



# Power of Insurgency: Effect on Women and Children

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**Abstract**— Militancy or insurgency affects all age groups- the old and the young in the same manner. In fact, violence associated with militancy can wreck the young psyche a lot. One can say that the younger generation is more vulnerable to the violence and terrors associated with wars and terrorism than the experienced. In certain parts of the world there are regions which are notorious for insurgency which takes place there. In India, Kashmir- hailed as 'Paradise on Earth' is one such region where war has been waged throughout history. Most often people speak of the lost beauty of Kashmir and the effects of the war on the people of Kashmir at large. But one tends to overlook the harmful impact of wars on young minds and the women. Paro Anand has given vent to the agony and fright in the minds of the children in the Kashmir valley, especially during the time of the recent Kargil war. The young minds are least bothered about the political and social ideology behind a war or a terrorist attack. This paper is an attempt to investigate Paro Anand's works, coming under the genre of children's fiction, especially her novels *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* and *Weed* to analyse the plight of the young generations of Kashmir. It would also explore how the power structures within the family shifts once the man in the family leaves home to join terrorist outfits. It is also an attempt to study about the militant power; how it lures the youth with its ideologies, and the power wielded by the armed forces, and the way in which it affects the common people residing in the valley.



**Keywords**— Militancy, violence, psyche, terrorism, ideology, power structure

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the prominent themes in the literature of the post-colonial nations is the subjugation of the natives by power structures and exploitation of their resources. Some self-centered men, of both the colonised countries and the colony are so greedy as to inflate their individual capital by hook or by crook. The intensity and methods of oppression of the weak have undergone changes in recent times, thanks to advances in technology. The leap in technological advances, the widening economic gap between the haves and have-nots in society and the deepening socio-economic-political crisis has contributed a new vice to our world- the rise of terrorism. In a patriarchal society like India, 'father' is a powerful figure. He is vested with the responsibility of looking after the family. The patriarch dictates terms and conditions to the rest of the family as to how to live and

behave in a society and his words are to be obeyed by the family members without questioning them.

## II. ANALYSIS OF WEED

*Weed* by Paro Anand gives a poignant picture of a family bearing the brunt of terrorism, since the patriarch has chosen to live the life of a 'jihadi'. The novel begins with the status of 'weed' in social life- they are 'wild, unwanted children' suffering in the war-torn areas of the Kashmir valley, simply for no fault of theirs. They have a fragmented identity and are often ostracized by members of the community, irrespective of their age.

Umer's mother, contrary to her usual nature, had tried strongly to dissuade her husband from joining the terrorist outfit-

“I hate what you’ve become- can’t you see that? Don’t you even care that your wife can’t stand you? Does it not matter that you can’t look your sons in the eye? You can’t answer their innocent questions - you hide behind lies and deceit...” (6)

The women and the children are the worst sufferers in this tumultuous situation. As a child, Umer is treated socially as a weed because his father joined the ‘jehadis’. He protests, though not publicly, against this unmerited social treatment, “But why? I didn’t do anything!” (1) He is fearfully curious about the whereabouts of his father- the worried child asks to himself, “I wonder where he sleeps at night? Does he have a place to take a refreshing bath, a place to eat a meal served with chilled water and hot pickle on the side?” (2) He follows his father unnoticed as the father leaves his home finally in the dark night because it is one of the customs in a patriarchal society for the sons of the family: “And aren’t sons forever following in their father’s footsteps? Even if those footsteps are blighted? So, this weed, filled with bitter bad blood, was cast out.” (3) This curiosity and his disobedience of his father is a sort of resistance that the child inherits from his father, who is also breaking the law but for a different purpose. And in the process, the construction of his identity has also begun. The child is taken aback when he finds his own father breaking the law- the same father who advises ‘us to be good, always to listen to our teachers, obey our parents’. (7).

