Chapter II

The Collaborator: A Narrative of Tragedy

The Collaborator is the debut novel of Mirza Waheed published in the year 2011. This critically acclaimed novel won him all sorts of awards and recognition. It is written in the backdrop of 90s’ of Kashmir, when turmoil struck the valley turning it into a place of conflict, chaos, war, massacres, fear and loss. As he himself has experienced and witnessed the dark period of 90s’ he is successful in portraying the dark shades of the conflict in his novel. Through his novel, he brings to the fore the reality of the conflict by attempting to foreground the humane aspect of the conflict. The chief emphasis of the writer is on the people of Kashmir who were persecuted in all kinds of contexts: they suffered both at the hands of vast military machine and militants. With his medium of art, he depicts the plight of the lives living amidst war-torn zone. There is nothing fictional about this novel except the names. The reality of Kashmir in the early 90s comes across in every page of this novel. It reflects the author’s emotional journey as well as journey of the people of Kashmir by fictionally recreating people’s lives under the shadow of armed insurgency. In an interview with Ahsan Sajid, Waheed remarks:

. . . I saw things as a teenager in Kashmir, and some of these things you carry for the rest of your life, disturbing and upsetting things...I saw things when I was around 15-16 living in Srinagar. But the first novel is not set in Srinagar, it is set as far as possible from it. It’s set on the border...I transported what happened in the city, which I witnessed, to this place on the border...I carried my impressions based on what I witnessed in Srinagar, such as sieges that lasted up to three days, being homebound for two months at a time, curfews. (Web)

The title of the novel, The Collaborator is apt and suggestive to its theme. It reflects the journey of a nineteen year old boy who became the reluctant collaborator of an army officer. His job was to collect the belongings of the militants who got killed by army either while crossing Line of Control in Pakistan to get armed training or coming
back from Pakistan. The young narrator’s anonymity and isolation foregrounds the loss of personal and social identity in a situation of military oppression. Compelled by circumstances to stay on in the deserted village, he is left with no choice but to enter into collaboration with the very force i.e. army that has oppressed others (villagers) into fleeing from their roots. Living on in Nowgam at his father’s insistence, the narrator’s life becomes isolated and estranged from the world. Waheed in an interview with Amitava Kar says:

During the nineties, the army used to conduct ‘operations’ every day. In the morning there would be an announcement from the local mosque ordering all men to gather in a field. A masked informer sat in a military vehicle and these men had to parade in front of it. All it took was a nod from the informer and you were taken away. A lot of young men disappeared like that in Kashmir— on many occasions, innocent men. I was in one of these parades when I was 15 or 16. As I was walking, I saw some bodies on the ground. One of them was still alive. . . . What if there was a hidden valley with hundreds of corpses lying around? That was the first impulse of the novel. And in order to narrate the story of those dead bodies in a valley, I invented a narrator who was a young boy. He is forced by an army to do this job. He goes down to this valley of corpses and he has to find IDs on them. What if he finds a friend? (Web)

The title of the novel portrays the theme of misery and sufferings imprinted on the lives of the people caught in one of the oldest conflict. The novel does not immortalize the memory of the dark period of 90s but has a humanitarian outlook concerning the lives of the people oppressed by both men in uniforms and men with guns. In short, The Collaborator is an offspring of emotionally disturbed side of Waheed in a turmoil stricken society of Kashmir during 1990s. Waheed felt mentally shattered after observing the miseries of the people in conflict and throughout his life, he could not forget these impressions and thus found an artistic expression in his novel. It is a saga of the period of 90s that took a toll on many innocent people— old, young, women, men, and children. This is corroborated by the “Afterward” of the novel, where he writes:
More than 70,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989; around 8,000 people have disappeared; at least 25,000 children have been orphaned; and over 4,000 people are still in Indian prisons. Thousands of women have been widowed in the conflict, including 2,000 ‘half-widows’ whose husbands remain missing till date. (305)

It is not the miseries of people that keep the interest alive; but the struggle of the sustained protagonist to stay back in the valley to witness the loss of the scared space of his childhood and his community, which flee the land for survival. Waheed paints the naked horror of 90s with all its precision and cumulative detail in his novel. Alok Kumar in an essay, “Writing from the Brink: Recent Writing from Kashmir” states that Waheed has described the saga of Kashmir of late 1980 by writing about the pain of the whole population that is caught in conflict. He remarks:

Both Basharat Peer and Mirza Waheed bring out the deep pain, anguish and shock at the brutalization of a whole people and culture. The whole saga of Kashmir since the late 1980s as it comes out— in the writing about the land is structured around the story of the militarization of Kashmir, about check posts, searchlights, sand bag bunkers, military crackdowns, gun battles between the militants and the army, . . . It is all about the ‘violence stained lives’ of the people of Kashmir. (23)

Even Justine Hardy, a journalist and novelist in a review of Mirza Waheed *The Collaborator*, “A Kashmiri Novelist Investigates the Conflicted Loyalties and Brutal Violence of his Homeland” states that *The Collaborator* is based on writer’s firsthand experience of the life lived under the dark period of 90s when militancy and military had caught the valley. Literature is a creative and sensitive social mirror originating in the sensibilities and creativities of socially conscious writers. The history of mankind has rarely been so peaceful. Throughout our past, humanity has been continuously shattered through wars, epidemics, and calamities. Every eventful period of war or calamity has created a body of literature of its own. People in general get accustomed to happenings or recurrent natural calamities while scars of wars live for long in a writer’s mind. But there
are long-lasting and ever-going wars throughout the world where human psyche almost crumble down and every native writer seems to recollect the same story. Afghanistan, Algeria, Vietnam, Gaza-Patti, Sudan, Syria, and Iraq are among the territories of the world where literature is a commitment to the common woes of humanity. She remarks:

Mirza Waheed’s first novel, *The Collaborator*, brings down the last vestiges of the walls of silence. Like the delicate pashmina shawls of Kashmir, his story is woven tight with autobiographical details. . . . His familiarity with the country people of home state gives him license to portray what must be the layers of his own life, growing up in conflict, using fiction to explore the nature of brutality. (Web)

