



## Exploration of Terrorism and Trauma in the Light of Select Indian English Novels

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### Abstract

A terrorist attack not only results in physical injuries, but also causes psychological trauma which can alter the way of living of an individual or a community altogether. Most of the time traumatic experiences are generalized, but reactions to terror have revealed a complexity that defies facile decoding. Literature as Nivedita Majumdar describes, personalizes the political and politicizes the personal, illuminate terrorism in ways without which the grasp of it remains incomplete. Terrorism as a subject has been limited to media, politics, popular culture, and non-fictions. Despite having space for reflective discourse, fiction on this subject hasn't been explored comprehensively by researchers. The present paper aims to explore the representation of terrorism, its different dimensions, strategies, execution, and consequences in the light of *Jihadi Jane* (2016) by Tabish Khair, *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016) by Karan Mahajan, and *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed. The traumatic conditions would be studied by tracing the portrayal of violent actions and extremist ideologies in the novels, as well as which have been experienced by an individual on regular basis in their contemporary surrounding. It is important to unravel the multiple facets of terrorism and trauma discussed in the novels by establishing a link between reality and fiction.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Literature, Trauma, Terrorism, Violence

Terrorism has emerged as the greatest menace to the international community. It has led to the increasing violation of human rights with devastating consequences. Terror has entrenched its dominance in society's psyche after the 9/11 assault. It was the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 that served to push terrorism to the centre of the world politics. No part of the world is

free from the problem of terrorism. The predicament of the contemporary world has been captured by Salman Rushdie in *Shalimar the Clown* (2006) "Everything is unsettled. Everything is connected...The story of anywhere is also the story of everywhere else." (STC 35) Hence, India is no exception. It has a variety of terrorist problems coming from political, religious, and ethnic strife. Northeast terrorism is caused by Politico-ethnic; Northwest- Politico-religious, and Central India is worst affected by Socioeconomic terrorism. It is difficult to limit this term within a fixed definition as its nature keeps on changing with respect to the social and political contexts. Still, the definition given by Federal Bureau of Investigation has gained consensus which says:

"Terrorism is the unlawful use of force of violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives." (White 8)

It can be either domestic or international, depending upon the origin, base, and objectives of the terrorist groups. There is not any definition which has gained consensus globally. Especially when this takes on a world-wide dimension, There are not even clear distinction between terrorism and war. The question of how 'terrorism' and 'war' are understood and used in contemporary public discourse should be taken into serious consideration. In his seminal book discussing about *War* (2004), political philosopher Michael Walzer has tried to distinguish between both. In his opinion war is legitimate if certain requirements are met, such as self-defense, honoring a treaty duty to a state that has been invaded, etc. He insists that, on the contrary, terrorism is always unlawful since it targets the innocent civilians to fulfil its motives and agendas. Hence, it is "worse than rape and murder commonly are, for in the latter cases the



victim has been chosen for a purpose... however twisted or ugly it may be” (Walzer 51). Walter Laquer has rightly commented on the rapidly changing modes of terrorism, “the endeavour to find a general theory of terrorism, one overall explanation of its roots, is a futile and misguided enterprise. Terrorism has changed over time and so have the terrorists, their motives, and the causes of terrorism.” (qtd. Borum 5) Terrorism as a subject has been gravely discussed in media, politics, popular culture, as well as in non-fictions, but in literary fiction, the debate of terrorism has been gradually evolved in the past two decades. The novels based on terrorism are often assumed as sensational or thriller, written for commercial purpose, as they have a ready setting for drama and ideologically “ensnared protagonist”. But, in the recent decades, novels which are being written on this subject have space for reflective discourse. It can be considered as significant cultural markers which have been dealing creatively with the global issue of terrorism, situating it within the context of race, region, religion, power, politics, and gender. The integral role of literature has been rightly asserted by Nivedita Majumdar:

“Literature, by personalizing the political and politicizing the personal, illuminates terrorism in ways that can’t be achieved through any other vehicle, and without which our grasp of terrorism remains incomplete. In literary texts, the social element is not merely a background condition for the emergence of the terrorist. Rather, the intimate portrayals of ordinary people help to show how the conditions of everyday life can fuel the politics of terror.” (*The Other Side of Terror* xxxvi)