Now with the departure of the father from home and his joining the ‘jihadis’, there occurs a shift of roles at home- the mother has taken charge of the family: “He was the commander of our ship. But the power structure had suddenly changed. She had taken over. And she had only wrath... The mother’s, the wife’s heart had died in her.” (11) This cultural shift leaves Umer bewildered. He searches for meanings to such a conduct from his mother. Shouldering all the responsibilities of the family, she wants to set a new family culture. So “she has wiped out every trace that he ever existed, that he was ever a husband and father here” (29). She is also adamant that they will never receive the money sent by her husband, because it is acquired through illegal means. Although Umer and his younger brother wish to tread the path of their father, since it is a step to make plenty of money easily and live a life of comforts their mother strongly objects to it. Thus, the mother who was a shadow successfully manages to hold the reigns at home.

At one point of time, the child Umer too wants to take over the charge of the family and wants to make decisions of his own: “So, suddenly, in a space of a few hours of one night, my childhood was gone. Gobbled up by the departing back of my father. And I was man of the house. Ready or

not, here I come.” (23). He also protects his brother when their playmates bully him, calling him a terrorist’s son. But again, his mother wields supreme power in the family and she gives the final word and she expects her sons to follow it: “You’ll not drop out of school, son. We’ll find a way. I want you to study, to get ahead...” (23) The mother also protects her children when the army forcefully enters the house, by weaving a story that her husband has left his family for another woman.

With the departure of their father, the attitude of the society towards the family undergoes a marked change. The relatives try to inculcate a beggarly culture upon the beleaguered family. They are provided with old clothes and previous day’s food from Khalla’s family, which Umer hated. He felt it to be abuses heaped upon the crestfallen family. Umer also feels shocked and agitated to find his mother forced to work as a servant for their livelihood. Thus there is a persistent attempt from the hostile society to demean the family’s social status from a bourgeoisie to a lower class family. The mother is forced to work as a servant of a rich family, so as to maintain the family, and provide for their education. Umer hates the thought of his mother working as a servant, he asks: “You mean you’re going to work in some one’s house? Clean someone’s dirty dishes? Be- - - be a servant?’ .... This was impossible.” (32) The son is also concerned if his mother gets her due honour from her employers: “[ - - ] Did they set aside food for her before they ate, or did they give her leftovers, or did they not feed her at all? - - - but even in my mind’s eye I couldn’t bear the images and shut down on it.” (37). Umer expresses his hatred towards his father and the society at large as the once housewife was demoted to the rank of a housemaid with the departure of the father-figure from the house.

Umer’s mother is apprehensive that “there are plenty of vultures who’ll smell a person’s hunger, sense his wanting, his longing. And they will consume him. Like vultures on a carcass, they’ll strip him down to nothingness”. (35) So, his mother advises him and his younger brother to abandon their father’s path. But Umer makes a desperate and passionate appeal to his father who is away in a ‘jehadi’ camp:

“Abbuhelpmoneyabbuhelpmoneyabbuhelpmoneyabbuhelp money. . .” (35). The appeal is repeated four times and the phrases are closely set to resemble a word. This is a technique for the child to raise engrossingly his demands without any hiatus lest a pause in between may subside the force of passion and his intensity may not be communicated properly.

Both their social as well as emotional standing worsens when Umer and his mother together go to an NGO whose job is to provide assistance to the half-orphans and

half-widows. Their identity is transformed into mere numbers. The social patriarchs effectively prove that both the mother and the son are liars. The dream of the mother for Umer to carry on with his schooling thus comes to an end. Thus, the power structures within the society too prove to be of no help to the family.

Soon after, financial assistance comes from Umer's father from his terrorist camp through a young boy, Hameed but it is rejected outrightly by the mother who "looked at it with contempt, her mouth down turning in such disgust". (59) This action of their mother makes both the sons upset. The younger one, Umed, impressed by the money wants to go to his father along with Hameed who has come from the camp of Umer's father. But, the mother in a strict tone warns firmly that she will not allow him to come back. But the adamant child leaves his home along with Hameed for his father. Soon after, the family receives the body of their father killed in a clash.

