

BAITED YOUTH IN PARO ANAND'S *NO GUNS AT MY SON'S FUNERAL*: A STUDY ON TERRORISM

Narendiran S¹ and Bhuvanewari R²

Children and young people are employed as soldiers, and also as perpetrators of other forms of violence by terrorists. This paper analyses how the innocent youth are lured towards terror outfits, the aftermath of terrorist activities on the people involved in it and also others who are not directly involved in it. The paper also brings out how the young adults' behavioral development is affected by their involvement with violence as victims and perpetrators using the novel *No Guns at my Son's Funeral*, Paro Anand's novel was in the IBBY Honor list nominated young adult novel. Young Adults Literature helps the readers to put themselves in the situation of the character in the novel and makes them to undergo the thrills, feelings, emotions, helplessness and the worries of the victims and sufferers from a safe stand.

Key words: Terrorism, Violence, Victims, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

A recent research article 'Lost Childhood: Caught in armed violence in Jharkhand' published by Child Soldiers International admonishes that Children are victimized and encouraged to become soldiers and also as perpetrators of other forms of violence by terrorists. The above-mentioned paper examines the use of children in hostilities by left wing armed groups in India and the impact of the armed violence on children. The exploitation of children for terrorism is not something new in the world. The young minds are groomed to be loyal member of their outfits as they easily accept their doctrine and less likely to resist. Moreover, they seem very innocent and soft which make them less suspicious. The recruits are often abducted and coerced to undergo rigorous training, and they are indoctrinated through violent group activities in order to build their loyalty towards their group. Even those who join the group inspired by the ideology later get panic to quit it fearing that the end may be their death in the hands of the terrorists. Moreover, nowadays more than cultivating their ideology, deterrence seems to be their main objective.

The effects of violence discourage the young adults and pave a way to a pessimistic attitude towards life, adding to it, they also fear the betrayal of their future. Patricia M. Hauschildt, an associate professor of English Education at Youngstown State University, in her study brings out that her students are reluctant to speak about terrorism. The terror groups use different strategies like social media to lure the young people towards them, and it is the need of the hour to project the

¹ Research Scholar, SSL, English Division, VIT University, Chennai-600127, India, *E-mail:* narendiran10@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, SSL, English Division, VIT University, Chennai-600127, India, *E-mail:* bhuvanadoss@yahoo.co.in

disaster caused by terrorism, especially to the young adults. Literature could be one of the best mediums to project social issues. Patricia M. Hauschildt says, "The concept of terrorism in young adult literature does range from the involvement of international terrorists to individual fear from being "terrorized" by someone or something."

PARO ANAND'S *NO GUNS AT MY SON'S FUNERAL*

Young Adult Literature makes the readers put themselves in the situation of the character in the novel and makes them to undergo the thrills, feelings, emotions, helplessness and the worries of the victims and sufferers from a safe stand. They can also critically judge the crucial happenings around them and the world. Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* is one such novel which makes the readers to undergo such emotions and feelings. Paro Anand is a writer for children and young adults. She has been awarded by 'The Russian Centre for Science and Culture' for her contribution to children's literature. Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, the then President of India, also honoured her for her writing on the Republic Day of 2007. Her book *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* has been on the IBBY Honour List and is also translated into German and Spanish. The author's omniscient point of view and her intrusive narration have helped to analyse the pivotal problems of the young adults who are deceived and victimized by terrorists. The novel does not have any formal introduction of the characters; it just starts with Aftab sneaking out of the house for their group's secret meeting. The very beginning of the novel shows Aftab, like any other young boy, dislikes to be called a mama's child and his struggles to prove himself worthy. In this struggle, he fails to realize the danger involved in his perilous game. The training and planning of the boys make Aftab to imagine himself as a Bollywood hero, with rippling muscles, capable of taking down a platoon of soldiers. The young mind has not evaluated the cost of his deed. Aftab has vested all his loyalty towards Akram whom he "admired like the older brother he didn't have, but longed for. Akram, so handsome, so tall, so sure of himself... Akram, who people said, was not a Kashmiri, but actually a firangi..." (3) has been a hero to Aftab.

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Nowadays, the terrorist organizations are more or less like gangsters, hitting the front page seems to be their main objective. We can understand this through the words of Feroze "we've got to make some inquiries. Our next operation has to be high profile. The big outfits have been hogging the newspaper headlines. Frankly we are getting sidelined. Now, while the forces are busy with crackdowns on the main guys, it's time to make our move." (6) This frank statement of Feroze shows that their plan for an attack is not for a cause but just for getting in the news. Establishing their identity or search for the identity is another reason that makes

them to indulge in all these terror activity. For instance, in the novel, Akram wants to establish himself and prove his identity as big shot in the newspaper for that he is ready to move to any extreme such as deceiving his group members and committing bloody disasters. He always broods on his bloody glorious achievement and he always grows furious, for his identity is not recognized through his action. "He would teach a bitter lesson to those who had thrown him out like a dog... But they were the big names. The big league. Well, he'd be there soon. He would... And when they would get to know... they'd regret that he was no longer part of them. That they'd never be part of him." (72-73) Akram is so audacious to prove his identity.

Likewise, everyone in the group wants to prove their self. "Imran, so full of ideas; Javed just to prove himself, would come up with something or other... Aftab, well, there were no bright... war winning strategies." But Aftab want to prove himself too. "He would do anything for that, anything at all...." Shazia was also restless, and she barely tolerates her mother's exhortations to involve her in household chores. She too wants to create her own identity by being with Akram. The novel also shows a fear for loss of identity, this is evident in the letter of Laxman Kachru; the letter reveals how the Kashmiris, especially the Kashmiri pundits, displaced to Delhi due to the terrorism in Kashmir. They have begun to forget their identity as Kashmiris and started considering every Kashmiri (the Muslims) as their enemy and also started getting used to their awful life in Delhi and have almost given up their idea to return to their homeland. Laxman also fears that he too has to live the same life and he is afraid that even his thoughts may change in the future and therefore he wants to convey this to someone before he changes too.

