

At Childhood's End: Trauma, Survivance, and the Healing Fantastic in Abhishek Majumdar's *The Djinns of Eidgah*

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Abstract

This essay explores how Abhishek Majumdar's play *The Djinns of Eidgah* embraces the non-mimetic mode to capture the *dyscatastrophe* (Tolkien) in the valley – the loss of childhood, radicalization of youth, and the inconceivable brutality and violence. It will analyze how the play casts the radicalized youth as djinns, fantastical beings made of 'fire, dust, and smoke', who are caught in the liminal space between life and death, between captivity and freedom, much as the valley is. As the Djinns warn 'not to expect reason from a world gone wrong', the play too effectively uses the fantastic to depict the chaos and madness so unrealistic that it challenges the boundaries of the realistic parameters. The paper also examines the use of *Dastaan* tradition -- legends and stories to add a mythopoeic dimension to the narrative which signals the loss of innocence and a contrapuntal imagining of the past against the trauma of fractured and dislocated present while also presenting a trope for healing, resistance, and survivance.

Keywords: Kashmir; Childhood; Fantasy; Dastaan; Trauma; Healing; Resistance

*"I left my home for play,
Nor yet again
Returned, although the day
Sank in the west."* – Habba Khatun²

*"While the government goes about trying to silence the living [in Kashmir],
the dead have begun to speak up."* – Arundhati Roy³

*"There is something universal about kids. We can all relate to them.
They are children; they have no power."* – NoViolet Bulawayo⁴

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² "Habba Khatun: Poetry by a Queen of Kashmir" in *Kashmir: A Case for Freedom*

³ "The dead begin to speak up in India" *Guardian*, September 30, 2011

⁴ "Close to Home: NoViolet Bulawayo" *Publishers Weekly*, March 29, 2013



Abhishek Majumdar's play *The Djinns of Eidgah* is one of the very few contemporary plays from South Asia that engage with the politically fraught situation in contemporary Kashmir, a region caught between the competing narratives – that of *azadi* (freedom) of the valley on the one hand and the state-backed nationalism on the other. The play presents a bold and scathing commentary on the volatile political realities of contemporary Kashmir and specifically brings into sharp focus the predicament of Kashmir's children and youth. This essay explores the use of Persian storytelling or the *dastan* tradition with legends and stories that add a mythopoeic dimension to the narrative, signalling a contrapuntal imagining of a cohesive and unbroken past against the fractured and dislocated present. It focuses on how the use of the *dastan* and the fantastic mode get interwoven into the depiction of loss of childhood, lasting effects of trauma, radicalization of youth, and the inconceivable brutality and violence that engulf the life of Kashmiri children and youth. Subsequently, using Tolkien's concepts of *dyscatastrophe*, *eucatastrophe*, and *consolation* (Tolkien 1964) along with John Clute's related idea of *healing* (Clute and Grant 1996), it analyses how the non-mimetic mode is used to mitigate the trauma and facilitate healing.

Paradise Lost

"If there is a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here" – Emperor Jahangir on Kashmir, quoting Sufi poet Amir Khusro⁵

One of the most militarised zones in the world today, Kashmir, once famed for its ethereal beauty, has continued to afflict the post-partition South Asian subcontinent as a festering wound. As Pankaj Mishra (2011) writes:

Once known for its extraordinary beauty, the valley of Kashmir now hosts the biggest, bloodiest and also most obscure military occupation in the world. With more than eighty thousand people dead in an anti-India insurgency backed by Pakistan, the killing fields of Kashmir dwarf those of Palestine and Tibet. In addition to the everyday regime of arbitrary arrests, curfews, raids, and checkpoints enforced by nearly 700000 Indian soldiers, the valley's four million Muslims are exposed to extrajudicial execution, rape, and torture, with such barbaric variations. (1)

The Kashmir situation is a legacy of the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 on the eve of Independence from British rule. In spite of being a province with Muslim majority and adjacent to Pakistan, Kashmir did not accede to Pakistan and its desire and right to self-determination can be traced back to the unfulfilled promise of a plebiscite as enshrined in the United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted in the wake of Independence in 1947 (Mishra et al. 2011; Duschinski and Ghosh 2017; Bhan et al. 2018).

