Chapter IV

The Garden of Solitude: An Analysis of Agony in Exile

The Garden of Solitude, published in 2011 by Siddhartha Gigoo, is a realist novel which assesses the historical phenomenon of forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the beginning years of the troubled period of 90s and its impact on the lives in exile. Exile is one of the dreadful experience to go through, be it forced or self-imposed. The concept of exile which is probably as ancient as human history and one of the oldest topics in the literature of the world means the condition which puts a person at a physical distance from his homeland, willingly or through the forced circumstances, in a bid for survival and a better life. It may be wilful, a deliberate decision to stay away from the native place or enforced. The former merely results from the circumstances, such as an offer of employment from a foreign country and such instances usually cause little hardships. The later occurs frequently from a major difference of political disagreement between the authorities of a state and the person being exiled. Often such exiles are helpless victims of circumstances which are beyond the sphere of their influence. Paul Tabori in his book The Anatomy of Exile writes:

An exile is person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last for a lifetime), hoping to return to his fatherland when circumstances permit— but unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that made him an exile persist. (27)

Exile is perhaps one of the most commonly occurring theme in the world of literature and has engaged the imagination of many writers in the course of literary history, either because they have experienced the pain of leaving their native country for political reasons, or because they have felt a disaffection with their society and consciously chose to live elsewhere. The writers try to rationalize their personal nightmare of exile in writing. They try to calm their fears, to put their broken life into
some sort of shape, to order the chaos they have landed in, to fix the insights they have come to and to dilute their own bitterness. Such writings of writers in dislocated circumstances are often termed as “Exile Literature.” The literature of exile gives meaning and form to feelings that had previously been private, relatively inaccessible and inexpressible. It articulates pain and sorrow of those who have experienced extreme, devastating or torturous forms of exile. The literature of exile spans periods, epochs, genres, nationalities, existing not as a category in and of itself, but as a component of many, a theme that captures the imagination and preoccupies the minds of authors and readers alike. Prominent in exile literature are the works of writers like Dante, Edward Said, Thomas Mann, Berlott Bretch, Herman Hesse, etc. who have reflected on the experience of life in exile and emotional dislocation caused by it. Though the exile fills one’s heart with emotions, love of the land and people and that is what various writers have invariably depicted. But at the same time it gives them the platform to explain things with broader perspective. The pain of living in exile has been explained by many authors quite often, but one thing is common in their writings that they have expressed it in such a manner that living in exile always brings a painful experience. Exile has always given the opportunity to writers and thinkers to explain to the world through their eyes, through their writings and poetry. It has given these writers a better canvas to draw the beauty of everything. In a way the writings of those in exile have acted as a beacon for those who are living in the system from where these thinkers have gone away. The pain of living in exile makes one to crave for what is left behind. The experience of exile and rootlessness is a common theme of literature today and has acquired a special significance in modern times. To cite Edward Said’s observation:

... all nationalisms have ... their rhetoric of belonging, their historical and geographical landmarks, their official enemies and heroes... In time successful nationalisms consign truth exclusively to themselves and relegate falsehood and inferiority to outsiders. ... And just beyond the frontier between “us” and “outsiders” is the perilous territory of not belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons. (176-177)
The forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from their native homeland in the wake of armed insurgency is a bitter saga of the modern day history and has left indelible marks on the psyche of the members of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Since the mass migration of 1990s large number of books with convoluted historical-cum-political plot based on the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits have been written by writers. But *The Garden of Solitude* represents a radical break from such narratives and it focuses mainly on the human experience in a given situation. It has given voice to the pangs and enormous sufferings borne to the community of Kashmiri Pandits in the form of exile and homelessness. The novel, charged with the emotions of loss and pain, articulates the torments of Kashmiri Pandit community which later lived in exile. They have to reckon with actual homelessness, a condition in which they are cut off from “their roots, their past” and their identity too. In an essay, “Summers of Exile” Sushant Dhar comments that torments of exile, the frequent fits of pain and the loss made people to long for their homes in Kashmir. He writes:

. . . I knew would murmur about her old life all the time. ‘What a big house I had, the big kitchen garden, all the comforts…the water was sweeter than the water of the Chashm-i-Shahi spring. Now there is no village, no house, no kitchen garden . . . But it was my home . . . I wish to go to my village and be in my old house. I wish to roam in those lanes. . . . I lost my everything. I’m a vagrant. (86)

The complex saga of conflict and the tragic stories that emanate from the conflict is sensitively brought out by Siddhartha Gigoo, a Kashmiri Pandit. Gigoo, with a swarm of other Kashmiri Pandits had to flee the ancestral land, Kashmir and migrate to different parts of India due to the political tumult which befell Kashmir and its people during the period of 90s. The nightmare of 90s, led to the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley and the incurable blow of forced migration, had a deep impact on the mind and psyche of Gigoo. These experiences kept haunting his memory which thus found an artistic expression in *The Garden of Solitude*. It is horrific manifestation of not only
Gigoo’s experiences but through him the representation of experiences of entire Kashmiri Pandit community: their displacement and their life in exile. Gigoo is deeply attached to his birth place, Kashmir and still longs for it. He left his beloved homeland with never ending sorrow and lament and is forced to become a migrant in his own country. He has been to Kashmir a couple of times after 1990, as it is evident in his interview with Henna Kausar published in *The Kashmir Walla*.

I have visited Kashmir four times in the last 21 years; each trip lasted no more than two days. On all visits, I felt strange. On my second visit, I clicked pictures like a tourist. From there I called my father. He gave the phone to my grandmother. When I told her that I was in Kashmir, she said, “So you are home now . . .” I was struck by the irony of it. Her words made me cry . . . (Web)

