Finding the Empathetic Genre: A Critique of Love and Heroism in Mirza Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves*

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Literary scholars today increasingly preoccupy themselves with the question: do literatures matter? This line of inquiry is partly an outcome of institutional demands that the arts and the humanities must remain practically and financially viable within an increasingly corporatized academic landscape. The interest in pursuing the topic is, however, also the result of a growing awareness that academic disciplines can no longer remain isolated, and must, in more tangible ways, engage critical issues that affect our lives today, including climate change, global inequality, and imperialism. In this article, I aim to engage one such issue that has emerged to the forefront in the light of such broader developments. Scholars of diverse specializations invariably engage and debate the questions: can the practice of reading literatures generate empathy, especially for others who do not share familiar socio-cultural or experiential backgrounds? And can this empathy motivate humans to act in altruistic ways? The engagement with such questions has led to contestations and disagreements. Some have rejected the idea by finding literatures to be ineffective in catalyzing concrete change in society. Elaine Scarry, for instance, compares literary imaginations to daydreams.[1] She suggests that the former, like daydreams, can involve musings with grand and revolutionary ideals. Nonetheless, when it comes to reality, she finds that literary imagination, like daydreams, have no real import or influence. Some have found empathy to be a bad criterion for supporting ethical cross-border-identification in literature. Thinkers including Marcus Wood and Fredric Jameson dismiss empathy as an ideology that promotes colonial subject imposition.[2] Yet others, such as Steven Aschheim and Paul Bloom, have maintained that, as an emotion, empathy is more prone to promoting egocentric and self-directed behaviors.[3]

Despite these oppositions, support for narrative empathy comes from many fronts. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum acknowledges that empathetic imagination may be "infallible, inconsistent, and incomplete" (447). Nonetheless, it is an "invaluable way of extending our ethical awareness and of understanding the human meaning of events and policies" (447). The literary theorist Suzanne Keen observes that the disdain that many postcolonialists have for concepts such as empathy is vigorously contradicted in practice by novelists from all over the world, who strategically employ

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empathy in their writings to reach out to audiences both near and far (14). The philosopher Richard Rorty also maintains that reading literatures can train the imagination to understand others despite differences: "novels and ethnographies which sensitize one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were supposed to do" (94). These scholars, who come from vastly different fields and who hold views that often contradict one another, agree that literatures have the capacity to motivate altruistic behaviors in humans, and that empathy plays a key role in that process.

Literatures often create complex narratives, themes, and histories through the employment of character development and other narrative techniques that cultivate in readers diverse responses of compassion and interest in other people's lives and circumstances (2).[4] However, not all literary works generate empathy in the same way or with the same intensity. In fact, while some are naturally dedicated to its production, others are designed to block it. For instance, certain kinds of travel narratives that invite readers to step out of their comfort zones and try new things are likely to produce empathy for foreigners. Meanwhile war narratives, that encourage blame assignment, promote strengthening of borders. A central focus of the article is thus to understand what kinds of literary works are suited for empathy and what kinds are not. And in doing so, it also aims to examine whether it is possible to identify empathy for out-groups in certain category of works where one least expects to find it.[5] I will primarily discuss the theoretical works of scholars including Keith Oatley, Patrick Hogan, Suzanne Keen, and Shameem Black, who not only provide compelling responses to such concerns, but who also outline a systematic model of thinking about narrative empathy. These theoretical concerns guide my readings of *The Book of Gold Leaves*, a novel by the Kashmiri writer Mirza Waheed. The novel narrates the story of the Kashmiri conflict from the perspectives of a local couple, Faiz and Roohi, who negotiate their romantic union through obstacles including communal strife between their families, their own ideological positions on Kashmir, and the broader political turmoil in the valley. My goal is to see whether the novel, as a romance, can truly extend an empathetic view to the pain experienced by the diverse residents of the valley, or whether it gets built into a propagandistic, hero-driven plot that favors a political agenda in telling the story of Kashmir.