The present study attempts to deal with the different facets of terrorism and its consequences in the novels like *Jihadi Jane* (2016) by Tabish Khair, *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016) by Karan Mahajan, and *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed. Terror has been often considered as a male dominated space. Yet in the recent decades, be it voluntarily or coercively, the role of female as suicide bombers and recruiters has increased at an alarming rate. *Jihadi Jane* (2016) by Tabish Khair “presents a vivid picture of militant brides operating around the world and the terrifying cost of religious fanaticism.” It deals with the process of radicalization of two girls Jamilla and Ameena from England. Through the help of Internet, they got acquainted with a preacher named Hejiye, a women working in support of the men fighting in the name of jihad. Leaving their families and country behind, they run to join the Islamic State in Syria to serve a cause they ideologically believe in. Ameena

belonged to a rich family. Her father was a banker and mother was a working woman. This shows that turning towards jihad was her personal choice rather than economic compulsion. When they reached Syria, they were categorized, on the basis of their usefulness as if they were an object, brought to be used and disposed. The older women used to preach younger ones regarding marital duties and responsibilities. Some of them who were not so attractive usually trained to be suicide bombers. They could be even raped, on the grounds that, as one Imam explains:

“a woman without a man was weak and fallible; and surely if a woman in such circumstances could not have a husband, she was still safer in the care of an honourable man of the faith, who would satisfy her womanly needs and protect her at the same time” (*JJ* 184)

It seem that for terrorists, ideology provides “the moral and political vision that inspires their violence, shapes the way in which they see the world, and defines how they judge the actions of people and institutions.” (qtd. Borum 45) Hejiye used to indoctrinate the girls by quoting lines from the religious texts which she manipulates in order to justify their acts of self-sacrifice and suicide. She liked quoting from the Bible to ‘prove’ that the Quran was its ‘uncorrupted’ version:

“Remember that Jesus...had asked his followers to give up their families to follow him. There can be nothing greater than God...Our role is as wives, mothers, and daughters. I keep urging you to marry; like your friend Ameena did. Marry a jihadi”. (*JJ* 134)

It shows that when terrorism takes its refuge in religion, the social, psychological, and political aspects of it, takes the form of sacred expression in the mind of terrorists. Nasra Hassan in her extensive study of Palestinian terrorists and recruiters notes that: “all of them believed that their actions were sanctioned by the divinely revealed religion of Islam.” (qtd. Borum 46) When Ameena gave her consent to be a suicide bomber; Hejiye gifted her rosary beads and said “Take this to Allah with you, O Blessed One”. (*JJ* 221) Hassan, a jihadi militant was indulged in ethnic and religious cleansing. His task was to segregate people who were of different faith and behead or shot them in a brutal manner. He used to shout: “Come and face the wrath of God”. (*JJ* 180) This reflects that these terrorists have created a divine mandate where the deity is perceived as being directly involved in the determination of ends and means. (Rapoport 655) Fundamentalism of such kind makes an individual fanatic in their religious convictions and smothers



their sense of rationality. Jamilla was given the task of burning books by Hejiye in Daesh camp which she did half-heartedly. But, there was a sense of guilt after this task and a statement by James, her school friend, was continuously pricking her mind:

“Burning a book’s like burning a human being. Once yer start burning books, yer end up burning the entire world, every damn human being in it!” (JJ 192)

It shows that there was still room for repentance in Jamilla. She felt that the path she has chosen will take her only towards damnation. She finally asserts that:

“To continue to be a believing Muslim- as I was, as I still am- one had to refuse the Islam of the Hassans and Hejjiyes of the world...who commit the blasphemy...of claiming to know the mind of God, of speaking in his voice, of insisting on their fallible human interpretations of his Word” (JJ 189)

A terrorist attack not only results in physical injuries but also causes psychological trauma which can alter the way of living of an individual or a community altogether. This can be evident in the novel *The Association of the Small Bombs* (2016) by Karan Mahajan, which is set in Delhi and deals with Khurana family. When Tushar and Nakul Khurana pick up their family’s television set at a repair shop with their friend Mansoor Ahmed one day in 1996, disaster strikes without warning. A small bomb detonates in the Delhi marketplace, killing the brothers instantly, to the devastation of their parents. Mansoor survives, bearing the physical and psychological effects of the bomb. The memory of the boys keeps on haunting their parents. Vikas, the father used to torture himself by saying:

Priya 5

“... Why me? Was I Hitler in my past life? Did I massacre a million people and forget? Was I Stalin, General Dyer, Cortes, or Ashoka before his conversion?” (TAOSB 106)

Deepa, the mother used to be a busy woman. In the past, she had handled multiple tasks together but now it seems that she has lost her consciousness. Vikas introspects about his wife in the following terms:

“Throughout their marriage, he had marvelled at how little she cried, how she never used tears to blackmail him, and in the past few weeks, there had been something particularly awful about watching this lovely, tough woman reduced to a shivering mess. But now, strange as it was, he was getting tired of it. He only had enough space for his own grief.” (TAOSB 75)

Though it was a minor bomb blast according to the reports but the whole world of a family was shattered. Their lives never remained the same.

