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BOOK REVIEW - OUR MOON HAS BLOOD CLOTS BY RAHUL PANDITA

By Swati Koul¹

The 2013 memoir by the Indian author Rahul Pandita called "Our moon had blood clots", is about the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the year 1990. The author begins the narrative rather abruptly after the exodus and leaves the readers with many questions about the occurrence of their current state of poverty. He explains the first year that he lived outside of Kashmir, amongst all the decaying dead bodies in the scorching heat. Through this, the author establishes a strong grip with the read in only a few pages. It is only after some description and expression of regret of not upholding his family legacy and tradition being the driving force for him to write the book, the author begins with a narrative. In the words of Ramchandra Guha "This powerful and moving book throws a sharp new light onto the most tragic conflicts in the modern world."

Rahul Pandita then begins with a brief history of the land of Kashmir while referencing the historical chronicle of the north-western Indian subcontinent referencing the kings of Kashmir in the book Rajatarangini which loosely translates to "The River of Kings" written by a Kashmiri historian Kalhana in the 12th century CE.

The author mentions various facts about the State and its mystical, religious, and spiritual dwellings that were present in the Valley. He also refers to how Kashmir was cut off from the rest of the world due to its geographical location and was a center of knowledge and education. Rahul Pandita was a mere fourteen years of age when he was thrown amongst the chaos of losing a home in Srinagar. This was due to the fact that their religious background was not the same as the majority of people in the Valley, thus starting the catastrophic conflicts in the State. The conflicts were not new or unknown. Rather the examples of such clashes of the ethnic majority can be seen throughout world history. For example in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and recently in Myanmar, such incident has taken place.

The book then proceeds with various detailed incidents of the heinous acts performed by men of terror who in their belief are protecting their land from infidels and are the sole guardian of their

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religious beliefs. Contrary to the popular belief, these accounts of deaths are not written with a sense of biasness towards a particular religion and are rather created to expand the knowledge of the world which was oblivious to the terror that was happening in the heart of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The deaths mentioned in the memoir are factually verifiable through the news articles of Kashmir Times achieves.

One such terrorizing account referred to in the book was that of the death of the tallest leader of the KP community, Pt. Tika Lal Taploo. On 14th September 1989, The Pandit political activist was shot dead by armed men outside his residence. The killing strategized, by the enemies, so as to make the community a political orphan. The lack of effective political representation at the time of need left the entire community feeling helpless and vulnerable. This did not stop just after one death. There was then a series of target killings of Kashmiri Pandit leaders and activists. These killings were done by the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) as they began a separatist insurgency for the independence of Kashmir from India.

In January 1990, massive crowds had assembled in various mosques across the valley and protested by shouting anti-India and anti-Pandit slogans. These slogans not only included the rape and death threats but also gave them a solution for their misery - change their religion to Islam. Thus began the infamous exodus of the community. In fact, on 21st January 1990, the Gawkadal massacre took place. In it the Indian paramilitary troops open fired on a group of Kashmiri protestors, killing around 50 people. However, this did not suppress the separatist movement and rather created a sense of agitation amongst the protestors.

In the next few months that followed, hundreds of Kashmiri Pandits were tortured, killed, and raped. By the end of the year, more than 3, 50,000 Pandits escaped the valley, over overnight to take refuge in Jammu and other cities. Only a handful stayed back and was met with a disastrous end to their lives.

On February 2nd, Satish Tickoo was shot dead by his acquaintance, Farooq Ahmed Dar, also known as Bitta Karate. In a TV interview after his arrest, he confessed that he killed twenty Kashmiri Pandits. Karate spent sixteen years in prison but was never convicted, the judge presiding over his case eventually set him free after a bail. It should also be noted that his case was not the only one, rather in hundreds of cases of killings of Kashmiri Pandits, not a single person was convicted.