After the leaving of Umed from home, mother tightens her security for her only child, which, for Umer, seems to be a noose. He wants to escape her grip which was suffocating him. At one point of time, his mother realizes this suffocation, because he is always under the watchful eyes of his mother and the owner of the shop. He practically got no opportunity to mingle with anyone else and it was as if he had become invisible, ceased to exist, but reduced to "only a pair of hands, folding cloth..". (86) So, one day, she advises that both of them skip their duties and takes Umer to Nishad Bagh for a day's outing from the uncomfortable environment of the cloth shop for one whole day, to the world of flowers with his mother playing a different role – it appears he is transported to the world of fairies where his mother herself is a fairy-personified. This is the world that Umer longs for- a world of freedom where he is not controlled and his actions keenly observed.

But this world too is interrupted with fear. A member of the extremist group to which his father belongs, comes down to Umer eluding his mother's eyes and gives him an envelope containing money and a letter providing him with directions to meet the extremists. Umer realises that even in this land of flowers, they are under constant vigil by the extremists who has assured his meeting with his younger brother. The presence of extremists is juxtaposed with the flowers that symbolise innocence, purity and brightness. It's incredible that any fiendish activity can take place in such a divine ambience. But all these developments are kept secret by Umer as he considers his mother to be an impediment to realize his dream of meeting his brother and enjoy unrestrained freedom. Their presence is marked by a blast in that area of which the extremists have already informed Umer, but he is also injured. He has to lie down in a

hospital-bed unconscious for fourteen days. This blast, his injuries and his lying down in a hospital bed makes his mother more and more worried and his freedom is further curtailed. He feels he won't be able to meet his brother in the rebel camp. Still, one evening he manages to escape her eyes. He has taken care of his movement and walks for a long time until he reaches Dal Lake, another icon of fairy-land. There he encounters a friendly old man who assures him a job as a tourist guide in a house boat. Thus the novel ends in a happy way for Umer who finally is able to enjoy the liberty he yearns for.

### III. ANALYSIS OF *NO GUNS AT MY SON'S FUNERAL*

But this may not be the case of most Kashmiri children who lives a strangled life owing to curfew and war as is the case of Aftab in *No Guns At My Son's Funeral*. Most of them, like Aftab, although they belong to middle class educated families, fall easily into the trap of terrorist outfits that use them to execute their diabolic plans. Just like Umer's father, Aftab is lured by better prospectus and a better life. Once they fall into the trap there is no getting out and people who escape from these terrorist outfits are mercilessly murdered as in the case of Hameed.

Aftab, the young protagonist of *No Guns At My Son's Funeral*, is lured with the promise of money, instant 'fame', and training in martial arts and weapons by the terrorist outfit. He always sneaks out at night, without his parents being aware of it to be with his terrorist friends in order to discuss plans with them for future operation. He hero worships and adores Akram, his mentor and leader of the group. Akram is successful in manipulating the young boy's thought that for Aftab Akram Bhai becomes more important than his family and friends. He leads a dual life- during the day he lives in the world of normalcy with his family and friends but in the night, he secretly sneaks into the world of violence and bloodshed to prove his loyalty towards his hero whom he worships "like the older brother he didn't have, but longed for. Akram, so handsome, so tall, so sure of himself... who wore his battle scars like medals. (3) Aftab is like any young teenager who wants to have a name for himself and to prove himself as bold and adventurous. In a hurry to prove his devotion towards Akram and his mission, what Aftab fails to realise is the dangers involved in the path he has chosen; the irreparable losses it can bring to his family and his friends. He is also too young and naive to discover the true colours of Akram and it is this very innocence that Akram exploits to fulfil his militant mission. His aim was to utilize the services of young adolescents like Aftab who has filled their minds with misconceptions which they got from the popular media. Akram knows about these

wrong notions and wants to use Aftab and kids of his age “while their dreams are bigger than their knowledge.” (P 9)

Aftab is filled with fascination for Akram, idealises him and draws comparison between Akram and his on- screen hero:

“ Like Hrithik Roshan in Fiza. He could easily picture Akram in that role. Cloaked in black, green eyes blazing out at those who hurt him. AK-47 in his powerful arms. Muscles rippling, jaws clenched, he could mow down a platoon of soldiers all by himself.”