While the mainstream historical and political narratives frame Kashmir as a flashpoint between India and Pakistan, the so-called disputed territory over which wars have been fought, another narrative of brutal everyday violence and suffering in the valley hides in plain sight. It is a narrative that is so strictly policed that it seldom breaks through the grid of control and proscription, as Indian state continues to "subvert, suppress, represent misrepresent, discredit, interpret, intimidate, purchase, and simply snuff out the voice of the Kashmiri people." (Roy 2011: 48) It is this narrative of conflict between the common people of

⁵ Appears as an epigraph in *The Djinns of Eidgah*



Kashmir, the *awam*, as referred to in the text, and the Indian state machinery which becomes the focal point of *The Djinns of Eidgah*. It provides a rare glimpse into the plights of ordinary people, and the irreparable toll that the years of violence and repression has taken on the valley's children and youth.

Even as childhood and youth studies, as an interdisciplinary field of research, has flourished in the past several decades, scholars have pointed out how children are often history's most silent subjects (Helgren and Vasconcellos 2010: 3-4) and are missing even in the histories written about them (Pollock 1983). It is also critical to note that the trajectory of scholarship in the field has resolutely moved away from a more biological and developmental perspective on childhood to one that views childhood as a historical, sociological, and cultural construct (Aries 1964; Pollock 1983; Jenks 2005). This shift marks a departure from a more universal notion of childhood to one that is specific and contextual. Within the South Asian context, one thus needs to be sensitised to the distinct experiences of the children of Kashmir whose stories are intertwined with the turbulent history and the destiny of the region. Even as mainstream historiography might render them silent and invisible, it is imperative to record and listen to their voices captured in life narratives (Nyla Khan 2014), compilation of oral testimonies (Manecksha 2017), as well as literary and cinematic representations.

From a more traditional viewpoint, childhood is a stage of human life that hovers between nostalgia and utopian optimism (Jenks 2005) and is enshrined as a state of incorruptible innocence often marked by urgent protectionism against the corrupted adult realm especially with reference to violence and death. Thus, the association between childhood and trauma serves at least obliquely to question some of the hallowed ideals and theorization of childhood innocence, which however has been refuted by scholars pointing out that 'unitary idea of the child as innocent [is] revealed as illusory.' (125) Any narrative, literary or otherwise, that focuses on contemporary childhood in Kashmir, however, has to ineluctably grapple with the experience and legacy of trauma in the children of the region. A recent report published by the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society in 2018, points out how the children of Jammu and Kashmir continue to be subjected to everyday violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access – all of which are grave violations against United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. (Mehraj et al. 2018: 3). In a deeply moving collection of narratives of women and children of Kashmir, *Behold I Shine*, independent journalist Freney Manecksha writes how for a young girl, growing up in Kashmir, 'almost every childhood event came to be bookmarked by the larger struggle for *azadi*.' (56) Paro Anand, whose novel *No Guns at my Son's Funeral* (2005) narrates the double-life of the young boy, Aftab, a bubbly teenager by the day and a radicalized youth in the night, describes her experience of working with the children of the region in "Kashmir: The Other Side of Childhood," where she writes: "I have long reviled the age-old sugary sweet descriptor *phool jaise bache*, but they *are* like flowers – delicate, beautiful, open. But also open like wounds – raw red in their pain, pale in their fear, tentative as they approach you and lay their pain in your lap, resting an over-burdened head on your shoulder, trustingly holding your hand and leading you from the beauty of their surroundings into the mire of their circumstance." (Anand 2005: 55) In the disquieting and yet poignant account of growing up in Kashmir in the 1990s, Farah Bashir describes the terror and lasting trauma as she dedicates her book to the 'children of Kashmir who know nothing of a normal childhood.' (Bashir 2021: 1). A recent cinematic representation *Goodbye, Mayfy* (Gigoo 2015) captures the precarity of childhood and their inescapable tryst with violence and

death. Other contemporary literary representations of childhood in Kashmir includes Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, a graphic novel that imaginatively depicts the characters as anthropomorphic *hanguls*, a species of elk endemic to Kashmir. Like Sajad's narrative, *Djinns of Eidgab* is ultimately a text about power - about the everyday struggle between the powerful and the disempowered. In both texts, it becomes an effective strategy to weave the narrative around child protagonists because children provide a contrapuntal accentuation and a mordant critique of violence perpetrated by adults.

