Chapter III

Under the Shadow of Militancy: A Tale of Loss and Suffering

Under the Shadow of Militancy published in 2002 foregrounds the grim realities of the long conflict of 90s and its adverse effect on Kashmiri Pandits against the backdrop of political history of Kashmir. The period of 1989-1990 was the most pathetic period in the history of Kashmir. During this period Kashmir witnessed the rise of armed insurgency and outbreak of militancy that changed the whole scenario of Kashmir valley in many ways. Violence and terror gripped the whole valley. The political upheaval created due to armed conflict disrupted and inflicted enormous suffering on the common people of Kashmir. During the phase of 90s in Kashmir everyone was affected by the unhealthy conditions of bloodshed and mayhem. The traumatic events of 1990 inflicted enormous suffering on the people of Kashmir. Hit lists were prepared by the militant organizations which contained the names of both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims to be killed. Day after day the incidents of targeted killings were being carried out. Under the Shadow of Militancy, positioned between history and literature narrates and explains the events with greater verve and passion, with seriousness of the pure historical account:

The writer’s relation to historical reality— be he playwright or novelist— can be no different in principle from his relation to reality as a whole. . . . The deeper and more genuinely historical a writer’s knowledge of a period, the more freely will he be able to move about inside his subject and the less tied will he feel to individual historical data. . . . We repeat, a writer’s relation to history is not something special and isolated, it is an important component of his relation to the whole of reality and especially society. (Lukacs 167-168)

Both the communities i.e. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits suffered equally. Kashmiri Pandits are the descendents of Hindu Priests and among the original inhabitant of the Kashmir valley. They became pain-stricken in the growing atmosphere
of terror and violence. They were given death threats to abandon their homes and hearth. Notices and messages were delivered to them asking to abandon their ancestral land. The barbarous and ruthless killings of Kashmiri Pandits were being carried out to spread terror among the minority community. To save themselves from massive massacre they had no choice but to flee their homeland leaving behind everything to live in exile with a sense of homelessness, rootlessness, and an illusion of returning back to their homes shortly. Having left their homes, belongings and everything behind they were forced to live the life of a refugee in their own country. For the Pandits, as would be for anybody else who is living in a place for years, to cut off the ties from the past, from the land, the house that had been once their home which in turn leads to denial of what one has grown up with, of being rooted in a definite place and clime within a network of social and cultural relationships which are crucial for defining one’s self has been a traumatic experience. The trauma of losing one’s home has also been dealt with in Sudha Koul’s narrative where she tries to recreate a certain semblance of a Kashmiri Pandit home in US.

It is lovely sight to see the multicoloured versions of Vishnu the Preserver flitting about in the front garden, on the blood red impatiens flowering amid deep green foliage, and in this universal moment I forget where I am. What is missing in my re-created world is what makes it different, the snowline and the mountains, all the relatives and the laughter and the coming and the going. (203)

The issues of miseries and problems faced by Kashmiri Pandits during the period of 90s in Kashmir, when the militancy and insurgency was at its peak, remained mostly hidden from the world. They found only passing references in the accounts written on the subject of militancy in the valley of Kashmir and the resultant turmoil there. The problems created by the rise of militancy for the Kashmiri Pandits, which further brought about their exodus in 1990 found a brief mention in most of the studies of rise of militancy in Kashmir. Majority of cluster of writings have either focused on historical account of Kashmir or on the Kashmir problem as an extension of an international relations debate between India and Pakistan. But none have bothered to go beyond and
depict the human side of the story i.e. the agony and trauma which Kashmiri Pandits experienced in their own homeland during the phase of 90s. The result is that very little is known about the miseries faced by Kashmiri Pandits and mostly remains hidden from the world. This kind of neglect has raised consciousness among Kashmiri Pandit masses. They scrutinize their shared brutalities and pen down those in their all encapsulating works.

Various indigenous contemporary writers have portrayed many shades of the experience of Kashmiri Pandits during the conflict. The pangs of enormous sufferings borne on them due to conflict has been a pervasive theme in a number of literary works produced by Kashmiri Pandit writers in Kashmiri, Hindi, and English in prose as well as in verse. They all lay emphasis on the innocent people of their community who were absolutely ignorant of what’s and why’s of the happenings while they were brutally murdered, tortured and asked to leave their place for reasons unknown to them. They make literature a prism through which they project the harsh realities of the conflict. Tej Nath Dhar through his novel *Under the Shadow of Militancy* tries to bring out the wrath and the horror that the people of his community had to face in Kashmir at the time of insurgency. Dhar’s narrative is different from his fellow writers in the sense that it is an interesting account of the plight of hapless Kashmiri Pandit community which is narrated through private and public events that took place in the Valley in 1990 and how it swelled and how common people got caught in the web of these events. A piece of art should be read in context of socio-political views of the novelist, which implies, “a writer’s political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest detail of his work” (Orwell 33). Therefore, a novel can be termed as socio-political novel in the barometer of the times in which it exists. It presents an entirely different vision of life. Further elaborating on this Dhar himself writes:

The pages contained descriptions of a variety of events and happenings, a mixture of the very immediate present and the distant past. The first few were about the outbreak of militancy in the Valley, particularly in the city of Srinagar, and the scare it had caused to people, especially among the
Pandits, forcing many of them to flee. . . . It is an interesting account of public events and private happenings, intermixed with the thoughts and reflections of an individual, written as a response to fast moving political developments in the valley of Kashmir in the early months of 1990. (XIII)

