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THE NOVEL AS WAR –FICTION IN JAYANTI M DALAL’S *BLEEDING HEIGHTS OF KARGIL*

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A war novel is a novel in which the primary action takes place in a field of armed combat or in a domestic setting or home front where the characters are preoccupied with the preparations for or recovery from war. It is sometimes referred to as militant fiction. The war novel came of age during the 19th century works such as Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*, featuring the *battle of Waterloo*, Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, about the *Napoleonic wars* in Russia, and Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* about the American Civil War novel as it has come down to us today. All these works feature realistic depictions of major battles, visceral scenes of insights into the nature of heroism, cowardice and morality in war.

Jayanti M Dalal is a Gujarati writer who has to his credit 25 published books as on today. The novel *‘Bleeding Heights of Kargil’*, translated from Gujarati into English, touches upon the issue of cross-border terrorism in the name of religion. Jayanti M Dalal impeccably describes how the terrorist outfits recruit young men and systematically become the victims of phoney religious propaganda and allurements like wine, women and wealth.

His characteristic of writing novels on problems affecting the masses today creates an interesting account of how a

young Hindu man is converted to Islam and ultimately cast as a hard core terrorist. The author presents a vivid description of the terrain of Indo-Pak border and the terrorist camps operative in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). The detailed account of Kargil war brings alive the bloody scenes of war. It all started with the kidnapping of Viplav who was first abducted and later released and inducted into terrorists’ gang. A vagabond, Viplav had an unsuccessful education as a student who defied his parent’s warnings. In fact, they wanted him to be a good citizen. He is now in the hands of terrorists who are taking him for training in Pakistan. He crossed the border along with others to enter Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Viplav now becomes Wasim Ali Khan who was engaged in operations against India.

“Mohammed Kasam spotted him in Mumbai. He has got all the qualities of being a great militant. You know very well how to keep him in bait, don’t you? Wine, Women and Cast! You have to see to it that the drug used for brain wing gets administered in his body at least once a month. I had secretly administered the first dose with his tea the day we crossed the border”

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(Bleeding Heights of Kargil, 101)

The misguiding of Kashmiri youth spread so much of bitterness among people of both the countries. They now become arch rivals in every field. The Kashmiri terrorists are not capable of leading the war on a greater scale, so they imported foreign help in the form of manpower, arms and ammunition and infiltrated the youth into Kashmir. The Afghan militants spread terror in their attempt to demoralize India. The Kashmiris thought the Afghan militants would help them to liberate Kashmir and protect them from the military atrocities. In the words of Jayanti M Dalal;

These foreign soldiers have aggravated the situation in Kashmir by looting innocent citizens and molesting Kashmir girls. (BHK, 181)

Wasim was very much shaken to hear Sita's sad story. Soon, his sorrow was replaced by anger and feelings of revenge for those who tortured the innocents. A sudden transformation was found in Wasim. The tyrant had become the messiah. Still, the police was searching for the most wanted terrorist-Wasim Ali Khan. In his attempts to find out the Afghan militants who were responsible for Sita's molestation, he had his own plans to find out her father from the terrorists den. He underwent introspection after Sita had entered on the scene. A militant Wasim now turned into a patriotic Indian. It was the transformation that really

marked a momentous step in the direction of nationalistic feelings which ran high in his mind. He made up his mind to get up and start working on his plans. An endless debate continued between Sita and Wasim Ali Khan.

"Sita, I am very happy with you have come as a messenger of love and peace in any life. I owe you a lot you will be pleased to know that into these couple of weeks, I have succeeded in killing at least ten hardcore terrorists who were going to cause a great destruction in this region". (BHK, 193)

Sita replied as she wiped her tears: "Viplav, you have done a great job. Terrorists deserve nothing better than this. They are responsible for ruining thousands of human lives in this valley. Misery and plight have almost become a part of daily routine for the Kashmiris. You have actually done a virtuous act by killing them." (BHK, 194)

Meanwhile, the war has broken out on the Kargil front. Wasim told Sita to be extremely careful. He received the orders to infiltrate into the Tiger Hills and fight as a representative of the Mujahideens. He would have to fight on the Tiger Hills, first as wasim Ali Khan. He would wait for the opportunity to get into the camp of Pakistani terrorists. There was already a heavy bombarding on the hills of the dress and Batalik Sectors. The war was taking a more serious turn. Viplav's realization is found in the following description.