No Child's Play

At the heart of *The Djinns of Eidgab* lies the story of two siblings, Bilal and his younger sister Ashrafi. While Ashrafi represents the devastating and lingering effect of trauma after their father is shot dead in her presence on the bus that was taking them to a family wedding in a nearby town, Bilal is a rising star in Kashmir football, whose dream of playing for a team in Brazil is dashed by the end of the play, when he is compelled to join the resistance following the violent death of his teammates in a brutal military crackdown.

The play begins, however, with an indoor scene on a sparsely populated stage, but unlike the rest of the narrative, it marks a tender prelapsarian moment where the audience meets Ashrafi, Bilal, and their Abbajaan [father] together for the first and the only time in the entire duration of the play as Abbajaan puts his two children to sleep with a story from their favourite *dastaan*. *Dastaans*, also known as *qissas*, literally means 'stories' in Persian and Urdu and refers to an immensely popular romance story-telling tradition that originated in Iran at least as early as the ninth century (Pritchett 1991) and flourished in the Indian subcontinent. They were 'a genre of verbal art that once flourished in India, edifying and entertaining audiences patronized at imperial and subimperial courts and the salons of wealthy urban elites.' (Pasha 2019:1) They came to the Indian subcontinent, first to the Sindh region and later to the rest of North-Western and India from the eleventh century onwards and became established with royal patronage during the Mughal period. They were tales of heroic adventures and romance and narrated by the professional *dastaango*, who would breathe life into the stories and even have a large repertoire of several versions of the same narrative depending on the audience and the setting making the *dastaans* a uniquely dynamic and malleable form of oral narratives. As Frances Pritchett points out, of all the *dastaans*, it was the *dastaan* of Amir Hamza, based on the life of Hamzah ibn Abd ul-Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, which 'took firm root in the new soil' in the Indian subcontinent. (Pritchett 1991:6)

In *The Djinns of Eidgab*, Abbajaan assumes the role of a *dastaango* and narrates a tale from the *dastaan* of Amir Hamza.⁶ At the beginning of the play, as the children bring their pillow and lie down with their heads on Abbajaan's lap, looking up at his face in anticipation, he asks "Which one?" Ashrafi replies, "The one in which the one about Hamza and the flying lamps." There is playful competition as Bilal protests, "No ... no ... no... [w]e just did that one yesterday. Abbu, the one in which Hamza tries to break the illusion" When Ashrafi interjects that Hamza tries to break the illusion in every *Dastaan*, Bilal points out that Hamza never actually succeeds. Abbajaan puts an end to this playful banter and says, "[i]f you sleep, we can have everything in our *Dastaan*...the flying lamps and also Hamza trying to break the illusion of war...and if all goes well, insha'Allah even succeeding at it." Ashrafi then smiling and all excited wonders, "Really...Abbu...Can we have *anything we want in our story?*" (169-70;

⁶ plholderace



italics added) The flashback to this moment of togetherness marking restfulness and sleep is simultaneously ironic and portentous as we know that this familial cohesion would soon turn into violent rupture and the restless anxiety of sleepless nights that would soon follow. Ashrafi and Bilal, like countless children in Kashmir, have no power over their own stories, and the never-ending war consuming their life is not an illusion that can be broken. The stories of the *Dastaan*, where one can have anything they want, hence become a powerful symbol of comfort and solace in the face of imminent unspeakable tragedy and loss.

The stories that Abbajaan narrates are like the stories in the original *dastaan* tales of war between the forces of good and evil, Hamza and the Gulabuddin respectively. Yet, they foreground the story of Fatima, Hamza's daughter in the narrative, whose Djinnns wish to break the spell or illusion of war itself, and the mindless violence: "My Djinnns have broken the illusion of war. They broke it the moment they remembered it is after all an illusion ... this war. When you fight you forget everything else, Abbu, and so does the evil Gulabuddin. Both of you forget that this war isn't real, Abbu ... both of you fight as if it were." (172) Reflecting the pain of a host of Kashmiri children who have tragically lost their eyes to pellet gun injuries by the armed forces, Fatima's eyes too have been stolen by the evil forces and turned into two stars in the sky. (173) Her own djinnns Rafis and Hafiz foretell that it was a war that neither the good nor the bad could win: "[T]hey weren't your Djinnns or Gulabuddin's, Abbu ... they were mine." Fatima, who had not yet looked into Hamza's eyes, said, "My Djinnns appeared and told me that you will never win the war, Abbu, nor will Gulabuddin ..." This prediction in the *dastaan* too ironically reflects the futility of the pointless violence that has overshadowed the valley for decades.

