

Structural Violence and Colonial Oppression in Shahnaz Bashir's Scattered Souls

ISHRAT BASHIR
Department of English
School of Languages
Central University of Kashmir, India
ishrat.mattoo@cukashmir.ac.in

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse the concept of structural violence and its implications for people as depicted in Scattered Souls. Galtung's concept of Structural violence and its distinction from other types of violence provides a useful framework to examine and understand the complexity of the representation of violence and socio-political relations. According to Galtung, structural violence refers to the indirect violence inherent in dominant social structures like systemic discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender, which create conditions of disadvantage for underprivileged and oppressed people. This paper aims to analyse how the conventional focus on visible violence in Scattered Souls leads to the invisibility and oblivion of implicit or structural violence. This paper endeavours to use Galtung's and Žižek's categorisation of violence as a conceptual tool to understand the impact of violence at the deeper levels. It further seeks to examine the ways in which structural violence deteriorates the lives of people, bolsters the direct violence of occupation, and diminishes the possible impact of resisting oppression.

Keywords: Kashmir; structural violence; oppression; Scattered Souls; Galtung

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and society has been ever-evolving in the history of critical literature studies. Literature is often seen as a self-enclosed body of writing that is not aimed at reflecting the social and political concerns of a society. Critical movements like New Criticism, Russian Formalism and Structuralism lend validity to this view by emphasising the self-sustaining inner structure of the literature. However, the relationship of literature with the lived experience of the people is significant. Though literature cannot reflect in an unsophisticated manner the growth of complex social structures, it does provide us insight into the workings of the social structures and people's responses to them. Art and literature document, interpret and express the values of specific social formations. In composing a poem, a song, a novel or a painting, artists, consciously or unconsciously, respond to the operation of the social-political forces of their times. Patrick McCarthy (2007, p. 358) aptly puts it, "Art always accompanies humanity and even defines humanity. A human being is the animal that makes art. The animal that is driven to embellish his world, to enhance his life, to cover the depressing nakedness of a barren horizon." In the 1990s, Kashmir witnessed the rise of armed resistance against the Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. A generation of writers born or brought up during this time experienced a tumultuous history of Kashmir that was marked by violence, the killing of thousands of people, disappearances, and mass migration of Kashmiri pandits. Following the armed uprising in Kashmir in the 1990s, new writing in English emerged from Kashmir centred on the theme of conflict. As Isak Dinesen (as cited in Arendt, 1998, p. 175) puts it, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them

into a story or tell a story about them,” a new generation of Kashmiri writers growing up in the conflict came out with poems, novels and short stories to make sense of the turn the Kashmir history had taken. Hannah Arendt once said, “No philosophy . . . can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story” (Arendt, 1968, p. 22). Kashmiri writers also found storytelling to be an enabling exercise for witnessing the vicissitudes of the world they lived in and making sense of it beyond the media headlines. *Scattered Souls* by Bashir (2016) is an unblinking witness to the disintegration of hundreds of lives in Kashmir under Indian occupation. Employing the technique of realistic form pioneered in Kashmir by writers like Akhtar Mohiuddin, Harikrishan Koul, and Amin Kamil, Shahnaz Bashir weaves a string of tales whose substratum is a colonial situation of conflict. *Scattered Souls* is a formidable act of witnessing the violence and oppression and the resistance built to it in Kashmir. A collection of short stories, *Scattered Souls* can be read as a novella unified through its focus on violence inflicted on people under occupation, which has torn apart their lives. Sakeena, a rape victim; Insha, a salesgirl; Ghulam Mohiuddeen, an Ex-militant; and Biul, born of the rape of his mother, Sakeena, are directly related as a family, but their stories are told separately.