The title of Siddhartha Gigoo’s novel, *The Garden of Solitude* is apt and suggestive of the novel. It signifies his preoccupation with the paradisal solitude which he and people of Kashmir lost during the turbulent period of 90s, when the conflict engulfed the valley of Kashmir. Before the violence, Kashmir was considered to be a heaven on earth. As the earlier Mughal rulers also adored and loved it. Jehangir, the Mughal Empreror is said to have written a couplet that echoed older verses on Kashmir and translate as: “If on earth there is a garden of bliss, it is this, it is this.” He admired Kashmir so much and was said to have died with the words “only Kashmir” on his lips, “Jehangir who, enamoured by Kashmir’s natural beauty, built many gardens. At the time of his death in 1627 when Jehangir was asked what he desired, he replied: ‘Kashmir and nothing else’” (Pandita, 16). Throughout the novel Gigoo keeps looking for the glimpse of that old Kashmir, a land of peace, simplicity, mutual amity and unmatched beauty. He keeps yearning for the lost roots that he and the members of his community have lost during turmoil. Their roots are actually embedded in Kashmir and staying away from Kashmir means staying away from their roots. In a freewheeling interview with Ibrahim Wani, “Memories of a Pandit Boy” published in *Kashmir Life*, Gigoo talks about the images which inspired him to title his novel as *The Garden of Solitude*. First is the image of an Eidgah, a place where Muslims offer Eid prayer. The Eidgah once a cheerful
playground is now turned into martyr’s graveyard. There were the children who used to play in that ground, are now buried in it. Second image is that of an old migrant lady sitting in heat and dust of camps waiting endlessly for something which will never turn up. The third and the last image is that of an old migrant who fights with his memory every now and then and keeps tossing into different world. He narrates:

There are these three images I have. There is this image of Eidgah, which is a playground and has been turned into a martyr’s graveyard. There are people who used to play in this ground and are now buried. That is one image. When I look back I see it as solitude. Second image, is of a camp and an old lady sitting in heat and dust. Waiting for something which will not come and she is in some solitude. . . .

Third image is that of an old migrant, who has lost his memory completely. And he is in this different world now. He does not recognise his own family, his own son, because of whatever has happened. And he is in a different world. That is also solitude. All these three images are somehow connected. All these images are beautiful images. They are sad images, but isn’t sadness pure. Deeply sad, deep suffering, there is some beauty in it. (Web)

The plot of the novel is set against the backdrop of tumultuous time when the turmoil struck the socio-cultural fabric of Kashmir during 90s. The result of political upheaval was that Kashmiri Pandits felt betrayed. They perceived threat in the looks of Muslims, and Muslims began to distrust Pandits for being informers. The slogans, posters, threats, abductions, assassinations, etc. during the turmoil terrified the minority community. The terror-stricken Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee their homeland leaving behind everything to live in exile in their own country with an illusion of returning back to their homes shortly. This uprooting of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland has been a traumatic experience for Kashmiri Pandits because it has severed them from access to their homeland and the places that were associated with their ancestors, their cultural legacies, their personal and familial memories and their own
sense of pride in belonging to a land so widely celebrated for its beauty, its tradition of learning and its spiritual and religious sanctity.

Before starting with his narrative, Gigoo gives a tender but very humble dedication to the exile where he writes, “All I dream of now is a garden of solitude, where I get a morsel of rice in the morning and a morsel of rice in the evening” (V). This very first sentence sets the tone for Gigoo’s novel. Throughout the novel the author keeps looking for the solitude, which he and the fellow members of his community have lost. It is the longing to get back to that solitude, their idyllic homeland, where the lives in exile could get a morsel of rice in the morning and in the evening. The very first sentence i.e. the dedication makes clear to the reader that Gigoo through his creative work is going to convey to mankind the miserable plight of the people in exile, their rootlessness, alienation, homelessness, abysses of identity and their longing and search for a real home—a homeland of their own. The miseries faced by Kashmiri Pandit community in exile remained mostly hidden from the world because they found a mention in passing references only. They have suffered a lot due to up-rootedness but have never made much noise over their fate. The result being that outside the community very little is known about their lives after their exodus. Gigoo narrates:

The Kashmiri Pandit story did not exist anywhere. The migrants and their stories did not appear in most news items related to Kashmir. There were no statistics, no pictures of the dead and of dilapidated Pandit houses, no accounts of brutalities on Pandits in Kashmir, no record of disease in the migrant camps. There were no stories of people’s past. There were no memories of ancestors. (196)

Rahul Pandita, a writer and a journalist in his book Our Moon has Blood Clots also talks about the neglect of the sufferings of Kashmiri Pandits. Their sufferings did not find mention anywhere and has remained mostly hidden from the world, “Another problem is the apathy of the media and a majority of India’s intellectual class who refuse to even acknowledge the suffering of the Pandits. No campaigns were ever run for us; no fellowships or grants given for research on our exodus” (220).
In the novel, *The Garden of Solitude* Gigoo creates his self portrait, Sridar as to address the lost history and a macabre experience of exile of Kashmiri Pandits which they have experienced for past more than two decades. Sridar, the protagonist of the novel is not just an individual who has lost his homeland during the whirlpool of the turbulent time but the portrayal of entire Kashmiri Pandit community who were forced to leave Kashmir. Through the character of Sridar the novelist delves in a wounding journey of the troubled times that saw an entire community rendered homeless and identitiless. Gigoo recreates the conditions that led to the forced exile of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir and its painful effect on their lives. Sridar’s solitary wounding journey of life becomes a panoramic view of tumultuous journey of every Kashmiri Pandit being forced to leave their homeland behind in the growing atmosphere of fear and hatred and to live in the sordid conditions and the inhuman existence. In an interview, “Book Talk: Kashmiri author writes exile odyssey” with Reuters (2011), News agency company, Gigoo remarks:

Perhaps there are shades of me in the protagonist. But there could be shades of the protagonist in me too. . . . But now that many people have read my novel, they all tell me that this is their story. There weren’t any migrants whose share of misfortunes was less than others. The same conditions, life in camps, the torment, the struggle, the shattering of dreams, the torment of the aged, and then the dementia . . . Many perished, longing to return to their homeland, Kashmir. The young generation still suffers from an erosion of identity and a sense of rootlessness. (Web)

At the beginning of the novel, the reader is dropped into the pristine world of narrator, Sridar where he is shown enjoying his peaceful life in his ancestral home in the downtown area of Srinagar, Kashmir. It describes the peaceful times of 1980s, an era preceding the insurgency in Kashmir, when both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims shared a harmonious social and cultural co-existence. They had been living together in peace through ages with mutual amity and brotherhood even through the reign of exploitative and authoritarian rulers. The bonding between them symbolizes the age-old traditions of Kashmir’s plurality and tolerance. For ages together, Kashmir has witnessed arrival of
diverse cultures, ideas and faiths. These elements merge together into its plural fabric. G.M.D Sufi, a Kashmiri writer pertinently observes that “the cult of Buddha, the teachings of Vedanta, the mysticism of Islam have one after another found a congenial home in Kashmir” (19). From time to time Kashmir has embraced new creeds without shedding away earlier ones and therefore evolved a unique socio-cultural fabric which gave primacy to shared values and tradition.