The novel also tries to capture the psyche of a terrorist through the portrayal of Shockie’s character. He has been shown as a leading agent of terror who wants extreme violence in order to fulfil his motives. He asserts that “My personal philosophy is, if we’re fighting a war, we should try to kill people, not injure them.” (TAOSB 53)

Reactions to terror, too, have revealed a complexity which demands a deep analysis rather than facile decoding. To oversimplify the notion of trauma and homogenize the experiences of victims can be problematic. Mirza Waheed’s *The Collaborator* reflects multiple aspects of trauma suffered by victims because of terrorists as well as the state apparatus. It is set in the Indian side of Line of Control that separates Indian Kashmir from Pakistani Kashmir during 1990s. In the novel, the deteriorated state of Kashmir is, reflected in the plight of woman which cues towards the collective trauma of a women’s community in Kashmir. When the men make their way across the Line of Control in the pursuit of ‘Jihad’, it is the women who are forced to wait and grieve. They also suffer the brutality at the hands of both the authorities and the opportunists. Left behind, they have to bear the brunt of all the questioning and investigations. Sometimes they are raped by Indian soldiers as well as by the terrorists. They turn into battered, mourning “curfew women and mothers of disappeared-sons band”, ironically these victim women are getting identity through their association with their male progeny. (who left their homes in pursuit of becoming a militant or killed by Indian soldiers) (qtd. Bharat) Theodore Adorno opines: “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream”. But, in the novel, it can be noticed that the narrator’s mother was neither allowed to express her agonies with her fellow victims nor she was being able to scream after witnessing the crumbling state of Kashmir. She was a breathing representative of the living hell in which she and her people were residing. This vicious transformation of her homeland has pushed her into a deathly silence and her pain can be felt in the line:

“Maybe that’s what Ma also wants, to leave, to run away, to escape her prison of loneliness. She hasn’t seen another woman for more than a year now” (TC 112).

The deployment of armed forces in the areas ravaged by terrorism has led to serious



violation of human rights. "In the name of fighting terrorists, the police, parliamentary forces, armed forces are arbitrarily searching, frisking, arresting, detaining, torturing and even killing the innocent people. Rape, murder, torture, disappearance, custodial deaths are common in the areas affected by terrorism." (*Human Rights in India* 23) In the novel, it can be evidently noticed in Farooq's case whose brother (Gul) was a militant. Farooq was taken in custody for three weeks by the police and when he returned, his condition was unbearable. He lifted his kurta up and "showed the area above his groin. There were small, etched black pits all over his pubic area." (*TC* 186) The milk beggars explicate the pitiable circumstances of people who were living in the curfew area, and how badly they were starving. Eventually, they decide to beg in order to save their children. A group of mournful women came to narrator's father and asked for milk.

"We have come from far, far away. We have been in curfew for more than three months now, the Army is everywhere and all around, there's nothing to eat...Our breasts are barren now, nothing left for our children, nothing. We have eaten all the grass in our gardens and finished every grain. Now we have eaten our *ghairat* too, our honour... Do not turn us away empty-handed, brother, do not turn us away, we have travelled far...If you give me milk, I will give you one of my girls." (*TC* 179-180)

The traumatic impact on the mind of the narrator after becoming an eyewitness to an attack can be seen when he says: "Young and old, men and children, dead, all dead, on the bridge." (*TC* 117) The novel itself serves as a creative outlet to evoke personal trauma of the author who is trying to communicate and translate the pain and agony inflicted by terrorists to the reader. He has tried to come up with his own suffering, which also echoes the voice of his entire community, which is evident in the line "We too are part of it." (*TC* 188) Cathy Caruth observes that: "...in a catastrophic age...trauma itself may provide the link between cultures." (Caruth 11)

Thus, it can be concluded that terrorism and trauma are inseparable to each-other. The abovementioned novels present wide range of incidents which includes violence, trauma, torture, pain and agony. *Just Another Jihadi Jane* deals with fundamentalism and extremist ideology,

*The Association of Small Bombs* unravels the psyche of terrorist and pain suffered by victims, and *The Collaborator* has painted grim picture of militancy. Despite depth and subtlety, novels written on this subject haven't been able to be the part of mainstream literature. In a BBC interview, Salman Rushdie has acknowledged that: "I think it's a serious function of literature...to ask difficult questions, to ruffle feathers, to put things in ways that make people rethink what they think, and, yes, to disagree with it." (qtd. Bharat) Hence, it is important to draw attention towards these narratives as they play an important role in the comprehensive understanding of terrorism.

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