Violence emerges as the structural grid that holds the stories together. Whether physical, psychological, or social, violence is at the heart of *Scattered Souls*. The very action in the opening story “Transistor” begins with bullets, “With each bullet pumped into him, all his great memories of loyalty to the revolution flashed through his mind . . . (p. 3)”. All the characters’ lives in *Scattered Souls* are invariably impinged and paralysed by violence. Sakeena has been raped and separated from her husband, which has submerged her in psychosis. Biul is tortured by the police when he is barely thirteen. Gul Baghwan has lost his son to a bullet, and Farooq Mir’s life falls apart when troops kill his wife. Shahnaz Bashir embodies this violence and people’s resilience in stories. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the conventional focus on visible violence in *Scattered Souls* leads to the invisibility and obscuring of implicit or structural violence. This paper endeavours to use Galtung’s and Žižek’s categorisation of violence as a conceptual tool to understand the impact of violence at the deeper levels. It further seeks to examine how structural violence bolsters the direct violence of occupation and diminishes the possible implications of resisting oppression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2009, a Kashmir-based journalist in Delhi, Basharat Peer, published a memoir, *Curfewed Nights* (Peer 2009), delineating his life growing up during the armed uprising in the 1990s. Kashmir has a rich heritage of brilliant literature written in Kashmiri. However, as the Kashmir conflict intensified, Kashmiri youth, having been educated in English Medium schools, began expressing their resistance through literature written in English. Even though Agha Shahid Ali started publishing his poetry in English in the 1970s and wrote *The Country without a Post Office* in 1997, which was directly related to the Kashmir conflict, Kashmiri literature in English gained impetus following the publication of *Curfewed Nights*. Many critically acclaimed novels were produced, including Mirza Waheed’s *The Collaborator*, Siddhartha Gigoo’s *The Garden of Solitude*, Shahnaz Bashir’s *The Half Mother*, Nayeema Mehjoor’s *Lost in Terror*, Shabir Mir’s *The Plague upon Us* to name a few. Most of this literature is written against the backdrop of the occupation and armed resistance to it. Many research studies have analysed the work of these writers, focusing on the themes of direct violence, identity crisis, gender, exile, trauma and resistance. However,

there is a dearth of a substantial body of literary criticism on Kashmiri literature in English.

The impact of violence on the people of Kashmir has chiefly been analysed through historical, journalistic, anthropological and ethnographic domains. Haley Duschinski's (2009) work on Kashmir focuses on the impact of violence, whether state-sponsored or inflicted by militants, on the people of Kashmir. She demonstrates how militarisation assisted by legal provisions produces impunity that operates beyond law and causes social suffering and death. Duschinski and Ghosh (2023) focus primarily on historical and anthropological aspects of the Kashmir Conflict and its impact. For instance, she has analysed how Indian jurisdiction is used to terrorise and control Kashmiri people, wherein a "political Kashmiri" is seen "as a security threat to the Indian nation" (p. 682). Meenakshi Bharat (2013) examines many of Kashmir's historical and fictional writings, including those of Gigoo, Peer, and Waheed, within the conceptual framework of terrorism. While she analyses the response of twenty-first-century novels in English in India to the rise of terrorism, one-third of the book is dedicated to Kashmiri literature in English, particularly Kashmiri English novels. Bharat examines how the Kashmir conflict enables the production of Kashmiri English memoirs, novels and graphic narratives, which in turn became instrumental in producing the counter-narratives against the reductive stereotypes of identifying Kashmir with terrorism. Ahsan (2020) employs Gramsci's concept of hegemony to examine the operations of power in Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator*. He discusses the way hegemony is used in maintaining Indian rule over Kashmir. Neha Rana (2021) studies Bashir's *The Half Mother* as an agency for creating an alternate narrative of indigenous voices against occupation and depicting the traumatic effect of disappearance on the women in Kashmir. Abbas and Malik (2023) employ LaCapra's Trauma Theory to examine the effect of trauma on individual and collective identities using *The Half Mother* as the primary text. They argue that trauma inflicted by political conflicts deeply affects the human perception of self. While all these works examine violence in one or another aspect, the relationship between colonial oppression and structural violence is not sufficiently analysed.

Galtung's concept of "structural violence" and its distinction from other types of violence provides a valuable framework to examine and understand the complexity of the representation of violence and socio-political relations in literary writings like novels. Armstrong and Tennenhouse (1989) study Bronte's *Jane Eyre* to show how the representation of violence in the novel becomes violence of representation. They argue that two kinds of violence are inseparable, and violent events are described as "bringing together different concepts of social order" (p. 9). Carroll (2014) studies Grimms' "Little Red Riding Hood," Angela Carter's "The Werewolf," and Shakespeare's *King Lear* to identify the evolutionary aspects of the various kinds of violence, including symbolic violence and their role in human relationships as depicted in these writings. Khalid et al. (2023) analyse *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to show how structural violence is embodied in the discrimination of the protagonist in America following the 9/11 attack. D. Misri (2014) explores the operation of various forms of violence in the fiction of Manto and other writers. She links the multiple forms of violence with the multiple ideas of India. Raza et al. (2022) employ Galtung's theory of violence to critique gender-based violence in *This House of Clay and Water*. They show how gender-based violence is normalised through various social practices like the use of language.