As the narrative progresses, *The Djinnns of Eidgah* focuses on the everyday violence which 'in the contexts in which children live, is routine, inescapable, and mundane' rather than specific instances of violence that is exceptional or abusive in nature. (Wells and Montgomery 2014: 1) Bilal's story, representative of countless others, is foregrounded vis-à-vis the relentless terror, humiliation, and harassment in the hands of the state operatives, and a perpetual state of anxiety in the face of curfews and crackdown parades that are a routine part of their everyday life. A young and promising centre-forward, 'the bright light of Kashmiri football,' (176) Bilal's future is snuffed out when he is incarcerated, tortured, and eventually killed for venting his frustration through stone-pelting at the Indian soldiers. However, even at the beginning of the play, in the second scene, the football stadium is 'occupied', synecdochally, much like the valley itself, by the Indian army. The stage directions for the scene inside the changing room specifies that '[it] has a window without glass and from that window, one can see soldier's uniforms, drying on a clothesline.' (172) and the senior player, Mushtaq, draws Bilal to the window and reminds him that:

This is your stadium. You play here. You practise here, look at them. What are they doing here? Don't you feel ashamed Bilal, when you have to enter your own stadium like a thief, from the back gate, because some [soldier] in a green helmet can just stop you and threaten to shoot you for merely doing what you love doing the most? (173)

Thus, the recreational space for sports, essential for children and youth in conflict zones to cope, (Wells and Montgomery 2014: 185) shrinks to a space of forced occupation and intimidation.

Eric Tribunella points out how trauma may be seen as a necessary catalyst to hasten the process of growing up – '[it] is as if loss generates the escape velocity of youth. It is the fuel used to achieve the speed necessary for escaping the gravitational force of childhood...love and loss work as a catalyst for maturation.' (ix) Like countless children of his generation whose childhood is truncated following the death of their parents, in the play, Bilal has been forced to prematurely grow up and become the sole caregiver of Ashrafi. This responsibility squarely placed on his shoulders, however, compels him to maintain a cautious distance from the *tehbreek* (resistance movement) as well as from his teammate and closest friend, Khaled. For example, when Khaled urges him to join the protest march in response to the brutal killing of a twelve-year during a military shoot-out on a funeral procession. (p.178), Bilal refuses and instead, he accompanies Ashrafi to the government hospital to see the child psychiatrist Dr. Baig.

As the setting shifts to the 'only psychiatric hospital in the entire valley' overrun with patients with a handful of overworked doctors, the play reminds the audience that while the valley undoubtedly bears witness to the physical violence in its every nook and cranny, the often-uncounted toll of psychological trauma has also been monumental: 'Forty-five thousand one hundred and seventy-eight...forty-five thousand... the sun total of the bravery and passions of our occupier and our revolutionaries...their report card on our register at the entrance. That many people walked in through that gate just this year' (186) In the play, Ashrafi epitomises the lingering legacies of trauma on the child's psyche after the experience of violent death of a parent. Deriving from Freud's use of the term 'latency' in *Moses and Monotheism*, through which he describes trauma as 'the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return', Chris Caruth points out how 'trauma is not a simple experience of events but that events, insofar as they are traumatic, assume their force precisely in their temporal delay.' (Caruth 1995: 7-9) As Dr. Baig tries to treat Ashrafi's trauma, he adopts imaginative pretend-play to re-enact of the event of trauma. Through their pretend play-in-play bus-ride game in the Dr. Baig's office, Ashrafi is afforded the distance, both in time and space, to confront her unspeakable loss and grief. As Ashrafi pretends that she is in fact the driver, and not a passenger of that fated bus to Mirpur, Dr. Baig attempts to remind her of the make-believe nature of the exercise – 'We are pretending that you are in the bus. Right. So, this is happening for real, (gesturing towards his room, desks etc.) and that I not happening now (pointing at her make-believe bus.) Right?' (181). However, Ashrafi attests to the continued presence and conflation of temporalities – past and present – in her suffering by pointing out that 'For you, because Doctor Saheb, you are not in the bus. I am in the bus. This is happening for real. Come, come into the bus. I really have to go early today....' (181). It is this 'inescapability of [the] belated impact of trauma' which makes it a 'narrative of belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life.' (Caruth 1996: 7) So, Ashrafi's trauma does not simply constitute of the experience of her father's violent death in her presence. Rather it oscillates between 'the *crisis of death* and the *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.' (7)