Kashmir

Kashmir is a Himalayan region in South Asia sandwiched between three nations: India, Pakistan, and China. Demographically, the region is diverse. Its population is constituted of a Muslim majority, in addition to a wide range of minority groups including Gujjars, Bakkarwals, Kashmiri Pandits, Dogras, and Ladakhi Buddhists (105).[6] Disputes over Kashmir in recent

times have mainly been between India and Pakistan, who have engaged in multiple wars since the mid-twentieth century over the acquisition of the region. India, which owns two-thirds of the valley—including Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh—has defended the land against Pakistan. Pakistan, which owns one-third of the valley—including Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan—has persistently attempted to expand its borders to include the entire territory. Polls today estimate the death toll to be between 70,000 and 100,000.[7] Human rights organizations have found crimes such as kidnapping and rape to be a daily occurrence in the valley. More than 20,000 children have been orphaned, in addition to 8,000 disappearances.[8] Communication lockdowns and extended curfews have adversely affected healthcare, education, trade, mobility, and daily livelihood. Understandingly, therefore, narratives about Kashmir have primarily been about war. And since war stories generally favor the heroic over the romantic genre, an overwhelming number of stories about Kashmir today have been told through the former. In other words, stories about Kashmir have typically been expressed through hero narratives committed to the goals of emancipating Kashmir from foreign threats. Of course, depending on whether the perspective favors India or Pakistan, the identity of this foreign threat has varied. In Bollywood films on Kashmir that follow the hero narrative (such as *Roja* or *LOC Kargil*), the foreign threat is almost invariably Pakistan. Some Pakistani films on Kashmir (such as *Azaadi*), in contrast, make India out to be the foreign invader.

Historical Tensions Between Hindus and Muslims

The long histories of Mughal, Afghan, and Dogra rule have fundamentally determined the contested nature of relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim communities in Kashmir.[9] Since the insurgency in the late 1980s, these tensions have resulted in several conflicts. Many Kashmiri Muslims, for instance, have cited the rule of oppressive Hindu rulers (Dogras) as the reason for their distrust of Kashmiri Hindus. Indeed, the Dogra rule in Kashmir, which lasted till mid-twentieth century, was particularly brutal for the Muslim majority population in the valley. Muslims were often excluded from state services. They were also unfairly taxed in comparison to non-Muslims, and the administrative system under the Dogras also ensured that trade, business, and banking were monopolized by Punjabis and Dogras (Behera 14). Many Kashmiri Hindus, on the other hand, have blamed Muslims for their persecution and exile during the years of the insurgency.[10] Such feelings of distrust and animosity against Muslims were a direct result of series of actions against their community, including "attacks on prominent Kashmiri Hindu politicians and advocates, displays of hit lists with the names of specific Kashmiri Hindu individuals, and acts of violence in Hindu localities in Srinagar and elsewhere in the region" (46).

The relationship between the two communities has also been mischaracterized by popular media. Kashmir, in such narratives, has been marked as the epicenter of a nationalist ideological battle by the Hindu right against Muslims and other minorities. The writer and journalist Pankaj Mishra observes that Bollywood, under the leadership of the current right-wing, BJP-led government, has largely transformed into a propaganda machine for promoting Hindutva ideologies. The film industry takes an active role in producing propaganda materials that erase the real traumas of Kashmiris, in addition to ideologically projecting Kashmiris, especially Kashmiri Muslims, as treacherous enemies of a largely Hindu Indian nation: "The Muslim— whether Indian, Kashmiri, Pakistani . . . It is hard to find mainstream films of late that do not feature this figure as a treacherous villain" (Mishra). The scholar Rustom Bharucha also confirms this point by noting that popular Bollywood films on Kashmir, such as *Roja*, channel impulses of nationalistic Hindutva ideology to falsely project the Kashmir conflict as a fight between righteous Hindus and villainous Muslims (1389).