DISCUSSION

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

Violence is inscribed in history. It is so ubiquitous in the history of the world that it might appear as a normal state of being. However, violence in the world's conflict zones has been one of the established strategies to control and sustain what Slavoj Žižek (2008, p. 118) calls 'the illegitimate power'. Violence is commonly envisioned as physical harm or threat of physical harm. It is seen as that which kills or injures. However, the studies on violence show that violence is not constituted only by that which results in physical harm, massacres or carnages. It may be very insidious and invisible. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, introduced the term "Structural Violence" in his 1969 essay "Violence, peace, and peace research" to refer to the indirect violence inherent in dominant social structures. Distinguishing it from personal (also called direct or behavioural) violence, Galtung emphasised that structural violence inscribed in social structures is characterised by inequality and exclusion where the authors of violence may not be clearly identified. He argues that "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations" (167) owing to the unequal distribution of power and resources. Structural violence exists in a state of 'negative' peace (Galtung, 1968, pp. 487–496), a state of absence of war or direct violence. Such violence is ingrained in a world that has normalised inequity, social exclusion, ageism, ableism and so on. In contrast to "negative peace", Galtung proffered another concept of peace called "positive peace", based on cooperation and integration among humankind. While negative peace refers to the absence of war in a situation of macro-conflict and the lack of interpersonal violence in micro-conflicts, positive peace constitutes the absence of structural inequalities that lead to the reduction of potential realisations in human beings. The pursuit of positive peace is impossible without addressing the structural violence.

Another philosopher and cultural theorist, Slavoj Žižek (2008, p.1), categorises violence into two categories: Subjective and Objective violence. His work on violence can be studied as an extended discussion of Galtung's idea of violence. Personal or direct violence is referred to as "subjective" violence, which is "experienced against the background of a non-violent zero level," a sort of normal state of being (p. 2). The term 'subjective' violence foregrounds the perpetrator as identifiable, and the violence is visible and confronted directly by the people. It is demonstrated in the horror it creates and the empathy it generates for the victim. Subjective violence is calculable in terms of the number of deaths or the extent of torture, for instance, of oppressed people by oppressive regimes. Žižek's concept of 'objective' violence is similar to Galtung's idea of structural violence. It entails "the subtler forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (p. 8). Žižek argues that objective violence serves as "the standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent" (p. 2). Both Galtung and Žižek seek to put the actor-oriented view of violence at a distance that has dominated the studies of violence, undermining its depth. Both emphasise that the normative social structures within which people live may cause enormous harm to people without being considered violence. For instance, hunger and starvation kill people without anyone considering it as violence perpetrated by a system. The focus on structural violence makes it possible to make it visible so that action is taken to address it and the suffering of people is reduced. The distinction between direct/subjective and structural/objective violence is essential for the resolution of conflicts and for attaining peace.

The invisibility of structural violence largely owes to the lack of dispassionate analysis of insidious forms of violence. The incognisance of structural violence serves the ideological function of perceiving subjective violence as the most compelling issue and worse than structural (objective) violence, which is sometimes not considered violence at all. This paper aims to examine, through *Scattered Souls*, how, in the context of political conflicts like that of Kashmir, the exclusive focus on subjective violence and the incognisance of objective or structural violence become a critical impediment to meaningful resistance and also provides the perpetrator's opportunities for justification for inflicting the violence. For instance, gender injustice was often used by hegemonic powers as justification for waging war on the oppressed countries to liberate their women. For a deeper analysis of structural violence, Galtung, in 1990, coined the term “cultural violence” that legitimises other forms of violence. Cultural violence, in his view, constitutes “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence— exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, . . . that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence” (p. 291). Žižek (2008) does not see cultural violence as a cause of structural violence but a type of structural violence referred to as symbolic violence embodied in the language itself and constitutes the discourse that sustains the social relations of domination. He contends that the incognisance of objective (structural) violence results in “the catastrophic consequence of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (p.1) that constitutes “systemic violence”. Systemic violence is inherent in the socioeconomic structures of inequity that robs a particular section of society of the possibility of living a healthy life. For example, non-accessibility to optimum healthcare for poor people is blamed on their poverty rather than on the politico-economic structure. To seek an end to systemic and symbolic violence, Žižek (p. 3) advocates ignoring the traumatic impact on the victims that subjective violence creates and analysing the deeper objective violence dispassionately that would allow us to create space for rendering objective violence more visible and show how the horror of subjective violence masks the existence of the former.

