arousal. According to Brown and Kulik, national events with a high level of consequentiality create greater impact in the retention of memory as the person constructs strong memory through frequent overt rehearsal of the event. Here, it emphasizes the need for surprise and consequentiality in flashbulb memory: "The phenomenon called "retrograde amnesia" suggests that there may be a level of surprise or shock that is too great for a FB [Flashbulb] memory...of mild arousal and attention on small departures from expectation suggests that there may be a level that is insufficient for a FB memory" (Brown and Kulik, 1977, p. 84). In that case, Farah Bashir's experiences of intense events that happened in Kashmir during the period 1989–1991 lead to the frequent rehearsal of a flashbulb memory in the form of verbal narrative (memoir). The memoir includes her emotions and feelings related to the event providing a subjective perspective of a nationally significant event which supports Brown and Kulik's claim on the involvement of a national event as a condition of consequentiality in flashbulb memory. Therefore, through the method of compiling several flashbulb memories of national importance in the memoir, the author presents personal narrative as a subjective tool to approach national

history in a different form. This way memoir functions as an alternative narrative of documented history.

The memoir not only communicates the flashbulb memories caused by impactful national events but also of personal jolts. Events of shock and surprise of personal accounts are referred to as personal jolts by the theorists, “that not only world figures had consequentiality for oneself, but also, obviously, relatives, friends, admired persons and others could be very consequential” (Brown and Kulik, 1977, p. 82). The death of Affi, a cousin of Farah Bashir, is accounted as a flashbulb memory of personal jolt in the narrative. The protagonist remembers her relationship with him and mentions her cousin’s words of wisdom related to the conflict. Farah Bashir provides a detailed description of her cousin and memories of her last encounter with him before his death expressing their close relationship and association which lead to the personal jolt caused by hearing the news of his death in the excerpt.

he smiled his usual effusive smile. His green eyes shone with kindness. I looked back and remember him riding away in his denim jacket. That was the last time I saw him alive. He was killed a week later.

A week later, his bullet-riddled body, with his bandaged throat, was laid in the middle of their small lawn, outside their home. That was his funeral. (2021, p. 139)

The severity of confronting the horrific death of Affi triggered Farah Bashir’s emotions which constructs a firm memory in her mind tending to frequent rehearsal of the event. Considering the protagonist’s fear of the security forces, their involvement in killing her cousin out of mere suspicion of being a militant escalated her emotions. These sudden occurrences that convey surprise create permanent memories in an individual and they are marked as flashbulb memories of personal jolts. Though flashbulb memory often indicates national events, personal events like Affi’s unexpected death create a greater impact in the process of emotional arousal. The memory mechanism of flashbulb memory in the case of personal jolts emphasizes the requirement of consequentiality and affective attitude of the person in terms of Catrin Finkenauer’s emotional-integrative model. The emotional-integrative model is derived from the previous models of Brown and Kulik, and Conway. The significant factor of the expanded model is that it embraces the priorly ignored aspect, affective attitude. C Finkenauer explains the reason behind the significance of emotional arousal in flashbulb memory, emphasising the role played by “antecedent personal characteristics” of the subject of remembrance as the “importance, emotional feeling state, and rehearsal are also determined by antecedent personal

characters" and they are "assessed by the affective attitude" (Catrin Finkenauer, et al., 1998, p. 521). Further, this specific attitude has an indirect impact on the flashbulb memory and in determining the rehearsal and remembrance of the original event. Throughout the memoir, Farah Bashir accentuates her discomfort towards the attitude of the security forces and militants which acts as the protagonist's affective attitude in the flashbulb memory mechanism. Similar to the trauma experienced by Farah Bashir in confronting the chaos that spreads because of the schisms between militants and security forces, the text also offers instances of the events indirectly affecting the common people of Kashmir. For example, the traumatic experiences of Farah Bashir's family heighten the affective attitude in flashbulb memory. Thus, the memoir imparts knowledge on the subjective perspectives of social and political scenarios in Kashmir, assisting the development of historical consciousness.

