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Micro-Governance in Exile: Indian Knowledge Systems and Collective Trauma in Rohit Tikoo's Uprooted and Forlorn

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Abstract

In the early 1990s, due to multifaceted socio-political issues like escalating militancy and ethnic clash with the Muslim population, Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Kashmir Valley causing serious disruption of the culture. This paper make a convincing case for the point that Rohit Tikoo's Uprooted and Forlorn is a vivid example of how displacement is a disruption of communal knowledge, especially of the disruption of traditional customs and social norms. The concept of micro-governance emerges as a crucial framework, encapsulating the informal rules, moralities, mutual aid arrangements, and institutional responses that displaced communities ingeniously devise daily when formal governance structures fall short. This dynamic adaptation underscores the resilience and resourcefulness of these communities, making a persuasive case for recognizing the significance of micro-governance in understanding the broader impacts of displacement.

The methodology is a close reading of the Tikoo narrative, aided by thematic coding of the material, and through juxtaposing literary evidence with official and academic documentation, the nuances of micro-governance and collective trauma are explored. Trauma theory, collective memory and dharmic ethics are the basis for the analysis. The paper highlights the practices that partially reconstruct collective agency through an analysis of how Tikoo's memoir captures the trauma, both within and as a process of unravelling social knowledge through Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). It is an interdisciplinary exploration that challenges the notion of displacement as loss, and foregrounds IKS frameworks for social restoration.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems; internal displacement; exile memoir; collective trauma; micro-governance; cultural memory.

Introduction

The mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir Valley in 1989-1990 is often portrayed as a political turmoil and psychosocial distress due to the complex socio-political dynamics of the region (Miller & Rasmussen, 2016).

Exile poses enduring challenges for social coordination: how do displaced groups manage daily survival without their customary resources? How is trust redefined during clandestine escapes?

In what ways are the everyday practices of routine re-created in the camp quarters or in rented houses? The loss of knowledge-in-practice, the tacit knowledge incorporated in traditional structures of indigenous communities, determines social life.

Uprooted and Forlorn by Tikoo is a literary storehouse of permanent consequences of this displacement. Instead of viewing the memoir solely through the prism of personal testimony, this analysis understands the memoir as a history of group knowledge put to severe stress. The narrative voice transitions from personal experiences, like daily struggles and adaptations, to examining the broader disruption and partial reconstruction of everyday life competencies, effectively highlighting the shift from individual to collective experiences. Calculated secretiveness and ad hoc household set-ups become manifest as nascent micro-institutions of survival. The memoir demonstrates the role of ground reality in triggering new tacit norms and ethical idioms.

This idea can be used to investigate how displaced communities, including the Kashmiri Pandits, can use storytelling as a tool to express and navigate massive upheavals to their identity and cultural persistence (Pandey & Singh, 2024).

To investigate this aspect, we place Indian Knowledge Systems as a conceptualization, avoiding the collapse into civilizational discourse. According to official policy, IKS is knowledge based on experience, empirically proven by practice, and applicable to various aspects (Kapoor & Singh, 2005). The Indian Knowledge System Division of the All India Council of Technical Education promotes interdisciplinary inquiry into Indian epistemologies in the arts, literature, and government (Kapoor & Singh, 2005). The practices depicted in *Uprooted and Forlorn*, such as storytelling, responsibility-driven caregiving, and community committees, are inscribed forms of culturally embedded knowledge-in-practice.

These micro-governance cultures are miniature types of morals and grouping that distribute the duty and preserve communal membership particularly in an environment of collapse of formal institutions. With the help of this framework, it is possible to examine how these communities negotiate the historical space, and what the recent sociopolitical dynamics of their displacement are (Somjyoti, 2016).

This paper argues that exile disrupts traditional knowledge, leading to the emergence of micro-governance practices as a response, with Indian Knowledge Systems playing a central role in restoring social order through these practices. Initially, exile is portrayed as a disruption of knowledge, characterized by the abandonment of long-standing social skills, resulting in a dual-layered trauma. Secondly, micro-governance denotes the novel everyday institutional practices that arise in exile to mend this disruption. Thirdly, an Indian Knowledge Systems framework legitimizes these practices as authentic knowledge, illustrating how indigenous paradigms reshape a new comprehension of social recovery.

This exploration will involve a theoretical synthesis that includes identifying relevant scholarship and IKS policies, providing an overview of a replicable system of written coding, explaining several excerpts from Tikoo's memoir, and critiquing the contribution to interdisciplinary discussions on exile, state regulations, and cultural endurance.