From the very beginning the novel traces the harmonious socio-cultural fabric of Kashmir’s milieu. Life in Sridar’s locality was shown beautiful with no sign of communal division between Pandits and they were shown having a cordial and ideal relationship with one another. They all participated in each other’s festival. Sridar’s grandfather, Mahanandju was used to be held in high esteem by both Pandits and Muslims of the locality. As Sridar comments, “He was very influential with both the communities owing to his close friendship with the local Muslim leaders and other Pandits” (2). Arvind Gigoo, a Kashmiri-born writer and translator of various Kashmiri poems and short stories in an essay, “Days of Parting” comments on the mutual friendship that existed between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims before armed insurgency:

Pandits have an ideal relationship with all the Muslims living in the locality. We help and trust one another . . . Sunnis, Shias and Pandits live in perfect harmony. . . . I have never seen any kind of division on communal lines between Muslims and Pandits. There was no such trouble . . . On the two Eids most of Pandits go to the Eidgah and ‘participate’ in the festival. My friends come to my place on every Shivratri and have lunch with me. (Gigoo 150)

Within this secular environment Sridar was growing and enjoying his childhood. As a teenager he loved reading and writing poetry and short stories. He developed interest in books early in his life and wanted to be a writer. His room was full of books and there were heaps of paper and some birches which he used as bookmarks. Writing and reading became his obsession and he maintained a journal in which he wrote poems and essays during winter holidays:
Sridar’s room was full of books, and his writing desk was so well-organised that he never invited any of his friends and classmates home for fear of disturbing the harmony of his belongings. His father had gifted him a notebook and encouraged him to write. He enjoyed playing with words. In his school he was the only one who could write essays on the most unusual of subjects. (6, 8-9)

Sridar’s wounding journey commences during winters. In Kashmir usually winters are extended and last for months together. They are long, quite cold and lifeless. In winters there is actually nothing much to do, except to wait for the long winters to come to an end. In order to pass time, Sridar used to read story books, eat roasted potatoes and used to wait for the spring to come. In spring Sridar accompanied his grandparent to Pampore so that he could visit his village and meet his cousins. He spent the days playing in the saffron fields. There was complete freedom for the children to play in the saffron fields and the orchards. He and his cousin enjoyed a lot, whole day they played with the cycle wheels. He used to use a stick to drive the wheel and when he would get tired of cycle play and would feel hungry he would rest in the shade of chinari in the midst of saffron field and would steal apples from the attic of the house, “Children had complete freedom to play in saffron fields and the orchards. . . . Sridar and his cousins played with cycle wheels all day long . . . next morning, catch hold of the cycle wheels once again, and run towards the chinari tree” (11).

The serene and beautiful childhood of Sridar portrays the picture of that Kashmir when it was called heavenly place on earth, where the Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits lived together in peace, happiness and harmony. But as the wheel of time revolved, violence crept the whole atmosphere of Kashmir and the people who lived for centuries together turned hostile to each other. 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 beautiful childhood of Sridar took an ugly turn where everything was caught in terror and violence. After coming from Pampore Sridar joined Professor Wakhlu’s tuition classes for the preparation of matriculation. He was a well reputed teacher of Srinagar, “he was known
for making even the duffers pass the school exams in Mathematics” (12). When Sridar’s batch was in its second month, Wakhlu stopped teaching in the middle of the class after being interrupted by his servant. He stepped out of the room and found two strangers were waiting at his gate. After having a conversation with the two visitors Wakhlu informed the students to leave and also told them not to come next day as it would be a holiday. The next day when students arrived at Wakhlu’s house they found it locked and a note pasted on the door, “My wife and I had to leave to be with our son. We will be back in a month. Till then, continue your studies” (13). Later it was revealed that Billa Puj, a goon of Sridar’s area and whose brother Majid, a Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) militant threatened Wakhlu to leave Kashmir which changed Sridar’s pristine world into a nightmare of horrific events where young boys started crossing the Line of Control (LoC) to get armed training in Pakistan. In Sridar’s locality, Abdul Gani’s son, Basharat too disappeared to get training. He came to know about his disappearance from Basharat’s brother, Mukhtiar during a cricket match in a temple compound:

... but Mukhtiar told Sridar that Basharat had gone across the border to undergo training in handling weapons. He had been chosen and handpicked by the area commander of the Liberation Front himself. Basharat will stay at training camp for a month, and then return to take charge of the locality. They say that he will bring guns and other weapons to fight for the liberation of our Kashmir. (18)

When Sridar came home after cricket match he learned that his father, Lassa already knew about disappearance of Basharat and Sridar was warned by Tathia, a neighbour who had come to have tea with Lasa not to share this thing with anyone. Tathia also told Lasa’s family about the ‘hit list’ prepared by militant organization, Hizbul Mujahedeen (HM). The hit list contained the name of both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims to be killed. Rahul Pandita, a famous writer and young journalist from Kashmir in his book, Our Moon has Blood Clots also talks about the death threats in the form of hit lists given to Pandits to abandon their homeland. He writes:
At the main gate, painted in blue, Father saw a piece of paper that had been stuck onto it. It was a hit list. Written in Urdu, with ‘JKLF’ across the top, it warned the Pandits to leave the Valley immediately. A list of about ten people followed—the list of people who the JKLF said would be killed. I read some of the names. Some of them were of our neighbours.