Bollywood, however, is not the only mainstream source of propaganda about Kashmir. Similar anti-Muslim narratives about Kashmir are promoted through outlets including journalistic media and songs. Reflecting on India journalism, for instance, Mishra states that the liberal nationalist Indian media "of the last twenty years— or since the 1990s— has possessed an extensively malign power to both ignore and erase the suffering of Kashmiris, and to prejudice a large part of the Indian population against them" (Mishra). Kashmir also features centrally in "patriotism pop," a Hindu propagandistic genre of music in India which has gained immense popularity recently in social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. Songs such as "Dharna 360," which has received millions of hits on social media, do not just call for a Hinduization of Kashmir, but also celebrate the Modi government's recent move of revoking Article 360 as a right step towards the attainment of the goal.[11]

Kashmiri Hindus have not suffered the same degrees of dehumanization as Muslims have in Indian media. Nonetheless, their struggles have been overlooked. Bollywood films have often chosen Hindutva propaganda over objective historical representation. As a result, most popular depictions of the Kashmiri Pandit displacement have succumbed to "anterior narratives about a Hindutva understanding of the sacred space of the Indian nation pressed upon by the other as Muslim" (160). A majority of films—including *Roja*, *LOC Kargil*, and *Mission Kashmir*—have sidelined the history of Kashmiri Pandits in favor of an invasion narrative about the heroic feats of Indian soldiers against a dehumanized Pakistani enemy.[12] Other films, such as *Sheen* and *Shikara*, which promise to reveal "how the Pandit became 'a refugee in [his] own country,'" also end up reproducing communal binaries that ideologically position Pandits as "righteous" Hindus

victimized by Muslims, who are typecasted as terrorists, traitors, or foreign spies (Kabir 170). Before transitioning to a reading of Waheed's novel, it is worth outlining the theoretical concerns of this article in more details. The next section therefore overviews certain theoretical perspectives that explore the connection between empathy and literature, allowing insights into understanding the Kashmir conflict, particularly its representations in literatures.

Emotion and Narrative

A central question that scholars of empathy often ask is: is there a right kind of literature that can consistently generate empathy for strangers or for victims who belong to out-groups? Scholars have approached this question in diverse ways. Patrick Hogan, for instance, notes that there is no one kind of literature that can systematically cultivate empathy for out-groups in readers. In his view, it is important to not be confined to one tradition of writing, but rather be open to a diversity of perspectives in reading and in literary discussion (Hogan 248). Suzanne Keen, on the other hand, believes that it is often the narrative choices made by an author that determine the emotional bandwidth of a work. In other words, whether a work fosters outgroup empathy or blocks it depends on who the author's intended readers are.[13] Shameem Black, differing from both Hogan and Keen, identifies "border crossing fictions" as a specific type of work that is more likely to generate empathy for out-groups. She notes that these works of fiction share two attributes: 1) they fundamentally and critically engage ethical problem of representing difference; and 2) they offer narrative choices that work to resist and subvert "complete recuperations into Orientalist, primitivist, sexist, or other modes of representational constraints" (Black 10).[14]

Narrative techniques and styles play an important role in determining the empathetic range of a work. The contributions of the psychologist Keith Oatley to the study of emotion and narratives are amongst the most notable in this regard. He states that creative writers, especially writers of fiction, invoke narrative scripts with which readers can emotionally resonate.[15] He identifies two scripts that, in his view, have far reaching relevance: the heroic script and the "falling in love" script. He finds the former as corresponding to the following sequence: leaving the safety of home, going alone on a journey, facing dangers that could mean being killed, and bringing back something of value to the community (Oatley 46). He adds that the heroic script, with some variations, is evoked cross-culturally, and can be found in a range of works including classical epics of heroism and Hollywood cinema. On the other hand, he characterizes the "falling in love" script as another commonly used storytelling sequence that can be found in many literary traditions and canonical works including Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.[16] Oatley does not directly discuss empathy. Nonetheless, his research

on the embeddedness of emotions in narratives lays the groundwork for scholars such as Hogan to discuss empathy and literature.[17]

Hogan states that heroic and romantic story sequences recur across most major written literary traditions, including "sub-Saharan Africa, South America, North America, Australia, and so on" (12–13).[18] Turning to empathy, he suggests that heroic narratives are more likely to block empathy for out-groups, whereas romantic narratives are more suited for cultivating empathy across identity groups. This, as Hogan explains, happens because the heroic and romantic story sequences correspond to different ideological functions. A heroic narrative often follows the story of a hero in their quest for power and recognition (typically within a particular in-group). The hero is someone who has social prestige and who, in some way, represents the interests of the given community or in-group (Hogan 248).[19] The fate of the hero is intimately connected with the fate of the community. The threat is often external, and the enemies, who typically belong to out-groups, threaten not just the wellbeing of the hero, but also the peace and survival of the hero's community.[20] Ultimately, the heroic story sequence demonstrates how a hero must fulfill a duty to the community and be willing to sacrifice everything to vanquish the enemy and thereby restore social stability. Heroic narratives, in Hogan's view, can be politically problematic as they tend to encourage harmful forms of blame assignment against outsiders in cases of communal distress (249).