The central theme of the novel is presented in such a manner that the sufferings caused to the people of the village, Nowgam by both defense authorities and military become the metaphor for the miseries inflicted on the people of whole Kashmir. Novelist’s concern in this novel is to portray the psychological and physical journey of Kashmiri people. Violence is not simply in the form of armed encounters. It is there at every step of routine life and in every form it can be perpetrated. Thus, the village becomes the microcosm of macrocosm. The people around the world make plans for further development and betterment of their life, people in war- torn places plan survival strategies in their routine life. The dreadful things like guns, bombs, encounters and causalities become part of their life. In an essay, “Approximating History and Experience through Fiction: A Study of Mirza Waheed’s *The Collaborator*,” Basharat Shameem remarks:

The novel transcends the narrator’s story by fictionally re-creating people’s lives under the shadows of insurgency and oppression. The story is as much about the narrator as about himself as the space/ place he occupies. His tale becomes the story of his people, his voice echoes their voices, his descriptions resound the perspectives of both the oppressor and oppressed. (147)
The novel is filled with such details that describe the tragedy of the victims of the conflict. Their tragedy is to live amidst horrific cycle of violence and to suffer in all aspects: psychologically, physically and spiritually. All these wheels of sufferings point towards the particular period of Kashmir history; to show the agonies, cruelties and frustrations which befell Kashmir. The period of 90s is mainly responsible for it which crushed the lives of many innocents and rendered many homeless. With the power of brilliant observation and writing skills, Waheed has transformed the story of the people caught in conflict into the story of narrator and his community. The plot of the novel moves around an eponymous narrator, a nineteen year old Gujjar (nomadic) boy. As a Kashmiri Gujjar, he hails from one of the regions of the nomadic herding tribes, though his family and others from the tribe have left nomadic life and settled down in the village, Nowgam. This village is situated near the Line of Control, the de facto border between India and Pakistan, which divides the formerly princely state of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Till 1989, Nowgam was an abode of peace and tranquility but as the things changed drastically in 1990s, the village too like other parts of Kashmir witnessed transition from tranquility to cataclysm. Waheed traces the psychological and physical journey of an unnamed young narrator. The journey starts with the insurgency in Kashmir around 1993 which led to the loss of harmony in Kashmir especially deep in the valley and along the Line of Control. The blissful world of villagers collapsed under the web tumultuous conditions. The Gujjars of Kashmir are nomadic goatherds and shepherds, who undertake seasonal migrations between the mountainous pastures and plains of the Himalayas in search of good grazing for their livestock. In the novel, Nowgam is presented as a comparatively recent settlement that still retains many of the values and attitudes of the nomadic past. Many Gujjars were persuaded to embrace more sedentary lifestyles in the years after independence, culminating in them being gifted land by the regional government in 1970s.

. . . As Baba put it, they had not been able to ‘improve their chances’ the way most other families in Nowgam had after Chief Minister Sheikh Abdullah’s provision of free land and development funds in the seventies for small Gujjar communities which had settled down on pastures-lands in the mountains after centuries of an uncertain nomadic life. While most
people of my father’s generation had then worked hard to assume a more sedentary life, building houses, procuring small holdings of land while also adding to their livestock, Hussain’s father, the humble Khadim Hussain, was given more to a spiritual life. (29)

Before the start of the novel there is a reference to the quote from “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight,” The Country Without a Post Office by Agha Shahid Ali. He was the most eloquent Kashmiri-English poet, a writer of unmatched elegance and virtuosity. He undisputedly is Kashmir’s most celebrated modern poet. His poetry depicts beauty, loss and redemption. His poetry can best be termed as an elaboration of the sub-continent’s mixed history. He draws from the rich cultural resources of his country, where plurality, compositeness and eclecticism mark cultural pattern. In the above mentioned poem he writes:

I won’t tell your father you have died, Rizwan,
but where has your shadow fallen, like cloth
on the tomb of which saint, or the body
of which unburied boy in the mountains,
bullet-torn, like you, his blood sheer rubies
on Himalayan snow? (46-51)

The Country Without a Post Office is poet’s testimony to the turbulent period of 90s of Kashmir, when armed insurgency against India started. In these couplet poet is referring to the death of young boys that often went unknown. The death of Rizwan is seen as being emblematic of Kashmiri deaths at large. Rizwan is depicted as a shadow, roaming in the streets of Srinagar, searching to find its body. His ghost becomes symbolic of the Kashmiri’s shadows not existing in the physical world, soul without bodies, unrecognized and existing in an almost suspended time and space. With these couplets Waheed introduces the theme of the novel. He expresses the pain and anguish of the people of Kashmir.

The novel is divided into three parts— “Now and Then,” “Then” and “Now.” Further each part is divided into chapters. The first part titled “Now and Then” vacillates
between present and past. It covers the present and past life of the people of Nowgam, how the life was before and after emergence of armed insurgency. In this section Waheed with the help of flashbacks draw a comparison between then of Kashmir (before insurgency) and now of Kashmir (after insurgency). The second part “Then” charts the consequences of armed insurgency and the devastation that befell the village, which led to flee of villagers for their survival to the places outside the valley. The third part titled “Now” describes the present situation of the narrator in which he is caught. Through the perception and persona of the protagonist Waheed brings to the forefront the larger and collective picture of contemporary reality of turmoil in Kashmir. The anonymity of the narrator makes him the representative image of his people, and it is through him that the writer depicts the brutal realities of the conflict.

The novel starts with a conversation between narrator and an Army captain, Captain Kadian, a young handsome Punjabi from north India, about an assignment in ‘no man’s land’, a nearby piece of land between India and Pakistan filled with dead bodies. Since the narrator becomes the reluctant collaborator of Captain so he is asked by officer to go down in the valley to collect the Identity cards and weapons from the dead bodies. These bodies were not only of infiltrators from across the border shot dead by army or of those who got killed in encounters either while crossing the Line of Control to get training in Pakistan or crossing back from Pakistan but of many innocent people who were arrested, tortured and then killed by the army. For this job he is offered five hundred rupees per trip and a small bonus for every identity card and weapon he manages to get from dead ones. The narrator first declines the offer by telling him that it would be easier for his men since they know the area well and also the exact location of the dead bodies. But captain makes him to accept the job and explains him that it would be risky and unsafe for his men to go down in the valley:

‘The job’s not that hard, you see, you just go down once in a week or fifteen days, and the money, the money is not bad at all’ . . . ‘But, but sir, won’t it be easier for your men, er, since they know the area very well, and also exactly who fell where. . . . ?’ ‘As I said, we just need ID cards and weapons, as many as possible,’ he raises his voice just enough to tell me
who’s boss. . . . ‘Five hundred per trip and a small bonus for every ID and weapon you bring back.’ (3-4)

Survival was more important than resistance as the narrator became the reluctant collaborator. Survival is a natural and biological impulse of every living being. Almost every activity of living beings is biologically calculated for survival and evolution of life. Struggle for survival is universal but humanity is unique as it strives beyond mere physical existence. Struggle for survival sharpens human intellect and leads to further invention of various strategies for survival. A survivor is a determined and committed self to thwart any threat to his life and dignity. An elevated notion of identity and morality busts a survivor to fight the debilitating and destructive forces. A survivor does not mean a superman or heroic warrior; he may look silent and weak from outside but he keeps on employing various strategies against the anti-life surrounding without losing his identity and human character. During his first visit down in the valley, he is horrified at the prospect of his job. The area is full of dead bodies, both intact and dismembered. These bodies; some huddled together and others forlorn are in various stages of their decay and are surrounded by yellow flowers. The dreadful sight of the dead bodies makes him cry and he wants someone to give a proper funeral to these rotting corpses. The description of protagonist’s visit to the valley of corpses is written in most harrowing and haunting prose.

I look at the few corpses and am immediately horrified at the prospects of what my first ever job entails. There are bare wounds, holes dark and visceral, and limbless, armless, even headless, torsos. . . . There are erstwhile legs and arms and backbones and ribcages surrounded by sparkling swathes of yellow created by the thousands and thousands of flowers all across the valley. . .

It makes me cry, it makes me want to run away, to disappear. . . . And these people die, after all. Someone has to pay visit, pay respect—offer a secret fateha. (7-11)
While at his frightening work involving dismembered corpses his thoughts vacillate between macabre present and idyllic past. After an evening consorting with the bodies in ‘no man’s land’, the narrator while picking his way back to home is reminded of his past. His past consisted of relatively peaceful time preceding the militancy. The protagonist revisits his happy childhood, where he spent an enjoyable childhood with his four close friends; Hussain, Gul, Mohammed and Ashfaq forming famous five. Growing up with his friends in the village he used to play cricket on lush green fields, swim in fresh waters and listen to the Bollywood songs sung by his closest friend, Hussain. They all used to loiter the village streets without caring for anyone in the world. They are shown spending their childhood among the idyllic capes of snow clad mountains, babbling brooks, blue skies, greener meadows, etc. But soon their beautiful and peaceful world was turned upside down with the stirrings of insurgency in Kashmir. Their happiness vanished, when militancy in Kashmir found its way to their village. The stories about how young men wronged by the defense authority cross the border to get training and return as freedom fighters to avenge upon India reached their village. The whole village resonated with the stories of the brutalities of defence authorities across the whole Kashmir. There is description about a village, Poshpur where all boys from the village disappeared and crossed the border to get armed training:

I’d heard stories of how hundreds of young men— excited, idealistic teenagers; hurt, angry boys wronged by police or army action; vengeful brothers with raped sisters and mothers at home; . . . had been leaving home everywhere and joining the Movement by walking the perilous walk across the border to receive arms and training and return as militants, as freedom fighters. . . . All the boys from Poshpur are gone, gone, no one left in the village, it’s empty now, all empty! It’s all happening, dear, happening everywhere. (24)

The whole village of Nowgam filled with such stories witnessed the arrival of moulvi, (Priest) who acted as a catalyst for such stories. The war against India for an independent Kashmir reached their village too with the coming of this florid moulvi. The newly appeared moulvi sahib was appointed by the Masjid (house of God) committee to
deliver Friday sermons to the people of Nowgam. The mosque was constructed by Khadim Hussain, father of Hussain. He was a spiritual man and would spend a lot of his time in the newly completed mosque, which was the result of his hard labour. Moulvi’s sermon apart from the religious teachings consisted of political proselytizing on the subject of Indian atrocities done to the people in Kashmir, Islamic injunctions against such western delights as videos, music and make up. He portrayed extremely ruthless and cruel picture of Indian army. He told them the stories of how hundreds of Muslims fell prey to the bullets of army. They dragged men out of their houses during search operations conducted at night, while their women became mute spectators to the whole process. They employed barbaric actions to torture the young people. Those who resisted or raised voice against their violence were put into prisons for no fault. The narrator says:

Hundreds of us fall to the bullets of the oppressor, to the guns of the kafir every day. We die in hundreds, no, thousands . . . all across the land. The cruel infidel kills us, tortures us, insults us and treats us like dirt, and then throws us into jail if we protest. You are dragged out of your houses at night by stinking drunken soldiers and then they search your houses while your women, your mothers, your ready-to-wed daughters and sisters are still in bed! Crackdown after crackdown, from dawn to dusk, for days sometimes . . . (33)

Apart from the atrocities perpetrated against men and women, moulvi also described the desecration of religion by men in uniforms. They showed no respect to the religious places, “In Srinagar they enter hundreds of mosques every day in their grimy, ugly shoes; …” (33). Like Louis Althuser, Waheed is aware of the fact that Ideological state apparatuses are not only the fundamental means by which only a society’s ruling ideology is transmitted but they are also a site in which oppositional ideologies are articulated. Here moulvi used religious ideological state apparatus as a means to influence common masses. Apart from religious teachings, he used religion as a bait to indoctrinate people. He conditioned their mind and made them believe his stories. He was able to convince some of the people in Nowgam. People like him who try to influence others for their mean motives are found in every society. They call themselves reformers but their
philosophy and teaching is nothing but sheer empty rhetoric. Even the newspapers like *Daily Aftab, Srinagar Times* and *The Daily Toll* contained the gut wrenching accounts of bizarre events that took place in Srinagar. These papers contained news about, “historic protest, marches, long processions, demonstrations by oceans of people, bellicose cries for freedom (half a million marched to Chrar Sharif, braving unprecedented rain and hail), big roadside massacres as if they were our destiny” (35-36). When the things were taking ugly turn and getting out of control, government of India declared governor rule in Jammu and Kashmir. In the novel, Governor is shown as a very strict administrator. Waheed remarks:

. . . a celebrated Indian administrator had been drafted in as the new Governor of Kashmir. He was known as a harsh administrator whose earlier jobs as governor had included ‘cleaning up’ the city, . . . In his previous jobs, this man had bulldozed the rickety shacks of poor people in Delhi and Bombay and Calcutta . . . this new Governor is supposed to be very strict, I’ve heard he is a stern administrator . . . No wonder they dismissed the big Minister and brought this man specially from Delhi. (168)

The day he took charge as a governor, he imposed curfews across the whole valley. There were fake encounters, crackdowns, arrests, etc. everywhere. People were being killed or arrested for no fault of theirs. He employed brutal state repressive apparatuses to treat anti- India insurgency. The government used force against those who dared to organize protests or funeral processions. In one of the incident in the novel, the narrator narrates the massacre of Gaw Kadal where nearly fifty people were killed by the Central Reserve Paramilitary Force in broad daylight. Even Bilal Bhat, Delhi-based Kashmiri journalist, author and actor in his essay, “The Gaw Kadal Massacre and Exodus of Kahmri Pandits” writes in the same vein, “…on 20 January, 1990, soldiers of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) opened fire on a group of Kashmiri protestors were brutally killed according to the official figures but, according to survivors the actual death toll might have been as high as 280” (Web). Apart from this, there is also the description of the fake encounters which were usually stage-managed and reported through media
partisanship or indifference. When some journalists came from Delhi to cover the situation on the border, Captain Kadian bragged about his skill of stage-managing the operations, he told narrator, “I can make any maderchod look like an Afghan. The dead do not speak, remember, and I still have plenty of old photos and clothes” (9). The other notable incident is about Zulfiqar. He became a top militant and divisional commander of HM (Hizbul Mujahideen). But after being persuaded by his mistress to surrender before army, he laid down arms. After his surrender army kept a check on him and one day they caught him and took him to the Changoor, a village before the near LoC. There they shot him dead along with three other random men, who were picked up by the army:

Oh, Yes, Zulfiqar! . . . He had been a divisional commander of HM, and was among the first militants to surrender before the Army… One day, we just nabbed him in Handwara, and drove him to Changoora, which is the last village before the check-posts start on the LoC in that sector… So we shoot him dead along with three other men. Just some random guys. They were all from Handwara;… Then we drove them around sixty kilometers to the border and shot them. (94)

Through the death of Zulfiqar and three other men, Waheed exposes and condemns the fake encounters carried out by defense authorities. Extra-judicial murders, fake encounters, disappearances, etc., were a part of *modus operandi* of all the paramilitary formations of the State like the CRPF, the BSF, the CISF, the RR, etc. during 90s. To curb support for pro-independence militants, Indian security forces resorted to arbitrary arrest, collective punishments, indiscriminate shootings, assaults, rapes, arson etc. of common masses. Even Angara Chatterji, author of *Violent Gods: Hindu Nationalism in India's Present* in her essay, “Kashmir: A Time for Freedom” criticizes the brutality of Indian army. She says:

The fabrications of military— fake encounters, escalating perceptions of cross-border threat— function as the truth-making apparatus of the nation . . . The Indian state’s violence functions as an intervention, to discipline and punish, to provoke and dominate. . . . The use of violence by the
Indian forces was deliberate, their tactics cruel and precise, amidst the
groundswell of public dissent. (133)

With this the distant cries of Azadi (freedom movement) started echoing in this
secluded region, Nowgam. These things had great impact on the psyche of young boys
and they started crossing the border into Pakistan for armed training imparted by various
militant organizations. Narrator’s friends were no exception, they too lured by freedom
movement crossed the Line of Control without informing him. He could not come to the
term with the sudden disappearance of the group of his childhood friends smuggled
across the border to militant’s training camp. The first to disappear among them was
Hussain. His sudden departure came as a jolt to him. Missing and worrying constantly
about his friend, he could not be at peace with everyone’s reconciliation of Hussain’s
crossing the border. He could not understand his motives for crossing over into Azad
Kashmir and longed for his resumption of their bond. Since Hussain was a kind of person
who could not be swayed easily, this made him believe that there was something else
behind his beloved friend’s disappearance:

While everyone seemed sort of reconciled to Hussain’s going across the
border, and many even admired him for being the first one from the
village, I just couldn’t be at peace with it. . . . What made him ‘join’, how
had it all come about, who was behind it? Although he could be somewhat
impressionable at times, he wasn’t someone swayed so easily. (57)

He was driven by the desire to find out, one way or another to get information
about Hussain. The first person he sought help to know about Hussain is Gul. Both Gul
and Hussain used to go home together in the evening after all friends’ usual huddle in the
street before parting. At Gul’s place narrator came to know that there were people
residing in the mountains who helped young boys in crossing Line of Control. These
people acted as guides since they knew the mountainous routes very well. Gul came to
know about a man, Shaban Khatana whose son, Rehman helped young boys to cross
border:
‘Farooq Bhaijan was saying that these people who live higher up in the woods, they, I mean their men, their boys, are very good, and they have been going across for a very long time, earns them good money, he said.’.

. . . ‘Farooq was saying there’s this man, Shaban Khatana, who lives just across the hill, he’s the man whose sons have been going back and forth.’

(56-57)