GROUPISM IN TERROR OUTFITS

Sajid, the leader of the group who trained Akram and Feroze, takes revenge on them for breaking away from the group. He used boys from Kashmir Action Group to plant a bomb and to bring the blame on its leader Akram and their group since Akram move away from the group of the former. In return, Akram Kills Sajid and forges the dead body as if it is his own and escapes from the police. This action of Akram is well known to Feroze. Thus he says, "They would have been after Akram... They may even have shot at Bhai... once again, Bhai had outwitted them. Somehow, he'd got hold of Sajid, as a he'd always wanted to and let his pursuers believe that they had killed him." (126) Either the work of Akram or Sajid does not prove any of the ideologies of their troupes, instead they just fight to prove their own dominance and power. Even the last bomb blast that has imposed on Aftab has no valid motives behind it. If an ideology is preached, it should have followers to take it up, but in this case, everyone has betrayed the group; even the last faithful follower of Akram is made a suicide bomber, and the greatest question that arises is how these incidents of madness are going to make them martyrs.

TERRORIST TRAINING- EFFECTS

Feroze, a man who played an indispensable role in the life of Akram, enters jihad when he is in his adolescence. He has given an extremely dangerous mission to accomplish. The mission has been to sneak into an army camp and plant bombs; as an A1 soldier, Feroze has made the mission a great success by killing twenty five men. Feroze shows off his excellence throughout the mission except for a clear getaway. It is Akram who raids the army camp to save Feroze from their clutches. The army's severe treatment makes Feroze 'a dangerous man with full of thoughts for revenge and their mortal enemy'. It is after that operation he starts suffering a lot of disorders in his young age. Even though he knows the adverse effects of being persuaded into terrorism, he himself does that and even trains the newcomers.

Akram also faces extreme disorders due to his training during adolescence. As a part of training, he has been given a puppy to be taken care of, he loved the puppy and has been very much attached to it. One day his commander has ordered him to kill the puppy. Akram has been really shattered to hear this, but the command once given could not be revoked. 'The cold blade' which has torn the heart of the puppy has the same impact on Akram himself, and he has been inconsolable for a long time. Later when he is given a kitten he does not have that much attachment with it, he knows that eventually he has to kill it. Akram has grown up without any emotion or feeling for the death of even his beloved ones. Akram, then starts to kill for pleasure and he grows very ferocious and he wants to get fame by executing great deeds. Sajid also has feared his ferocity and stops assigning works to him, but Akram desperately breaks away from the group and starts recruiting people in a separate group and becomes another perpetrator of violence. In another instance, he has been also ready to take down his very loyal follower Feroze, he does the same when Feroze gets caught by the army. He does this with the help of Shazia, his lover and Aftab's sister. Akram asks her to seduce a guard to enter the military base where Feroze is held as captive and to give Feroze the poisoned halwa. Akram wins over Shazia to do this and he further explains, "the word 'prostitute' would not apply here. Shazia would be a martyr to 'the cause'." Shazia who is in the spell of Akram realizes every mistake she has done including not stopping her brother, and she is furious on Akram. She also reveals that she is pregnant and she doesn't want her son to choose the path of his father, all she wants is a peaceful life for her child, her only solace and she is determined to give it.

The author uses the epistolary technique to show the attitude of the people displaced during the time of war in Kashmir. The letter from Laxman Karachu to Aftab brings out the generalized perspective of the displaced, that is, all Kashmiris are their enemies, and they even forget the fact that they themselves are Kashmiris. Laxman's letter is a chapter in the novel. This letter reflects the author's perspective on the general idea of the people, and she also refines their thoughts through the voice of Laxman, he defends, "it isn't every Kashmiri. It isn't our friends, it's only

the enemy, the firangis and those who have chosen to join them... It is the antankvadis, the gun-toting terrorists who are the enemy. Our common enemy.” (119) With growing jihadist activity, a common stereotype is building up that all Muslims are terrorists, and Laxman’s words could be taken as a defense for the entire community.

CONCLUSION

The engagement of the young adults with literature, which intersects with the world around us, can help them to replace their ignorance, inaction and fear with the knowledge of the world around them; it also helps them to understand and become proactive in making peace to prevail in the world. The study of the novel first draws our attention towards the rebellious attitude of young adults, and this finds ample space in the novel, so it is easy for the young adults to relate themselves with the novel. The problem of identity crisis in Aftab becomes representational of the generation. Secondly, the distance between the parent and the adult, the conflict ego state, is very clear. The understanding of the self, which is very minimal in the adult stage, and very less concern for the consequences are apparent. Further, the novel shows how terrorism is dependent on youth and has used them as a victim.

References

- Agarwal, Deepa. (May –Jun 2014). “Young Adult Literature in India”. Muse India. Issue 55.
- Anand, Paro. (2005). No Guns at my Son’s Funeral. New Delhi: India Ink.
- Brotherson, Sean. (2013). “Talking to Children about War and Terrorism.” PsycEXTRA Dataset Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/famsci/fs635.pdf>>.
- Hauschildt, Patricia M. (Summer 2006). “Worlds of Terrorism: Learning through Young Adult Literature”. The ALAN Review. Vol 32, No 2: 18 – 25.
- Lost Childhood: Caught in Armed Violence in Jharkhand. Apr. 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2016. <http://www.child-soldiers.org/research_report_reader.php?id=882>.