In contrast, romantic narratives commonly work against in-group identity categories. In other words, categories such as "'class, caste, race, nation, ethnicity, and family" are among the primary hurdles that lovers, who often come from diverse backgrounds, have to overcome in order to unite. Thus, romantic plots, Hogan clarifies, invariably incline us to empathize with the lovers" (249). Hogan also notes that in romantic plots, the antagonists, or the blocking characters, are typically family members or relatives of the lovers, not some foreign enemy who threatens invasion upon the home society of the protagonists. As such, the level of dehumanization of antagonists in a romantic plot is far less intense in comparison to the treatment of enemies in a heroic plot.[21] The remainder of this article takes up the case of Kashmir not just to explore cross-border empathy in its literature, but to also evaluate whether or not one can come any closer to answering the question, "Is there a right kind of literature that can consistently generate empathy for strangers or victims who belong to outgroups?"

Intra and Intergroup Dynamic in The Book of Gold Leaves

The Book of Gold Leaves is a love story. The conflict in the region serves as the backdrop to the romance between the two protagonists, Faiz and Roohi, who come from prominent Muslim families in a fictional Kashmiri city

called Khanqah. The first few pages of the novel make it clear that the survival of Faiz and Roohi's romance is contingent on their ability to successfully navigate through several domestic and social challenges. Perhaps the greatest challenge in this regard is that the protagonists belong to different sects within Islam. Faiz comes from a Shia household, whereas Roohi belongs to the Sunni sect.[22] Communal antagonisms between the two families make it clear that the future prospect of marriage would be met with harsh resistance from both sides. Roohi, in one instance, imagines how her family would react if they found out about her romantic relations with Faiz: "That he is a Shia . . . the thought did cross her mind, that images of an irate Mummy did fly into her head, that she did think about how furious, even violent, her brother Rumi might be, that she did contemplate how tormented Papa would be" (Waheed 28). Faiz's family hold similar reservations. His mother, for instance, after meeting Roohi for the first time, rejects her as a potential bride for Faiz solely because of her Sunni background: "Faiz's mother sees a white face, like that of an angel, she would tell her daughters later. 'If only she was Shia'" (47).

Muslims constitute a majority in Kashmir demographically, and *The Book of Gold Leaves* adopts a majoritarian point of view in narrating the story of Kashmir from the perspectives of Faiz and Roohi. Nonetheless, Kashmiri Hindus, who are a minority in the region, feature centrally in the novel, and their interaction with Kashmiri Muslims reveal a lot about the contested history of the two communities. The novel follows the story of Professor Madan Koul, a prominent Kashmiri Pandit from Srinagar and the principle of the prestigious Gandhi College. He is described as someone who is proud of his lineage: "high Brahmin, educationalists, and social reformers" (74). His story brings attention to how the oppressive Dogra rule in Kashmir instituted polices, laws, and infrastructures that disproportionately favored Hindus over Muslims and created deep socioeconomic inequalities between the two communities. He is a social activist who voluntarily renounces his ancestral land holdings, acquired by his family during the Dogra rule, as a gesture of solidarity with "the Muslim tiller clans . . . who for generations had broken their backs tilling for the Kouls" (74). More precisely, as the quote suggests, Professor Koul relinquishes his lands because of his guilt from the fact that his family, who were rich landowners, participated in the oppression of Muslim peasants. Perhaps most importantly, Professor Koul's story highlights the complicated relationship between many Hindus and Muslims in Khanqah. He publicly identifies as a liberal educator, a humanist, and an advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity in the valley (187). Yet, he implicitly harbors Islamophobic sentiments, revealed through his resentment towards his daughter's relationship with a Muslim: "He simply could not bring himself to be

comfortable with the prospect that his daughter . . . wanted to marry a Muslim" (188).[23]

