

Book Review

Uncovering the Fear of Loss and Longing for Freedom in Kashmir

The Lion of Kashmir, Siddhartha Gigoo's third and latest novel, grapples with unanswerable questions about the Valley.

PRADEEPIKA SARASWAT
The Wire

Zooni's missing father is an officer with Kashmir's notorious Special Forces, largely composed of surrendered Kashmiri militants, created to fight insurgency in the state. We have read the accounts of the lives of rebels and freedom fighters, of 'mujahids' and 'terrorists'. We have also heard from the 'protectors' of the land and its people. But not much from those who not only renege on their promise to their people, that they will stand for them, but also on their own daring dream of freedom. We have not known what makes them cross the line and stand neither here nor there.

What happens to those who are neither here nor there? When the ground stands divided by a single frozen line, where do who are denied a sense of belonging on either side go? Do they ever get justice? Abdul Aziz, commandant of the Special Forces, once asks his daughter, the protagonist of The Lion of Kashmir, "Someday you must tell me everything about justice. What meaning does it hold for people who are bereft of all meaning? What value does it hold in a place that has no value left? How must we keep it alive? How do we see its light?"

The Lion of Kashmir, Siddhartha Gigoo's third and latest novel, grapples with these unanswerable questions. Searching for truth, hope and a peaceful home, it takes the reader through a turbulent journey to see what Kashmir has been like for the last three decades.

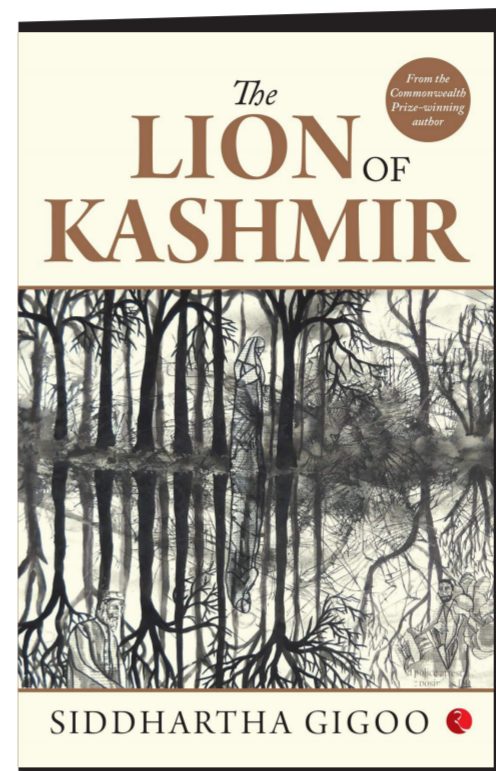
The events of the story occur on a single night. Gigoo's unreliable narrator, top policeman's daughter Zooni – a young Kashmiri girl sent away to study in London, who becomes a law student and a human rights activist standing up for the rights of migrant students in Europe – has to return to Kashmir for her missing father. The book is about her journey to understand her relationship with her father and her relationship with Kashmir.

While in London, Zooni has been constantly struggling to support the rights of the people she left behind in Kashmir. She cannot keep mum just because her father sides with the state – a state seen as an oppressor and occupier by the people. But she cannot go against her own father, either. She knows, like many other Kashmiris, that she is neither here nor there.

On her return, she finds herself alone in a city under siege. Gigoo takes the reader into her mind, her fears and fantasies laid out like a three-dimensional film. The phantasmagoria of his narration makes his characters delusional and unreliable, and gives him the required freedom to say the unsayable.

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Through the story of two policemen (and their two daughters), Gigoo's work allows the reader a close look into human strengths and weaknesses,



their courage, fears and greed leading them to a place so deep and dark that they cease to be their ordinary selves. The darkness that comes after the hope turns into despair, and despair into resignation. That darkness is highlighted when they say, "We have seen everything, even things that are yet to happen, for they will happen again and again in the same fashion as they have happened for years. What else is there to see? What else can happen that has not already happened?"

The book is as much about memories and dreams as it is about reality and truth. Zooni's struggle to hold on to the truth, as she emerges and submerges in the tide of dreams and reality, sucks the reader into the whirlwind that is everyday life in Kashmir. You come face to face with their fear of loss and longing for freedom.

In the crows and pigeons, the cow and her calf, wild dogs and lady fox, Gigoo chooses the most ordinary characters to tell the most ordinary stories. Stories that are so ordinary that they become extraordinary. The author wants you to be aware of your dreams, for these dreams are the reality being lived in the dimension you condemn to be un-

real. The night Zooni spends with Flatnose is one of those nights when it becomes difficult to tell dreams from reality.

The narrative delves deep into Kashmir's psyche and says what hasn't been said so clearly before: "...but, by that time, they had lost the ability to differentiate between happiness and sadness. Some clung to illusions and pretended to be brave. They expressed their happiness at terrible things and grieved when good things took place. They felt pleased with other people's misfortunes."

The magical realism of Gigoo's narrative is exasperating but also comforting. For instance, you see Zooni losing sight of her father again and again. You worry for her. Despite the fact that she has not had her parents around like other young girls her age, she has had a protected life. She has not known this kind of uncertainty; her father is her protection.