After getting information about this man, he along with Gul made it to the cabin in the woods where Shaban Khatana lived. Khatana’s family was still nomadic living in the shelters in mountains. His family knew the mountain forests intimately. They kept on roaming the mountainous pastures in search of good grazing for their livestock. Khatana informed him about his son, Rahman who acted as a guide and scouts for recruits to whisk across the Line of Control into Pakistan to get armed training, “So many have crossed these paths and mountains that one does not even remember. In any case, I haven’t been across in years now. My sons go sometimes” (62). He told them to come next time to get information regarding Hussain since Rahman was not around and he would come home after ten days. He further made it clear that his son too does not know much about the boys. He just was in contact with a man, who imported the boys across the border and paid Rahman for helping them in crossing Loc, “I don’t know much, beta, man comes at night, gives my sons money sometimes. This man, he is the real man. Someone important, I can tell . . . He doesn’t speak much, this man, just a few words with my elder son, Rahman. He does not see the boys till the last” (63). Ten days after a futile meet with Khatana, the narrator had not come across his other friends including Gul. And he went to their homes to enquire about them and came to know that they were not home. He was told that they had gone to their relatives and would not return soon. But deep down, he already knew the truth that like Hussain they too were absconded across the Line of Control. Even worse and shocking than this for him was when after meeting Rahman he discovered that it was Hussain’s own father, Khadim Hussain who had given his son as well as many other young boys over to the insurgency and possibly to martyrdom. He had been instrumental in encouraging his son’s defection, while significantly rejecting the narrator, whom he saw as a ‘sissy,’ mired in ‘silly ideas’ and lacking the valour required of a militant.
I soon caught up with Hussain’s abba that night… Khadim dealt me, blow after blow. With each step of our descent, he unraveled for me what must have seemed quite ordinary to him. . . . Your friends, they have shown great valour. They are freedom fighters now . . . He was Hussain’s father. My best friend, my soulmate’s father . . . This man sacrificed his own son for Kashmir. He paid the ultimate price for the struggle for freedom. (157, 160-164)

The devastation that befell village after their departure was like a nightmare for its people. As militancy gained momentum, the state in power used violence to curb the insurgency to maintain its rule in the valley. Althuser in his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” writes:

The state to keep hold on the people uses repressive state elements which function primarily through repression and violence. These repressive elements include the government, the administration, the army, the courts, the police, the prisons, etc. These elements use force or immediate threat of force to maintain the order of the state. (qtd. in Ferreter 83)

In the same vein to check infiltration and curb the inception, the Indian government deployed army in massive number in Kashmir. It became abode of curfews, crackdowns, raids, encounters, killings, bunkers, burning markets, schools and buildings. In the novel, Nowgam becomes the metaphor for the Kashmir of 90s. Waheed has painfully portrayed the ruins of Kashmir. The physical beauty of the landscape is rendered irrelevant. He uses terrifying images to depict how the continual bombardment from both the sides of LoC destroyed the beauty of valley. The ruination of land is visible everywhere, the trees are maimed, the mountains are killed and the ‘no man’s land’ is turned into terrain of dead bodies, “The whole jungle must be on fire, smoke and fumes and soot flying everywhere— what on earth they are doing, tearing the jungle apart, mixing limb with limb, branches and arms, grass and hair, sap and blood?” (129). The narrator’s memory of idyllic Kashmir is subverted through the description of macabre
ugliness that abounds in the landscape. This recounts what Edward Said says at the very beginning of *Culture and Imperialism*:

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. . . . The main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the totally ideal sense, each co-exists with the other. (1-2)

In the village, Captain Kadian’s troops were stationed to prevent and wherever possible shoot down insurgents crossing into Indian Territory who were threat to the state. As the army intensified its operation against militants atrocities became routine for Nowgam’s residents. Army used repressive measures like night-time raids, curfews, crackdowns and punishment beatings to quell the insurgency. The villagers witnessed first curfew in the middle of the month May. Residents of Nowgam were ordered not to come out of their houses since they were under curfew, “The area is declared under curfew, day and night. No one will venture out of their houses. Anyone violating this order will be dealt with severely. This is a government order” (177). This was the first tragedy that the people of the village met. Later the narrator came to know that the entire Kashmir had been under curfew ever since the arrival of new Governor in the state. Curfew made the life of the people miserable by putting a halt to their everyday lives. People were detained in their houses for months together. They ran out of food storage. Manish Gangahar in his book *Kashmiri’s Narratives of Conflict Identity Lost in Space and Time* remarks:

Violence has undeniably disrupted everyday life. A protest, retaliation by security forces, call for a strike, followed by a curfew, and then the cycle repeats. What is for people in other parts of the country perhaps a daily routine of stepping out for work and then returning home that only breaks on the weekends, in Kashmir it is not as regular an affair. For days before
there is no stepping out. And, if they do then there could be days before they return, as in case of detentions. (66)

Having been under curfew for more than three months, a group of withered looking women came to Nowgam in search of milk for their hungry children. The scene of milk-beggars, women from Poshpur, uncovers an extreme case of struggle for survival. When life is at stake human being fails to differentiate between good or bad. At this particular time dignity and character are pushed to the edge and a human being struggles like an animal. Women from Poshpur were unable to feed their children because of long-term curfew. There was lack of food and their breasts were dry of milk. Unable to see their children dying, they came to Nowgam to beg. One of the women was even ready to sell one of her daughters for milk so that she could save the others. This kind of struggle to survive employed by milk-beggars is beyond the common defense mechanisms as they were on the edge of insanity. Waheed has very painfully portrayed their pathetic conditions. Their faces were pale. It seemed as if they all had been drained of blood from their bodies. They all were wailing, crying and pleading villagers not to turn them empty-handed. Desperation and helplessness had driven them to the edge where a mother was ready to sell a daughter to feed her other child. He remarks:

‘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. . . . It is for our children that we have come this far . . . We just want milk, brother, please give us some milk. . . . My baby will die, my baby will die. If you give me milk, I will give you one of my girls.’ (179-181)

Apart from curfews, other repressive elements used by army that made the life of the people of Nowgam miserable were arrests and tortures in the interrogation centre. People were arrested, tortured and even killed for their suspected links with the militants. In the novel there is no dearth of heart rendering incidents which can evoke the human soul to the deepest point. In one of the incidents in the novel, Farooq Khan of Nowgam, brother of narrator’s friend Gul was arrested for being an associate of the militants. He
was taken away by army mere on suspicion. He was released after three weeks. Everyone came to see him as he had undergone third-degree interrogation. He had been inflicted various kinds of tortures. Waheed has very painstakingly given the detail account of torture inflicted upon Farooq in interrogation centre:

He was made to pee on an electric heater while they threw ice-cold water over him; they pierced a red-hot knitting needle through his penis and then gave him electric shocks; they stuffed a bamboo cane with hot chilli powder and thrust it up his anus and then broke the cane; they made him to drink their collective urine after keeping him thirsty for days; they ran a cricket roller over his feet and knees. (186)

Even worse to follow was that he got killed by army during his second arrest. After enjoying for nearly a month he was arrested again by army. During his second arrest the army murdered him brutally by decapitating his head. Three days later after his arrest his decapitated head was thrown into his parent’s yard. After seeing his decapitated head the villagers decided to look for Farooq’s body. They searched everywhere and after two days his headless body was tracked near a stream which runs down from the mountain:

Three days later, Farooq’s head was hurled over the fence, into the front garden of their house. . . . Two days later, Ramzan Choudhary’s elder son, Ishaq jan Choudhary, I only got to know now when we were paired together in the hunt for Farooq’s body— and Iwere scouring the area around the dirt track that goes away from the village and tails off into the footpath to the valley, when we saw Farooq’s bloated, headless body lying near a narrow stream running down from the mountain. (195-196)

Waheed introduces one more type of repressive element used by army to curb insurgency i.e. crackdown. During the period of 90s crackdowns were common. People suffered a lot during this process carried out by the army. Farooq Faheem, born and brought up in Kashmir and right now teaching at the South Asia Centre for Peace,
“The Disobedient Spring” writes about his experience of crackdowns:

The crackdown had a ripple effect on our neighbourhood too. The government school building close to Bilal’s house was turned into an interrogation centre. After the muezzin’s call to morning prayer, the mosque loudspeakers announced that there was a crackdown. Women were asked to stay indoors while men were ordered to assemble in the graveyard. . . . Before we knew what was happening, around 20 young boys were picked up from the graveyard. (92)

In the novel the whole village, Nowgam was caught under the grip of crackdown, when the army got a clue that the militants were hiding in the village. The narrator describes that one day early in the morning something unusual happened. Khadim Hussain had been rendering *azaan* (Allah’s summon’s to prayer to the devoted) in the reverse order. Just five minutes after he finished his inverse *azaan* a loud burst of gunfire came from the village. There was an encounter going on in the village. Such kind of encounters between militants and security forces were taking place everywhere in the state; some lasted for hours and some for brief period. This encounter lasted for a short period. After that an announcement was made on loudspeaker that there would be a search operation in the area and all men were ordered to assemble in an open field. When they gathered in the field they found clusters of vehicles and army men coming out of those vehicles. These men laid a dead body on the ground in their midst which they were carrying. Since the face of that dead body was covered that made narrator and villagers unable to see it. Some thoughts flashed through the mind of the narrator. He thought that this body may be of a militant who got killed in morning skirmish. He struggled a lot to put a name to the dead body. He was scared that body may be one of his friends killed in morning encounter. Then at the end of the day they were told to assemble in the same field tomorrow morning at the same time, since some search is being conducted in the village. On the second day when they all gathered, the face of the dead was made visible to them. They were made to walk pass the body one by one. And finally when narrator
reached the spot and looked down at the body, he was shocked to see Khadim Hussain’s mutilated face. The narrator narrates:

I took a brief look at Khadim Hussain’s face, his fair face, his son’s face, and the shiny nose and the burn-like prayer mark on his forehead, through all scars and mutilations. . . . There must have been militants in the village, most probably in the mosque, or somewhere close by, who he know, his own son even, who he wanted to warn. (222)

Khadim was killed in that encounter for allegedly helping militants by alerting them, who were hiding in the village. During the third day of crackdown, the Governor visited Nowgam on the occasion of the Indian Republic Day. He was to address the very people on whom he had ordered a crackdown. It was during the chill of January that the old and the infirm, the women and the children, had to listen to his words after having endured earlier three days of curfew incarceration. The Governor, to the bewilderment of the artist-protagonist, addressed the people of Nowgam in English. His speech in a language alien to them produced confusion in the crowd indicated by their “disoriented glances” and “ears bent over tilting shadow” (232). The narrator noted that despite the crowd’s failure to comprehend the Governor’s message, the latter “railed in never-ending English sentences” (233). His speech emphasized the bond between India and Kashmir which according to him is unbreakable and exists despite the “convulsions” and “tribulations” of history. By referring to past history, he emphasized that Kashmir is a ‘sacred’ part of Indian national imagination. He tells:

‘My dear brothers and sisters let me tell you something . . . the bond between Kashmir and Mother India is based not just on your King Maharaja Hari Singh’s Instrument of Accession and the articles and clauses of India’s great constitution; it is held together by far more tenacious and lasting forces that neither the convulsions, tribulations and tremors of history, nor the anarchy and cynicism of contemporary politics, can break up!’ (232)
The Governor’s visit acted as a final blow to the people of Nowgam. After a week of this episode the people held a meeting at Sarpanch’s house where all the villagers put forward reasons of leaving the village. It was not safe for people to stay in the village in such militarization. They talked about the things happening in whole Kashmir due to armed movement. People were dying and getting massacred everywhere. People were being picked up by army and thrown into jails never to return. Kashmir became a dark place with multitudes of dead bodies:

There was a full-scale armed movement under way somewhere, everywhere, and things like this must be happening everywhere. There were people dying everywhere, getting massacred in every town and village, there were people being picked up and thrown into jails in unknown parts, there were dungeons in the city where hundreds of young men were kept in heavy chains and from where they never emerged alive, there were thousands who had disappeared, leaving behind women with photographs and perennial waiting, there were multitudes of dead bodies on the roads, in hospital beds, in fresh martyrs’ graveyards and scattered casually on the snow of mindless borders. (250)

Fearing reprisal and persecution by the soldiers, almost all the families in the village fled to places outside the valley except headman’s family. These people were compelled by the circumstances prevailing in the valley to abandon their homes to save their lives. Waheed has artistically painted the dreadful experience of villagers during their exodus movement carried out to the outskirts of the valley. It gives the reader an idea about the conditions of the destitute and miserable people who left their homes for the sake of survival during the conflict of 90s in Kashmir. He remarks:

They left in a small caravan, in a kafila that reminded me of movies I’d seen, of black and white scenes of Partition, . . . The caravan throbbed with things— everything— both animate and otherwise. Mules, dogs, sacks of flour and rice, hens, goats, crying blabbering children, fathers, mothers, old matrons leaning on ancient turbaned-with-rags walking sticks, heavily
bearded emaciated grandfathers, young women... They marched in one buzzing, breathing, sinuous line, and were trying to hurry on, lest someone stop them... The old men, and you must trust me, stopped every minute or so, bent on their curved staffs, and then slowly swiveled round to take a last look at the village. (248-249)

Hannah Arendt in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Imperialism* while commenting on the loss of one’s homeland says that the first and foremost loss which migrants suffer is the loss of their homes, the entire social texture in which they are born and brought up. This takes the form of a loss of “connectedness” and a loss of inner identity. The loss of language and culture due to migration contributes to perpetuated inner conflict which leads to an emotional disconnection to a new language and culture. The calamity of the migrants is unprecedented; they are cut off from their land and the roots which are embedded in their past.