Two Love Stories

Hogan states that love stories are empathetic on a structural level because a) they urge readers to support the romantic union of lovers who come from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds; and b) they promote the view that the dismantling of identity politics based on categories like race, class, caste, and religion is necessary for the union of the lovers. Both these assertions are supported by the novel. The primary focus of the novel is on the story of Faiz and Roohi. However, it also highlights another love story, one that happened in the past between Shanta Koul and Afaq Bhukhari, a Hindu and a Muslim: "Afaq considered it a message from God . . . had found Shanta . . . He would look for opportunities to be near her, just to take home the fragrance from her saris every day" (191). Shanta is the daughter of Professor Koul. She is also the principal of the Government Girl's High School in Khanqah. Afaq is an educator in the same school. The lovers, from both the stories, face familiar challenges. In the former case, the challenge lies in overcoming the obstacles posed by the communal antagonisms between Shias and Sunnis. In the latter case, it is overcoming the Hindu-Muslim divide.

The outcomes of the two love stories are different. Faiz and Roohi are successful in overcoming the obstacles to their union: "It isn't every day, after all, that Sunni girls marry Shia boys" (278). The romance of Shanta and Afaq, on the other hand, ends abruptly due to the intervention of Professor Koul, who disapproves of his daughter's association with a Muslim: "He simply could not bring himself to be comfortable with the prospect that . . . he would have a Muslim for a son-in-law" (188). This quote clearly highlights Professor Koul's disapproval of even the possibility of his daughter's marriage to a Muslim. The novel does not explicitly offer reasons for the different outcomes in the two stories. Nonetheless, one can speculate on a few possible factors that may have contributed to the different fates. The ideological chasm between Hindus and Muslims is much wider than the one between Shais and Sunnis. Thus, a successful relationship between a Shia and Sunni couple is more plausible than one between a Hindu and a Muslim. The more consequential contributing factor, however, might have been the different time-periods of the two love stories. Faiz's and Roohi's story takes place during times of conflict. Shanta's and Afaq's story, on the other hand, dates back to the pre-insurgency years when things were relatively peaceful. Both Faiz's and Roohi's families put their social differences aside to unite against the common threat of extermination facing their community: "Shia girls marry Sunni boys. Roohi realizes there is an unspoken understanding at work here, namely that very few people want strife between

the two communities in these times" (278). In the latter case, the relationship doesn't survive because, in times of relative peace, there are no external pressures to dissolve existing social/communal antagonisms.

Tropes of Heroism

While the novel reveals itself to be a love story from the beginning, there are certain aspects of it that stay committed to tropes that are more common to the heroic model. Faiz's story in the novel, for instance, significantly draws from the heroic script: leaving the safety of home, going alone on a journey, facing dangers that could mean being killed, bringing back something of value to the community (Oatley 46). Indeed, the killing of Faiz's godmother launches Faiz into a heroic quest for revenge. He embraces militancy and leaves Kashmir for Afghanistan to receive para-military training: "This is proper training Artist Saeb. . . . Do you have any idea what happens in Afghanistan? You can learn how to shoot down a plane" (Waheed 126). On his return, he is no longer the delicate and thoughtful artist who could "unleash a thousand nightingales from his brush in a single night of work" (5). His training transforms him into a mercenary who is "a deft assembler of the AK47 rifle and a keen student of the craft of bomb-making" (134).

A heroic plot typically climaxes with a grand gesture. This grand gesture represents the culmination of heroic action, the penultimate moment of heroism at the end of a hero's journey. In some cases, the heroic action has a positive outcome signaling a hero's victory over adversities. In other cases, the outcome is negative, gesturing to sacrifice and martyrdom. The novel hints that the penultimate moment of heroism for Faiz would likely be a confrontation with those who, according to him, are responsible for the death of this godmother: "Who will end it? . . . what about Fatima? Who will stand up for her?" (108). Faiz, in this quote, clarifies his intentions of avenging Fatima's death. His heroic journey, in more precise terms, lead him to a confrontation with the Indian army, who were likely the perpetrators responsible for Fatima's murder.[24] What makes the novel deviate from the standard heroic plot is the anticlimactic ending to Faiz's story, which abandons this heroic trajectory. The narrative does not lead to a final heroic confrontation. Rather, it ends with Faiz's decision to walk away from the path of revenge: "he throws off the thought with a shake of the head. Roohi looks at him, her chest in agony . . . 'Don't ever leave, Faiza, never.' 'I am not going anywhere— never'" (328). This quote emphasizes how in the final moments, Faiz, abandoning his heroic quest, commits to supporting Roohi as she grieves for her father's death.