The analysis will draw on four major schools of thought: socio-political trauma theory, memory studies, dharmic ethics, and displacement scholarship, to explain the complexities of displacement and the application of micro-governance and Indian Knowledge Systems in exile. The theory of socio-political trauma states that getting traumatized does not imply getting a pathology but rather a social scourge of the society. According to Judith Herman, the desecration of safety, trust, community ties, and the healing process involves the re-establishment of the ties (Herman, 1992). In the case of a long-term displacement during a conflict, the trauma will continue because of the constant uncertainty, in contrast to events (Miller & Rasmussen, 2016).

The story of unstoppable dread and loss as told by Tikoo, thus, must be considered in the context of trauma as not only a personal one, but also as the failure of the social protective mechanisms. This view is in line with the fact that in the year 1989-1991, the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits caused a prolonged crisis characterized by the presence of forces and violence of the state that still creates an unresolved memory and division among the diaspora (Razdan, 2024).

Furthering the trauma theory, research in memory studies explains the reliance of social memory in collective systems. Maurice Halbwachs assumed that the social milieu form and shape individual memories, which break down and dissolve with the collapse of structures. On this basis, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory, short-term and verbal, and cultural memory, which is maintained in objectified forms.

The memoir by Tikoo is a cultural-memory artifact: a textual mnemotechnic that stores social knowledge in still-divided social contexts (Somjyoti, 2016). This paper looks into the workings of storytelling and prayer in exile as mnemonic practices, which connect the past and the present to maintain moral identity in a social context where no traditional social identifiers exist (Pandey and Singh, 2024).

B.K. Matilal views dharma and ethical dilemmas as modalities of practical reasoning under constraint (Matilal & Ganeri, 2002). Tikoo's lexicon of duty, dignity, accountability, and hospitality is a recurring theme. For instance, the need to lock doors when even trust might be lost is a moral choice that has been shaped by exile. The outlook of Matilal changes from a kind of rigid moral structure to a kind of improvisational deliberation: exile compels characters to consider the need to think in terms of communal responsibilities and individual safety, and makes "ground reality" an exigency driven dharma (Bilimoria, 2021).

It is important to remember the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits as a backdrop. More than 100,000 people fled in 1989-90 (Braithwaite & D'Costa, 2018; Gulzar et al., 2022), and those who survived were in camps for long periods. This is considered a long-term displacement by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and groups of people are still living as IDPs decades later. Peer-reviewed investigations reveal the daily impacts: Seema Shekhawat's survey study reconfigures family structures and community ties within camps and tenements, while Ankur Datta's ethnographic study emphasizes the social void created by exile and the community's response to it. Integrating these insights with Indian Knowledge Systems policy documents transforms governance, extending it beyond state-centric practices to embrace indigenous local approaches.

These strands combined, support our main argument, which is that *Uprooted and Forlorn* is a book of displacement as a shared disruption of social knowledge and governance. Trauma is not merely inner suffering but social loss of security; without a collectivity, memory cannot be recalled, and hence, the text is a memory-work; morally living is action under distress based on ethical consideration of duty. IKS as an analytic binds 'knowledge' to practice: we will show how Tikoo's narrative enacts indigenous governance models on the micro-scale, even as it critiques the absence of macro-level support. This interdisciplinary approach positions Tikoo's memoir as a critical site for understanding how displaced communities re-establish normative frameworks and sustain cultural identity in the aftermath of large-scale societal disruption.

Exile as Epistemic Rupture

Tikoo poignantly states, 'I was born twice: first in Kashmir, and second when I had to leave it' (Tikoo, 2021), highlighting the profound personal transformation and identity reconstruction necessitated by displacement. This statement underscores the deep emotional and existential impact of such a rupture, where the workable modalities of life in Kashmir are being outmoded. The metaphor of second birth highlights the fact of knowledge discontinuity, the fact that inherited routines and social roles imposed by the previous existence are radically upset by exile. In

a paradigm of Indian Knowledge Systems, the epistemic ecologies of knowing, place, communal memory, and caste/kinship networks fade away, and there is a need to rebuild identity. This echoes Halbwachs's conceptualization that memory is dependent on social structures: without the initial context, the narrating subject is virtually recalibrating its social orientation. The statement also indicates that exile dictates a new existential mode, aligning with the fact that traumatic experiences have the potential to radically restructure oneself and their understanding of time (Herman, 1992).

