

From Exile to Expression: A Study of Transgenerational Trauma in Siddhartha Gigoo's *A Fistful of Earth*

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Abstract

This article examines the enduring effects of transgenerational and collective trauma on the Kashmiri Pandit community, focusing on their forced exodus in the early 1990s. Drawing upon the insights of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, the study explores how traumatic experiences have profound and long-lasting impacts on individuals and communities. Collective trauma is analysed, emphasising its potential to disrupt the social fabric of a community and leave an indelible mark on its members. The research underscores how such trauma can lead to a sense of collective vulnerability, loss, and displacement, particularly when it is linked to violence and exile. We also explore the phenomenon of trans-generational trauma among the Kashmiri Pandit community, showing how traumatic experiences are transmitted across generations through narratives and stories. Through analysing Siddhartha Gigoo's short story collection, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* (2015), the study identifies instances of trans-generational trauma expression, highlighting how literature can serve as a powerful means of conveying the emotional and psychological toll of collective and trans-generational trauma emphasising the significance of writing as the expression of trauma and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: trans-generational trauma, Kashmiri Pandit, exodus, collective trauma, cultural heritage

Introduction

The word trauma originates from the Greek, where it means "wound" or "injury." However, its meaning has evolved beyond physical injuries to encompass psychological and emotional disturbances.¹ Trauma is now understood as a psychological and emotional response to deeply distressing or disturbing events or situations. It can arise from a single incident or prolonged exposure to stressful experiences such as wars, natural disasters, violence, abuse, or loss. Over time, the meaning of trauma has changed; recent understandings view it as a "response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences."² Trauma can cause a range of symptoms, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a range of physical health issues.

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¹ "Trauma," *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² "What is Trauma?," *Integrated Listening* (2018). At: <https://integratedlistening.com/blog/what-is-trauma/>.

Transgenerational trauma, also known as intergenerational trauma, refers to the transmission of the psychological and emotional effects of trauma across generations. It suggests that the impact of trauma experienced by one generation can be passed down to subsequent generations through complex mechanisms, including cultural, social, and familial influences. The effects of trauma manifest in a multitude of ways, such as behavioral patterns, psychological symptoms, cultural beliefs, and coping mechanisms.³ Transgenerational trauma has gained significant attention in literature, as authors explore its profound effects on individuals, families, communities, and societies. Through storytelling and fictional narratives, the authors navigate into the complexities of inherited trauma, exploring how it shapes personal identity, relationships, and the collective memory of a community or culture. By giving voice to the experiences of trauma survivors and their descendants, literature contributes to the understanding and empathy towards those affected by intergenerational trauma.

Siddhartha Gigoo is a contemporary Kashmiri author whose writings examine themes of identity, displacement, and conflict. His writings explore the subtleties of human experiences and emotions, particularly those influenced by historical and intergenerational trauma. Through his storytelling and evocative imagery, Gigoo navigates personal and cultural identities, bridging past and present, with his notable works *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) and *A Fistful of Earth* (2015) exploring intergenerational trauma and complexities of identity amidst the turmoil of the Kashmir conflict. This article focuses on *A Fistful of Earth*, analysing its themes of persecution, loss of identity, and exodus to understand the impact of intergenerational trauma, the enduring legacy of negative experiences, and their impact on future generations.

Trans-generational Trauma

The term “trans-generational trauma” was first used by Canadian psychiatrists Vivian M. Rakoff, John Sigal, and Nathan B. Epstein in 1966.⁴ Their work highlighted increased psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors, forming a basis for subsequent research. Trans-generational trauma is the transmission of parental trauma to later generations, impacting behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Rachel Yehuda and Amy Lehrner define the term as the “transmission of the effect of an experience of trauma from an individual or group of individuals in one generation to an individual(s) in later generations.”⁵ While there is no concrete evidence of genetic alterations due to trauma, research indicates that it can have lasting effects on the behavior, thoughts, and emotions of future generations. Trauma fiction depicts the traumatic ordeals of survivors, their journey towards reconciling with trauma, and the cathartic aspect of healing. Additionally, it serves as a means of public healing by increasing awareness about collective suffering.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) and Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1991) are considered canonical texts of transgenerational trauma in literature.

³ Anthony Collins, *Culture, Narrative, and Collective Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 105.