Just as the occupied football stadium represents the shrinking space for games and sports for the youth, and the football becomes a trope of crushed aspirations, Ashrafi's dolls assume the character of the two Djinnns from the Hamza narrative, Rafis and Hafiz, and later Dr. Baig and she also pretend play becoming Rafis and Hafiz themselves. When Dr. Baig urges Ashrafi



to tell more of her story, to help her reconcile with the trauma, she asks: “How can I tell you more of your story, Rafis ... your story, you make as your *dastaan* moves along.” (208) When Dr. Baig enquires, “My story or the Djinn’s story?,” Ashrafi replies with another question that further imbricates her narrative of trauma with that of the *dastaan*, “Your story of the Djinn or the Djinn’s story of you ... who is telling whose story?” (208)

The use of the *dastaan* tropes to capture the war and violence in the valley becomes most vivid in the play when Dr. Baig’s dead son, who had ‘crossed over’ to become a *mujahid*⁷, appears as the Djinn and the father and the son spur over the doctor’s imminent participation in talks with the Indian state. Junaid, who had taken the name Pareen – the star of the East, appears as the Djinn and remonstrates his father: “Don’t speak to the Indians, Abbu...humiliate them, insult them, blow them up on their faces.” (213) To this Dr. Baig pitilessly replies reminding the Djinn of Junaid/Pareen of the pointless violence and the horrendously torturous death that Junaid had to experience. When Dr. Baig taunts that the boys are only fighting out of anger at themselves, the Djinn says: “No Abbu. No. They are fighting for their Djinn. For hundreds of thousands of Djinn, who are still around ... It’s not a war of right and wrong. For cars and jobs. Of books and blankets. It’s a war of the living and the dead. Between those who are fighting for tomorrow and those who are laying down their lives for eternity. These boys, Abbu, will keep coming back, again and again.” (211)

Here the Djinn becomes a trope of resistance that is eternal and indestructible, a living being that is larger than the individual mujahideen and their violent deaths. As the Djinn of Pareen states: “You are not speaking to the dead Abbu ... you are speaking to the living ... you are the one who is dead. You are speaking to your own desire, Abbu ... you are speaking to your Djinn ... Pure passion, made from smokeless fire, Allah made the Djinn first, Abbu ... you are talking to the first creation of the Quran.” (213) To this Baig objects as that this is not how the Quran talks about the Djinn and that Djinn have no souls, but the Djinn of Pareen counters:

“How can you want everything so neatly Abbu ... in this madness, in this chaos, in this churning ocean of violence, not only have our lives got mixed ... so have our deaths. Our stories, our gods and demons and angels ... have all collided in this infinite churning of passion. *Don’t expect reason from a world gone wrong*, Abbu ... don’t wish the universe into an understandable falsehood ... this is real, Abbu... and reality cannot be that simple.” (213; italics added)

The Djinn continues to appear in pivotal moments of the play, especially during the most unbearable depiction of horror and suffering. In a scene towards the end, Bilal and Ashrafi visit the morgue with the morbid mission of finding his friend Khaled’s corpse so that he could retrieve the pair of Mushtaq’s shoes that they were supposed to share for the try-out the following day. To his utter horror, Bilal finds that not was his young friend killed, his feet were also cut off in an act of extreme torture. This discovery finally breaks Bilal’s resolve to stay away from the resistance, and he too throws stones at the armed forces, and is eventually caught, incarcerated, and tortured, extinguishing all hope of escape for him and his sister. Bilal’s traumatic experience which marks a pivotal moment of his transformation from an aspirational and promising sportsman seeking an escape from the volatile valley, ironically