The novel has been named as *Under the Shadow of Militancy* by the writer because it throws light on the life of the Kashmiri Pandits who had to live under the constant shadow of death during the period of early 90s. The period of 90s was a crucial period in the growth of militancy and had its consequent impact on the lives of Kashmiri Pandits in the valley of Kashmir. They had to live the life of insecurity and uncertainty during the critical period of 1990, when the valley of Kashmir was caught up in the tumultuous whirlpool of militancy and turmoil. It records the unpleasant and gruesome happenings of the conflict and its traumatic consequences on Kashmiri Pandits. They were subjected to various brutal atrocities to uproot them from their motherland, Kashmir. They were killed by various brutal means to create an atmosphere of terror and menace. Similarly Salman Rushdie in his novel, *Shalimar the Clown* talks about the atrocities done on Kashmiri Pandits to force them to abandon their homeland, “Kill one, scare ten. Kill one, scare ten” (295). Various fear campaigns like threatening letters, telephone calls, and posters, notices posted on doors and walls and warnings through newspapers were given to the whole community either to leave the valley within short and specified time or be ready to perish. Through all these acts of violence they were compelled to leave their homeland. Rushdie in his novel, *Shalimar the Clown* shares the same anecdote “Posters appeared on the road leading from Srinagar to Dachigam demanding that all Pandits vacate their property and leave Kashmir” (294). The impact of militancy on the lives of community of Kashmiri Pandit is well framed by Paul S. Jiji in an essay, “Kashmir Militancy and the Militants,” where he writes:

The minority Pandits of the valley became the victims of this operation and they were gunned down indiscriminately, hanged or murdered by other brutal means. Torture, molestation and rape, threatening letters and telephone calls, posters and bit notices pasted on doors and warnings through newspapers for the whole community to leave the valley within
short and specified time. Nearly three thousand members of this community have been done to death, and nearly three thousand forced into exile. (15)

Thus the title of Tej Nath Dhar’s novel, Under the Shadow of Militancy is apt and suggestive. It signifies writer’s preoccupation with what he saw and experienced during the turbulent times of 90s. It speaks of the traumatic experiences of the community of Kashmiri Pandits. They were subjected to unspeakable atrocities, enormous sufferings and gruesome acts to make them flee their ancestral homeland, Kashmir.

Before starting with the narrative, Dhar at the beginning of the novel introduces a quote of Andre Brink, who is a well known author with an already substantial record as a radical critic of South African regime and its apartheid policy, which serves as an appropriate epigraph for the novel. It states, “Writing is an affirmation, not only of the individual but, through him, of the nameless and voiceless multitude, who must rely on him to define the validity of their right to be” (Brink 205). According to Brink literature is a powerful means through which a writer puts forward not only his own assertions or statements but through it he becomes the voice of nameless and voiceless multitudes. He repeatedly reverts to the question of the function of literature and the responsibility of a writer in a repressive society. He is of the opinion that writer has no choice but to expose and proclaim the truth wherever he can and where so ever he perceives it. Thus literature basically reflects the thoughts of the writer and through him presents the saga of a large number of people who cannot express themselves.

Similarly through his novel, Under the Shadow of Militancy, Dhar brings to the fore his feelings as well as feelings of the people of his community i.e. their pain, suffering and anguish. The protagonist of the novel becomes the mouthpiece not only of author but of the whole community of Kashmiri Pandits. Thus the words of the Andre Brink which are quoted in the beginning of the novel seem to specify the author’s own intention of writing about himself both as an individual and as a member of the community he belongs to. Dhar’s novel becomes an exercise in constructing a voice for the unsung pain and suffering of Kashmiri Pandits caught in terror and violence. Through
the voice of the protagonist of his novel, he attempts to recreate the tragedy that befell his community, how they were tortured, killed and subjected to various brutal atrocities with no fault of theirs. He writes:

It provides an authentic record of a crucial period in the growth of militancy, which could have taken a different turn if the governments in power in the state and centre had acted differently from how they did. . . . the narrative vividly records the various facets of the terrorist menace and violence that the members of Pandit community had to face and which forced them to flee for their dear lives (Introduction XIX)

The novel, *Under the Shadow of Militancy* has been composed of different narratives holding up a single plot. There is one principal narrator who unites the various episodes concerning the life of Kashmiri Pandits during an era of 90s amid the atmosphere of terror and violence caused due to armed struggle. It contains sixty seven chapters covering the period of February to August of 1990. Through his novel he gives a grim picture of what has happened to Kashmiri Pandits during the turmoil. The incidents which he has presented in his novel have never been portrayed before so realistically. He has provided a picture of Kashmir as the state of Eden before and after the fall. State of Eden before the fall symbolizes the peaceful Kashmir where both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits were living together through ages with complete mutual amity and the fall symbolizes 90s of Kashmir, when the whole valley of Kashmir was engulfed in political turmoil created by militancy. Dhar has been a sufferer and observer of the unfortunate events of 90s and has witnessed that period with his naked eyes and has tried to bring that most ghastly event on paper. Dhar himself in an essay, “Dear brother, our part in this story is over” has talked about the events of 90s that made him to write this novel. He writes:

When I was pushed into leaving my home in Srinagar in 1990, I could not get over what I went through in the early months of that terrible year. It sat so heavy on me that I had a compelling urge to write about it, to take it out of my system, as it were. . . . It took me several years to get over the
agitation that the effort caused within me and to write about what I experienced then. And when that happened, the act took on a creative hue. The result was a narrative mix of memories of people and happenings of the present and the past. It resulted in a book that appeared in 2002. (171)

Dhar’s main purpose of writing this novel was to make the world aware of various tortures and atrocities inflicted upon Kashmiri Pandits by militants. Dhar’s account is entirely populated with the victims of heavy torture due to militancy. The novel is full of barbaric, cruel and non-humanistic actions meted out to the Kashmiri Pandits by the militants. These inhuman actions include killings, murders, assassinations, abductions, threats and messages delivered to Pandits about the danger of staying back in Kashmir. Georg Lukacs, the most influential figure in twentieth century genre theory also stresses on the fact that a writer who deals with history cannot chop and change his material as he likes. Events and destinies have their natural, objective weight, their natural, objective proportion. If a writer succeeds in producing a story which correctly reproduces these relationships and proportions, human and artistic truth will emerge alongside of history.