The memories of Farah Bashir foreground the causes and consequences of trauma in a militarized society and contextualize the sense of self. The postmodern take on subjectification projects repeated production of meaning that is variably never complete (Stewart and Roy 2014, p. 1879). Michael Foucault provides two meanings for the word, "subject"; subject to another by power and "*tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge*" (1983, p. 212). The protagonist's knowledge of truth is confided to the self since she overlooks the idea of objectification. In the memoir, the narrator portrays the necessary actions of the security forces to be extremely traumatic. The efforts of the armed forces pursuing security through systematic surveillance are mentioned as "The aquatic-patrolling troops toured the entire lake, checking for suspected militants and their hideouts. Like that wasn't frightening enough, unusually bright halogen lights were flashed from across the lake from the club" (Bashir 2021, p. 158). The excerpt clearly describes the subjective truth of events from the narrator's perspective. Foucault's idea of subjectification maybe referred to as "the way the subject experiences to self in a game of truth where he relates to self" (1998, p. 461). The idea of subjectification reveals the absence of an alternative truth. In comprehending the autobiographical memories of the author, the evident conflict of the psyche caused by trauma demonstrates the shortcomings of the individual in identifying the meaning of the actions of the security forces. Therefore, subjectivity in the narrativization of personal memories project the complexity in the formation of meaning that relate to historical consciousness.

Farah Bashir's recollections of her memory certainly point to the direct course of sociopolitical mishaps in the region, while they also hint at the underlying trauma discourse in narrativizing her flashbulb memories. The author's reconstruction of personal memory finds its ground in the direct response of trauma from the objects at Bobeh's funeral, which reflects

the correlative components of the existing conflict in Kashmir. While capturing the trauma response triggered by exposure and storytelling, Bashir deliberately shifts to a distorted narration of memory which serves to simultaneously reflect the conflict of the psyche and symbolically reflect the political turmoil in the state. As Judith Herman in her book, *Trauma and Recovery*, notes

it is not practical to approach each memory as a separate entity. There are simply too many incidents, and often similar memories have blurred together. Usually, however, a few distinct and particularly meaningful incidents stand out. Reconstruction of trauma narrative is often based heavily upon these paradigmatic incidents, with the understanding that one episode stands for many. (1997, p. 187)

Traumatic memories of high consequentiality possessing paradigmatic essence synchronize the purpose of imparting subjective knowledge on trauma to stimulate the historical consciousness of the Kashmiris. Bashir's nonlinear narration of traumatic memories interspersed with the events at the funeral of Bobeh, emphasizing how they are triggered by mundane objects and events, is an attempt to establish trauma as a habitual response in a conflict zone. Thereby, the adopted narrativization technique by offering an unbiased and actual reflection of the author's memory exposes the implications of secondary trauma in a militarized setting.

Collective trauma and memory communities

The perpetual relationship between memory and trauma is understood through the evaluation of the aftermath of a consequential event or, inversely, the repercussions of the remembrance. Traumatic memories, which often register as emotionally impactful flashbulb memories, are permanent memories of negatively idiosyncratic life events. Richard McNally, a clinical psychologist and psychopathologist remarks that, "emotional stress enhances memory for the central features of the stressful experience. Stress does not impair memory; it strengthens it" (2005, p. 62). The last canonical element of Flashbulb memory is the "Aftermath", the impact or effect created by hearing the news for the first time. In the memoir, trauma is the aftermath of flashbulb memory after hearing the events of insurgency and conflict in the region. Mental images and subjective emotions of the events develop trauma for a person, representing the aftermath of flashbulb memory. During the adolescence of the author, she happened to hear about violence rendered against one of her classmates. Nuzhat, her classmate, was attacked with acid for not following the religious dress code for women promulgated as an act of promoting the modest way of living by religious institutions. Since the girl was wearing a

modern outfit, she was punished for going against the rule and to set an example for the other members of the society. After hearing the news of the acid attack, Farah Bashir associated the violence against the girl to herself and began adopting new practices that can be interpreted as traumatic behaviours. The author's flashbulb memory of Nuzhat's incident and the resultant trauma are narrated in the memoir, documenting the effect of gaze in inflicting trauma.