You hear her admit that in her dreams, she is the weakest of all. And just when you know that she is the weakest, you are told that she was not dreaming her own dream. This is not the kind of writing where mysteries are hidden behind simple words. It's the opposite. There are lucid, fundamental human verities behind all that seems mysterious.

"Will you always keep going away like this? Does it not bother you to see me suffer and pine for you eternally?"

"I will always keep coming back to you."

"Will we still be happy?"

"We will still be happy despite the comings and goings."

A reader may find the imagery complicated, but the beauty of this prose lies not just in the intent of the writer but also in the intricacy of his craft. Dealing with a subject as convoluted as Kashmir, where nothing is allowed to exist between two opposite discourses competing to become the truth, requires a fresh script and imagery. This imagery makes the writer stand next to Murakami and Marquez.

The Lion of Kashmir is a daring title. Those who follow Kashmir know what the phrase means for Kashmiris. The book silently asks the difficult questions: Who is the Lion of Kashmir? What is expected of him?

This is a story of loss, and a story of hope. The loss doesn't remain a loss if there is hope. When everything seems to come to an end, you are told, "It will take you to a place where you get to meet everyone you have ever loved."

Despite everything dark and dismal, Gigoo leaves us with a warm dash of hope. "We are back to square one. But at least, we are not dead."

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Reward Or Punishment: Finding The Best Match For Your Child's Personality

RACHAEL SHARMAN

ONE of the more frustrating assumptions in the mix of modern parenting advice is the "tabula rasa" idea that all kids are born as identical clean slates.

I suspect the increase in this attitude is partly due to the loss of large families. With the total fertility rate in Australia down to 1.88 children per woman, the acceptance that some people are lucky enough to get a "beginner's baby", compared with one who takes them straight to advanced level, has very much diminished.

Somewhere along the line we have lost the appreciation of intrinsic personality differences, which has led to a frustratingly common belief that a one-size-fits-all approach to shaping behaviour and discipline will always work.

Someone frequently will preach intervention X, which you try, and it doesn't work. What's the typical response? "Oh you mustn't have done it properly" rather than "oh, your kid mustn't share the same motivations as my kid, let's figure out what drives them and work with that".

One size doesn't fit all

Yet research tells us that babies differ wildly in their natural temperaments, as early as in the womb.

Here's a pair of babies I prepared earlier, in the same womb, at the same time. What does this picture below tell you about their temperament and subsequent personality as they've aged?

If you guessed the boy on the right is now an extroverted, adventurous, sociable young man – you guessed right. And if you guessed the girl on the left is a highly cautious introvert (despite 21 years of relentless CBT from her mother) – spot on.

So how could these two children possibly be expected to respond favourably to the same discipline techniques? Can you imagine Anxious Baby Girl knowingly breaking a rule; can you imagine Novelty-Seeking Boy being able to stick to one?

This is where modern-day parenting advice regarding "appropriate" disciplinary techniques typically falls apart. The assumption is that all children are alike, but what happens if you don't have angel-baby who is interested in pleasing others or responds positively to praise?



In debating the pros and cons of all the available disciplinary approaches out there, don't fall into the trap of believing that just because an intervention worked for your child, it will automatically work for everyone else's.

What if your child gets excited by pushing boundaries and breaking rules, is aggressive and angry, morose and difficult, even downright anti-social? All of these are possible personality styles – so how can you best manage problematic behaviour in the context of such different temperaments?

Tailoring the response to each child

The answer lies in understanding your child and what makes them tick.

An easy mistake to make is trying to apply a

punishment (a response designed to reduce or extinguish a behaviour) but in doing so, inadvertently supplying a reward (which reinforces and increases the behaviour).

If your child loves attention for example, any form of attention (including yelling or a smack) may well act as reward. For example, my attention-seeking adult boy now invests a substantial amount of energy winding up his grandmother to earn himself a "smack" – which he finds hysterically funny.

Time-out, on the other hand, especially if it re-

moved his audience, was a very effective punishment for him.

Conversely, imagine what happened when I put my scaredy-cat daughter in time-out. She loved it. Her quiet nature craves alone time, so what was intended as a form of punishment in her case would act as a reward.

In fact, allowing someone with a naturally anxious disposition to "withdraw" or "avoid" (for example, not going to a party, getting extensions on a deadline) may actually reinforce or enable poor coping strategies. It's a tricky balance.

Children differ cognitively, too. A child with a poor attention span and limited working memory will need an immediate reward or punishment rather than delayed for it to work.

This is where a short sharp smack can become a very seductive technique for some parents; in contrast to other children who have highly developed verbal skills and memory, where parents can wax lyrical to negotiate future expected behaviours.

Children with serious behaviour problems

When we delve into the really complicated cases, University of Sydney professor Mark Dadds has been working with a fascinating group of an estimated 0.5% of children who, despite loving parents and a good upbringing, don't respond to disciplinary approaches at all.

While these children are few and far between, they highlight an unpalatable possibility – that no standard disciplinary technique will work for these difficult little characters. These children and their parents require highly specialised neuropsychological training to edge them towards more effective approaches.

In debating the pros and cons of all the available disciplinary approaches out there, don't fall into the trap of believing that just because an intervention worked for your child, it will automatically work for everyone else's.

In fact, the same technique applied to a different child might even exacerbate the problem. When it comes to effective discipline, what works well or even what works at all will depend on the child.

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