(93)

The fearful wind of frenzied atmosphere changed the historic harmonic atmosphere of Kashmir. Kashmir resonated with mass protests, stone pelting, and funeral processions. The armed conflict brought out new kind of religious oriented nationalism. People came on roads pointing finger to form V signifying victory, green flags waved at the top of mosques and houses, even signboards of shops were green in colour, the time in all watches and clocks was set according to Pakistani time zone. Gigoo points to a new kind of identity being articulated by proponents of militant nationalism. He writes:

The names of towns and streets were changed to reinforce a new cultural identity. Green was decreed to be the colour for all signboards of the shops and commercial establishments. The time in all watches and clocks was turned backwards by half an hour. Pamphleteering became an obsession. New militant organizations put posters all over the city announcing their mission. The posters carried warnings against those suspected to be harmful to their cause and the movement. (36)

Notices, messages, letters and ultimatums published in newspapers were used by militants to warn Pandits of dire consequences of staying back in the Kashmir. One day early in the morning Gunatoth and Gunwati, a Kashmiri Pandit couple from Mattan, a small town in Kashmir arrived at Sridar’s house and narrated them horrifying account of how Pandit families from Mattan evacuated their homes after seeing the posters pasted on the walls, “The Posters on the walls of Pandits houses read: All the non believers and informers are given thirty-six hours to leave this place. Those who fail to obey will be sawed” (40). In the mean time Sridar and Lasa also saw many posters glued to the walls
Targeted killings, abductions, rapes and massacres of Kashmiri Pandits were being carried out by the militant organizations. Through these methods militants wanted to create an atmosphere of terror and fear to warn them to abandon their homeland. In an essay “Night of Terror” Meenakshi Raina, author of the novel, *The Divine and the Destiny* also talks about the threats and killings carried out by militants as a means to threaten Kashmiri Pandits to abandon their homeland. She remarks:

The separatist movement in Kashmir started with anti-India slogan, hoisting of green flags, pro-Pakistani sentiments and exploitation of youths by the fundamentalist leaders . . . there was a well-planned strategy that started with selective killings of prominent Kashmiri Pandits to create fear. The militants killed many Pandits . . . Threatening letters asking Kashmiri Pandits to leave were pasted on the doors of Pandit houses. (65)

*The Garden of Solitude* is abounded with the incidents of killings of Kashmiri Pandits by militants. In one of the incidents Gigoo narrates that Amarnath, a Kashmiri Pandit was killed by two unidentified young men while he was returning home from a Temple early in the morning. He was shot two bullets in his ribs. Amarnath was a retired lecturer of history. His cremation was attended by many people including some of his students. Many of his students knew the militant groups operating in the locality. After the cremation when they went to his house to pay their condolence to his wife, she asked one of his students, the one who was speaking highly of Amarnath, “why Amarnath.” The man replied, “He should not have been killed. His name was not in the hit list. I checked. It is a mistake. May be, some boys from a different outfit, did this. May God forgive them!” (42). After hearing all this, another Pandit got paranoid and asked, “And what did others do to get killed?” (42). He answered, “Some people have to die. Otherwise, we won’t be taken seriously. They are killing Muslims too. It is a price which has to be paid. Many more will die in the struggle” (42).
In another incident Leelawati, a Kashmiri Pandit doctor and her husband was killed brutally by the militants as she ignored the warning of militants. The militants threatened her with the consequences of charging money from any injured militants. She did not pay any heed to their decree and thus was put to death, “A worker at the Mattan Lumber Bazaar saw bits of mangled remains of a body tied around a chainsaw. Some yards away, the body of Leelawati’s husband was found tied to a poplar tree. It had bullet marks in the neck and the temple” (40). The objective of killing several Pandits by militants was “to dramatize the ascendancy of subversive and to create a fearful atmosphere for Kashmiri Pandits” (Jalali 213).

With every passing day assassinations, killings, murders, abductions, clash between militants and defense authorities, curfews, crackdowns, protests, strikes, detentions, fear campaigns, etc. engulfed the whole valley. Fear and insecurity ruled the Pandits. The old harmonies between the Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims shattered in an atmosphere of suspicion. Kashmiri Pandits perceived threat in the looks of Muslims, and Muslims began to distrust Pandits for being ‘informers, agents and kafirs.’ Fear, insecurity and uncertainty ruled the hearts of Pandits and suspicion crept in their minds against their Muslim neighbours and friends and the same could be seen in the eyes of Muslims for Pandits. In this vitiated environment, these drastic changes shattered Kashmiri Pandits into apprehension and atrophy. Gigoo dwells upon this:

The Pandits kept the windows of their houses permanently shut. They were scared to venture out on the roads. The Pandit women stopped putting tilaks on their foreheads to mask their identity. The men grew beards. They did not speak to one another on the streets. They abandoned their traditional greeting ‘Namaskar.’ (39)

Rahul Pandita in his book Our Moon has Blood Clots has also talked about the fears that lurked in the hearts of Pandits. They were scared to the extent that they began to conceal their identity, “Ma had removed the golden atth from her ears and her bindi that identified her as a Pandit. Father removed the red sacred thread from his wrist” (94).
In the growing atmosphere of menace and fear, Kashmiri Pandits fled their homeland. Soon their flight grew into giant wave and engulfed Sridar’s family too. Sridar is not just an eye witness but a sufferer in every sense of the word. Through the character of Sridar, Gigoo saw an entire community rendered homeless and identityless. The odyssey of Sridar and other members of his community started one winter night, when the anti-India and pro-independence slogans broadcasted everywhere through loudspeakers from the mosques. Mosques were used as warning centers to threaten the Kashmiri Pandits. The slogans were about clearance of Pandits from Kashmir, subdue of Kashmiri Pandits women and eviction of Kashmiri Pandit from land. A feeling of fear and terror gripped the minds and the hearts of the Pandits. Amidst the atmosphere of fear and terror barely with their lives and some material possession they could lay their hands on, they started abandoning their native place. He writes, “One night in January, the Pandits heard the slogans broadcast through loudspeakers from the mosques. O informers, agents and kafirs, leave this land. Leave Kashmir, leave Kashmir” (43). Kundan Lal Chowdhury, a famous writer and poet of Kashmir in an essay, “It is for your own good to leave” also comments on the terror created by the slogans that were broadcasted through loudspeakers of mosques during nights of 90s. The slogans about pro-independence and eviction of non-Muslims spread panic waves among Kashmiri Pandit community and they left their place for the survival. He writes:

On the long, dark, wintry night of 19 January, when the whole world was asleep, thousands of loudspeakers hoisted on as many mosques through the length and breadth of the valley suddenly boomed ‘Azadi’… They were urged to cleanse the land of kafirs, to subdue the Pandit women and drive their men out of Kashmir! Two slogans in particular were terrifying:
‘What do we want?’
-‘Azadi’
‘What do we want?’
-‘Pakistan. Without the Pandit men; with the Pandit women.’ (22)