The principal narrator of the novel, *Under the Shadow of Militancy* 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 safety reasons after being snubbed by his colleagues. They made him aware of the prevailing conditions of Kashmir. Since past two months narrator’s family had to live alone in Kashmir as he had to go outside Srinagar for a research project. During his absence, Srinagar changed into a dangerous and unsafe place. Demonstrations, police firings, disorders, etc. disrupted the normal life of the people of Kashmir. He was unaware of the dreadful situation in Kashmir until he came back home after a few months. On reaching home his family told him about the happenings in their locality and Kashmir during his absence. They told him about how they had been living with threats given to Kashmiri Pandits by militants. His wife told him about an incident which left her paralyzed when one evening she saw some tall beard men talking in low tones near the boundary-wall of their home. The sight of men made her panic because in Kashmir nobody would generally be around after dark.
One evening, when darkness had just set in, she heard sounds of people talking in low tones near the boundary-wall of our home. This was something unusual, because nobody would generally be around after dark. When she peeped from the small windowpane of the first floor, to figure out who they could be, the sight paralyzed her. There were three bearded young men, all of them more than six feet tall. She understood at once from their appearance and dress that they were not local people. The more she watched them, the more worried she became. In panic, she clutched at Vasu and Vinay. (4)

The common masses of Kashmir suffered a lot at the hands of militants. After fighting the police and security forces during the day, some of the militants would look for good food and some relaxation in the evening. Soon after darkness would set in, they would seek shelter in any home, be it Muslim’s or Pandit’s and ordered the intimates to cook for them. His wife also told him how she was advised by one of their neighbour, Nazir to let the militants in if they happened to knock the door. He further told her that the militants lived and worked under the constant threat to their lives, so they deserved some moments of leisure and pleasure.

If they ever heard a knock at their door after dark, they were to open it at once, and let in whoever was there without creating any fuss or asking any suspicious questions. For they would be the mujahideen, the new saviours of the community, who needed the shelter and food to keep going . . . this was minimum that every citizen should do, as they had taken on the dangerous struggle to change the political system of the state. (5)

After listening to the traumatic incident he got panicked about the safety of his family and next morning went to see his parents and relatives. There he got to know that his parents and brothers were all packed to leave Kashmir and told him that they all should go with them. Since the narrator had a job to attend and the responsibilities it entailed so he himself stayed back while sending his wife and children with them. During his stay in Kashmir he became an eye witness to the brutal happenings of 90s. To keep
record of the unfortunate events of that period he put those cruel and barbaric incidents in black and white. The atmosphere of Kashmir was charged with threats and menace.

Dhar has very painstakingly portrayed a picture of the horrors of 90s of Kashmir. He has very dexterously explained how due to the conflict the lives of the common people of Kashmir became a package of miseries and hardships. Violence disrupted everyday life. Protests were caught in a vicious cycle of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Disorders made life of the common people of Kashmir crippled. Sometimes it was government curfew and sometimes strikes, protests and hartals that paralyzed the whole Kashmir valley as well as its people. Curfew became a part of the daily existence of the people. They hardly left their homes, except to buy things necessary for their survival during curfew relaxation. Besides, curfew relaxation times did not always coincide with the availability of public or private transport. Curfew was announced either by the government or any organization almost every day and transport would disappear from the roads within minutes. So, most of the people preferred to stay home. Narrator also talks about the difficulties of the people due to curfew, “People rush to their homes in the evening to ensure that they are not caught violating the curfew timings. I have stayed home for many days now; the curfew timings do not allow me to make a two-way trip to my far-away office. I also realize that staying home is the best guarantee of safety” (67). Commenting on the halt created by curfew Indu Bushan Zutshi in her essay, “She was killed because she was an informant; no harm will come to you” writes:

People’s movements were totally restricted to their homes. One morning in April, as I looked out of the window of my room, I saw a vegetable vendor, who lived nearby, returning from the main road with a cart full of unsold vegetables. He was forced to return because curfew had been imposed. . . . The hapless vendor retorted, ‘How shall I feed my family when I am not allowed to go to work? It is curfew day today. This movement will hurt the poor people like us. We will die of starvation. God should save us now.’ Because of curfew, offices, schools, colleges and business establishments shut down indefinitely. (3)
Apart from curfews there were also house to house search operations conducted by security forces in order to find out any militants and firearms hidden in any of the houses. In narrator’s locality too, a search operation was conducted to find out hidden insurgents. His house along with other Muslim neighbours was searched. In one of the house of Kashmiri Muslim several young boys were beaten. One of them was so badly injured that he had to be taken to a hospital for treatment. In another incident, narrator’s friend, Ranjit told him about the inhuman behaviour of soldiers during a search operation. They in order to punish the people for their non-cooperative ways overturned sacks of rice, flour and coal. Not only this after overturning they mixed them into a pile of waste. He narrates:

Ranjit also said that at one place, the soldiers overturned sacks of rice, flour, and coal, to mix them into a pile of waste, to punish people for their discourteous behaviour and non-cooperative ways. Some people complained that gold ornaments and jewellery had disappeared from the secret compartments of their wardrobes. (21)

The other thing which further added to the miseries of the people during 90s was crackdowns which were carried out by armed forces when they got information regarding the presence of militants. They sealed that particular place or area from all possible sides and interrogated the people to catch hiding militants, hidden weapons and other material. Narrator narrates an incident where an announcement was made that all the people of the locality had to come out in an open space for questioning by the army. He hurriedly locked his home and moved out. He saw a huge gathering of people: men, women, children of all communities. A large majority of them were Muslims. In one part of the field sat an army officer, who called people one by one for questioning:

There was another crackdown today, but this time it worked differently. First, there was an announcement, which I could not hear clearly. When I saw people rushing out of their homes towards a nearby park, I too came out, and found a large gathering of people there. . . . A uniformed officer, who sat in a chair away from these groups, called people for questioning,
one by one. Much later, when it was all over, the soldiers moved into the localities to search our homes. (26-27)

Narrator also talks about myriad horrifying tales of the innocent Kashmiri Pandits. They were subjected to various tortures and violence perpetrated by the militants. The perpetrators used various methods to threaten them to leave Kashmir. These include threats, mass killings, abductions, rapes etc that had left deep mark on the psyche of Kashmiri Pandits. Various militant organizations threatened the Kashmiri Pandits through letters, posters, notices, messages, pamphlets, slogans, telephonic calls, and ultimatums published in newspapers and advertisements in the press. These threats contained message for Kashmiri Pandits to leave Kashmir or they have to perish forever.

Notices, messages and posters were pasted on the doors and walls of Kashmiri Pandit’s houses to warn them to vacate the Valley or face the consequences of staying back. The protagonist of the novel was also given the notice to leave Kashmir otherwise he was told to be ready for the repercussion of disobedience. He says, “but what about the notice that had been slapped on the door of my compound: Leave this place in forty-eight hours or be prepared to face the consequence” (16). Kundan Lal Chowdhary in his essay, “It is for your own good to leave” has also written about the death threats given to the Kashmiri Pandits in order to create fear among the community. He remarks:

The doorbell rings and your hear flutters, a knock on the door and you brace yourself, a telephone ring and you wonder whether it is another unknown caller threatening you to leave or face the consequences. . . . You look into your letterbox and your hands tremble while scanning the mail lest there be another warrant from the terrorists. When you go out, you open the door of your house with trepidation; you furtively look for any pamphlets or letters pasted outside, proclaiming you a mole or an informer, an enemy agent or a blasphemer, a drug peddler or a smuggler. (26)

Another kind of threatening tool used by militants was newspaper. The locally published Urdu newspapers published the press release issued by some militant groups
ordering all Kashmiri Pandits to vacate the valley otherwise the consequences would be fatal. Valley-based newspapers had unfortunately turned into instruments of disinformation, weapons of terror, and harbingers of tragedy and death. These newspapers had become the mouth organ of the terrorists, highlighting their programmes and activities, eulogizing their achievements, publishing their directives for the common masses, pouring venom against the Kashmiri Pandits. The narrator in the novel also mentions that the Urdu newspapers were kind of source of getting the information related to the activities of the militants, incidents of clash between the security forces and militants. Apart from this they also contained some box items, in which people stated that they had broken off their links with those political parties which the militants declared anti-people. People had no choice but to obey them and for the sake of their lives they had to show loyalty towards miscreants. He writes:

Only the locally published Urdu newspapers, we are told, carry details related to the activities of the militants, public protest, and incidents of exchange of fire between security forces and the militants, but I do not get to see them daily. They also feature boxed items, in which people affirm that they have broken off their links with recognized political parties, especially the ones that the militants have decreed anti-people. (13-14)

Kundan Lal Chowdhary also comments on how media like local newspapers created panic waves against Kashmiri Pandits by publishing threats to vacate Kashmir by various militant organisations. The death threats published in local daily terrorized the Kashmiri Pandits and they started fleeing Kashmir for their survival. He writes:

Al Safa, a local Urdu daily, has published a front-page ultimatum issued by Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the dreaded terror group, warning all non-Muslims to leave the valley within 36 hours or face death. The headline reads: ‘Leave Kashmir within 36 hours.’ This is the last straw, the final push to set off the exodus of the residual Pandits. It has sent panic waves all around. Even the Muslims are getting nervous. (28)
Pamphlets, anonymous letters and slogans were also used to create terror and panic among Kashmiri Pandits. Narrator has talked about the night of 19th January where in the middle of the night whole Kashmir valley erupted into a loud booming of pro-freedom slogans relayed from various mosques through loudspeakers. Slogans were broadcasted everywhere to threaten Kashmiri Pandits. These slogans contained warnings for Pandits to leave the place of their ancestors or face retribution or death. Rahul Pandita, a Kashmiri writer and journalist in his book *Our Moon has Blood Clots* writes in the same vein. He talks about how the slogans about freedom movement and eviction of non-Muslims from the valley blared out from the mosques during 90s. These slogans created a hellish din all around. Pandits shrank in their houses.

It was then that a long drawl tore through the murmurs, and with the same force the loudspeaker began to hiss.

‘Naare-e-taqbeer, Allah ho Akbar!’

I looked at my father; his face was contorted. . . . Within a few minutes, battle cries flew at us from every direction. They rushed towards us like poison darts.

*Hum kya chaaaaahte: Azadiiii!*  
*Eiy zalimon, eiy kafirn, Kashmir humara chhod do.*  
What do we want- Freedom!  
O tyrants, O infidels, leave our Kashmir.