POLITICO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *SCATTERED SOULS*

The network of various forms of violence and its impact on people under military occupation constitutes the central grid of *Scattered Souls*. The subjective or direct violence that permeates the book is apparent in the images of blood, wounds, physical and psychic, and disintegrated lives. The stories in *Scattered Souls* succinctly document killings, clueless disappearances, custodial deaths, torture and the unending trauma of Kashmiris. The violence is subjective as all these people experience violence “against the background of a non-violent zero level,” which perturbs “the ‘normal’ peaceful state of things” (Žižek, 2008, p. 2). The uprising of the 1990s in Kashmir is seen as the beginning of a violent era in the valley in contrast to the non-violent state of negative peace before the 1990s. It is important to consider the historical context here. Following the independence of the Indian subcontinent and its bifurcation into India and Pakistan in August 1947, the Maharaja of Kashmir, who hoped to remain independent, was pressured into accession with India (Whitehead, 2018, p. 80). Sheikh Abdullah, who had been leading the struggle for independence from princely rule since the 1930s, became the head of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The accession to India was understood as an interim arrangement till a referendum was held under United Nations supervision, enabling people to decide the future of the Jammu & Kashmir (p. 82). The referendum never took place, and India continued to work towards making

Kashmir's integration an absolute albeit enforced reality. Kashmir continued to live, almost invariably under the rule of a single party, the National Conference empowered by Delhi. The legitimacy of the Jammu & Kashmir governments had always remained doubtful, and the dissatisfaction and anger of the masses in Muslim majority Kashmir kept simmering until it exploded in the armed uprising in the 1990s following the rigging of elections by the National Conference in collaboration with Delhi. With the rebellion in the 1990s, Kashmir witnessed the death of thousands of people, custodial killings, massacres, rapes, forced disappearances, the exodus of pandits and multiple draconian laws to quell dissent.

DISPOSSESSION AS COLONIALY-ENABLED VIOLENCE

Colonial occupation hurled Kashmir into an abyss of fear and despair. The illegitimate confiscation of political power exacerbated the inequity in the socioeconomic structure of Kashmir. The energy and resources that could have been utilised in transforming people's lives and reducing the inequities in their socioeconomic conditions are divested into resistance, dealing with fear, insecurity and mourning. As Galtung (1969) explains, it is a form of violence when "human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations" (p. 168). Characters' lives in *Scattered Souls* are ruined and dispossessed. For instance, in the story "Psychosis", Sakeena and her children are reduced to poverty after her husband's enforced disappearance. Suddenly, she becomes a half widow, a term used in media discourse for a Kashmiri woman whose husband has disappeared in the conflict of the 1990s and who does not know whether he is alive or dead. Her life hangs in a precarious balance of the two possibilities of her husband being alive or dead. She is convinced that her husband might never return, yet there is a hope that he might be alive. The direct cause of this violence is the Indian military occupation of Kashmir, which engenders structural violence that makes the possibility of living a life of dignity a remote dream for Sakeena and her family. Sakeena and her children are dispossessed of productive human living. They are made to bear the loss of a potential state of being, the possibility of a happy and fulfilling childhood. Her mourning for the "mode of being that is dispossessed," as Judith Butler (p. 20) calls it, does not end. In the story "The Woman Who Became Her Own Husband", Ayesha is traumatised by the sudden death of her husband, caught in a crossfire between militants and Indian security forces. She loses all sense of life and behaves as if she is her husband, Tariq, walking with a limp like him. Two decades later, people see her roaming the streets like a mad woman (pp. 165-183).

In "The Gravestone" (Bashir, 2016), Muhammad Sultan's family is reduced to poverty and his daughter resorts to begging following the killing of his son by the Army. Sultan had to compromise his dignity when he decided to apply for government compensation of Rs. one lakh for his son's death, which also necessitates the removal of the word *Shaheed* (martyr) from his son's epitaph (pp. 21-25). People, whether militants or non-militants, killed by security forces in the 1990s in Kashmir were regarded as martyrs. The direct cause of this violence is the Indian military occupation of Kashmir, which engenders structural violence. Colonial oppression dispossessed them of productive human living and inflicted the loss of a potential state of being, a possibility of a happy and fulfilled life.