Though the writer himself has witnessed the trauma of exile, but while dealing with the plot he has kept impartial approach. He is at times angry, frustrated, bewildered,
disoriented, helpless and even heartbroken, but he never comes across as bitter or prejudiced. He has seen Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims suffered equally. In the novel, The Garden of Solitude he more than one occasion depicts the anxiety that befell the Muslims of Kashmir. He also peeps into homes and hearts of his Muslim brothers. As he narrates the agony of Kashmiri Pandits, in the same vein he also tries to capture the fear of Paramilitary forces under which Kashmiri Muslims spent their time. Apart from losing the warmth of being neighbours for years together, they were afraid that after their exile the Indian state would militarize the entire valley of Kashmir on the pretext of communalization. He writes:

The army convoys and the fearful armoured vehicles marched the roads of the city at all times. The faces of soldiers betrayed anger and hate. . . . Pandits, do not leave your motherland. It is a conspiracy by our enemy to separate brother from brother. We will be slaughtered like sheep now. It will rain bullets on innocents Muslims. . . . Pandits do not leave this place. Without you, how will we exist? (33, 67-68)

Sridar’s family, like all other several Pandit families migrated to Jammu after being scared by an incident which frightened the whole family. One wintry night Lasa heard some screeching sound as if someone was trying to open their main gate and after sometime knocking was followed by intermittent sound of footfalls. He slowly crept to the window and peeped through the curtains and saw two young boys wearing pherans walking up and down the lane without speaking with each other. These two boys stopped at Lasa’s gate to share cigarette. After sharing cigarette they left whispering something into each other’s ears. Next day after this episode in the evening Lasa decided and told his family that they would leave in a day or two. He first sent his family to Jammu and after a few days he too left with an overwhelming sense of disinclination, leaving behind a rich cultural tradition. He carried along with him trunks which contained books, utensils, clothes, files and documents and boarded the truck for his destination. As soon as truck reached Qazigund it stopped for a while. The scene at Qazigund was chaotic and noisy. All the trucks carrying Pandit families from different towns and villages in Kashmir were lined up. All displaced migrants wore a sense of abandonment and looked
helpless and defeated. Gigoo has very artistically presented the harrowing scene of trucks carrying Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland. Each truck carried the pain, fear, past, present, culture, belongings, relations, broken links, “each truck carried a home and hopelessness” (66). Lasa also noted that when Kashmiri Pandits were leaving in trucks and crossing Banihal tunnel most people seemed, “speechless as though they had lost voices” and that “each one had a story to narrate” (66). Being uprooted from their roots, their homes and their ancestral land a feeling of homelessness and sense of loss lurked in their hearts, “a sense of homelessness ignited their hearts with love for one another. A sense of loss made them embrace each other and seek solace in grief” (67). Kundan Lal Chowdhary also talks about the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, how the trucks and buses carried Pandits away from their homeland:

Poignant scenes have followed, of truckloads and busloads of Pandits in flight, some even barefoot with hardly any belongings— caravans of men, women and children running away from their homes and hearths. We hear frightening stories of escape after that fateful night— how each one of them planned their flight on a short notice as news filtered that there would be mass massacres of the Pandits in the valley. (22)

Siddhartha Gigoo in *The Garden of Solitude* has given his socialistic view and believes that literature has social value and relevance. Literature is without any doubt the greatest means to articulate society’s value because it provides the reader a glance of these ideals and how they influence people’s lives. The author achieves this by being at the reader’s place and writing something that the reader can identify with. It is the sense of social responsibility of this writer which has obligated him to inscribe the dilemma of an ordinary human being’s sufferings due to the enforced migration. Gigoo’s focal spot in writing this novel has been to illustrate the story of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley and to bring to the notice of world the miserable plight of the lives in exile, who have lost their homes and hearths and peace of mind forever. Tej N Dhar in a review “Kashmiri exodus: A must read” writes, “Gigoo has a firm grip on his material and he writes well. He makes us see and feel the pain and suffering of the Pandits. . . .
Nevertheless, his novel deserves to be read and should be of interest to all kinds of readers” (Web).

After reaching Jammu Lasa was horrified to see chaos that erupted on the arrival of Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu; the residents of the town watched the homeless Pandits with astonishment, there were Pandits who were searching for their relatives, neighbours, friends and others and there were some Pandits who wanted to get the latest information regarding the situation of Kashmir. Lasa was told by some acquaintance that many government schools and buildings were converted into camps for rehabilitating Kashmiri Pandits, “Many government schools and buildings had been converted into camps for them” (72). After spending a night in the dusty room of the school he went out in search of his family. While searching he saw the plight of migrant families. Leaving their native place, the displaced community got refuge in tents, cowsheds, barns, dilapidated dark rooms, camps and other makeshift arrangements made by the government. Most displaced Pandits had been rehabilitated but many thousands still lived in camps in Jammu, Delhi and other parts of India in atrocious conditions of deprivation. Herded into nightmare of refugee camps in Jammu, the life and quandaries of those in exile was atrocious. Few places were habitable but there was no choice left except than that to occupy whatever space one found. In some cases the accommodation was worse than established slums. A group of investigators characterized the one-room accommodation in the camp as “one room that is used as the living-room-cum-bedroom-cum store for an average family of five members” (Dabla 78).

The camps conveyed the tale of miseries and sorrows that these lives had been encountering inside the cramped camps. The inhabitants divided their single room accommodations by piling up trunks and hanging old sarees and bedspreads as walls. They also faced the problem of privacy which was not available to them in one room accommodation. Husband had lost love for their wives, they were devoid of passion. Lack of privacy affected the birth rate of the Kashmiri Pandits. Gigoo writes, “For months together marriages in the Pandit migrant community did not happen at all. No birth took place in any of the families living in the camps” (101). Sushant Dhar in an essay “Life in the Camp” also comments on the inhuman conditions of camp life. For the
camp dwellers the survival became a struggle. The migrants lived a tumultuous journey, battling desolation, toiling day after day:

The school had been converted into a camp for us. There was nowhere else to go. We occupied a small corner in an overcrowded room in the school. We struggled for space. Many families had to share a single room. . . . The school building was old. There were no toilets or bathrooms in the compound of the school. . . . In the camp, we faced water scarcity . . . People scrounged for water all the time. (134-135)