The Enemies

The novel centrally highlights the oppressive practices of the Indian army. We are given a sense of how random city-wide curfews imposed by the army

disrupt day-to-day activities of Kashmiris: "the whole city is under a round-the-clock curfew now. All movement proscribed. All meetings banned. All life besieged. A deathly calm has spread everywhere, as soldiers circle the area from all sides" (87–88). The novel also describes how the army, using the excuse of securing the defenses of the city against militant attacks, turns schools into barracks and internment camps: "This was a girls' school until two weeks ago, now it's a barracks" (54). The novel draws attention to how the presence of the army contributes to the rise of violence and bloodshed in the city: "The soldiers ensure that there is a blood-soaked headline in the paper everyday" (211). To this end, it also clarifies that the violence perpetrated by the army is often directed against innocent civilians and not militants. There are several instances, for example, that show how the army is behind the daily kidnappings and disappearances of Kashmiris: "this motor . . . a quick blur, emerge from the wings, sweep off two people and disappear" (98). This quote draws attention to a military vehicle, known to locals as the Zaal (the trap), used by army officers for kidnapping Kashmiris in Khanqah. Faiz's elder brother Mir Zafar is injured and maimed by the Zaal: " Mir Zafar Ali is dragged for forty feet or so. As he lies on the road, his elbows burning from the graze, his trousers torn at the buttocks and his Haji skullcap lying like a deflated ball" (98). The novel also shows how innocent lives are lost in cross-fires between the army and militants: "The men in the bunker have a machine-gun . . . The machine gunner knows what he has to do. He is always ready . . . He doesn't stop on seeing the school minibus. He doesn't even spare the sky" (84). This quote highlights an incident where innocent school children and teachers (including Faiz's godmother Fatima) are killed in a crossfire initiated by the army.

Conclusion

Waheed has garnered high praises from many, including Basharat Peer, Arundhati Roy, and Pankaj Mishra, for his eloquent portrayal of Kashmir and his celebration of the diversity of Kashmiri people. Nonetheless, there have been a few who have criticized him. The writer and politician Shashi Tharoor, for instance, has stated that Waheed's writing "largely absolves Pakistan of responsibility for its cynical use of Kashmiri youth in a proxy war with India"[25] Hogan has also stated that Waheed downplays the contributions of militants to the violence in Kashmir (170). It must be noted that these criticisms have not been directed against *The Book of Gold Leaves*. Rather, they are critiques of his first novel *The Collaborator*. Nonetheless, it is worth looking into them briefly in the light of the current novel. *The Book of Gold Leaves* highlights the distinctive nature of violence committed by the army and the militants. It suggests, for instance, the Indian army is more likely to commit violence against civilian Muslims over Hindus. On the other hand, the novel also suggests that Kashmiri

Hindus are disproportionately targeted by militants. Now, because the novel has a majoritarian focus, the narrative emphasis is primarily on highlighting the violence of the Indian army against Indian Muslims. In this sense, Hogan's critique does have some validity because the novel does indeed focus more on the crimes of the Indian army. Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that Waheed favors Pakistan or erases the violence committed by militants. Militants do cause brutalities in the novel. They are not only responsible for brutally murdering Professor Koul; they are also responsible for the killing of Roohi's father. Finally, the novel also suggests that militants are responsible for creating an environment of fear for Kashmiri Hindus, which largely drove them away from the valley. Dinanath asserts this point clearly when Zafar enquires about his sudden decision to leave the city: "It's not the soldiers I fear, Zafar. I don't think you quite understand" (262).