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“I think the right time has come when I need to undo my wrong actions. My motherland is calling me. Iqbal will come from Delhi anytime to take me to Kargil”. (BHK, 196)

Viplav gave all the necessary instructions to Sita while leaving for the war. These was an exchange of unending dialogue between viplav and Sita about the impending dangers of Kargil war. Sita wished him success.

‘Be Victorious, Teach the enemies such a great lesson that they will not turn back and look at our motherland. (BHK, 198)

The evening was freezing with cold, harsh gusts of wind and temperatures plunging to about -20 degrees Celsius. Captain parvat sinh, colonel shetty, Major Kripashankar and other officers were discussing the upcoming plans & strategies of attacking the Pakistani insurgents. The Kashmir valley shook with tremors caused by intermittent explosions and exchange of fire assaults. Ammunitions, mortars and bombshells were hurled indiscriminately from both the sides by the military soldiers and militants. The battle has almost taken a catastrophic turn. Coloney shetty explained everybody about the strategy with which the Indian army had been operating.

“Our jawans are doing extremely well. They have been successful in forcing the insurgents to retaliate. What worries me the most is their

hide outs and the ambush on the peaks of mountains from where the militants launch surprise attacks. We need to work upon a strategy to evict the intruders and get the posts evacuated” (BHK, 199)

The discussion on war strategies went on with almost everybody giving their suggestions. Coloney Shetty instructed Subedar Rajesh Bhandari.

“Subedar Bhandari, this operation Vijay is going to cost us a great member of lives of our jawans. In spite of multiple reports to the Indian govt, we have been ordered not to cross the line of control”. (BHK, 201)

Subedar Rajesh Bhandari puts forth his ideas on war strategy.

“Sir, that’s why it’s difficult to destroy the enemies even after having cordoned them from all sides. We have planned it so well that fighting at the higher attitudes in that sector will be fully backed by the logistical support. In order to capture the high peaks, We will have to fight for days together with our full might and power. In order to carry out the process smoothly, roads have been dug out on the mountains for facilitation, the transport of arms and ammunitions, food supplies and generators bunkers have also been dug out under the ridges on some of the peaks. The infiltrators must not have

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imagined that our soldiers are well-equipped and trained to fight at such high attitudes. (BHK, 201)

The war-strategies led to the discussion on bilateral relations in which the Indian Prime Minister has flagged off the bus services from Delhi to Lahore in order to maintain friendly relations with Pakistan, on the other hand, the Pakistan prime Minister is adopting wrong methods and principles to be implemented for the war. The Lahore summit was purposefully boycotted. The army officers pointed out the lacunae what had happened in 1965 & 1971 wars with Pakistan.

“Many times, I feel that we should have taken the possession of Azad Kashmir in the 1965 battle, when Pakistan was badly defeated by India. Again in 1971, 93,000 Pakistani soldiers were arrested by us. Still, we did not take Azad Kashmir back and released the war prisoners without any conditions. I think it was a wrong decision taken by our Government. In 1947, when Pakistan attacked Srinagar, we could have taught a strict lesson to Pakistan. The erstwhile Prime Minister Pandit Javaharlal Nehru refrained the Indian army from taking action against the Pakistani insurgents. I think it was an attempt to create his image as that of the ‘ambassador of peace’ in the international Scenario. Having ignored the recommendations of his

cabinet and people’s opinion, he approached the UNO. What was the outcome? Pakistan occupied half of the Kashmir valley and developed hostile relations with India (BHK, 202).