⁴ Vivian Rakoff, John Sigal and Nathan. B. Epstein, “Children and Families of Concentration Camp Survivors,” *Canada’s Mental Health*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1966), pp. 8-12.

⁵ Rachel Yehuda and Amy Lehrner, “Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms,” *World Psychiatry*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2018), pp. 243-257.

In Indian literature, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is an outstanding work in this regard. This novel shows how past traumatic experiences mold the characters' present and future, influencing their identities and choices. It underscores the enduring legacy of suffering and the passage of trauma through generations. Roy's quote "the secret of the Great Stories is that they have no secrets"⁶ underscores the vital role of storytelling in transmitting trauma across generations, as the characters grapple with the weight of their shared past.

Cathy Caruth writes that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent, or original event in an individual's past but rather in the way that it's very unassimilated nature - the way it is precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on."⁷ The concept of trauma is trans-historical, that is "one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another."⁸ Trauma can be defined as the response to a deeply distressing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, leading to feelings of helplessness and misery, which often manifest in their behavior. Émile Durkheim's concept of "collective consciousness" offers insight into the intergenerational transmission of traumatic memories, illustrating how these memories are passed on to future generations through storytelling, oral traditions, photographs, observed behaviors, and assimilation. Individual accounts of trauma become woven into the broader culture, forming cultural narratives of trauma.⁹ Caruth emphasises that trauma is never solely an individual experience, echoing Sigmund Freud's idea that memories often manifest as thoughts, emotions, and images rather than existing in a pure, unaltered form. This article explores trans-generational trauma, as depicted in literary analysis.

Trauma and Identity

Identity plays a critical role in trans-generational trauma, as it is often the identity of a community that is targeted in acts of hate crime, genocide, or religious persecution. This has been evident in numerous instances throughout history, such as the Holocaust endured by the Jewish population, the atrocities faced by Palestinians, the persistent racism experienced by African Americans, or the recent ethnic cleansing of Yazidis by ISIS in Iraq. The trauma associated with such events can persist across generations and impact the sense of vulnerability of a community. In the case of the Kashmiri Pandits, their religious identity made them a target of violence.¹⁰ To protect themselves, most of them fled Kashmir while the others who stayed back lived with concealing their identity by altering their appearance, like women avoiding wearing vermilion on their forehead and men growing beards. The violence inflicted upon this community underscores the importance of acknowledging the pivotal role of identity in trauma and the pressing necessity to redress their grievances and ensure justice. The loss of both identity and homeland constitutes a profound facet of the traumatic ordeal endured by the

⁶ Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1997), p. 46.

⁷ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁸ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 8.

⁹ Warren Schmaus, *Durkheim's Philosophy of Science and the Sociology of Knowledge: Creating an Intellectual Niche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰ Partha Sarathi Patra, "Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A Testimonio of Necropolitical Trauma, Displacement and Loss of the Kashmiri Pandit Community," in Shikha Sharma and Geeta Phogat (eds), *Displacement and Diaspora* (New Delhi: Authors Press, 2023), pp. 86-101.

Kashmiri Pandits during their forced exodus. The Pandits' links to their land and community, constituting an integral part of their identity, was shattered due to this forced displacement.

Minakshi Watts details the deep-rooted trauma and sense of loss that continues to haunt the Kashmiri Pandit community, even after years of displacement. The trauma of loss of identity was even more severe than losing the land itself. Minakshi writes further that "everything was taken away from us. Even our claim of belonging to Kashmir."¹¹ Rahul Pandita's memoir vividly portrays the untold stories and personal experiences of Kashmiri Pandits. The book is a poignant account of their exodus from the Kashmir Valley during the 1990s due to targeted violence. Pandita's narrative explores the challenges of identity, trauma, and displacement within his community, shedding light on their status as refugees within their homeland. The memoir highlights the harsh realities of the conflict, loss, and complexities of maintaining cultural identity while in exile.¹² Tej Nath Dhar presents their work as a diary, portraying the tumultuous period from February to August 1990. Through the diary, Dhar captures the outbreak of militancy and the resulting insecurity faced by Kashmiri Pandits.¹³ The individual's voice represents the community's tragedy of trauma and displacement. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as an event that goes beyond the normal human experience.¹⁴ The literature on trauma retells these experiences, making them real for readers from other communities. Intellectuals and writers have often found solace in writing about traumatic events, with their texts serving as a form of refuge.