The camp in its totality was a living spectacle of dirt, filth and insanitary conditions. These camps conveyed the tale of the woes of lives in exile whose hopes and dreams were torn to mere shreds. There was lack of basic amenities like drinking water, drainage, sewerage and proper lavatory facilities. Heaps of dirt and garbage were seen strewn around. The foul and stinking smell reigned over the environment. Rainwater was used to wash utensils and fresh water had an unusual earthy colour and odour to it. Rain further added to their miseries. During monsoon, snakes, and scorpions came out of the anthills and other crevices in the ground and entered the camps. Each day was a fight for those living in the camps. Gigoo narrates:

There was only one block of latrines for the entire school. The stench was appalling. The sweeper kept away and did not show up for days together. The men went reluctantly to the stinking latrines to relieve themselves . . . There were others who refused to use the latrines. The faucets ran dry. The stray dogs were all around. (75)

Sushant Dhar in his essay, “Life in the Camp” talks about the sufferings faced by the people in camps. The living conditions, the dark locales, pallid days, scorching heat, constricted lanes, mobile water tankers constituted the dreary days of the migrants. The toilet reeked and the horrible stench in the latrines made their lives wretched. The migrants were engulfed in foul smell all the time. In the beginning years of exile, there were makeshift latrines and then after years they were plastered with bricks and cement.
For the camp dwellers, it became difficult to stay indoors all the time; the air reeked of a bad stench all the time. He remarks:

Many families had to share one bathroom. We had to clean the toilet ourselves. The toilet was nothing but a shed without any water supply. There was no drainage system in the camp. There was horrible stench all the time, though my family worked hard to always keep our quarters neat and clean . . . It was a small room and all of us had to be patient with one another. (135)

Lasa rejoined his family in the afternoon when an acquaintance from their old locality took him to the temple complex in Jammu, where the temple authorities had accommodated the Pandits in one of the room and after few days they occupied a dormitory in the school where many other families were also living. Lasa and Sridar explored the place and also went to the camps where Pandits had taken shelter. The dormitory in the school was partitioned to create separate rooms, “The families piled trunk upon trunk and box upon box to create partitions in the dormitory. Some women put a clothesline across the walls and hung old sarees and bedspreads to create separate rooms” (78). After spending some weeks at camp in the school, Lasa and Sridar decided to take a room on rent with a kitchen and bathroom. They searched and visited the houses in which rooms were available for rent. During those days it was impossible to get a suitable accommodation. The residents of Jammu exploited the Kashmiri Pandits by opening some barns, sheds and dilapidated shops on rent. After days of search they finally moved in one small room accommodation. The room was dark and without any window. Rattan Lal, a well known writer and critic in his essay, “Roses Shed Fragrance” also talks about the callousness of the landlords and exploitation of Kashmiri Pandits by them, “The Dogras in Jammu threw open barns and cattle sheds for the displaced Pandits to rent. They looked at the new arrivers suspiciously as though they were antiques from a museum” (205).

Sridar explored the new locality and saw that the people were distributing pamphlets that carried information about the registration centers and camps that were
being set up by the government. Outside the registration centers there was utter confusion and chaos. Thousands of Pandits were lined up to get their families registered as ‘migrants’ and to get the relief announced by the government for the Pandits, “The government had announced relief to the Pandits who migrated. It included a monthly allowance of five hundred rupees and some kilos of rice and sugar. People . . . queued up in front of the registration centers” (82). Gigoo has brought out the helplessness of Kashmiri Pandits at the registration center. Migrants came in large numbers and lined up in long queues along with the documents, papers and forms. After they were allocated as migrants, they got accommodation in camps and those who got no shelter were adjusted in canvas tents erected in the outskirts of the city. Meenakshi Raina, a writer in her essay, “Nights of Terror” talks about the relief commissioner office where the migrants had to register themselves in order to get government aid. She remarks:

The state government set up a relief commissioner’s office. The migrants who had fled from the Valley were asked to register their names. Once registered, the family was provided with a ration card, identifying them as displaced migrants. On presenting the ration card, government aid was provided to the tent residents and other non-salaried families who had no source of income. (66)

Siddhartha Gigoo’s realistic sense is so great that he has very skillfully sketched realistic events with fictional characters making them as real as possible. Though the characters are invented but they all are amongst those who have seen that most atrocious episode of time. Gigoo himself underwent the torturous interlude which completely changed the scenario of the 90s of Kashmir. After The Garden of Solitude, the league of writers who wrote on migration of Kashmiri Pandits emerged but none could leave as deep a mark as Gigoo has. The realism shown in The Garden of Solitude is par excellence. For him, literature has the power to reflect the truth of the society. As Lukacs also believes that literature provides a critical understanding of underlying social and historical processes by revealing the contradictions of the age. By mere reflecting reality, the novel simply creates a ‘mental structure’ transposed into words. But, the most important thing is that the novel should conduct the reader “towards a more concrete
insight into reality” (Nayar 118). The artist does not however impose an abstract order upon the world, but it presents the reader with an image of the richness of life from which the sense of order emerges. Hence, the goal of artistic reflection is a picture of reality in which there is a unity of essence and appearance.

Siddhartha Gigoo can be called a true child of transition period as he ardently observed the effect of exile on the lives of Kashmir Pandits. This novel plunges deep into the human conditions ultimately depicting the fact that everyone has gone through the physical and mental agony during exile. The older generation lost the sense of time and belongings, the younger ones struggled hard to find the means of livelihood in the alienated place and the student worked hard to get the education in the hostile conditions.