Shabnam, her neighbour, another classmate of ours, broke the news to us in school. 'Nuzhat was wearing jeans. Her head was uncovered at the time of the attack,' said a newly hijab-clad Shabnam. . . .

To an extent, the scarf made me feel protected, and yet, that feeling of unease never quite left me completely. And so, I began to ignore caring for my skin. I thought maybe if I looked ugly and less pleasant, the men would not look at me and I'd be safe. I wouldn't wash my face for days. . . .

I, too, desperately wished that I could vanish, escape everyone's gaze, and not attract any unwanted attention. Not be thrown acid at like Nuzhat, not to be stared at by the troops. (2021, pp. 57-59)

The desperate desire to disappear exemplifies a post-traumatic condition. The compulsion to follow the religious dress code even after the disappearance of those conditions indicates the desperation of the protagonist to protect herself from the harm experienced by Nuzhat. The indirect influence of fear on the protagonist results in post-traumatic stress disorder (hereafter PTSD). Farah Bashir's behaviour of not washing her face to present herself ugly in order to avoid being gazed at is an expression of a defence mechanism, and displacement. Through her actions of plucking her hair, she expresses her fear and trauma which are aspects of PTSD. The events of terror and war in Kashmir have contributed to the increase of the population experiencing PTSD.

Judith Herman posits meaning making as a post-trauma activity: "Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community" (1997, p. 51). The aftermath of post trauma demonstrates the attribution of meaning to the events which signify the rupture in the basic shared sense of belief like belonging, morality and justice (J. Herman 1997, p. 178). For instance, Farah Bashir marks an attested signature over the contents of obituaries in the local newspaper believing "a sense of closure ensued from that act" (2021, p. 210). The behaviour emphasizes the attempt of the character in perceiving the meaning behind death in

the conflict zone by distinguishing obituaries – natural deaths – and casualty counts that appear in the local newspaper. Farah Bashir's meaning-making process concerning the subject of death reflects the conflict in the psyche. Subsequently, by recognizing the characteristics of trauma, Farah Bashir manifests its emotional response in the form of narration elevating its purpose into a social action. Herman notes women's sense of connection with the wider community as "women who recover most successfully are those who discover some meaning in their experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy" (1997, p. 73). Therefore, Farah Bashir's entries of her flashbulb memories in her memoir point to her attempt at articulating a more viable representation of trauma in the conflict-ridden society of Kashmir creating an awareness of historical consciousness and collective memory.

A strong flashbulb memory has a high impact over the shared trauma transcending to become collective trauma of Kashmir. Since flashbulb memory is not a reflection of a firsthand experience of an event, it partially becomes a shared memory because of society's contribution in constructing the memory. Memories of national events and events that involve close associates of the family are shared through media communication and social interactions, and they are one of the primary components for the formation of collective memory and collective trauma. Gilad Hirschberger, a social psychologist, remarks on collective trauma: "the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it" (Hirschberger, 2018, p. 1). The traumatic events related to geopolitical dispute and internal conflicts in Kashmir are often marked as significant in terms of its effect on the society and the individual. Neil J Smelser defines collective trauma as a tendency through which traumatic events are "remembered, or made to be remembered. Furthermore, the memory must be made culturally relevant, that is, represented as obliterating, damaging, or rendering problematic something sacred" (Smelser, 2004, p. 36). Similarly, the traumatic events of insurgency are remembered and reconstructed by the Kashmiris through narratives.

The geopolitical conflict inflicts trauma onto the entire populace due to the fear and anxiety caused by the situation. Farah Bashir, in her memoir, marks the construction of collective trauma by stating the relative experiences and familiarity of trauma among the people of Kashmir

But then it was not just Jaaji and Abida alone. More faces resembling Jaaji's started appearing in the streets, and the number of patients outside the psychiatrist clinic increased rapidly. . . .