Exile and Kashmiri Pandits

The memories of exodus, genocide, and war crimes haunt the victims, causing them to relive their trauma repeatedly. The recollection of these experiences perpetuates trauma even for subsequent generations who have not experienced it directly. According to Caruth, trauma is both repetitive and trans-generational, with survivors powerless to prevent its recurrence.¹⁵ Trauma persists in the subconscious and is passed down through narratives, impacting subsequent generations' behavior and emotions. Exiling is a deeply emotional and psychological experience that can have profound effects on individuals and communities. It is not just physical removal from one's home and territory, but a process of loss that can encompass one's entire sense of self and identity. The displacement of individuals from their lands can be a traumatic experience, characterised by a profound sense of loss and alienation.

The Kashmiri Pandit community's experienced mass exodus in 1989, triggered by militant insurgency, is emblematic of the relationship between historical events and collective trauma. The violence they experienced, including rape, killings, and harassment, remains

¹¹ Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma, *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury India, 2015), p. 285.

¹² Rahul Pandita, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A Memoir of a Lost Home in Kashmir* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 34.

¹³ Tej Nath Dhar, *Under the Shadow of Militancy: The Diary of an Unknown Kashmiri* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2002), p. 103.

¹⁴ 'Trauma', *American Psychological Association (APA)*. At: <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma#:~:text=Trauma%20is%20an%20emotional%20response,symptoms%20like%20headaches%20or%20nausea>.

¹⁵ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 2.

etched in their memory. Forced migration from the Kashmir Valley left them dispossessed, without a community or cultural identity, and struggling to find a sense of belonging. More than thirty years of exilic living have not erased the lingering fear and trans-generational trauma that permeate the current generation. Indeed, the reluctance to return to their homeland is a testimony to the deep-rooted trauma that has affected the community. The experience of exile is marked by a sense of longing for home, a constant reminder of loss and pain, making it difficult to find peace or belonging in new surroundings. The pain of exile can be particularly difficult for individuals who have been stripped of their identity and community, as is often the case for those who have been forcibly displaced. Judith Lewis Herman describes the core dilemma for those who have experienced psychological trauma as the tension between a desire to suppress the memory of horrific events and a need to bring them to light. Survivors often recount their experiences in a manner that is disjointed and emotionally charged, making it difficult to establish the veracity of their accounts. This contradictory and fragmented approach serves to both reveal and conceal the truth. Ultimately, the recognition of the truth can provide a pathway for survivors to begin the healing process.¹⁶

Gigoo brings attention to the plight of the Pandit community, which had been largely overlooked in the Kashmir discourse, through a moral obligation to share their story with the world. His stories serve as vital documentation of the suffering endured by a community forced from their homeland, causing severe emotional and mental distress, including trauma and neurosis. Recognising their experiences and telling their story is crucial for healing and recovery, especially considering their deep historical ties to Kashmir, an integral part of their identity for generations. As Boothena Majoul notes “Trauma is inherently linked to any form of ingurgitated violence; people have tendencies to regurgitate what they have witnessed or experienced. Intellectuals in general and writers in particular find refuge in their texts.”¹⁷ This highlights the importance of understanding and acknowledging the trauma experienced by the Pandit community and other similar communities who have undergone similar experiences.

Gigoo depicts individuals struggling with the monotony of their daily lives, battling with trauma and despair, and ultimately succumbing to mental illness and physical fragility. Gigoo’s work shows the profound impact of displacement on individuals and communities, and the need for greater awareness and support for mental health issues in migrant populations.

A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories

A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories is a collection of short stories that explore the themes of dispossession, betrayal, and suffering in a land marked by political upheaval and war. The stories vividly portray the loss of human lives, longing for home, desolation, and suffering experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community. Gigoo’s allegorical style enables him to paint a picture of the cataclysmic effects of conflict without necessarily mentioning Kashmir explicitly. It provides a devastating account of displacement, despair, and suffering that plague those who find themselves in circumstances over which they have no control. Gigoo’s artistic

¹⁶ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 1.