The migration left a deep effect on the psychology of old men. Dementia along with other several psychological disorders became common among the older members of Kashmiri Pandits. The trauma they had to go through in the face of forced migration made older generation unable to reconcile with the new and the changing scenario. Gigoo in his novel effectively delineates the psychological built up of the characters who moved out of Kashmir. The psychological plight almost involved every Pandit inhabitant of the tented camps. Their anxiety and despair, causing a “sickness unto death” developed after migration. They found it difficult to belong to a new terrain and to re-connect the present with the snatched past. The more consciousness of loss of their past grew, the more their psychological despair intensified. Kierkegaard’s in his philosophy of anxiety believes, “the more consciousness [of despair], the more intense the despair” (179). After migration, Sridar’s grandfather, Mahanandju’s health began to deteriorate. Under the colossal weight of the memories of past, his body began to decay. This also stands true for all elderly Pandits who could not endure the shock of forced displacement and harsh alien surroundings. Gigoo in the novel brings out how these people were victims of identity crisis and how they struggled to cope with dementia and forgetting, represented through the characters like Sridar’s grandfather and many of his generation who resided in the refugee camps, and who “... had become delusional owing to mental trauma and [their] inability to cope up with the alien surroundings and loss of [their] land” (144).
Apart from this Gigoo also delineates that migration left the moral imagination of people utterly paralyzed. It brought about the death of conscience and moral code of man. Everyone was fighting a hard battle for his own survival and no soul was capable of giving solace to another devastated soul. Gigoo does not shun away in projecting the degradation of morality and conscience of the lives in exile. Of all horrors of migration, the plight of the old men who were considered as a burden by their children is difficult to write about. Instead of becoming a support of their parents in old age, their children held them responsible for adding on to their burden. In one of the incident in the novel an old man was like a burden for his son and daughter-in-law. They felt that he is another mouth whom they need to feed. They made fun of him when he would moan at night. Gigoo writes:

In an adjacent tent a family of five torture an old man, their foster-grandfather, who lost his mental balance upon seeing his house fade away in a hazy distance. The old man is a burden for his son and daughter-in-law. Another mouth to feed, they feel! He moans at night constantly, and intermittently wakes up to a cold shiver- a nightmare. His son and daughter-in-law taunt him for their amusement. They whisper in his ears that his mother was dead and that she was beaten mercilessly to death. The old man groans and pleads them not to utter the atrocities. Every evening, the torment continues . . . (99)

Being away from homeland, the exiles take upon themselves the task of preserving the memory of their homeland by adhering to the past and nurturing hopes of returning back to their homes in the Kashmir. The displaced people nursed a hope of returning their homes one day. They prayed for an early return and did not open their suitcase and trunks for months together. They did not unpack their things and kept waiting day after day, month after month and year after year for their return. Salman Rushdie in his novel Shame writes, “What is the best thing about migrant people . . . ? I think it is their hopefulness . . . And what’s the worst thing? It’s emptiness of one’s luggage . . . We’ve come unstuck from more than land. We’ve floated upwards from history, from memory, from time” (87). In the novel Lasa also nursed the hope of return
when he wrote to his old Muslim friend, Ali, “This parting is not forever. We will re-live the lost time” (179). For such people the memory of the past is richer than the times they are living in and beautiful to be re-lived and to be reflected on. The pain triggered by the exile and impossibility to return, for them, can only be mitigated and comforted by keeping the past inseparable from them. They seek refuge in past to provide solace to their devastated souls.

In the novel after the exile of the Pandit community there are numerous examples where narrative is disrupted by recollections: a dream of the lost homeland, of green fields in Pampore, of Sridar’s mother and grandmother making apple jams, of his mother sending him to the baker to buy lavasas (baked bread) and the image of the stained glass in Sridar’s house against the present refugee existence in one cramped room without windows in a barn. Sridar also notes that they were learning “to live life backwards” with “thoughts oscillating back and forth between the past and present” (113). Elsewhere, Sridar’s grandfather in order to escape the harsh reality of exile created a sense of nostalgia and reminding, “the weeping willows, dancing saffron buds, the lush green rice fields and the singing hoopoes” (86). He was displaced physically, but he lived in his past. An imperious presence of a disjointed absence marked his dotage:

I am a man without a reflection. . . . Each day brought new problems and difficulties. The calendar on the wall lost its meaning. The dates seemed meaningless. It was difficult for Mahanandju to tell the past from the present. He longed to live life backwards. With each passing day and night, he grew fond of his loneliness. He reflected on the past and remembered the days in Kashmir. (85)

Beside all these ill effects, education sector was also badly disrupted by the exodus of the community who undisputedly considered being dedicated, capable and hard working. The children of exile had to bear the brunt of the exodus. Exodus had a major impact on their education. During the initial years of exodus large number of Kashmiri Pandit students could not pursue their studies. After that government made alternate arrangements for the education of displaced students as they were denied admissions in
the mainstream educational institutions. They had to continue their education in the camp schools and colleges far from satisfactory in terms of the facilities as well as infrastructure. Meenakshi Raina in her essay “Nights’ of Terror” talks about the hardships faced by the displaced students and the conditions of the camp school:

The colleges in Jammu refused to admit the displaced students due to lack of infrastructure . . . The teenagers and youth had to go through trauma at a different level . . . The doors of camp schools and degree colleges were opened in Jammu but the children from migrant families had to attend the camp schools and colleges in the afternoon in scorching heat, with very little infrastructure. (67,69)

Sridar’s father, Lasa also found it difficult to get admission for his son in any Indian school after leaving Kashmir. Sridar’s admission in a private school was difficult. In Delhi they roamed from one school to another. In some schools the admission was closed and in others Sridar’s marks did not qualify him for admission. In Delhi they came to know that the government was considering reservation for the migrant students in various schools and colleges across the country. After that they went to Shimla in a hope to get admission. But luck did not favour him and the school authority regretted their inability to help them with the admissions. Sridar says, “No school will be willing to admit a homeless migrant; one without an address. Sridar resigned to the turn of events and decided to stay with his family. He did not wish to go through any more distress, given his restless temperament” (90). Unable to get admission anywhere, Sridar pleaded his father and convinced him to return back to Jammu and join camp school for migrants. On reaching back he joined the camp school set up by government authorities. Elaborating on the infrastructure and facilities of the camp school, he writes:

The district administration had allocated a dozen tents to the school administration. One tent was used as a makeshift office and others were used as classrooms. Migrant boys and girls, who lived in the tents, simply walked from their tents into the other tents to attend their classes. The
teachers were migrants who had taught in various government schools in Kashmir. (93)

While attending the camp school Sridar met Pamphosh in one of the classes who accentuated him the tortures he and his peers had to face in the hostile camps in Jammu. They were living under impoverished conditions with no choice of their own. The narration of post-migration pathetic conditions of Pandits in migrant camps is most harrowing. He talked about the stinking puddles of water in which his mother washed the utensils, the narrow room in which they could not stretch their arms and legs, the unreal smile on his mother’s face, the frozen silence on his grandfather’s face, the biting snakes and insects, and the broiling heat of summers in Jammu, “All around the camp, there is stench of human excrement and waste. . . . The water in the water tanker smells foul, and the children lie whole day in their own vomit . . . I am a mute spectator to the horrors of life inside my tent. The air inside is squalid” (97). He continued as he talked about the plight of his mother and sister, “They line up for hours in the morning to use the makeshift toilet made of torn shreds of canvas, pieces of cupboard and tin. They await their turn at the filthy and stinking toilets while the loitering men watch the women wait to relieve themselves” (98).