COLLATION OF COLONIAL AND SOCIETAL OPPRESSION

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS INSTRUMENT OF CONTROL

The collation of the oppressive framework of colonialism with the structural violence embedded in social relations strengthens both. This is illustrated by the story "Psychosis", which is a story of a young married woman who is struggling with her mental health issues after troops kidnapped her husband and gang-raped her. The story begins with Sakeena on her visit to the only Psychiatric Diseases Hospital in Srinagar in an over-crowded local bus whose convex mirror reflects each "receding paranoid trooper" (Bashir, 2016, p. 51) as diminishing, shrivelling and fading as the bus moves on. Psychiatric Diseases Hospital in Srinagar has emerged as an important institution in the wake of the growing number of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder cases following the uprising in the 1990s. Sakeena is struggling with her trauma. The troopers constitute the direct action wing of the colonial paraphernalia that inflicts violence on the subjugated peoples. The "receding" and "shrivelling" of the trooper in the mirror evokes the possibility of Sakeena's healing, corresponding to the reduction in the frequency of Sakina's post-rape nightmares of "bloody shalwar" and seeing herself "rolling down the riverbank" though the "smell of sperm" stays with her. The possibility of healing is punctured by the presence of her son Bilal alias Biul who was born as a consequence of her rape by troopers. Sakeena abhors Biul as a bastard and has completely abandoned him to the care of his little half-sister Insha. While Bashir poignantly depicts the disintegration of Sakeena's family due to the direct violence inflicted by the troops and renegades, it is the structural or invisible violence that marks Sakeena's and Biul's struggle for survival.

Sakeena's attempt to commit suicide after she was raped is the result of the sense of shame and meaninglessness that the victims of sexual assault usually experience. This sense of shame typically in the case of women results from the cultural stigmatising of rape. Rape victims are viewed as impure or damaged. This idea of sexual violence against women is grounded in the normative understanding of rape as a violation of a man's property rights over the body of his woman and that the value of a woman is compromised after rape. Susan Brownmiller (1975, p. 15) describes rape aptly as "a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear". She demonstrates "rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear" (391). Since rape is fundamentally a forced sexual act that disregards the consent of a victim, it corresponds to the military occupation that occupies without the consent of colonised peoples. In a colonial situation, rape is not only used as a weapon against women but as a weapon by men against men. Since rape is understood as "an aggressive expression of sexuality" rather than as a "sexual expression of aggression" (Seifert, 1996, p.1), it has been serving as a tool of oppression under military occupations. Throughout history, rape has functioned as an instrument of property acquisition, demonstration of manhood, conquest over a woman, instrument of both discipline, threat and intimidation, revenge and a mechanism of social control (Brownmiller, 1975). In the colonial context, rape is used as a spectacle of horror, present even in its absence to intimidate and control the subjugated people. Sakeena is gang-raped by a group of troopers accompanied by a Kashmiri renegade, Buit'te Shauda (Buit'te, the loafer). The forced disappearance of Sakeena's husband is an event of individual import, but rape is a spectacle. Sakeena's rape is a spectacle of violence that would serve as a harsh reminder for other people in the community of their own vulnerability as "the whole neighbourhood seemed to be alert and listening" as she is being raped (Bashir, p. 62). The potency of rape as a tool in the colonial oppressive machinery comes from the idea of rape as a

defilement of women and causing damage to men's sense of honour. Because rape as the defilement of women's honour is a dominant social idea, the community fails to acknowledge Sakeena's rape as violence. Sakeena becomes more vulnerable to the humiliation and lewd glances of a local shopkeeper.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

Another interconnected story, "A Photo with Barack Obama," describes the struggle of Biul, a young boy and Sakeena's son, with colonial violence on the one hand and societal violence on the other. Biul, born after Sakeena's rape, is abhorred by his mother and treated, by the neighbourhood, as a "haraamzaada" (bastard), an unclean body forbidden from entering the sacred space of the mosque (p. 81). The story begins with "The first time Biul became indifferent to his social stigma was when a policeman called him haraamzaada . . ." (Bashir, 2016, p.75). The term "haramzada (bastard)" used for a so-called "illegitimate child" is symbolic of the structural violence that is inflicted on Biul even before he was born. He becomes the youngest stone-pelter in Batamaloo, a locality in the Srinagar district, as stone-pelting "was the only vent to his frustration and the only way to give meaning to his life" (p. 76). At thirteen, he is arrested and booked under the Public Safety Act, a law that is used as a political weapon of coercion in Kashmir. It has been described as the "lawless law" in an Amnesty report of 2010 (Amnesty International).