Apprehensions of Nuclear bomb attack figured in their discussions on war strategy. A nuclear war will make India restore itself where as Pakistan will disappear from the world map. Pakistan has been funding agencies like ISI who wants to destroy India. The peace talks failed resulting only into more bankloots, infiltration, fake currency, killing of innocent civilians, molestations of women and weakening of economy. Pakistan has violated the international war rules. It is aiding and abetting terror activities in the Kashmir valley by luring the youth, Pakistan supports the Afghan Mujahideens and other hired professional militants. The nightmare continued when the Indian soldiers were captured and brutally treated-their organs were amputated and they were left to die in the most abominable and merciless manner. The Kashmir is will never be able to live peacefully as long as the Indians, known for their tolerance and forbearance, strongly attacked their actions and Major Krispashankar said to Colonel Shetty:

“I have heard that the insurgents sent by Pakistan are not ordinary people. They are well-trained war-guerillas. India slept quietly while they lent itself to pre emptive

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seizure of unoccupied military positions for occupying the region of 150 kilometres on the Kargil sector, Pakistan had started its preparations since last January. First, they conducted an aerial survey of the region with the help of helicopters equipped with a commercial video camera installed in its fuselage. A detailed video of the region was first prepared, followed by preparing a topographical map of the region. Thereafter, Pakistan trained foreign militants to fight in the valleys on the mountains of the Gilgit, Baltistan and the Northern provinces” (BHK, 205).

The discussion further took them to the involvement of Osama Bin Laden and his people in his operation. Laden announced that Kashmir was his next target after USA. They sensed something dangerous from Osama Bin Laden who has involved in blowing up the American Embassy in Africa, could have interfered in the Kashmir issue. Pakistan continued to conduct peace talks and end enmity with India seems to be a far-fetched image. Pakistan wants India to be divided into many parts. It has not been a rosy picture for the people of either of the two nations. Pakistan is jealous of India standing on top of the world map.

The echoes of a united India in times of adversity are found in Kripashankar’s narration:

“The politicians will never improve. They talk big things and make false promises till they get our votes. After their needs are fulfilled, they avoid us. At least there is one good thing that has happened –the whole country has supported the Indian government during the war time, no matter which ever political party formed the government”. (BHK, 208)

Many Hindu Pandits have left their houses and the valley because of the atrocities inflicted by some hardcore terrorists. They are on the hit list of the terrorists. The Govt. should concentrate on the issue of protecting the Hindu Pandits, their wealth and their property because they are now a minority community amidst the Muslim majority. The Chief Minister becomes a trouble shooter in the matter of protecting the Hindus. He is working more towards putting their lives into danger. Corrupt officers are adding fuel to the fire. Gradually, the control of Kargil heights was taken over by the terrorists who intended to strengthen their position by capturing the unattended Indian posts on higher altitudes. Colonel Shetty expressed his views angrily about the situation in Kashmir.

“On 21st February, when Indian Prime Minister, in Lahore was signing documents of finalizing the agreement to start the bus services, a few Mujahideens attacked a marriage procession in the Baljarala of Rajori distict and killed fourteen

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people including women and children. (BHK, 214)

When Pakistan virtually launched a military operation, it was Subedar Rajesh Bhandari who received the message and passed it on to Colonel Shetty.

“Sir, a great battle has broken out in the Drass sector, Tololing peaks and Mushko valley. Our soldiers are fighting out there with the ‘do or die’ spirit. The Pakistan militants are bombarding the Batalik and Kargil regions. Our bombardiers are retaliating with the force of their Bofors guns. Our soldiers have proceeded towards capturing the highest of Tololing peaks and other hills. (BHK, 217)

Jayanti M Dalal presented the impediments of war in its glowing scenario of geographical conditions.

“Our territories are burning; our soldiers have successfully conquered the most difficult mountains; Kargil is about 9897 feet above the Sea-level; Drass is 10,594; Tololing at 14,000 and Tiger Hills at the height of 16,040 feet; Only the braves can fight a war at such a high altitude; in winter, the temperature goes down there below -20 to -30 degrees Celsius; because of the snow glare, there are problems related to vision and breathing; sometimes the soldiers have to be contented with a meager

of meal of gram and jiggery; it is the duty of every Indian to donate blood and to come forward and offer financial support to the soldiers who are giving a tough fight to the enemies at the battlefield”. (BHK, 235)

The novelist presents the image of Kargil in its true picture.