The Book of Gold Leaves clearly falls in the category of works that are successful in cultivating cross-border empathy. The novel, for instance, qualifies as a border-crossing fiction based on Black's criterion that a) a work of fiction must critically engage ethical issues involving social difference; and b) it must offers narrative choices that subvert hegemonic modes of representation (10). The novel does both. It encounters ethical challenges in representing social differences at both intra and inter-communal levels, between Shias and Sunnis as well as Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. The novel also offers choices that subvert hegemonic modes of representations. Despite being a novel with a predominantly Muslim perspective, it does not overlook or mischaracterize the story of Kashmiri Hindus. Through the stories of characters such as Professor Koul, Shanta, Dinanath, and the priest, we get a rich overview of the history of the Kashmiri Hindu community in the region since the beginning of the twentieth century. Their stories also highlight the broader factors that led to the eventual dispersion of the community from the region. The novel also validates, to a large extent, Hogan's hypothesis that the romantic genre is structurally more empathetic than the heroic genre. As pointed in this article, there is ample evidence to suggest that the two love stories in the novel encourage positive cross-border interactions and relationships, not only at an intragroup level between Shias and Sunni, but also at an intergroup level between Hindus and Muslims.

Notes

1. See Scarry's essay, "The Difficulty of Imagining Others," *For Love of Country?*
2. See Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography.* Also see Keen's discussion on Jameson in "Human Rights Discourse and Universals of Cognition and Emotion."

3. See Aschheim's essay "The (Ambiguous) Political Economy of Empathy," *Empathy and its Limits.* Also see Bloom's *Against Empathy.*
4. See Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers, *Empathy and its Limits.*
5. In-group refers to a social group to which an individual identifies as being a member. This social group can be oriented along the lines of one or more identity categories including nationality, race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, interests, experience, and environment. On the other hand, out-group refers to a social group that one does not identify with. Literatures may include both literal and ironic representations of social group dynamics. Literal representations are often unconsciously employed by narratives that are ideologically aligned with an in-group position. An example of this can be found in many post-9/11 Hollywood films where Arabs get type casted as terrorists. Such representations of course have no basis in reality but are rather reflective of how the narrative subscribes to certain xenophobic attitudes against Muslims held by many Americans. Ironic representations of group dynamics are often recruited by literary works for social critique. The plays of George Bernard Shaw are good examples of this. A majority of his plots are driven by characters who come from the most privileged and wealthy sections of the English society and who display attitudes of sexism and social elitism. Indeed, at a surface level, his plots seem to participate in such cultures of exclusion, and thereby alienate women and members of lower classes. Nonetheless, Shaw himself does not subscribe to such views, but rather utilizes them to expose the social hypocrisies of upper middle-class England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
6. See Nyla Ali Khan, *The Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Transnationalism.*
7. See Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir.*
8. See Behera.
9. See Behera.
10. See Haley Duschinski's "'Survival is now our politics': Kashmiri Hindu Community Identity and the Politics of Homeland."
11. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which was revoked by the Modi led BJP government in 2019, gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Under this status, the region had the power to have a separate constitution, a state flag, and autonomy over internal state affairs.
12. See Hogan.
13. Keen suggests that authors often employ strategic narrative empathy to "move potential target audience through deliberate representational choices designed to sway the feelings of their readers" (12).
14. Black asserts that within the anglophone traditions, some authors whose writings represent this category are Ruth Ozeki, Charles Johnson, Gish Jen, Rupa Bajwa, Amitav Ghosh, and J. M Coetzee.