Aftab, throughout the novel lives under the illusion that Akram and himself are ‘freedom fighters’ and liberators fighting for a noble cause. His faith in Akram is so blind that he doesn’t even mind considering his Ammi or his Appa an enemy for they are not supporting the cause. He lives in an illusory world where he visualises himself as ‘hero’ or ‘the anonymous militant reported in the national dailies’ who is responsible for the death of thousands of innocent people. Aftab’s sister also is allured by Akram’s secret mission and is infatuated by him - she takes him as her husband and provides him with vital information when he goes into hiding. She also provides him with medicines, takes care of him and nurses him back to health. Although she claims herself as Akram’s wife her very identity is put at stake when Akram demands her to make use of her feminine sexuality to get into prison in order to meet Feroze, his aid. She obeys him without haste or questioning although she herself did not like the idea of using her body as per his suggestions. Both Aftab and Shazia are mere scapegoats in the hands of Akram who uses them to get these evil designs worked out. He is fully aware of the risks he is asking Aftab and Shazia to shoulder, but he is least bothered about them and sees them only as agents to get his work done.

Paro Anand tries to draw our attention to the fact as to how absence of proper guidance and direction can deviate teenagers from right path. Aftab, Akram and Shazia are directionless youth who are too young to handle the situation that they themselves have created. Akram’s sudden death is unbearable for Aftab. He acts instantly and hurries to avenge his death by blasting the market place. The bomb kills not only Aftab but also many more children and people around him. The shocks are too much especially for Shazia with both brother and her lover Akram meeting violent deaths. As Aftab’s body is lifted to be buried and the military men draw their own weapons, Aftab’s Ammi cries out, “No! There will be no Guns. There will be no Guns at my Son’s Funeral. ( 169)” Paro Anand dedicates the Afterword for the description of Shazia’s mindset after the birth of her son from Akram. She has now realised the cost

of blind faith in a wrong ideology. She sums ruthlessly an eternal question haunting her about her son “will he follow his father’s footsteps?” She cries out a big “No”, “Her son, her precious son..will not ever hold a gun in his tender hands. His feet will never walk the killer’s path. His father’s path. Never...There will be no guns at my son’s funeral.” (p 172) Paro Anand ends her novel with an anonymous girl’s prayer from Baramullah, “Whatever else happens let there be peace.” *No Guns at my Son’s Funeral* gives a vivid picture of the harsh realities of many youngsters being drawn into the dark dungeons of bloodshed and vicious circles of violence from which there is no escape. The novel is an eye opener for it portrays painfully the angst and anxieties, false ideologies and fantasies, media influences and peer pressures that haunt a teenager’s life.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In her novels, Paro Anand observes how terrorism, being one of the vilest sorts of corruption, ruins the life of the children in the affected regions of the Kashmir valley. There is a callous indifference from the elders to the distress of these kinds in the post colonial society, in which the young minds are left terrified and panic stricken. Its volume is so much but the elders do not dither to accept this to be a part of their civilization to be corrupt, to be violent with the children and misbehave with them, which restricts their freedom and creativity. They are so much hardened by the socio-economic pressures that they cannot even differentiate right from the wrong. The children are perturbed by the plight and try out some devices so as to get out of these iniquities which further put them in trouble.

Jihadi- The term originates from ‘Jihad’ meaning struggle. This is an Islamic term. Kashmiri rebels consider it as a religious obligation to fight against the Indian force to establish an independent Kashmir.

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