The first loss which the rightless suffered was loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world. This calamity is far from unprecedented; in the long memory of history, forced migrations of individuals or whole groups of people for political or economic reasons look like everyday occurrences. (173)

Living in Nowgam at his father’s insistence, the narrator’s life of complete isolation and estrangement from the world is highlighted in the stark image of “the militarized wilderness.” The narrator dwelled sadly upon the isolation which he and his family were suffering after villagers’ departure. Compelled by circumstances to stay on in the deserted village, he was left with no choice but to enter collaboration with the force, Captain Kadian approached the narrator’s father with a job offer for his son. Narrator was asked to work for the army, “I knew, and my father knew, too, in that very first moment, in that very first meeting with the Captain, that we had to do exactly what we were told. We just knew” (256). Fearing the repercussion of denial, the narrator’s father accepted the offer. The narrator’s job involved collecting the belongings of the
dead bodies. Every time when he made it to that place, he feared the possibility of coming across his friend’s dead bodies. He got sick of the place filled with the stench of the rotting bodies strewn all around. He wanted to offer them a decent burial but as he was alone it is impossible for him to give them funeral according to their religion. Staring at the field of corpses he cursed the cross border war which made the life of the people extremely miserable and damaged them beyond any repair. In order to give them a mass cremation he set fire to human parts and left-over that laid littered in hundreds down the valley near village. While gazing at the ablaze field of corpses he remarks:

To hell with all, to hell with the Indian, to hell with the killer dogs they send here in their millions to prey on us, to hell with all this swarming Army here, to hell with the Pakistanis. To hell with the Line of Control, to hell with Kadian and his Mehrotra Sir, to hell with India, to hell with Pakistan, to hell with Jihad, and to hell with, to burning, smouldering hell with everything! It must all end. It must all, all end. I let loose shards of the crisp chaff as I move over the burning mounds. I feel satisfied for having thought of that in advance. (300-301)

Women too had to bear the brunt of the conflict. They hardly find any place in ‘masculinized’ narratives. They are pushed to the margins. Their sufferings are hard heard. They are often the worst victims in any violent conflict because of their vulnerable position in the society. The worst kind of violence committed on their bodies during the violent times includes various forms of sexual assault like rape, which has frequently been used as a weapon of war and a tool of political repression. Women have been subjugated to violence in Kashmir for the past two decades by security forces as well as rebel groups. Rape is used as a means of targeting women whom the security forces accuse of being militant sympathizers; in raping them, the security forces are attempting to punish and humiliate the entire community. Examining the military ideology underlying the torture of women, Bunster-Burotto in “Surviving beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America” writes, “One of the essential ideas behind the sexual slavery of a woman in torture is to teach her that she must retreat into the house and fulfill the traditional role of wife and mother” (Alexander and Mohanty 157).
Nitasha Kaul, a London-based academic, public intellectual, media commentator and writer of fiction and verse, in her essay, “Everything I Cannot Tell You About the Women Of Kashmir” writes about plight of women in Kashmir. Their tragedy is to live their life under constant threat of militancy and military. They have endured a lot during period of 90s. They lost their near and dear ones in the war:

You must know that the women of Kashmir today are also victims of mass rapes in villages whose names have become shorthand for uninvestigated crimes. The women of Kashmir are the tens of thousands of widows and half-widows; wives of killed and disappeared men; as well as mothers and grandmothers of missing children. Vulnerable, often impoverished, the sorrows, struggles and humiliation of these women of Kashmir are a catalogue of charges against the occupation of Kashmir. (252)

Through his novel Waheed has given voice to the unheard sufferings and made world aware of various atrocities inflicted upon woman population of Kashmir. They have been subjected to various inhuman treatments. In the novel the oppression of women by army is infested in the incident of Kunan Poshpura tragedy. In order to find out about sixteen boys who had disappeared from the village, the army in a night-long raid raped all the women of the same village. This was done while holding the village men captive in a field where search operation for militants was being carried out, “the story of the sixteen boys who had apparently disappeared together a few weeks ago from the nearest village down in the big valley, soon after all the women there had been raped in a night-long raid by Indian soldiers” (25). Press Council of India in Crisis and Credibility: Report of the Press Council of Indian also comments on mass rape of women in Kunan Poshpura:

On February 23, 1991, at least 23 and perhaps as many as 100 women between the ages of 13 and 80 were reported to have been raped in the village of Kunan Poshpura by soldiers of the Fourth Raj Rifles, who were posted in Kupwara. The soldiers many of whom were reportedly intoxicated, entered the village at around 11:00 P.M, and forced the men
to assemble outside where they were assaulted and interrogated about militant activity . . . that 23 women claimed to have been gang raped and subjected to cruel measures irrespective of their age, marital status, pregnancy, etc. (231)

Numerous national and international rights organizations have investigated and verified the gruesome incident. The Indian government however, has denied that any such incident ever took place. In a reflection on this incident, Waheed’s narrator sarcastically remarks, “A brand new Minister for Kashmir Affairs from Delhi was also quoted as saying that no place by the name of Poshpur ever existed on the map”(26).