15. Scrips, Oatley insists, are not just cognitive components of understanding, they can also be sequences that are deeply rooted in a society's beliefs and values. To clarify this, Oatley explains that the following sequence of going to a restaurant can serve as a good example of a script: "one feels hungry, enters a restaurant, orders what one wants, receives it, eats it, pays, and leaves" (46). He adds that today one only needs to hear the word "restaurant" to intuitively infer the whole sequence without the need of additional prompt.
16. Taking the example of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Oatley deciphers the "falling in love" script as: the lovers are strangers to each other at the beginning. On seeing each other, they experience attraction. There is an interval during which they think about each other. The two then meet face to face and talk in a way that confirms each one's interest in the other. Finally, they experience falling in love, a state characterized as all absorbing; enough to annul all commitments (74). Oatley's overall research points out that there are certain 'basic emotions' that drive storytelling sequences in literature. He finds courage, for instance, to be a dominant emotion that drives the heroic script. He states that stories with a heroic plot often instill protagonists and audiences with courage to face dangers, and therefore ultimately with a sense of perseverance (75). Similarly, lust, or more accurately the emotion "amorous," in his view, predominantly guides stories involving romantic love; "Scripts of the amorous enable us to visit worlds of love, and to take rides on the vehicles that transport us into those worlds" (75).
17. Both Oatley and Hogan have often influenced each other in developing their positions on emotions. Hogan, for instance, invokes Oatley's work on basic emotions centrally in developing his positions on the topic. Conversely, Hogan's work on narratives has predominantly inspired Oatley to relate his frames of basic emotions drawn from psychology to world literature.
18. See Hogan, *Mind and its Stories.*
19. See Hogan, *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories.*
20. See Hogan.
21. By asserting that heroic and romantic narratives follow a script, Oatley and Hogan do not imply that all such narratives are the same. Rather, they suggest that one can identify certain patters in the way they evolve. Clearly, there is no doubt that there are overarching differences between the heroic stories of the Sumerian demigod Gilgamesh and the British spy James Bond. However, if one looks closely, one will see some structural similarities between how both the stories treat the theme of heroism; of well-respected and capable heroes defending their nations or communities against foreign threat. In the former, the foreign threat presents itself in the form of demons/ monsters such as Humbaba and

the Bull of Heaven. In the latter, the threat is often foreign terrorists or zealots like Mr. Big or Hugo Drax who threaten national security of Western nations like England. One can make similar observations in romantic narratives as well. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Nizami Ganjavi's Persian romance *Layla Majnun* can both be classified broadly as romantic narratives despite the obvious differences. Indeed, they involve star-struck lovers who belong to different social groups typically from the same region. Their ultimate union is contingent on their ability to overcome domestic social obstacles. In Shakespeare's story the obstacles are the antagonistic families of the lovers. In Ganjavi's story, it is the different social classes of the lovers. Even when narratives follow scripts, there may be differences and variations. Some narratives, for instance, end on a positive note celebrating the hero's success by gesturing towards the ultimate victory of good over evil (consider the victory of Rama over the demon king Ravana in the *Ramayana*). Whereas others can fit the mold of sacrificial narratives, lamenting and memorialize the death of the martyred hero (for instance, consider G.B. Shaw's *Saint Joan* or Guan Hanqing's *Dou E yuan*).

22. Shia-Sunni antagonisms are common around the world and often arise because the two groups align themselves with different (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations of Islam. While in some cases such antagonisms lead to violent conflict (such as sectarian violence in Iraq), in most situations they result in social isolation between the two groups. In other words, even when Shias and Sunni have co-existed in relative peace, they have rarely engaged in intergroup bonding through intermarriage and other social activities such as praying at the same mosque or jointly celebrating a religious festival.
23. It must be clarified that the novel resists promoting the view that being a Hindu makes one automatically support the Dogra rule. The novel does demonstrate that, as Hindus, many such as Professor Koul (and his family) benefitted from the institutional structures and policies put in place by the Dogra. However, the novel also makes it amply clear that Hindus played a significant part in the mass movements against the Dogras; "The pandit smiles from his seat . . . He was entrusted with care of the temple in 1946 . . . he remembers, when there was only Kashmir, and his uncles and their friends had launched their movement against the cruel king" (82).
24. One can also infer that if this confrontation with the Indian army happens, it will likely end in Faiz's death. This point is revealed by Faiz as he reflects on his own mortality in coming to terms with his decision to become a militant "I might also not last here long anyway. I might as well put myself to some use" (108). Here, he acknowledges that the likelihood of his getting kidnapped or murdered is high whether he

decides to become a militant or not. Therefore, if becoming one gives him the opportunity to avenge his godmother, then for him it's a risk worth taking.

25. While it's worth looking into this claim, it must also be said that Tharoor himself is not blameless when it comes to the issue of Kashmir. His views on Kashmir are in fact in line with a popular version of pro-Indian government propaganda. In other words, while he has on many occasions placed blame on Pakistan for the situation in Kashmir, he has seldom ever acknowledged/critiqued India's contribution to the conflict.

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