Conclusion

The present study attempts to analyse the wounding journeys of five contemporary Kashmiri novelists i.e. Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Tej Nath Dhar, Siddhartha Gigoo and Shahnaz Bashir through their works. The fundamental premise of the study is to explore the treatment of social concerns in the novels of these writers in order to bring into light the tragedies and sufferings of the common masses in the conflict ridden society, Kashmir. Their narratives capture the bitter truth of Kashmir during 90s by presenting a true picture of the horrors of violence when the whole valley was shrouded under the dark clouds of militancy and military. The aim of the thesis is not to understand the origin of the long standing conflict in Kashmir, which has been discussed and dissected in great detail by various writers, scholars, and chroniclers, and neither has it aimed to provide a roadmap to a possible solution. The endeavour has been taken to take a step back and sociologically looks at the sufferings of the people in Kashmir through the work of these writers irrespective of their religion, class, creed, and sex.

The Introduction provides a brief overview of the history of Kashmir. It further presents biographical details of five novelists taken up for the study and examines sociological theory and the critics. Kashmir has gone through a tumultuous history through its existence as it has passed from ruler to ruler and empire to empire. Kashmir, a stoic witness to the tragedies experienced at the hands of brutal invaders and greedy conquerors who oppressed the hapless and gullible Kashmiris by their inhumane and tyrannical oppression century after century. The historical tragedy of Kashmir conflict dates back to 16th century. Since then Kashmir has witnessed a series of tyranny, rebellion and bloodshed under the rule of various rulers. Of all the traumas and brutalities Kashmir has witnessed, the phase of early 90s was the worst and continues to be so. Though the seeds of the conflict were sown with the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 but an overt form of armed insurgency started in Kashmir against India in 1987 and gathered momentum in 1989. The phase of 90s was the most horrendous period which triggered many people to delineate the brutality and savagery of the events of this period in literature which mirrors the pathos and sufferings of the common people of Kashmir. The writers like Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Tej Nath Dhar, Siddhartha
Gigoo and Shahnaz Bashir have attempted to bring before the world the dilemma of the people of Kashmir through their works.

Journey as a structural and organizational principle has been employed by different writers right from the beginning of literature, whether oral or written, to reflect the mental, physical and emotional events in their lives. In such works, the protagonists recall their memories from the past and tell a story based on their experiences tracing a journey of the wounds suffered by them. It helps to put the protagonist in a specific socio-cultural frame, with which he has a vital connection: he comes to life within it; he helps us to perceive it; and he is also affected by it. The movement of the protagonist within his journey defines the scope of the novel, opening a vista from where the readers get to see and understand the novels from the perspective of the novelist. The physical movement is complemented by the changing thoughts of the protagonist. There is juxtaposition of the landscape in the backdrop within which the protagonist moves and his introspection on the various thoughts which keep interacting with each other throughout the novel. The chosen works, Basharat Peer’s Curfewed Night, Mirza Waheed’s The Collaborator, Tej Nath Dhar’s Under the Shadow of Militancy, Siddhartha Gigoo’s The Garden of Solitude and Shahnaz Bashir’s The Half Mother show that the protagonist is deeply affected by the turmoil that occurred in Kashmir during 1990s, they have to move within it, think about it, and reflect on it. Their thinking and reflection provides the basis of their understanding of what has happened and is happening there. The works of these writers which, of course are the reflections of their own wounding journeys provides a platform for analyzing the agonized Kashmir. The present study is confined to a sociological analysis of their works and to analyze the agony, pathos, wounds faced by the innocent people of Kashmir.

The first chapter “Curfewed Night: Journey of Self” describes the tragedies and brutalities which the people of Kashmir have gone through during the conflict of 90s. The victims of the conflict are all common men and women irrespective of their community or religion. It is the journey of every Kashmiri youth. Peer realistically displays their agonies, frustrations and trauma of living in a war-torn zone, Kashmir. By making the protagonist of the novel a mouth piece he unravels the vicious cycle of violence that
unleashed in the valley, when the young men lured by freedom movement crossed the border to get training in Pakistan and returned as freedom fighters to revolt against India. This led to the chaos and total collapse of democratic system in the state. Killings, abductions, assassination, protests, disappearances became order of the day. In order to pacify the rebellious province, the Indian government deployed military, paramilitary and police force in massive number. They rebelled with arms and ammunition. The novel is full of barbaric, cruel and non-humanistic actions of the state meted out to the common masses. Apart from this, Peer also delineates the oppression faced by the people of Kashmir at the hands of militants. They claimed to be their liberators but were themselves engaged in brutalities. There are many incidents in the novel which establish that much of the miseries that the people of Kashmir faced were because of militants. He also broods over the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley and their plight in exile.