¹⁷ Boothena Mojoul, *On Trauma and Traumatic Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), p. 11.

narration of human tragedy, his ability to portray a full range of human emotions, and his delicately drawn characters make the book a compelling read. It explores the lasting impact of historical and personal traumas on individuals and their families, highlighting the profound connections between past and present experiences. Gigoo employs polyphonic narration in his stories to represent the diverse voices of Kashmiri Pandits. The stories diverge from linear storytelling and instead, the non-linear, fragmented pieces of the narrative, mirroring the complex identities of the community. According to Caruth, “Trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation.”¹⁸ By breaking with conventional narrative structures, Gigoo captures complex traumatic experiences and their effects on memory and recovery. These fractured narratives, featuring multiple storylines show the multifaceted nature of Pandit identities and shed light on the challenges they encountered.

The book begins with “The Search,” where the protagonist, a researcher studying histories and biographies of banished people, stumbles on the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits. The author portrays the profound impact of the community on the culture, history, and identity of Kashmir, dating back centuries. The story also sheds light on the numerous instances of exile endured by the Kashmiri Pandits throughout their history, often as a result of foreign rule:

The banished people, in my initial study revealed, were forsaken by their progeny who were scattered in faraway places. The descendants of these banished people diminished, year after year, unable to beget children. A report prepared by my predecessor suggested that there were only eleven original specimens left in the entire world¹⁹

The APA describes PTSD as “a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being.”²⁰ Self-injury is often associated with PTSD and can be seen as a coping mechanism for dealing with the intense emotions and psychological distress that can arise from traumatic experiences. Robin Connors conducted research on the links between self-injury, childhood trauma, and the resulting consequences. In her research, she delved into the multiple functions and interpretations associated with self-injury following traumatic experiences. She described self-injury as a “fundamentally adaptive and life-preserving coping mechanism.”²¹

Individuals who have experienced trauma may develop maladaptive coping strategies to deal with the overwhelming emotions and sensations associated with the traumatic event. There is a series of recurring scenes in this story where the character, Cook, would put the pencil between his fingers and clench it fast:

¹⁸ Michael Balaev, “Trauma Studies,” in *A Companion to Literary Theory*, ed. David H. Richter (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), p. 363.

¹⁹ Siddhartha Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2015), p. 4.

²⁰ “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” *National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service*. At: www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml.

²¹ Robin Connors, “Self-Injury in Trauma Survivors: Functions and Meaning,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 66, no. 2 (1996), p. 199.

The cook did something strange. Without saying a word, he picked up a pencil lying on the table, placed it between the fingers of his right hand, and clenched his fist ferociously... his expressions betrayed both pleasure and pain.²²

“The Last Haircut” is set in the tumultuous period of 1990s Kashmir, marked by heightened militancy and persecution of those who were supportive of India, particularly the Kashmiri Pandit community. In this story, two boys are assigned the task of assassinating their teacher, Wasdev, who happens to be a Kashmiri Pandit. However, the boys do not carry out the mission (though two other boys do) and are congratulated mistakenly by their handler. It emphasises the pervasive climate of danger and the psychological toll inflicted upon the community as they faced the threat of targeted killings and lived under the specter of violence. In the days following the teacher’s murder, the boys come across his wife, Woma, hopelessly seated at the entrance of their house. She tells them “He never returned home from the haircut that day. He had promised to be back by lunchtime. I have been waiting for him since then.”²³ Judith Herman highlights how the loss of loved ones in a conflict deeply impacts women. It leaves them shattered, grieving, and unable to find solace or meaning in life. The trauma disrupts their sense of self, relationships, and ability to trust and engage with the world. It emphasises the profound and enduring pain caused by this ultimate violation, emphasising the urgent need for support and resources to address the trauma women experience in conflict.²⁴

“Poison, Nectar” narrates the story of a family of Kashmiri Pandit refugees living in exile far from home; “We left out of fear and now there is no freedom from fear. Freedom has become a prison for us.”²⁵ Initially, the decision of Kashmiri Pandits to flee Kashmir was driven by an imminent threat to their lives; they left their homeland in search of safety and security elsewhere. They sought freedom from immediate dangers, hoping to find a refuge where they could live without fear. Yet, their physical departure did not bring the expected liberation. Instead, they found themselves confined by the lingering psychological and emotional aftermath of displacement. The freedom they had hoped for became a prison of perpetual fear, shaping their perceptions, choices, and daily lives. The psychological and emotional impact of their forced displacement challenged them to escape the shackles of fear that became deeply ingrained in their lives. This story portrays the deplorable conditions Pandits faced in the refugee camps of Jammu. They were put in filthy tents, with no amenities, with poisonous insects and snakes. Many Pandits died of the extreme heat in Jammu because they were not used to such hot conditions. Whole families were crammed into small tents. The misery was so bad that some wished that their ill elderly people might die so that they could get more space; “Lalit’s wife would imagine the bed without her father-in-law. She had visions that she cremated the old man, but had not been able to discard the bed which occupied plenty of space in the tent. She imagined herself lying on the bed and sleeping peacefully.”²⁶