In 1993, just before I turned seventeen, I showed symptoms of heightened anxiety. I'd get palpitations, sleeplessness, and was inexplicably restless. I often contemplated various means by which to commit suicide. . . . Doctors diagnosed the condition as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD, like they did for everyone else. Mir, a friend of mine, once joked that the acronym's expansion needed a revision in Kashmir. It should have stood for Perennially Traumatic Stress Disorder, he said. (2021, pp. 78-79)

The statement explains the intensity of the trauma in the people of Kashmir by emphasizing it with the term “perennially”, indicating the recurring phenomenon of traumatic disorder. Along with Farah Bashir, a relatively greater number of people experience PTSD caused “in relation to the troops” (Bashir, 2021, p. 77) or the terrorist activities of the militants. The unusual behavioural patterns of the characters, Jaaji and Abida, later identified as the symptoms of PTSD implies the consequences of traumatic events. Through the account of Farah Bashir, trauma is established as the aftermath of flashbulb memory for the people of Kashmir, further, explaining the progress of collective trauma through shared traumatic memory. David Herman describes the bilateral process of the shared traumatic memory as a socio-cognitive process: “[I]n the development of individuals, intramental thinking derives from shared or intermental thinking has led to a broader interest in socially distributed cognition” (2007, p. 313). As Herman proposes, the progressive nature of collective trauma from individual narratives to memory communities is reciprocal.

The trauma process is the development of psychological depression which is mentioned through various symbolical representations, including narratives of social events. The claims of trauma are “about a horrible destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution” (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Literary narrators of traumatic events act as collective agents in transcending personal emotions to collective trauma through their autobiographical narratives. Max Weber addresses the community of narrators as “carrier groups”: “Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests, they are situated in particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims—for what might be called ‘meaning making’—in the public sphere” (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). The subjective perspectives of a historical event, expressed in the form of narratives, contribute to the “meaning making” process related to traumatic experience. Through this memoir, the author attempts to convey personal experiences and trauma to a wider population, especially to the people of Kashmir to develop the

interconnectedness of emotions and memories related to the territory's history. Also, she extends a gendered trauma consciousness by expressing the triple wound¹ of the community. Thereby, Farah Bashir's memoir triggers the memories and trauma of ordinary people of Kashmir exposing them to their past and the reliving of the past as a community expanding the possibilities of experiencing collective trauma.

The narrativization of personal trauma triggers the subsided past traumatic memories of a group which later transmutes into collective trauma. Similarly, narrativization of personal memories transcends into collective history because of the documentation of the subjective experiences of nationally and historically significant events. Memoirs and life histories which narrate personally consequential national events later act as archives of historical discourse. In the memoir, *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, Farah Bashir narrativizes her past experiences as a memory documentation providing the details of her personal experiences that involve the events of national importance supporting the claims of historians. Documentation of autobiographical memories as memoirs or biographies stimulates the dissemination of shared memories helping individuals to connect and form communities of memory through the relevance of experiences. Iwon Irwin-Zarecka opines on the construction of communities of memory through individuals that

the bonding initially created by living through a trauma extends, with time, to those for whom remembrance of that trauma acts as a key orienting force for their lives and public actions. What underlies that bonding, though, or what defines the community through its many transitions, is a shared, if not always explicated, meaning given to the experience itself. . . . Personal relevance of the traumatic memory, and not personal witness to the trauma, here defines the community.

(2017, p. 49)

Exposure to traumatic memory affects the behaviour of individuals, but they need not necessarily have a first-hand experience of the traumatic event. Flashbulb memories, especially the ones related to nationally significant events, contribute to the formation of a “community of memory”. Farah Bashir's memoir, structured as a compilation of Flashbulb memories remembered during her Bobeh's funeral, narrates certain references of national events and the personal relevance to that event. Particularly, the protagonist's memory pertaining to women's security and the Kunan Pospora incident represent the intensity of the impact over individuals' memory and its course of development in the construction of communities of shared memories. Farah Bashir illustrates her flashbulb memory of the Kunan Pospora incident as this:

Then there was a call from Mother's relative that I eavesdropped on, along with Bobeh, whose face grew pale.