“Kargil is a small but a beautiful city in the Ladakh region. It is famous for its scenic natural beauty spread over miles. Its green orchards of mulberry and apicot trees, deep ravines and tall mountain ranges are breath taking. In 1979, the Ladakh district was divided into two regions to form the independent district of Kargil. Today, it is a district comprising of two taluks-Kargil and Jhanskar. It comprises of seven areas-Drass, Kargil, Tamisued, Shergol, Shankar, Miktan and Sanku. All these villages have settled on the banks of rivers. In summer, the farmers harvest the crop of wheat and barley. In winter, it starts snowing in the months of October or November. For six to eight months, the National Highway connecting Leh-Srinagar is closed down. As a result, Ladakh and Kashmir get disconnected from the other parts of the country. Taking advantage of this situation, Pakistan intruded into Kargil, Drass and Batalik sectors.

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There is acute food crisis, starvation and hunger because of the poverty in this region. Pakistan had conspired to acquire this region by luring people with giving them financial aid. The whole region of Ladakh is affected by war-like Situation because of pakistan's insurgency. The Pakistani bombing has badly affected the tall buildings and standing crops in the Kargil city. As a result, Kargil city seems to be a haunted place". (BHK, 236-237)

The partition of the country into two independent nations namely India and Pakistan witnessed two new world records. The Indian army displayed its worth by setting two new world records: the first world record was established by Major General Thimaiya for the first time use of battle cars in the hilly regions of the Zozila peaks at a height of 11,578 feet, on 1st November 1948. The second record was established on 24th May, 1948 by Commander Major Singh. Who had flown the airplane at the height of 20,000 feet without oxygen. The Indian jawans have displayed valor, strength and adventurous spirit since the time of independence. Pakistan still continues the exercise of bringing instability into India. Around 25,000 people have lost their lives including 15,000 army officers, 130 political leaders and 17 prominent leaders of Kashmir in the war. Moreover, more than two lakh Hindu pundits have been tortured and forced to leave the valley and

migrate to other places of safety. Apart from various militant organizations, Jamaat-E-Islami and Muslim organizations United Jihad council have patronized more than fifteen terrorist outfits like Hizbul Mujahideens, Al-Jehaad, Harketul Mujahideens, Hizbul Mominin, Lashkar-E-Toiba, Al-Badr Mujahideens, Al-Badr force and others.

The great battle was being fought on Tololing and Tiger Hills by the soldiers. The war was still on and there was no chance for bilateral dialogue. The Kashmir issue cannot be solved at the point of gun-battle. The Shimla Accord and the Lahore Declaration are buried now. War is the only solution if there are no peaceful solutions. The Kargil war was at its peak stage. Every moment was nerve-wrecking. The Indian army was steadily climbing up the hills surrounded by thunderous noises of fire cannons and explosives. The Pakistani insurgents continued to attack the Indian soldiers with grenades and mortars but the Indian soldiers refused to retreat or withdraw from the spot.

The insurgents did not give up although the IAF (Indian Air Force) soldiers continued to conduct aerial attacks and were damaging the bunkers of the insurgents.

"The war was taking a terrible turn. The insurgents slowed down after they faced more violent attacks some of the aides were injured or dead. It was becoming difficult for them to fight against the Indian

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soldiers who were fighting more ferociously than before. The enemies realized that the tables were getting over them and they were losing a large number of their fellow beings. They started retreating”. (BHK, 261)

Lieutenant Colonel Rabindranath remarked joyfully:

“Well done, my brave jawans! They are going..... we are successful in driving them away. We put on lives at risk but we achieved it” (261).

The Indian soldiers who were now more elated with the victory on hand, drove away the insurgents away from the bunkers on the point 5140. The Indian army was victorious but the victory did not come easily. It came with a great loss with the martyrdom of a great member of soldiers. India lost its great sons like Major Gupta and Mansinh. Still, the spirit of Indian soldiers is remarkably high. They are fighting to capture the Tololing Hills. Finally, the Indian army seized Tololing Hills much to the celebrations of nation. Tololing Hills were now in the possession of the Indian army but Mansinh had become a shahid in the war.