In custody, Biul is beaten ruthlessly by the police. The images of "policeman's dark flashy groin" and "clanking of his steel belt" become entrenched in his psyche and flash through his mind in moments of vulnerability. This image clearly identifies the perpetrator of the direct violence. But the structural violence of being stigmatised as a bastard is reflected in the absurdity and meaninglessness of his life. He stays away from his school and spends time in the lonely wetlands on the outskirts of Srinagar, which offers him solace and anonymity. The narrator recounts that he "cherished his solitary expeditions; they helped him understand himself and his existence in the world a little better. Helped him come to terms with the guilt of his being and make a bit of sense of the absurdity of his loneliness, and absurdity most difficult to express through language" (p.79). He felt his mother "had never truly understood the things he went through, being a 'bastard'— the social ostracisation he faced from his classmates . . . the extra punishments he endured at school" (p.80). Biul is not able to make sense of the absurdity of his life precisely because he is experiencing structural violence that does not have a clear perpetrator. It is the unjust social order that designates certain individuals as lesser mortals who occupy the wrong side of the violent binary opposition of legitimate and illegitimate. Biul is too young to understand that his stigmatisation as "haraamzaada" is a social form of controlling human bodies wherein children are considered the property of their fathers. In Biul's case, his mother's rejection of him in his early childhood and the taunts and humiliation meted out to him by society alienates him.

In stigmatising Biul, the subjugated community demonstrates its failure to perceive the symbolic violence of Sakeena's rape as the collation of male power with colonial oppression. The community is indifferent to the fact that masculine military aggression is used to control the colonial body represented by Sakeena and extended into Biul's. The acceptance of the social discrimination between the marital (legitimate) and nonmarital (illegitimate) children illustrates the invisibility of the symbolic violence of which Biul is a victim. James Baldwin aptly made our perception of children as the standard of our sense of morality when he wrote, "The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognising this may be incapable of morality." (Baldwin 1980). As a result, Biul is doubly marginalised and victimised by both societal and colonial violence. What is

significant to note is that both Sakeena and Biul have, in a certain sense, internalised the social relations based on the structural violence of discrimination. Sakeena's abhorrence of Biul as a bastard child is informed by the structural violence inherent in the social order that sees women as defiled and damaged after the sexual violence. Biul demonstrates his internalisation of the same moral code of the community that leads to his discrimination and humiliation when he vows to fight the community, precisely men, by shaming them and exposing the so-called illicit love affairs of their women (81). His idea of seeking revenge for his humiliation by exposing scandals of other women is fundamentally using women's sexuality as a weapon in the war between men. With the gross spectacle of subjective violence, the symbols of which in Biul's psyche are the policeman's "belt and hairy groin" (76) and the community's taunts, the structural violence remains largely invisible. In addition to the robbing of the opportunity for education and finding social support and security, the invisible violence inflicted on Biul is embodied in his interiorising the binary opposition of good and bad women based on their relationships with men. He seeks abatement of his humiliation in exposing the illicit love affairs of women in his community to shame their men, thereby perpetuating the use of women's bodies as weapons against men of which he himself is a victim.

In another story, "Thief", allegations of theft against Insha, a sales associate at a provisional store, are used as an excuse to sack her. Even though Insha is conscious of the fact that such easy allegations are possible against her partly because of her family background and partly because she is a woman in a patriarchal society, she too prepares her defence by positing her female colleagues as morally tainted who steal money for their "long cellphone-heating nightly chats" (p. 70) with their boyfriends. Insha is exploited by the male proprietor of the provisional store where she works and later wants to get rid of her when their relationship becomes known to his wife. However, by evoking the social morality concerning women (in which having boyfriends is seen as being morally corrupt), Insha also uses women's sexuality as a weapon in her fight with men (in this case, her boss). By structuring her monologue on a binary opposition of the social morality of women, the narrative obscures the structural violence of inequity in the society that has been exacerbated by colonial violence. The circumstances, in addition to the patriarchal norms, that have made Insha vulnerable to exploitation are rooted in the colonial oppression that killed her father and robbed her of an opportunity to live a potentially fulfilling life without want and having a future of hope. The structural violence exacerbated by the colonial occupation disintegrates the lives of people represented in *Scattered Souls*, making the reduction or elimination of inequity difficult, if not impossible.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND OBLITERATION OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