However, even after the murders of thousands of Pandits, the fire in the valley of Kashmir did not die out. On March 21st, 1997, seven Kashmiri Pandit Hindu villagers in Sangrampora village of Budgam district were killed, calling it the Sangrampora massacre. The rationale of these killings which were viewed as ethnic cleansing was believed to be to dishearten the Hindu's who had fled Kashmir from returning and were restored by the Farooq Abdullah government.

The author, Rahul Pandita, also interviewed Dr. Vinod Kumar Dhar, the sole survivor of the Wandhama massacre. On 25 January 1998, 23 Kashmiri Pandits, living in the town of Wandhama were, were executed by unidentified shooters. As indicated by the declaration of one of the over comers of the episode, a 14-year-old Hindu kid named Vinod Kuman Dhar, the shooters went to their home dressed like Indian Army fighters, had tea with them, sitting tight for a radio message showing that all Pandit families in the town had been covered. After a short discussion, they gathered together all the individuals from the Hindu family units and afterward immediately gunned them down with Kalashnikov rifles.

Furthermore, the slaughter was purportedly dedicated by Abdul Hamid Gada of the Hizbul Mujahideen and was coordinated to agree with the Shab-e-Qadar, the holiest night of the period of Ramzan, when devotees remain alert until sunrise.

In this way, it was broadcasted that the individual from the network got no opportunities of being reestablished back to their homes. For example, the outfitted aggressors came wearing fake military regalia. The assault occurred between 11 pm and 12 PM. Casualties included 11 men, 11 ladies, and two little young men who were arranged and fired and slaughtered by the shooters. The casualties extended from a 65-year-elderly person to a 2-year-old kid. On the night of 23 March 2003, the fear-based oppressors entered at Nadimarg town close Shopian in Pulwama area in Jammu and Kashmir and hauled the Hindus out from their homes, lined them and shot them from programmed weapons.

The author also gave a note of personal experience where he was encouraged to turn to violence to restore his losses. However, just like all to other members of the community, he chose the path of righteousness and did not bow down to the level of the ones who destroyed their lives. These values, the author claimed were inculcated into the young minds by their parents. Thus he expressed that his father played a vital role in keeping him on a disciplined path.

He also expresses the fact that even though the community lost their homes, they did not lose their humanity. Thus they grabbed all the educational and professional benefits that they could

get, in order to sustain their living. These were thankfully provided to them by the government, despite the lack of physical protection that should have been provided while they were still in the valley.

In the book, the author also wrote a section about the tribal raid of Kashmir in 1947, through the perspective of his Uncle who had experienced it first hand after the Independence of India while the fate of the State of Jammu and Kashmir was still not decided.

The First Kashmir War (Indo-Pakistani War of 1947 – 1948), was battled among Pakistan and India over the territory of Jammu and Kashmir from 1947 - 1948. It was the first of four Indo-Pakistan Wars battled between the two recently independent countries. Pakistan encouraged the war half a month after freedom by propelling tribal Lashkar (volunteer army) from Waziristan, with an end goal to catch Kashmir, the eventual fate of which remained in a critical state. The uncertain consequence of the war still influences the geopolitics of the two nations.

As the end of the book approached, the author, presented some statistics, which said that there were still thousands of Kasmiri Pandits, without a home in refugee settlements. These settlements are not inhabitable as they lack the basic necessities of electricity or water. He grieved over the deaths of hundreds of Pandits and thousands of families that were displaced and forcefully removed from their homes. Even after three decades of the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits, the community has still not been able to return to their ancestral land and are now dispersed all over the world, slowly losing on to their ethnic culture.

Thus, in my opinion, this book is essential in understanding the issues arising in current times in Kashmir as the rest of the world was oblivious to the pain suffered by the community of Kashmiri Pandits, who even today mourn their loss while upholding their self-respect. Therefore making this book is an untold chapter in the story of Kashmir that was becoming increasingly agitated with the cries of 'Azadi' (freedom) in 1990 and is still continuously burning with hate, revenge, and illusionistic superiority for upholding ethnic values.