Viplav alias Wasim Ali Khan vowed to host the Indian flag on the Tiger Hills.

“I will host the tri-coloured flag on the Tiger Hills and I do not mind if I have to pay the price of my life for that I have expressed my last desires in my letter to the intelligent Bureau. Once more, if I get a chance, I will not lose the opportunity of attacking the enemies Pakistan and ISI agents, so that they never turn around and cast their sinful glance at Kashmir. I will detonate myself upon the bloody terrorists in such a way that they will feel they have been attacked by a living human bomb” (BHK, 269).

For Indian army, it was the capturing of Tiger Hills that mattered most. All of a sudden, the roaring noises of airplanes were heard. Viplav alias Wasim Ali Khan was disturbed in his trance. There were no signs of a great battle on the Tiger Hills. It was not easy for the Indian army to fight the battle at such great heights.

All the Indians are with the Indian army, prayers were conducted at temples, mosques, gurudwaras and other religious places to protect the lives of our soldiers, gradually, the Indian army advanced towards the higher peaks of the Tiger Hills. The night was dark and terribly cold. It was raining bullets from the top of the mountains. The jawans climbing the hills were struggling to combat the cold as well as the mountains, lifting the burden of their twenty kills of bag on their shoulders. Their spirits were unbroken. They had cornored

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Tiger Hills from three strong fort like bunkers constructed with iron girdles and iron corrugated sheets. The insurgents, sitting on the mountains, shot incessant bullets and mortars on the advancing Indian jawans so that they would be stopped. The Indian soldiers were facing the bullets but were moving ahead.

The bloody war continued. Intense firing continued on both the sides. The Pakistani soldiers were surrounded by the Indian soldiers from all the sides. Many of them wearing the red and the green bands gradually fell prey to the bullets. Some of them retreated with in no time. Wasim, who had rushed to the bunker, told the terrorists.

“The bloody battle is on the Pakistani soldiers are giving a tooth and a nail reply to the Indian army”. (BHK, 274)

The Tiger Hills witnessed a corpse of dead bodies. Some of the Indian soldiers were climbing down the hills with a few Pakistani soldiers handcuffed as captives. Wasim’s whispering talk with Brigadier Shrikant Patel proved immensely valuable. The whistle made the difference and Wasim and two Indian soldiers opened fire with their AK-47 rifles on all the eight hardcore terrorists and Pakistani soldiers. They were all dead on the spot. All the Indian soldiers gathered around Viplav to offer their gratitude. Brigadier Shrikant Patel cheerfully said,

“Viplav, we respect your patriotic feelings. Go to the peak of the Tiger Hills and hoist the Tri-coloured flag with your own hands”. (BHK, 275)

As Viplav was about to fix the flag in a hole, he saw the face of Salim, who was a former accomplice. He was shaken for a while. Salim’s rifle hit Viplav. When he saw the tri-coloured flag in Wasim’s hand who was steadily moving ahead to hoist it, he took the aim and shot at Wasim. It took hardly a minute for the Indian soldiers to finish Salim. The Marine commando Sudhendu rushed to the peak and took the flag from Viplav’s right hand and fixed it on its stand. Viplav’s dying face was filled with joy. “Jai Hind! Bharat Mata Ki Jay!” He collapsed murmuring these words. Viplav had attained martyrdom after having filled his heart with the color of the sky.

In conclusion, I firmly hold that Jayanti M Dalal has joined the select band of novelists on war fiction. *Bleeding Heights of Kargil* is truly a memoir of Kargil war that took place between India and Pakistan a decade ago. The novel reminds of the incidents that India, as a nation, fought the battle at Kargil. It is a monumental contribution to Indo-English literature. Readers are left to grim reminders as long as they read the novel. It invokes a sense of patriotism among the readers. The selfless sacrifices made by the Indian army remain afresh in the minds of patriotic souls. Jayanti M Dalal has done his job like a true litterateur. The novel will

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cherish the memories of hard-fought kargil war.

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