Displacement can pose significant challenges in marital relationships of those affected, especially for women who may experience profound trauma due to the loss of personal space

²² Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 11.

²³ Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 40.

²⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 33.

²⁵ Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 43.

²⁶ Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 46.

and physical closeness in the crowded and makeshift tents of refugee camps. Caruth highlights the complex nature of trauma and its impact on individuals. “The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them. Or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess and thus which possesses them.”²⁷ It suggests that those who have experienced trauma carry within them an unfathomable history, a history that is too overwhelming to fully comprehend or process. The trauma becomes a part of their identity; it is not something they can easily separate from or fully own. Rather, it exerts its influence on their lives, often manifesting as symptoms or unresolved wounds.

The exodus experienced by Lalit and his family has a profound and transformative effect on their lives. Lalit, the protagonist, uses the symbolism of the tunnel as a metaphorical representation of moving on. Calling the tunnel connecting Jammu with Kashmir the “tunnel of forgetfulness”²⁸ reflects that individuals who undergo traumatic experiences often do not fully comprehend the magnitude of the trauma at the time it occurs. Lalit believed that by physically distancing themselves from the source of their trauma, they could escape its lingering effects. This belief reflects a common coping mechanism where individuals try to protect themselves from the pain and distress associated with their past experiences. The impact of trauma remains incomprehensible to Lalit and his family until it resurfaces. Caruth states:

The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness...it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time.²⁹

“The End of the Time” is an allegorical story that can be connected to the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The Grandmaster and the Postmaster are lodged in a prison that gradually becomes deserted. The desolate prison here symbolises Kashmir. The Grandmaster calls it a ‘Mill of Broken Echoes’. The Postmaster keeps insisting that they should leave as well, but the Grandmaster would make excuses to prolong their stay. The Postmaster urging him to leave the place symbolises the human desire to escape the hardships and seek a better future. The Grandmaster alludes to the Hindu god Shiva and embodies the preserver of the community’s cultural and spiritual heritage. The arrival of pilgrims and the subsequent equinox symbolise the writer’s hope for a collective return to the homeland, where they can reclaim their lost heritage and rebuild their lives. Pilgrims at the end chant hymns for the ‘Grandmaster’ saying; “the one whose feet we will wash with our tears! The one who has rid the land of this curse! The one who protected our homes while he withered away in captivity! He brings the luminous dawn. Only those who can see shall see it.”³⁰

“The Pilgrimage” portrays Chukeshwar, an elderly man living in exile, who faces the shocking revelation that his children plan to send him on a pilgrimage to evict him from the house. This shocking revelation from his children instils the fear of experiencing a second exile

²⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 13.

²⁸ Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 49.

²⁹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 17.

³⁰ Gigoo, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories*, p. 68.

in his lifetime. Much like Chukeshwar's dread of a second exile, individuals with trauma may experience PTSD-related anticipatory anxiety, particularly triggered by reminders of their traumatic experiences. The story underscores personal suffering within the context of broader sociopolitical dynamics, highlighting the deep impact on individuals and communities.³¹ In total, there are sixteen stories in the book, each portraying different aspects of human life caught in the turmoil of conflict regions. It explores the complex layers of trauma, memory, and identity within the Kashmiri Pandit community. Gigoo unearths the profound effects of displacement, emphasising the urgent need for healing and recognition of the Pandits' story. Gigoo's work serves as a compelling testament to the enduring power of literature in shedding light on the silenced voices and untold stories of a community marked by historical tragedy.