Through the “Fractured Fetus Case” in the novel, Waheed explains how the body of the woman becomes a ‘site for political intimidation.’ He created the character of Dasrath Singh, who invariably accompanied Captain Kadian during his dreaded sessions of interrogation. The narrator assumed Dasrath Singh as a peon in Captain Kadian’s office but he turned out to be the Interrogator extraordinaire. Kadian told the narrator that he had been a ‘Subedar’ in the army. During a search operation, he had kicked a pregnant woman repeatedly in her belly. Consequently this hapless woman gave birth to a baby with fractured limbs. The case was investigated by some NGO who managed to take the case to Lok Sabha of the Parliament and Dasrath Singh was transferred to Kadian’s camp. The Captain Kadian reserved high praise for Singh, whose ranking as a lowly subordinate made the Captain lightly dismiss this kind of oppression as a ‘procedural error.’ He tells the narrator:

. . . from time to time we have these inquiries and cases against our men for violations of fucking human rights, et cetera. Bloody fucking civilians— really, they just don’t get it sometimes. You know, a lot of the times, it’s just some procedural error, some silly, logistical, technical mistake, some simple human fucking error, in short. These things happen during operations, we have to meet our objectives and we go about it purely as a business; it’s a task, a fucking job. But people don’t get it, they just don’t get it. (265-266)
In the novel there is no dearth of scenes depicting the sufferings of women or the tortures inflicted upon them by army, whether it was a menstruating woman who wept a lot due to pain as she was made to sit for hours to listen to Governor’s speech on Republic day. Fear and anxiety was also instilled by military in women by taking away their sons, husbands, brothers or by killing them. Beside this, militants were also shown to be guilty of committing human rights violation several times. Extremist militant groups, seeking to enforce an Islamic code of behaviour, launched violent attacks on women. In an oblique reference, the narrator once says, “I can’t help thinking of this new group, Allah Tigers, who broke video rental shops and torched cinemas in the city and dragged frightened little girls out of school buses and checked their hands for any signs of nail polish and sent them back home to wear floor-length burqas” (90). In the same vein Toyeba Pandita comments upon the atrocities meted out to the women by militants in her article “A Commentary on Armed Insurgency: A Catalyst towards Social Injustice in Kashmir”

Militant threats to women were reported as early as 1990, most frequently by groups reportedly seeking to enforce their manipulation of "Islamic" culture in Kashmir, reports of rape by militant groups were rare in the conflict's early years. In July 1990 warnings were issued to the women to maintain purdah (or burqa— clothing which entirely conceals the body). In May 1993 militants sprayed paint on women who defied the order. Four students were hospitalized with eye injuries from the paint. (6)

Waheed through his novel not only portrays the brutalities of the Indian army or the Indian state, he also takes a critical and sarcastic view of Pakistan and militants. The role of Pakistan in fomenting the armed struggle against India cannot be denied; it aims to engage India by means of a proxy war. Waheed has given a scathing portrayal of Pakistan. Pakistan, in the novel is described as “that goddamn country a few kilometers across the border which is never at rest and will never let anyone else rest in peace either” (152). It is described as the place from where the militants would come with arms training to fight against Indian authorities in Kashmir. Militants who claimed to be the liberators of the people were shown to be engaged in brutalities themselves. They too
oppressed the people. This earned them ire and derision of many Kashmiris, one of whom is the narrator’s father who often condemned them for their violent methods and disapproved of their violent resistance, “I have seen this before, son, seen it all, nothing happens in the end, you know, nothing” (27). Toyeba Pandit in an article, “A Commentary on Armed Insurgency: A Catalyst towards Social Injustice in Kashmir” writes about the violation of human rights by the militants. She remarks:

A dozen major militant organizations, and perhaps many more of smaller ones, operate in Kashmir; roughly divided between those who support independence of Kashmir and those who support accession to Pakistan. . . . Reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists have confirmed Indian reports of systematic human rights violations by militants. A 2010 US state department report blamed separatist insurgents in Kashmir of committing several serious abuses, including the killing of security personnel as well as civilians, and of engaging in widespread torture, rape, beheadings, kidnapping and extortion. (5)

Militants too used repressive measures to take control of the people. They committed atrocities and issued threats to those who were seen as betraying the cause. An example is the narrator’s description of inhuman violence meted out to the family of Shaban Khatana by the militants. They were tortured of being accused as army informers and were seen to have betrayed the cause of the movement of Azaadi as well as militants. One day a few men from some militant group came to see Khatana to help them to find out hidden arms and ammunitions. The arms were hidden by an Afghan militant who got killed in an encounter and it was only he who knew about it. After his death the men from his organization had been looking for the arms for months and they got to know that Khatana had a sense for sniffing things out. They asked for his help to find the ammunitions dumped in the Shiingund Jungle. After hearing the whole incident, he told them to come back after a few days because he needed some time to prepare for the trip. Meanwhile army seized a big seizure of weapons somewhere near the same place, forest of Shiingund. After that they displaced the seized weapons on television and also said
that the local people had helped them in tracing out the dumped material. After a month and a half, the militants who visited Khatana for help arrived at their place to enquire about arms. These boys extremely furious shouted at them by labeling them as informers. They suspected Khatana as an informer, who helped army in finding out the hidden ammunitions. Waheed has very painstakingly portrayed the picture of whole family being tortured by militants. They chopped off the nose and earlobes of the head of the family, Khatana. Not satiated with this, they very brutally grabbed Khatana’s wife by head scarf and then cut out first her ears and then tip of her tongue. Even Khatana’s son Rahman was not spared, they disfigured his arm. He says:

The boy took out a long large knife, a hatchet—like large knife- it was black on one side, Bhaijan— and then in a swift blow of its blade sliced off a part of Father’s nose. He screamed very loudly, Bhaijan, but only once. . . . Next, they grabbed Mother by her headscarf and chopped off a part of her ears. They didn’t bleed much. Then the big brute forced her mouth open, Bhaijan, and tore off the tip of her tongue! . . . I didn’t move from my place for fear of finding my hand gone. (211)

Thus, Waheed’s fictional narrative becomes a microcosm of the Kashmir of 1990s. It is a representation that merges events, ideas, and arena of conflict. It brings to fore the voices and aspirations of people numbed into silence by a brutal conflict. Against the backdrop of the cross-border tension, Waheed portrays simple characters that represent the precarious lives and deaths of the Kashmiri population at large and in so far as they convey the fragmented and often traumatic experience of violent conflict. The Collaborator is based on the facts personally observed and carefully reported. The special merit of this novel lies in evoking the most significant point of the Kashmir conflict, the perspective of the unheard victims. Through the novel Waheed brings out the deep pain, anguish and shock at the brutalization of the whole population. He is critical of the breaking away of the people of Kashmir by the triple assault of Pakistani shelling, militant menace and military. He lays bare the harrowing realities of insurgency-infested Kashmir of 1990s through a wounding journey of a Gujjar boy. Through his journey we come to know about the wounds and scars imprinted on the lives of people of Kashmir by defense authorities as well as militants, who claim to be their liberators.