⁷ As it is explained in the text: Mujahid refers to “one engaged in jihad in its contemporary political sense. Etymologically, it means one who fights for spiritual Islam. Plural: mujahideen.” (246)

comes through sports while simultaneously wresting all hope and respite that were previously associated with it. At the moment of that gruesome discovery when Bilal is overwhelmed with grief and shock, the Djinn appears in front of Ashrafi. This time he addresses Ashrafi as royalty and refers to Bilal as Hamza himself: “Your highness...(smiles). Your Bhajjaan... our general.” (219) As he foretells Bilal’s impending death, Ashrafi calls the Djinn by the name Hafiz and protests, “Let someone else be Hamza... Let someone else...not my Bhajjaan.” (219) As the Djinn explains to Ashrafi and prepares her for the inevitable, the scene ends with the Djinn himself picking up a stone ready to throw at the forces, just like Bilal would be compelled to do as a symbolic act of resistance.

The tropes of the *dastaan* are used in the play to capture the unspeakable violence that the valley of Kashmir has been plunged in, and in that world gone wrong, it is impossible to expect reason. The fantastic and the non-mimetic are invoked to express what may be understood as a variation of what Tolkien refers to as *dyscatastrophe* in his pioneering work on fairy stories (which have been understood as the literature of the fantastic in a broader sense, not just restricted to fairy tales). The *dyscatastrophe* of extreme ‘sorrow and failure’ (Tolkien 1964: 47) can only be expressed and voiced by the Djinn -- fantastical beings made of “fire, dust, and smoke.” (Majumdar 234). On the other hand, the concept of *encatastrophe* Tolkien explains as a “sudden joyous turn” that gives “a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” (47-8) Although it doesn’t come at the end of the narrative as a ‘joyous turn,’ the interpellation of the fantastic through the *dastaan* also functions as a means to mitigate trauma while the act of telling stories provides solace and palliation. This is most evident in the last meeting between Ashrafi and Bilal in the prison, where Bilal lies tortured and broken. Still, on looking at Ashrafi, he musters the strength to assume the tone of a *dastaango* and cries, “Shefu,, Welcome to your Bhajjaan’s cave...hahahahaha!!!” (232)

In the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute suggests the four stages in fantasy narrative, that Farah Mendlesohn calls “the quadripartite template or grammar” (Mendlesohn 2008: xv) as being wrongness, thinning, recognition, and healing. (Clute 1996: 338-39) At the very end of the play, while Ashrafi and Bilal both recognise that they are imminent faced with final separation, they turn to the *dastaan* for consolation and healing. Ashrafi tells Bilal that her Djinn Hafiz has informed her that Bilal would soon turn into the moon, the moon of Eid. (233) When Bilal reminisces that their “Abba told [them] beautiful stories, didn’t he?” Ashrafi corrects him: “Our Abbu told us the truth...the truth of in-between,” (235) and also prepares Bilal to face death: “Don’t be afraid, Bhajjaan...you won’t die, you will just change. From man to moon.” (235) Struck by Ashrafi’s wise and mature words, Bilal says that she sounds like she is suddenly older than him. Ashrafi says: “I am, Bhajjaan ... I am very old. I am as old as this land itself. If they get the land, I will become the moon, if they get the moon, I will become the sun ... they will never get me, Bhajjaan ... they will never get us. We will all become Djinn ... Djinn ... at the Eidgah.” (235) As Ashrafi and Bilal reconcile to the final rupture, they make sense of the reality through the *dastaan* metaphorically and the ubiquitous shape-shifting trope of the Djinn turns into a symbol of undying and subversive defiance – a form of survivance.

The Djinn of Eidgah therefore uses the fantastic in at least two ways. First, it is used to capture the horror and the *dyscatastrophe* that the valley is plunged into resulting from a complete disintegration of the social and moral framework; secondly, it is used as a vulnerable or healing trope to counter the psychological impact of trauma and its lasting legacies. What is remarkable



about the text, and what sets it apart from other similar narratives, is the rejection of a purely mimetic mode to represent the graphic montage of unspeakable horror and violence. It brings into sharp focus the function of the magical and the fantastic in the representation of trauma and violence as well as its healing potential. While there are scenes of graphic violence in the text, merely realistic portrayal would be inadequate to represent the brutal everyday reality. Similarly, for children and youth who totter on the brink of death and live through unspeakable horrors, and where acts objects that signify childhood, for example the doll and football, become poignant metaphors of the trauma, the fantastic allows a path to healing, survivance, and defiance.

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