In this collection of stories, there is a deliberate absence of direct references to Kashmir. Caruth's theory explores how traumatic events and experiences can disrupt conventional narratives and language, rendering them inadequate to fully capture and express the deep impact of trauma. In Gigoo's narratives, the omission of the word "Kashmir" can be seen as a linguistic manifestation of the trauma experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community. Trauma often defies easy articulation, and survivors may struggle to convey their experiences using conventional language. Gigoo's choice to avoid explicit references to Kashmir might reflect the difficulty of encapsulating the collective trauma endured by his community. Instead, he utilises the recurring motif of Nagbal, a place of significance and cultural heritage for Kashmiri Pandits, to indirectly evoke the broader Kashmiri landscape and history.

Writing to Heal Trans-generational Trauma

Caruth's model defines that speaking about the "unknown" trauma brings it to consciousness, which can lessen its "traumatic" impact; otherwise, the victim remains in the "black hole" of trauma.³² Gigoo's storytelling encapsulates the fragmented experiences and memories of the Kashmiri Pandit community, echoing Caruth's idea that trauma resists easy narration due to its fragmented nature. By weaving together fragmented narratives, Gigoo not only acknowledges the profound trauma endured by the community but also offers a means of processing and healing through the act of storytelling. Caruth's approach emphasises that trauma survivors may be unable to express their experiences directly in words, leading to delayed and fragmented accounts. In a similar vein, Gigoo's characters grapple with the complexities of their past, often struggling to articulate their pain coherently. The act of writing has become a way for Kashmiri Pandit writers to process and come to terms with their traumatic past. While the pain of their experiences remains with them, many writers find solace in telling their stories and sharing them with the world. Gigoo, in writing about his traumatic past, finds catharsis and a way to reclaim his lost home. He writes, "Kashmir is a home I can no longer reclaim except

³¹ Christian Grillon, Daniel S. Pine, Shmuel Lissek, Stephanie Rabin, Omer Bonne, and Meena Vythilingam, "Increased Anxiety During Anticipation of Unpredictable Aversive Stimuli in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder but not in Generalized Anxiety Disorder," *Biological Psychiatry*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2009), p. 47-53.

³² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, pp. 9-11.

through my writings.”³³ Gigoo's writing serves as a means of coping with the trans-generational trauma of their community, and is a form of activism, aimed at peacefully reclaiming his lost homeland and giving voice to his community. Gigoo writes, “We will rise and rebel against those who are hell-bent on preventing our homecoming. But our rebellion will be through our writings and activism, not violence and propaganda.”³⁴

Although writing about trauma can be a reliving experience, it is also a healing process. Apart from the loss of a physical home, the impact of war also deeply affects an individual's sense of identity. Caruth characterises this impact as a “horrendous experience” that eventually becomes accessible to normal consciousness later. In the context of “normal consciousness,” it denotes the traumatic experience that remains hidden and unconscious, timeless and speechless, that causes continuous pain and damage to the psyche.³⁵ Writing serves as a potent means to alleviate trauma by empowering individuals to confront, process, and ultimately heal from their distressing experiences, fostering resilience and personal reclamation.

Conclusion

The exploration of intergenerational trauma in Siddhartha Gigoo's *A Fistful of Earth* sheds light on the profound impact that trauma can have on individuals and communities. Through his stories, Gigoo reveals the deep wounds carried by the Kashmiri Pandit community, highlighting how the trauma of displacement and loss continues to reverberate through generations. Through the nuanced portrayal of characters navigating the legacy of conflict and displacement, Gigoo shows how trauma transcends generations, leaving lasting scars that shape the identities and destinies of those affected. His storytelling not only provides a platform to express their pain but also serves as a means of preserving their cultural heritage, which is intricately tied to their identity. By giving voice to the silenced suffering and sharing their experiences, Gigoo's work contributes not only to personal healing but also to the collective healing and resilience of a community that refuses to be forgotten or erased from history. Through the act of writing and storytelling, the Pandit community reclaims agency over their narrative, offering a pathway towards understanding, empathy, and a hopeful future, where the wounds of the past are not merely remembered but actively engaged with and healed.

³³ Niyati Bhat, “Kashmiri Pandits and Exodus,” *Scroll*, 26 March (2022). At: <https://scroll.in/article/1020235/kashmiripandits-and-the-exodus-eight-books-thatgo-to-the-heart-of-the-pain-and-trauma>.

³⁴ Siddhartha Gigoo, Arvind Gigoo and Adarsh Ajit, *Once We Had Everything: Literature in Exile* (New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing, 2018), p. 24.

³⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, pp. 160-163.