Micro-governance using secrecy. Tikoo recalls the first cases of departure: when everyone got up and saw a large lock on their own doors (Tikoo, 2021). The theme of closed doors, which occurs in the morning after the escape of a family, is a sunny bright example of the restructuring of the community infrastructure, in which the openness of neighbors yields to privacy and solitude. Such locked doors are a kind of micro-governance - a tacit order, which demands the confidentiality of departures. This kills community knowledge base and leaves the neighbors ignorant of one another within the neighborhood or their escapes. The trauma model of Herman is that the greater the disturbance of the protective networks the more severe the trauma is (Herman, 1998); the example is the case when the network of neighbors lookout that already happens is broken obviously and mistrustfully. This is what an IKS lens cognizes as adaptive praxis: the ritual inculcated culturally to lock the door gets reconfigured to survive in exile, and the creation of epistemic disjuncture to instigate a code of silence the restriction of trust to kin is coerced. Such reorganization of social behavior implies even more reestablishment of social order in society, which previously was built upon collective memory and mutual understanding, replacing the traditional pattern of social interaction with the broken contact with the demands of the moment to remain alive (Singh, 2015).

Trauma of Uncertainty

Tikoo notes: "The dread of death was more horrific than the death itself" (Tikoo, 2021). This is a penetrating remark that summarizes the exile agony intensified by uncertainty. Although the memoir does not use clinical terms, its structure through an Indian Knowledge Systems prism is an omen of the disappearance of existential security. The concern in question is social and communal by nature - fears about familial security and the future of day-to-day existence. It is similar to the human rights testimonies of the dangers of the early-1990s, including hit-lists, that spread fear and panic among Pandits (Singh et al., 2021). Halbwachs would argue that exile disintegrates even memories of previous safety, making fear the new hegemonic tale. In our coding system, the passage overlays with Knowledge Rupture and Micro-Governance, as fear is a collective and systemic experience: plural and systemic. This anxiety feeling was an outcome of historical dispute and enhanced by generational accounts, leading to the massive psychological unease and post-traumatic stress of Kashmiri people (Suganya & Vijayalakshmi, 2023). During a memorable conversation, Tikoo is also informed: my doors would be shut by him as well (Tikoo, 2021). The repeated theme of the closed door, now distorted through the prism of human relations morality. The repeated theme of the closed door, now distorted through the prism of human relations morality, shows the fear of a speaker that even a friend can barricade his house against the speaker in the situation of exigence. The normative ethos of hospitality is thus reversed: the demands of exile refreeze a sacrosanct moral covenant and make it an unsafe liability. In a nutshell, the comment is a distillation of a sharp betrayal and ethical dilemma. It demeans a subtle moral calculus through the prism of the exegesis of dharma by Matilal (Matilal & Ganeri, 2002). The story of Tikoo is an eloquent performance of the clashes of conflicting demands in time of necessity. The moral language of the vignette displays dharmic principles employed to effect practical judgment: the person of the dialogue struggles with proper behavior in incurable situations.

Resettlement as Micro-Institution

Tikoo's depiction of camp accommodations is stark: "Approximately four families had to share one common room separated by curtains made of saris" (Tikoo, 2021). This is a richly evocative picture of a disconnection in the built environment, of domestic privacy and spatial arrangements being forced to fit other new arrangements. The emphasis of the excerpt is on micro-governance as a material practice, as families create collective norms in the face of extreme lack of privacy, over the distribution of space, access to sanitary facilities and support of each other. Records from the 1990s confirm these conditions, including in the Jammu slums, where one-room tenements were allotted to families, causing highly overcrowded conditions and severe lack of privacy (Bootheina, 2017; Sawhney & Mehrotra, 2013). Documented history merges with details of the memoir.

This vignette is related to Micro-Governance and State Interface categories. The vignette can be categorized as Micro-Governance and State Interface, and it is a case of Dharmic-Ethical Reasoning, which is a negotiation of dignity in degrading exigencies, and a questioning of ideals of mutual succour. Where there is a need, there are micro-institutions of civility and obligation: for example, alternating prayer areas, or food sharing.