'Haleemav Haleemav, ma vadd. Don't cry, Haleema, don't cry,' Mother was consoling her cousin sister over the phone. Then she added in a whisper, 'I too have heard. Yes, Kunan Poshpura. *Boozum.*'

As I tried to hear what Mother said next, I couldn't shake off a strange, nauseous feeling of fear that gripped me. We had heard about the unspeakable things that happened to the women from two villages: Kunan and Poshpura. To the young and the elderly. I tried not to think too much about it as I did not want to recreate the helplessness of the women in my head. (2021, pp. 36-37)

This excerpt denotes the prevalence of communities of memory through the narration of the protagonist's personal impact on hearing the news of the tragic mass rape that happened in the villages, Kunan and Poshpura. Further, it may be argued that Bashir's memoir both borrows from and contributes to these communities of memory. Notably, the underlying discourse of gendered violence also emphasizes the shared vulnerability of women. Farah Bashir's representation of girlhood offers a feminist perspective to the silenced victims of gendered violence. In *Thinking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, bell hooks asserts that narrativization of gendered trauma experiences that are personal can be politically efficacious and transformative— "Story-telling becomes a process of historization. It does not remove women from history but enables us to see ourselves as a part of history" (1989, p.110). The essence of self-narrative engenders political consciousness among women prompting agency for the emancipatory project against gender hegemonic groups. Moreover, elevating the concerns of gendered violence, trauma and vulnerability from a confessional domain to a public discourse avails the "socially transformative effect" (Alcoff 2018, p. 200) of the autobiographical narrative.

Following the elder's conversation on the Kunan and Poshpura incident, the shared memories exert a level of consequentiality that triggers fear and anxiety exhibiting trauma, though Farah Bashir has no direct association with the incident. Thereby, personal trauma and personal memory are documented, developing a sense of community. The author's memory rehearsal process presented in the form of verbal narrative is a contribution for the construction of "communities of memory", i.e. collective memory. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, complying to the notions of the contribution of personal documentation to public discourses (history), states that

“[t]he ‘realities of the past’ as they pertain to individuals are not carbon copies of publicly available accounts. They are often worked out within smaller and larger communities of memory, their shape and texture reflecting a complex mixture of history and biography” (2017, p. 56). The subjective representations of a nationally significant event and the lived experiences in the form of memoirs, biographies and autobiographies gain the attention of the community bonded by that memory and the empathetic witnesses also. Narrativization through a literary text exhibits the transition of personal history to public discourses of national importance.

Conclusion

The self-narrative, a narrativization technique of presenting the images of autobiographical memory in the form of texts, goes beyond its purpose of reflecting personal experiences and acts as an element of tangible cultural heritage and referential advantage to historical discourses. Kowalska, et.al. discuss the role of memoirs and similar literary narratives in developing a sense of community and contributing to history. They write, ““To say that self-accounts are solely found on singular subjectivity is to ignore the potential for these texts to open a space in which the narrating ‘I’ might connect with the reader’ and . . . add with the reference to Forest, ‘with the others, history, and world’” (Kowalska, et al., 2021, p. 702). In the case of Farah Bashir’s memoir, the personal document replicates the author’s cognitive progression by following the memory mechanism of flashbulb memory as a technique of narrativization. The paper demonstrates how memories of national and historical significance play a massive role in constructing cultural identity, gender identity, history and trauma through personal narratives. Further, it also construes the contribution of personal narratives such as memoir in the understanding of history from a subjective perspective. Memoirs and other personal documents are reflections of events from an individual’s memory which also manifest the significant role of personal and collective meaning making in a society. Subjective perspectives of historical events create a sense of community and develop the quality of relatability in constructing strong shared memories that emerge as collective memories among the people of Kashmir. Since the memories of Farah Bashir focused on societal and personal events of high-level consequentiality related to the circumstances of the Kashmir insurgency of the 1990s, the subjective writings of the memories contribute to the formation of memory communities and historical reliability.

Endnotes:

¹ “A DOUBLE WOUND” (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). Cathy Caruth describes trauma as a double wound, referring to the physical implication followed by psychological trauma. Gendered trauma may be considered a triple wound as it adds another layer of pain to the individual.

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