Apart from the harshness of the system which was no help to them, nature too was hostile to them. Being thrown out into an alien environment the migrants suffered on account of harsh weather. For Kashmiri Pandits, forced migration led them to geographical areas grossly incomparable to their original habitation in terms of weather conditions. From lush green cold environment, they were forced to land into hot and dry areas, which they found totally uncomfortable. Problems of acclimatization to an entirely different and hostile climate to which Pandits were not earlier acquainted affected them with severe health trauma. They had not only bore the horrors of weather vagaries but also had fallen prey to sun-strokes and snake bites. Beside the exposure to hostile environment the other causes of death were snake bites and heat strokes. He writes, “There was only one question to be asked during the funeral processions that left the camp every day. Snake bite or sun strokes?” (101). Sushant Dhar in his essay, “Summers
of Exile” writes about the problems faced by migrants on the account of harsh weather. He narrates:

We waited summers to end. . . . Many collapsed and died in the streets. The scorching heat was unbearable; many succumbed to sunstrokes and snakebites. Death became a daily affair in the camp. Heat was our biggest enemy. The soaring temperatures in Jammu rendered us insane. We had nowhere to go. The rooftops and the walls of our room went on baking us throughout the day. (77)

After completing his camp school, Sridar and his family shifted to Baderkote. He got admission in camp college and studied Arts. During his college he became passionate about his writing. He wrote both, prose and poetry and sent them for publication in the Sunday Supplement of the local English daily. After completing his graduation he went to Delhi to get admission in a film school. But luck did not favour him and he did not get admission and joined a part-time job with a film maker. There he befriended Lenin, a part-time assistant to film maker. With the help of Lenin Sridar obtained admission as a part-time in film making course. The process of film making fascinated him a lot. On one occasion, the Japanese cultural center at New Delhi screened a film and the guests included some bureaucrats and ambassador of Japan. Sridar decided to watch film without having any invitation pass. He sneaked into the hall, “The guards at the Centre had been instructed not to allow any uninvited guest. He decided to be in at any cost, and somehow sneaked into the hall” (154). The movie impacted him so much that he desired to screen the pangs and pain of his community.

Sridar spent more and more time in reading after completing his work at production house. One afternoon Lenin told him about an essay competition organized by the Asian Buddhist Foundation. After Lenin’s insistence Sridar participated in the essay competition and won a consolation prize of twenty-five thousand rupees and a two-week stay in Ladakh. He boarded a bus and started his journey to Ladakh. On the way he read his father’s letter and the content in the letter disturbed him. The letter, suffused with an overwhelming despondency talked about the plight of migrants in an alien atmosphere.
Lasā watched and visited every migrant family in the locality. He experienced a strange physical detachment among the couples of almost every family. In the letter Lasā also told Sridar:

A community is on the verge of extinction. The middle-aged are no longer passionate about life. They crave their share of the monetary relief. Our identity is imprisoned in a ration card. This should change, or else we will be forgotten forever. . . . You must remember to look back and reflect on our journey. Someday, you will have to search for the shreds of your identity, your essence and your own history. (157-158)

The trip to Ladakh brought about inner transformation of Sridar and he realized the purpose and meaning of life and existence. The sub-plot of novel is about Ladakh which involves a monastery, a Lama and a mysterious woman. The whole experience of Ladakh became a metaphor for ephemeral for Sridar. After spending some weeks in Ladakh, Sridar went to his home to see his ailing grandfather who had now lost most of his memory. On reaching home Lasā explained everything about Mahanandju to Sridar, “He takes dreams and illusions for real and he confuses reality with dreams. He is beyond any treatment now . . . That is what the doctor said. Alzheimer’s! (171). Day by day Mahanandju’s physical and mental condition deteriorated. He lost his appetite and only ate a few morsels and his skin started to decay. One day he passed away. A year after the death of his grandfather Sridar found his way to Delhi and there he took up a job as a full time writer in a company that owned travel and tourism websites. After spending sometime in Delhi he was sent for a one-year deputation to Denver in America. In Denver he felt an urge to write the book that would help him to construct the identity of his community that is on the verge of extinction. He wanted to narrate the world the horror of exilic holocaust that befell his community, “Soon, we all will forget. Forgetfulness will invade everyone. Collective amnesia will lead to permanent vacuity of the mind” (192). Sridar found very difficult to keep the interest in his job. He wanted to return to his home to collect the stories of migrant people to write his book, The Book of Ancestors. After eighteen months he went back to India. He visited various camps in Jammu and met people residing in camps. After visiting camps he came to know that
there were only a handful of old migrants in the camp. They were losing their memory and no one would be able to know the identity of their clan:

These people will die soon, one by one, and take with them their memories. The precious stories will be lost forever. Years later, no one would be able to know their identity. No one would remember where they came from. The old are losing their memory. The young are busy in mundane affairs and do not care about the stories of their elders. (202)

Thus he constantly searched for lost stories of migrant people to record the suffering of a generation of nothingness and “forgetfulness” and “loneliness and neglect” (208). Before beginning the last chapter of his book Sridar decided to visit Kashmir. He visited his old house and met with the people there. His home coming at the end of novel escalates his yearnings as he looked on the walls of his old house which was now inhibited by some Muslim family. The novel ends with the release of The Book of Ancestors.

The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir during 90s is one of the greatest tragedies which everyone wants to forget yet one cannot overlook this inevitable, inescapable stark reality. Few books have caught the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits during 90s but none has given an unbiased and balanced account of events like that of The Garden of Solitude. Gigoo has successfully delineated the unpleasant phase of 90s in the history of Kashmir with an impartial approach. He is a cognizant artist who writes to fulfill some purpose. In The Garden of Solitude, he comes down at the level of the common man and highlights the sufferings of that section of the society which has been rendered least importance in books.