Uprooted and Forlorn is a work that shows that trauma is a process in two directions, an internal one of psychological distress and an external one of disintegration of social structures. Both are suffused with memory and narration. Tikoo's familial practices of shrine prayer and pronouncing sacred verses during exile serve as means of resilience. This aligns with Assmann's thesis that cultural memory demands stabilization through external apparatuses (Assmann, 2011). The memoir itself is such an apparatus, which is a mnemonic technology to preserve the exiled community's knowledge through rituals, genealogies, and obligations. Writing, as one passage emphasizes, is a shared task, and an act of remembrance is a way of reclaiming agency in the case of the Kashmiri Pandits, "the tale of which," as another passage states, "must be told." Writing constitutes a collective endeavor to restore agency through acts of remembrance, transforming individual traumatic experiences into a shared historical narrative (Chakrabarty, 2018).

An interpretation that takes this 'IKS' into account explains two main issues. First, it outlines the notion of "trauma" in this context, avoiding a psychological reductive approach. Trauma has been intimately connected with a breakdown in community – it is the result of failing protections, disrupted routines and fading social connections. Trauma has a social and political context, as Herman has pointed out (1992), and Tikoo's memoir is a telling illustration of the first of these dimensions. Traumatic affliction is aggravated by the loss of sanctioned practices, which an IKS view sees as epistemic structures, the undermining of which contributes to suffering. Disruption of sociocultural mechanisms of affective equilibrium increases psychological damage.

Secondly, the IKS lens elucidates governance dynamics in contexts of protracted internal displacement. While policy frameworks such as the Guiding Principles delineate the definition of internally displaced persons and state responsibilities (Deng, 1999), they inadequately address the informal modalities of self-governance enacted amid crisis. This analysis attributes analytical salience to such practices by foregrounding IKS which reveals that IKS-based disciplinary knowledge paradigms are more likely to bring into focus the lived exigencies of exile compared to generic conceptual vocabularies. Such an orientation reveals policy gaps: the relief programs provided by the government included physical housing, but it was not enough to restore the relationships and mutual support networks, which are typical of the life of the Kashmiri Pandit village (Thussu, 2014). More suggesting evidence on the concept of micro-governance is the vignette of overcrowding and informational precarity as described by Tikoo, who explains that

without the support of the macro level institute, the micro-governance is still unsatisfactory (Tikoo, 1994).

This perspective applies also to other academic conversations. Using IKS, formal cultural policies can be intersected and brought into the discussion, such as the vision of the National Education Policy to build “an education system rooted in Indian values.” An IKS-based analysis of literary testimony can help us understand the ways in which such “Indian values” (such as dharma, satya, seva) are expressed in approaches towards collective endurance. It therefore suggests that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems can support displacement interventions, in addition to unidirectional policy approaches. But significant, the inquiry is not idealistic about the ingenuity of the grassroots, and it is not afraid to address the shortcomings of the institutions. In sum, Tikoo's memoir reveals the fragility of these provisional arrangements in the absence of adequate state guarantees, and the limits of micro-governance to replace the basic protections of human rights and security. Conversely, an integrated approach that incorporates indigenous knowledge systems offers a holistic understanding of sustainability and resilience, potentially bridging gaps left by conventional scientific methods (Maheshkumar & Soundarapandian, 2023).

Concision

This paper argues that *Uprooted and Forlorn* by Rohit Tikoo depicts Kashmiri Pandit displacement as a knowledge breakage, the crumbling of community-engraved expertise that previously structured social life, and outlines micro-governance in exile as the everyday institutional response to this break. The analysis is based on the integration of the theory of trauma and memory with the theory of an Indigenous Knowledge Systems approach. Close readings support the fact that previously existing practices of the family of openness, hospitality, and duty were bounded by the exile, which triggered the emergent practices to alleviate the resultant crisis.

This framework highlights the fact that Indigenous Knowledge, which is frequently grounded in a particular geographic area and constantly changes due to experiences, provides significant insights into the process of building community resilience and finding new ways to create knowledge, even when the latter is shaken by massive disturbances (Karmakar & Pal, 2024).

The IKS model enabled validation of these observations as knowledge in practice, which is above contextual information. Program documents underline that knowledge proven by praxis is irreplaceable to the social operation (Kapoor & Singh, 2005); based on the analysis of this lens to the Tikoo story, his narration is taken as an essential storehouse of indigenous governance concepts. Furthermore, confirming the literary analysis according to the UN guidelines and records of archival relief placed the study into the empirical history of long-term displacement. This trans-disciplinary approach enhances governance and cultural studies by the way in which indigenous knowledge paradigms, when emphasized in literature descriptions, can explain the restoration of the social and moral strength in the face of post-conflict exile.

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