The second chapter “The Collaborator: A Narrative of Tragedy” is an account of the people of Nowgam, Kashmir, a village situated near the border between India and Pakistan living amidst the armed insurgency. The central theme of the novel is presented in such a manner that the sufferings caused to the common people of the village, Nowgam by both defense authorities and militants become the metaphor for the miseries inflicted on the people of whole Kashmir. Thus the village becomes the microcosm of macrocosm. The novel traces the journey of an eponymous narrator, a nineteen year old Gujjar (nomadic) boy. Before the onset of insurgency, Nowgam is shown relatively peaceful place, where narrator and his four friends spent an enjoyable childhood. But their happiness vanished, when militancy started in Kashmir finding its way to their village with the coming of a florid moulvi (religious head). He radicalized the villagers. He used religion as a bait to indoctrinate people of Nowgam. He conditioned their mind by portraying extremely ruthless picture of Indian army. The teachings of moulvi had a great impact on the psyche of young boys and they started crossing the border into Pakistan for armed training imparted by militant organizations. Narrator’s friends too crossed the border without informing him. The devastation that befell the villagers after their departure is like a nightmare for its people. Arrests, encounters, killings, abductions, tortures, crackdowns, humiliation became routine for the residents of Nowgam. Scared by the conditions the villagers fled outside the Kashmir for survival except narrator’s family.
Compelled by the circumstances to stay on in deserted village, the narrator had no choice but to enter into collaboration with the army. The narrator’s job involved collecting the belongings of the dead bodies from a place, ‘no man’s land.’ He got sick of that place which was filled with the stench of the rotting bodies strewn all around. He wanted to offer them a decent burial but as he was alone and it was impossible for him. Staring at the field of corpses he cursed the cross border war which made the life of people extremely miserable. In order to give them a mass cremation he set fire to human parts and left-over that lay littered in hundreds down the valley.

The third chapter “Under the Shadow of Militancy: A Tale of Loss and Suffering” throws light on miseries and problems faced by Kashmiri Pandits during the period of 90s in Kashmir, when the militancy and insurgency was at its peak, which remained mostly hidden from the world. Through his novel, Dhar tries to bring out the wrath and horror that Kashmiri Pandits had to face at the time of insurgency. The single plot of the novel composed of different narratives is united by the main protagonist who narrates various episodes where the miseries of Kashmiri Pandits are expressed. The principal narrator of the novel is an unnamed Kashmiri Pandit who decided to reside alone in his home in Kashmir while sending away his wife and children to a safer place outside Kashmir for their safety after being snubbed by his colleagues. During his stay in Kashmir he became an eye witness to the brutal happenings of 90s. In order to keep the record of the unfortunate events of that period he started putting those cruel and barbaric incidents in black and white. The atmosphere of Kashmir was charged with threats and menace. Dhar has very painstakingly portrayed the picture of horrors of 90s of Kashmir. From heavenly abode it became a place where demonstrations, police firings, crackdowns, protests, strikes, curfew started. Narrator tells about myriad horrifying tales of the innocent Kashmiri Pandits. They had been subjected to various tortures and violence perpetrated by the militants. The perpetrators used various methods to threaten them to leave Kashmir. These included threats, mass killings, abductions, rapes etc that left deep mark on the psyche of the Kashmiri Pandits and they left the valley. Dhar’s historic sense is so deep that he has skillfully portrayed the grim picture of real incidents with the fictional characters in a way that has never been portrayed before so realistically.
The fourth chapter “The Garden of Solitude: An Analysis of Agony in Exile” assesses the historical phenomenon of forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits during the troubled period of 90s and the plight of lives in exile. The events of 90s had a deep impact on the mind of Siddhartha Gigoo and these experiences found an artistic expression in The Garden of Solitude. It is a horrific manifestation of not only Gigoo’s experience but through him the representation of entire Kashmiri Pandit community: their displacement and their life in exile. Through the main character of the novel, Sridar the novelist delves in a wounding journey through the tumultuous times that saw an entire community homeless and identitiless. At the beginning of the novel Sridar is shown enjoying his peaceful life in Srinagar. It describes the peaceful time of 1980s, an era preceding militancy when both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims shared a harmonious social and cultural co-existence. Soon when the violence engulfed the valley of Kashmir, the idyllic world of Sridar’s childhood shattered and disrupted the lives of many innocents like Sridar who were trying to lead a simple life. The fearful wind of frenzied atmosphere changed the historic harmonic atmosphere of Kashmir. Sridar’s solitary wounding journey of life becomes the panoramic view of every Kashmiri Pandit being forced to leave their homeland behind in the growing atmosphere of fear and hatred. Notices, messages, letters were used by militants to warn Pandits to flee Kashmir. Targeted killings and assassination of Kashmiri Pandits were being carried out by the militants. The macabre happenings during 90s proved to be the turning point in the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, as it unleashed terrible forces against them, making it impossible for them to stay back in their homeland. After leaving their native place, the homeless community got refugee in tents, camps and other makeshift arrangements made by the government. Herded into nightmare of refugee camps in Jammu the plight of lives in exile was atrocious. Gigoo through his book presents the realistic picture to the world of the sufferings endured by Kashmiri Pandits and their struggle to survive and adapt to the new, hostile surroundings.