The invisibility of the structural violence is further demonstrated in *Scattered Souls* at the formal level of the narrative. Most stories in *Scattered Souls* are narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator. "Narrator" is a linguistic subject "which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text" (Bal, 2009, p.15). The omniscient narrator forms the logos or rationale of the text that creates a structure of meaning when the voice and point of view of the omniscient narrator dominate the text. It becomes "a metaphor of truth and authenticity" (Norris, 1982, p. 28) in the absence of the multiple points of view, for example, of the characters themselves. At the formal level of a narrative, its truth and authenticity are established or challenged by bringing in a play of voices. In most of the stories in *Scattered Souls*, the play of voices is absent. Instead, the omniscient consciousness/voice of the third-person omniscient narrator is the only voice that speaks for the

characters and evaluates their lived experience and thoughts. The dominance of omniscient narration can be seen in the following opening sentences of many stories: “Transistor” begins as “. . . With each bullet pumped into him, all his great memories . . . flashed through his mind” (Bashir, 2016, p.3). The story “Oil and Roses” opens as “The earth has to be at its softest to accept the seed well, thinks Gul Baaghwaan” (p.97), and “He wasn’t easily convinced of the size and space of his grave” (p. 119) are the opening lines of “Shabaan Kaak’s Death”. This dominance of the authorial or omniscient narrator results in maintaining the invisibility of the structural violence to a large extent.

The stories demonstrate how the narrative consciousness operates within the normative worldview of violence, which emphasises the visible subjective violence perpetrated by an identifiable agent. This is particularly the case in the story “The Transistor”. In a protracted colonial situation as in Kashmir, the presence of a comprador group that supports Indian occupation results in a complex reality where people related through social or kinship bonds find themselves caught in a web of perceptual differences and misunderstandings that aid, consciously or unconsciously, the oppressive framework of colonialism. The effect of the military occupation of Kashmir manifests itself in the tension between the Kashmiri people and the comprador group that upholds military occupation and participates in electoral politics even as people boycott elections held under Delhi’s absolute supervision. In “The Transistor,” two brothers, Muhammad Yusuf Dar and Abdul Rahman Dar, live in peace “without ever discussing politics” until Yusuf is killed by unidentified gunmen, probably militants. Yusuf supports people’s struggle for freedom, while his brother Rahmaan, a politician, is against it. The omniscient narrator suggests that the violence inflicted on Yusuf is the result of rumour-mongering and insensitivity displayed by Yusuf’s neighbours. The peaceful state in which the two brothers operate is a state of “negative peace”, an apparent absence of conflict, in which the narrative consciousness presumes the real or actual state of peace. However, this state of peaceful coexistence of the two brothers, on analysis, reveals a state of what Žižek calls “symbolic violence”. In Žižek’s view, such violence is often embodied in situations where “a certain universe of meaning” is imposed (p. 1). In “The Transistor”, the only meaning-making agent is the omniscient narrator, who interprets the absence of dialogue between the brothers as a symbol of peace or a way of maintaining peace. This imposition of meaning by narrative consciousness masks the forced deprivation of communication and dialogue, which is fundamental to any reform or affirmative change between the two brothers. It entails symbolic violence, which is not easily visible because the narrative discourse makes it normative and prevents one from identifying it easily. This is exacerbated by the fact that the colonial situation, for instance, has created a discursive space of categorising people as “pro-freedom/pro-Kashmir” and “anti-freedom/pro-India”. In such a context, the two brothers represent the opposing poles of the struggle. However, by presenting these contradictory forces in a ‘normal state’ of being, a peaceful state achieved through a clever strategy of avoiding the discussion of politics, the narrative consciousness masks the potential consequences of such a conflict. While the omniscient narrator makes us witness the violence inflicted by the colonial repressive machinery (Police, Army, Special Task forces, etc.), it tends to bar our view of the structural violence envisaged in a space for misinformation and misperception created by the military occupation. Positing the rumour-mongering neighbours of Yusuf as responsible for his killing obscures the structural violence perpetuated by the colonial situation.