Then the slogans ceased for a while. From another mosque came the sound of recorded songs eulogizing the Mujahideen resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan… The crowd wanted to turn Kashmir into Pakistan, without the Pandit men, but with their women. (76-77)

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. *Under the Shadow of Militancy* truly describes human experience of the conflict of 90s, an artistic fusion of personal and historical perspective. He revives the past events of 90s to bring out the tortures meted out to Kashmiri Pandits. Even Frederic Jameson, a famous Marxist critic also employs a Lukacsian-inspired historical narrative
to tell the story of how texts contain political and social experiences. He says that all literary texts possess historical and political resonance and lays stress to always place a literary text in their various historical contexts when engaging in any act of interpretation.

Another method used by militants was the threatening phone calls to Kashmiri Pandits for abandoning Kashmir. Through the use of such calls militants aimed at creating fear and terror among the minority community members and to a great extent they succeeded in their Machiavellian design. These things terrorized them to an extent that they started packing off for their survival. Narrator in the novel shares an incident about his doctor-friend who had been receiving threats through telephonic calls. First he tried to ignore them but when the things took serious turn he was made to rush for his survival. One day when he was not home and his wife answered the phone call and she was taken aback. She was asked to make her husband understand the repercussions of staying back.

One day, when he was not home, his, wife took the call: “Oh! Is that the doctor’s wife? Pleased to hear your voice. Will you kindly tell your husband to quit before it is too late.” Taken aback by this sudden and unexpected request, she said nothing in response, upon which the voice on the phone grew stern: “Do you hear us, Mrs. Doctor, we mean it. We will blast you both out of this world along with your house.” She became so nervous that the phone fell from her hand onto the receiver, silencing it for the time being. (65)

When her husband reached home in the evening she narrated the whole tale to him. But he tried to evade her fear by convincing her that such calls were meant to be taken lightly not seriously. Next day she again received the same call, “You seem to take things lightly but we warn you not to do so. Now hear me for the very last time. If you and your husband are seen here tomorrow morning, it could well be your last day in the world”(66). When the doctor came back home in the afternoon, and after seeing the condition of his wife, he decided to go and stay with her friend for some days. The very next day, after the doctor had returned and was having tea at the house of his wife’s
friend just then telephone rang. His wife’s friend picked up the phone and handed it to
doctor as it was for him. They very next morning he took early flight to Jammu along
with his wife. He narrates:

His wife’s friend took the phone, and handed it to the doctor, because it
was for him. Presuming that it would be from his brother-in-law . . .
“Doctor, you cannot escape your fate by changing places. We have been
trying to tell you that you have no option but to leave, but you don’t take
us seriously. Now here is our final warning. By tomorrow morning, you
must be off, and don’t you dare to be seen around your home.” The doctor
turned pale and felt frightened. (66-67)

The brutality did not end with the threatening mediums asking Pandits to leave
Kashmir. Even the stones were pelted at the houses of Pandits in Kashmir during night.
The din of the stones smashing their rooftops frightened them. In the novel narrator has
talked about an incident where some masked men threw stones at the houses of Pandits in
some village. This was followed by slogans. The villagers felt frightened and thought that
they were about to be slaughtered.

One day, late in the evening, when the whole village was enveloped in
darkness, the Pandits heard sounds of slogans . . . They were followed by
the shattering noise of pelting stones on the galvanized iron roofs of their
houses. Their initial response was one of shock and fear, though many
among them had suspected that something of this kind was likely to
happen. Their village could not remain unaffected by what was happening
elsewhere! Everyone felt frightened and cowered within, like animals that
were about to be slaughtered. (41)

Rahul Pandit in Our Moon has Blood Clots talks about the stone pelting tactics being
employed by the militants to create terror and fear among Kashmiri Pandits. He narrates
an incident in which some men during night showered stones at the house of his father’s
colleague. That was followed by slogans. He writes:
At Draebyaar, Habba Kadal, for hours stones had been showered over Pandit houses. In several places, families were threatened. ‘Bring petrol, let’s burn them down!’ someone had shouted outside the house of father’s colleague in Jawahar Nagar. The next morning the family left, leaving the house keys with their Muslim neighbours. (79)

After spending night in terror next morning the villagers gathered and decided to meet the elders of the village who were Muslims. They all met at one of the Pandit’s house. After listening to them Sonahjoo, senior most villager talked for nearly an hour and claimed that both Hindus and Muslims were brothers and no one could draw a wedge between their relations. He further assured them that the present turmoil was temporary and requested all Muslims present in the meeting to rein their children and stop them fromstoning the houses of Pandits. They decided that they would keep vigil:

He stressed the need for mutual togetherness of the two communities in this hour of trial. He also dwelt on the responsibility of the good Muslims towards the Pandits. . . . he stated boldly that the Pandits had no need to fear for their lives. The people who had pelted stones on the roofs of their houses were mischief-mongers, who had not only created bad blood between the two communities but also sullied the good name and reputation of the village. (45)

The other weapon used by the militants to drive away the Pandits was killings and abductions. There were numerous ferocious and ruthless crimes perpetrated against the innocent people of the Kashmir by the perpetrators of violence. Countless people fell prey to the bullets of militants. They were either first kidnapped and then killed or directly murdered. The reason behind the brutal killings was to spread the terror among the Kashmiri Pandits and to keep their movement alive they killed whoever was available to them, “militants needed to kill people to keep their movement alive; that forced them to kill whoever was available” (74). The novel abounds with numerous horrifying instances of brutal and barbarous murders and assassinations of the Kashmiri Pandits at the cruel and merciless hands of militants in the valley. The Pandits who left the valley
temporarily and went to Jammu to see their family, friends or relatives and then came back to Kashmir became the targets of militants. They were killed on the basis of mere suspicion. They considered them as a threat to their movement. Dhar remarks:

Surely, the guns in their hands have turned them into paranoids. It is difficult to accept that they could think of every Pandit as a spy who needed to be eliminated brutally. The militants have been most ruthless with Pandits who left the valley temporarily to return their homes. Ranjit has already told me about two of them who were eliminated by the terrorists just because they had gone to Jammu for a few days. (109)

In the novel one such story is about Shamboonath. He had three sons and two of them were employed in government sector in Jammu. Only his youngest son was staying with him in Kashmir. He was jobless and had applied for a job in the valley. Since he did not get any interview call so he thought of visiting his brothers in Jammu. In the mean time he got the interview letter and had to rush back to Kashmir. After reaching home and meeting his father, Shamboonath’s son went to Srinagar for the interview. After an hour when his son was gone, two young boys approached Shamboonath and enquired him about his son and the reason of his visit. He narrated them the whole story but they were not satisfied. They wanted to know the confidential message which his son had passed on to him. Since Shamboonath had no knowledge of this so he tried to dispel their baseless apprehensions and did not tell them the things which they wanted to hear. So in a fit of anger they blinded him by plunging two red-hot irons into his eyeballs. He writes:

Soon after, they asked him questions about his son and the reason of his visit. He told them what he knew . . . They thought that he was being evasive, and this made them angry. So they took him to a nearby barn to get the truth out of him . . . They beat him and threatened him, but he was unmoved. Finally, in one fit of blind fury, they plunged two red-hot irons into his eyeballs to silence him forever. . . . The atrocities committed by the terrorists have shaken people’s faith in their gods, too. (112)
The novel is full of such spine chilling incidents of inhuman and savage killings of innocent people. The writer narrates another incident in which Ashok, another Kashmiri Pandit met the same fate as that of Shamboonath. Ashok had gone to his in-laws to meet his wife and children. After returning back to his home from his in-laws he found the atmosphere of the place tense and within a few minutes his Muslim neighbour’s son came and told him that some people wanted to see him at the nearby shop of the tailor where the tailor asked him the reason of his absence from the village for some days. He told him that he had gone to see his family. When he was about to ask the tailor the reason of his search for him, he saw few young boys approaching towards the shop. And when he figured out that something is about to happen he started rushing towards his home. But unfortunately after covering some distance one of them fired at him and he fell into his mother’s arm:

In a flash, Ashok understood the import of that exchange and ran towards his home. He had barely covered some distance when one of them fired at him. Bleeding profusely, he fell into his mother’s expectant arms; she knew something unusual was to happen, so she had been waiting for him. She had also worked out a possible plan to meet any eventuality. (100)

Ashok’s mother tried hard to save her son’s life. She took the help of the police to carry him to the hospital after completing the required formalities. He was admitted to the emergency ward but no doctor came to attend on him. Seeing the critical condition of his son she took his head in her lap where he breathed his last. P. L. Waguzari in an essay, “The Fatal Seconds” also writes about the callousness of doctors in Kashmir. The doctors were afraid of treating any patient who was target of the militants. The main character, Veerji of his essay suffers the same fate when he was targeted by the militants as doctors refused to treat him:

. . . After some time, two militants reached the place and showered bullets on Veerji. He fell down. The other shopkeepers downed the shutters of their shops. People deserted the place. Veerji bled profusely. No person came to his rescue till his mother came out wailing and weeping. Some of
his Pandit neighbours rushed to the police station for hiring a police vehicle to carry him to the hospital. . . . Veerji was admitted to the hospital. When the doctors on duty there heard that it was a case of firing by militants, they did not attend to him. The doctors forgot everything about the Hippocratic oath. (189)

When the news of Ashok’s death reached his family and in-laws they all sank in sorrow. As this was not enough the police came regularly to enquire his in-laws about Ashok’s stay with them. They pestered them every day by asking them pointless questions. Muslim neighbours held them responsible for their troubles because security forces from outside too had come to investigate the killing and they harassed every other person of the village. The family felt so troubled by these enquiries of the defense authorities and the blames of their Muslim neighbours that they left their home in Kashmir and went to Jammu. Kundan Lal Chowdhary in an essay, “It is good for your own to leave” talks about the scenario of 90s in Kashmir when the killing of Pandits became order of the day. These killings brought terror among Kashmiri Pandits and with the result they left their homes and got settled elsewhere. These settlements were not easy for Kashmiri Pandits and everyone has a saga of their sufferings to narrate. He writes:

There has been an increased number of bomb blasts as the abductions and killings of Pandits go on. By now more than thirty Kashmiri Pandits have been gunned down. There is an all-pervasive sense of fear and insecurity in the community. They are like frightened chicken in a cage in the butcher’s shop. The murderers kill with impunity. (20)

There is another incident about a Kashmiri Pandit, Makhanji who nearly escaped death. He became the target of the militants and he came to know about it from the two young boys whom he met while he was coming back from his work. The two boys did not know Makhanji by face so they started inquiring about Makhanji and his whereabouts unaware of the fact that the man whom they were asking was Makhanji himself. On smelling some danger he told them that he did not know anything about him and if they wanted to get any information about Makhanji they need to go to the village. After giving
them the directions he ran towards his home and hid himself on the top floor. The two young men with guns entered the house of Makhanji in search of their prey. They searched every nook and corner of the house but could not find him. They did no harm to anyone in the house because their main concern was Makhanji. They only wanted to kidnap the famous personalities of Kashmiri Pandit community. After they left he went to narrator’s place with the help of Sunil, a friend of narrator. There he took shelter for a night and next day he fled to Jammu.