The fifth chapter “The Half Mother: A Woman’s Journey for Justice” expounds the issue of enforced disappearances in Kashmir, one of the ugliest realities of conflict. The Half Mother is highly symbolical and allegorical. It refers to those mothers in Kashmir whose sons disappeared in army and police custodies during the conflict of 90s.
The term “Half” is borrowed by writer from “half widow” which is used for the wives of those men who were picked by the defense authorities and there was no trace whether they were alive or dead. Similarly Bashir has used “Half Mother” as a metaphor for the plight of all the devastated and robbed mothers of the conflict whose sons disappeared. Through the wounding journey of the main character of novel, Haleema, Bashir depicts the plight of all those mothers who have lost their son in burning cauldron of territorial war. Before the onset of insurgency Haleema is living a peaceful life with her only son, Imran. He is a stark reminder of her past, of her marriage with the medical assistant which lasted only for three months. But soon turbulent period of 90s shatters and disrupts the lives of many innocent people. Haleema’s life too does not remain untouched by the ugly happenings of war. She first loses her father, Ghulam Rasool Joo who got killed by a Major Aman Khushwaha. The other shock which shatters her life forever is the arrest of Imran during a night raid by the army. The mysterious disappearance of Imran leads to an ingenious and dark story of a mother’s quest to track down her only son. Imran’s arrest marks the beginning of the most agonizing phase of Haleema’s life, the repercussions of which take a heavy toll on her physical and psychological health. Her journey for the search of her disappeared son takes her to army camps, torture centres, police stations, jails, social leaders, journalists, bureaucrats, NGOs and court. But the mystery regarding Imran search is never revealed and truth is never disclosed. As the days pass there is no sign of Imran which affect her both mentally and physically and she dies without seeing the return of her son.

These five Kashmiri contemporary writers writing in English are social realist and believe that art has a functional role in the society. They have succeeded in their attempts to bring about a harmonious fusion of their social concerns of artistic values. In fact, their novels appear to be a study of sociology or sociological novel— broadly speaking as sociology is study of the nature and development of human society, of human behaviour in groups. The works of these writers are pertinent to time and space which is palpable in their concern for the suffering and tragedy that befell Kashmir and its people since the armed rebellion broke out. Their works are consistently engaged with stories of human sufferings. Their themes and characters embody their value for humanistic stories and in their works they explore the miseries of common masses. Thus, it is evident that the
novels of these writers explored closely the social as well as political realities of life in Kashmir during period of 90s. These realities lead to the sufferings of the people of Kashmir. The vision of life of these writers is always affirmative, positive and humanistic. The literary works of these writers bring the tragedy and angst of the people of Kashmir. They have spotlighted the intricate subjects like individuality, exertion, travails, endeavour and persecution which were normally missing from the narrative thought of Kashmir.