VIOLENCE AS ENHANCEMENT OF VULNERABILITY IN *SCATTERED SOULS*

Structural violence, moreover, impacts vulnerable people more than others, or it can be argued that structural violence enhances the vulnerability of people. Vulnerability can be defined as a condition of threat, physical or emotional. In the book *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler sees vulnerability as the ontological condition of our being. Butler (2004) writes:

Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, and at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (p. 20)

Butler explains that vulnerability cannot be eradicated from human life. Still, certain groups of people are exposed more to injury, violence and death due to the failure of, for example, social and economic networks of support (p. 26). While human beings are generally vulnerable, the colonial situation exacerbates it. Paradoxically, the vulnerability of the human subject, or that of the colonised people, enables colonial oppression. The dispossession and poverty of Sakeena's and Sultan's families (as discussed above) are also examples of vulnerability enhanced by colonialism.

Resisting colonialism also constitutes an act of exposing one's vulnerability to harm. In "The Transistor", on the one hand, the state of avoiding the political dialogue or discussion of the differences can be seen as an act of refusal by the two brothers to expose the vulnerability of their relationship in an apprehensive colonial situation. On the other hand, Yusuf's desire to rebel against the oppressor or his brother's decision to be a collaborator still constitutes the possibility of the 'exposure' of their social and physical (individual) vulnerability. The silence or absence of dialogue between two brothers on their ideological positions is simultaneously an assertion of the vulnerability of their relationship and a refusal to expose it to the risk. It is misperceived as insulated and secure. The fight against the occupation and colonialism in which Yusuf participates not only emotionally but physically by taking part in *pro-azaadi* (pro-freedom) demonstrations and providing militants refuge during search operations, locally known as crackdowns, is fraught with risks and dangers. However, what kills him is not the association with militants but his peaceful and cordial relationship with his brother, which makes him a dubious figure in the community. The state of dubiety is symbolised by 'the transistor' that he has received as a gift from his brother. The colonial situation enables the symbolic transformation of a simple object like a transistor into an instrument to enhance vulnerability.

The idea of a vulnerable human subject is at the heart of a colonial framework that controls through coercion or direct crude violence of killing, maiming and humiliating a colonial subject. The armed uprising of the Kashmiri people against a mighty military power of India was an assertion yet an acceptance of vulnerability in which lies human dignity. The armed struggle against colonial oppression emerged after decades of undermining the possibility of honest dialogue by the Indian state. Dialogue or negotiations transform "conflict, or contest, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, creative interaction" (Said 2007, p. 33). It was the denial by the Indian state of considering Kashmir a disputed territory for more than three decades and opening the possibilities for meaningful dialogue that led to the armed uprising in the 1990s. Therefore, considering the avoidance of dialogue between the brothers on their political positions as a reasonable way of circumventing the differences and making rumour-mongering of the community responsible for Yusuf's death is to acknowledge the subjective or direct violence at the expense of unseeing the structural violence inherent in the complexity of the colonial situation.

Since the omniscient narrator is the only dominant voice in the story, it tends to erase structural complexities within the colonised community created by the situation of colonisation. It undermines the fact that the Indian state has used the structural deprivation like poverty of many Kashmiris as a weapon against Kashmiris by roping such populations in as *mukhbirs* (informers) or renegades who inform police and Army about the activities of militants and sometimes work as double agents as well. Zutshi (2019, p. xvi) points to this structural violence when she writes, “. . . Kashmir is not just a territory or a conflict; it is as much a group of people who have been forced into becoming agents of their own oppression due to lack of resolution of [Kashmir] dispute”. This forced agency of becoming the cause of one’s own doom correlates the ontological vulnerability of a human subject with its institutional vulnerability constituted by the structural violence of military occupation.

CONCLUSION

The characters in *Scattered Souls* are caught in the web of structural and direct violence exacerbated by colonial oppression. Some have been reduced to begging when the sole breadwinner of their family is killed or maimed. Whereas in a democratic society, people have a voice and can invest their intellectual, economic, or political resources in changing the social system that affects their well-being, people under colonial occupation are deprived of the opportunity to invest in social movements of change. Much of their energy and resources are utilised in resisting the occupation or, inversely, in crushing the resistance by the state. *Scattered Souls* reveals the debilitating effects of structural violence bolstered by colonial violence, both subjective and objective, on the people of Kashmir. The first step to address the problem would then be educating people about the structures of inequity exacerbated by colonial oppression.

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