Like a young boy, Makhanji ran through the fields as fast as he could. Without stopping and talking to people in the compound of his home, he rushed up to the top floor to ensure youths had no chance of catching him. He had barely made it to that place; when the two people entered his house . . . His mother was not killed because they were not interested in her death. They only wanted to kidnap the most known person of the community to create panic among its members. (119-120)

There were countless horrifying stories of people and each had a tragic tale to narrate. People were left with no choice but they had to leave everything behind for their survival. Leaving their home and hearth for an unknown future they carried with themselves a sense of being unhomed. They spent all their earnings to build up their houses. Some incurred debts and some sold their gold and jewellery for the construction of their homes and one day they were asked to vacate their places. They were uprooted from their own land and this kind of uprootedness is extremely painful because they were cut off from the place which is linked to their roots, past, culture and tradition. In the novel the writer narrates a gruesome incident about a couple who had been living in Jammu for several years. They had come to Srinagar to take with them whatever they left in their home in Kashmir. They hired a truck for this purpose. And when they were done with putting their belongings in the truck, they were shot dead by the militants who were watching them from a safe distance. He writes:

If the Pandits were still staying in any part of the valley in a sizable number, the militants created conditions in which they felt unsafe, forcing
them to flee the place, like the ones who had already left. Earlier they left with whatever they could manage from their belongings, but now the militants wanted them to leave empty handed. (120)

Even worse was that the people were threatened from purchasing any property of Kashmiri Pandits. The narrator narrates an incident about an old Kashmiri Pandit couple in a locality of the city. They decided to leave Kashmir after selling their house. For this purpose the old man approached his Muslim friend so that he could help him in searching a buyer. Muslim friend’s wife decided that they would buy it for their daughter. But the next day his friend was threatened by some men the consequences of purchasing the property of Kashmiri Pandits. The narrator narrates:

They criticized him severely for acting against the interests of the movement, and reminded that in this hour of trail he was not to think of petty private interests, but the larger interest of the community. They made it clear to him that the house of his friend was already his because the Pandit would be forced to leave the place without selling it. (175)

Meenakshi Raina in her essay, “Nights of Terror” also writes about how militants banned local Muslims of Kashmir from purchasing property of Kashmiri Pandits. Leaving no option for them they had to sell the properties for not even half the value of their property. It was not only the financial deficit but also an emotional one as they were parting from their homes, belongings, relations, etc. They faced socio-economic as well as cultural problems. The Kashmiri Pandits with distinct cultural practices and food habits and having lived in different climatic conditions found it difficult to adjust in other places. She remarks:

The locals in Kashmir were banned by the militants from buying properties of Kashmiri Hindus as eventually these properties would be grabbed forcibly without any payments. In such prevailing circumstances, our neighbour sent an offer for purchasing our house in Kashmir. The amount offered was not even close to half the estimated value of our house. (66)
Apart from this, militants had devised new method to frighten the Kashmiri Pandits. Instead of individual killing, they targeted the major household to clean places of residual Pandits. Such killings were a part of new strategy that was designed to warn those Pandits who were still in the valley. He narrates an incident in which the members of a family who had bravely stayed back had been gunned down by the militants. By targeting one particular household in that area they created fear among Pandits. He very painstakingly describes the brutal massacres of a Pandit family by the militants. He comments:

Men, women and children lay in pools of blood all over the house. It seemed that a big group of militants had swooped on the place. . . . Bodies were lying in all conceivable places: one on the front porch, two on the stairs, children in their beds, a woman just near the kitchen, and two old women at the high corners of the big living room. . . .

It is the new low-cost method of ethnic cleansing, for it drives people away without wasting too many bullets. (199-200)

Varad Sharma in “The Inheritance of Memory” writes about how Kashmiri Pandits during 90s had to live under the shadow of gun and constant fear. Pandit families were targeted by the militants. The massacres were a clear message to Pandits, who had left the valley, not to return. These massacres put a lid on whatever little hope Pandits had for their return. He remarks:

On the night of 21 March 1997, seven Kashmiri Pandits of Sangrampora village in Budgam were killed. It was followed by another brutal massacre the following year in Wandhama village near Ganderbal. Twenty-three Kashmiri Pandits including women and children were gunned down on 25 January 1998. While the shock and trauma of these massacres were still fresh in the minds of Kashmiri Pandit community, it was further jolted by another massacre in Nadimarg village of Pulwama. (251)

In addition to pervasive killings, the conflict of 90s is also filled with the sufferings and miseries of women. It contains the story of rape, abduction and
widowhood of thousands of women. During this phase women too suffered a lot and made calamitous phase of 90s a saga of rapes and abduction as women were caught in horrendous bind. They were subjected to maximum mortification and affliction. They became targets of the militants. Militants used rape and abduction as weapons to violate and humiliate Kashmiri Pandit’s women. Dhar detests the inhuman treatment meted out to the women. He depicts the atrocities perpetrated against women in the embedded story of Sarla, a Kashmiri Pandit woman. She was married to an important official in the telecommunication department. To get access to some valuable information, Sarla was chosen as a target by the militants to accomplish their mission. One day she went to Sarah’s home, her childhood friend, to meet her. After spending some time with her friend she left. As she came out of her house she was kidnapped and taken to an unknown place. Sarah went to inform her husband about Sarla’s abduction and led him to the hideout where his wife was kept. To open the mouth of her husband she was tortured and raped violently in front of her husband. They tried all the weapons to get the information and at last when all their attempts failed they pounded both of them to death:

Right in the presence of her husband, they raped her violently, cut off her breast, and stilled her fiery rage. Forced to watch it all, her husband turned into defiant stone, and refused to answer the questions of his tormentors. They tried all weapons in their armoury, but failed to force open his mouth. In sheer desperation, they pounded him to death. The two died to create a new legend of love and betrayal, faith and treachery. (95)

Indu Bushan Zutshi in an essay, “She was killed because she was an informant” writes about the violent crimes committed by militants on Kashmiri Pandit women. She felt pained after observing how women had been raped by the militants. They used rape as a way of punishing those whom they suspected informers or suspected of opposing militants. The perpetrators raped, murdered and threw the dead bodies. Violence against women in Kashmir demonstrated the personality dynamics and the psychopathology of assailants in a unique manner. This brings to the light an important aspect of the deliberate damage done to the one particular gender of the society. One is aware of the
social pressure that a raped woman faces. Thus the militants achieved the motto of disorienting the community. She remarks:

. . . The terrifying news of the murder of our neighbour’s daughter was a shock to all three Pandit families in the moholla. Sarla Bhat, working as a staff nurse at the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences in Soura, had been abducted from her hostel on April 15. On the morning of April 19, her mutilated dead body was found in the downtown area of Srinagar. A hand-written note was attached to her body, describing her as a police informant. (4-5)

There is another chilling account of Sanjana who worked as a teacher in a school located in a distant village. She had a nightmarish experience. One day when she reached her school she was told by her colleagues that three people were waiting for her in the staff room. They took her to a store room where junk was kept. They suspected her as a top agent of an organization which was working against the militants. They investigated and pestered her with the questions regarding the plans she had designed against them. When she denied about the things which they thought that she must know, they got infuriated. They first humiliated her by hurling abuse at her and then she was slapped and threatened with the dire consequences of remaining silent. After that they used various brutal and ruthless ways to interrogate her. He writes:

They became ruthless; they hurled abuse at her, slapped her, and even threatened her with dire consequences if she did not spill all that she knew…then they assaulted her; they twisted her arms, hit her face, and then used another weapon of interrogator; they signed her tender skin with burning cigarettes. That was the when she passed out. (90)

Apart from this, forcible marriages were also common during insurgency. Some people used tactics of militants to marry the women whom they liked. Instant marriages were performed hastily at the gun point. In the novel narrator describes an episode in which servant of a Muslim family suddenly disappeared from their house. After several weeks he visited them along with two young men. He made inquiries about their
daughter, Saleema whom he wanted to marry. The family was in shock to hear about it. To save their daughter they asked him to come after some days so that they would make arrangements for the marriage. The very next day early in the morning they all left for Jammu:

Then somewhat abruptly he made bold to tell them that as a new recruit in the army of the Mujahids, he considered himself a worthy suitor for their Saleema, and requested them for her hand. . . . This was like a bombshell, totally unexpected and unimaginable. Without showing any signs of anger or nerve or discomfort, they heard him quietly and maintained a calm exterior . . . Early in the morning, when cock had not opened his eyes to announce the dawn, and the city was still under languorous influence of the lazy moon, he put all the members of his family in his car, and drove out of the city towards Jammu. (225-226)

In another heart wrenching episode narrator narrates how a Kashmiri Pandit girl, Sheila was spotted by the leader of a militant group when she and her family were leaving Kashmir. She became sexual target and was abused by various militants. Women of all ages became easy victims of the militants and became more insecure, disadvantaged and marginalized. Women were often found in a persistently disadvantaged social situation due to the deep rooted patriarchal culture values and the vulnerability in the war-zones. Women were not just made targets because of their ethnicity but mainly because of their gender, where their bodies were made the sites of combats. He narrates:

When Jagarnath tried to help Sheila into the front seat, the leader stopped him and said that she would not go with him . . . This was the beginning of Sheila’s travails. She struggled to be herself, but failed because she could not withstand the aggression of the old and new leaders. She was used and abused by every one of them. (229-230)

Towards the end of the novel narrator came to know from his Sikh friend, Mohinder that his name too was in the hit list of the militants. He told him that staying in
Kashmir would be risky for him and advised him to flee away from Kashmir as soon as possible. He further added that they kept watchful eye on his every movement and they even knew the number of the times he had gone out of his house and the people he had talked with. After hearing him he became worried about the disaster that befell his community. He feared that the community would become extinct soon. They would lose their language, customs and traditions and would get assimilated into the other cultural identities of the country. In the end of the novel while brooding over the fate of Kashmiri Pandits he felt asleep and had a dream in which he saw his grandfather and grandmother. In the dream his grandfather took him to a house where all dead elders from his mother’s and father’s families were. All of them sympathized with his situation and told him:

How saddened they were by the pain and suffering that had befallen home. They assured me that it would end soon, and I would be freed from all my miseries. They had entrusted Grandfather with the job of working out all the arrangements. I was overwhelmed by what I saw and heard from those venerable people that I did not know how to respond to their solicitous concern for me. (234)

Dhar’s main purpose of writing his novel is to make the world aware to the pain and sufferings of the members of his community. *Under the Shadow of Militancy* truly describes human experience of the conflict of 90s, an artistic fusion of personal and historical perspective. The novel examines in-depth and details the displacement of about half a million Kashmiri Pandits, who got uprooted from the valley. Through his novel, he presents a fictionalized version of the ethnic cleansing of a large number of Kashmiri Pandits and the consequent exodus of community from Kashmir.