

# Depiction Of Homeland And Belongingness: A Critical Study Of Nitasha Kaul's Residue

Sahil Katoch<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Gowher Ahmad Naik<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.A. English

<sup>2</sup>Department of English School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

## Abstract

Homeland and belongingness is always a matter of debate when it comes to community group that have either suffered exile or either suffered from a situation of war; Kashmir being itself a subject for which a war had breakout between to post-colonized powers, created it a hot spot for stories of prejudices; the people of Kashmir being exposed to wars and political fight remained in misery, but the question yet remain of homeland and belongingness; the people who left Kashmir in fear like surviving Jews in holocaust were they capable to feel the belongingness in their new homeland; rightly this is the question that the research contest to answer; secondary data approach uncovers, that it's not one's ethnicity or social identity that make one an outcast but it is rather their mental makeup that makes a person believe— in short, it is schizophrenic mind of a human that makes one believe that one an outcast in the society; a proper mental nurturing is necessary to feel that one belongs to place or one is at home; there is magnificent of parents mental health in shaping home for the children.

**Keywords:** Belongingness, teenager, mental health, Kashmir, early post-colonial India, parenting, single-parenthood, homeland

## Introduction

The Man- Asian Prize winner Author Nitasha Kaul (6) is a widely traveled writer who has studied culture widely and thoroughly; In her novel depicts the significance of homeland and belongingness in an individual's life through pictures of A Kashmiri boy who has an identity crisis. Leon Ali has his name is Inspired by Tarkovsky, a Russian revolutionist, and his life is quite revolutionary.

He Struggles with the identity of being a Muslim single parent's child; he feels powerless in society, struggles in school, gets bullied in college, indulges in smoking substances, and has bad relationships with women.

Being disturbed by his life, he traveled the world to find his father, Mir Ali. On this mission, he meets Kaye- a beautiful and hilarious Kashmiri Hindu girl who is also a

child of single parents and has a similar identity crisis. Being attracted to each other because of their similarity, both go on a mission to find Mir, flying from the United Kingdom to Germany to find him.

Though in amidst the mission, Keya had to leave for India, resulting in an unpredictable revelation, Mir, the father of Leon Ali had an extramarital affair with Shalu Farida's mother., and Abilash (Shalu Farid's husband) caught him, he went missing after that, and had no mark after that.

After learning about his father and being unable to find him, he returns from his mission with little remorse and finds his reason for misery— his escapist nature, and his need to feel belongingness. To finish his escapist nature and old chapters of life, he goes back to Kashmir with Keya to read a death sermon on a random grave, assuming the random grave to be his father's. In the end, both travel back to

Kashmir heading to the successful conclusion of the novel.

There are various views of critics on the novel, that appreciate Nitasha Kaul for her amazing portrayal of Leon Ali, his character, and his mesmerizing dialogue. Leon and the concept around him of a handsome Kashmir boy, in this struggle of life, being represented in literature, has been a sentiment that's been appreciated by the print media and digital media of Kashmir and the world. "The Kashmir Wallah", a Kashmir newspaper appreciates her for portraying a hero from her state despite her living in London and portraying a Kashmiri Muslim hero, which is rare to see in movies and novels. Her literature on the exile of Kashmiri people at the time of Independence, is a commendable display of Kashmiri society, in fresh post-colonial India; the newspaper writes

Literature of all shades has emerged from the realm of exile. Academic, poet, and author Nitasha Kaul's debut book, *Residue*, makes a significant contribution to the literature on exile by offering a unique perspective on the prejudices, restraints, and myriad problems connected to it. rests in the formation of fully developed characters via the genesis and resolution of crises. The main themes of this book include overcoming preconceptions, learning shocking realities about oneself, and returning to one's roots. A remnant of

hope, desire, and aspiration, as well as the will to overcome one's inner demons, are left behind. (Kaul)

Kindle praises the Man-Asian prize winner for her deep representation of the characters in the novel and the poetic justice she provided to the characters, her, in-depth research on background that wonderfully shaped the characters of the novel.

Kaul seemed to have arrived at a place of profound empathy for each other characters. The work is an absolute joy to read because of her profound and often moving insights into the characters' minds and lives. In many respects, *Residue* is a novel whose story and substance are evident. These elements alone make it an excellent read. (Kaul 1)

The Magazine applauds the author for her representation of society's prejudices of the early post-colonial era; the dispute and divide she represents within communities, and the contrast between two different classes of society.

Many people had drawn parallels with the life of Leon, it is a character that is so universal that its universality does not only pass the barrier of social identity but also of gender Identity his loneliness is very universal— loneliness in non-belongingness that we all must have felt in our life. Amidst a society torn apart by bigotry, hatred, and sectarianism, Nitasha Kaul's debut novel *Residue* introduces us to a diverse cast of characters who refuse to

participate in the muck. For those who share my desire to see a world free of sectarian discrimination and who also enjoy a good story, I heartily suggest Residue (Kaul 1).

“Nitasha Kaul’s novel Residue reminds one of the epigraphs with which Marquez’s work *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, opens. The novel’s opening lines are from a poem by the Portuguese poet Gil Vicente from the 14th century: “The chase for love is arrogant falconry.” All the characters in Residue occupy a lonely world of their hunting for that iota of love that touched them and passed them by in a heartbeat... The novel by Kaul is a breath of fresh air since it takes a non-traditional approach to politics by focusing on the protagonist’s struggles (Kaul 1)

We can read in the lines, the actual purpose of the novel is to bring two communal groups together and to bring harmony to the society; her purpose to restore Kashmir can be seen transparently in the novel, the greater Kashmir newspaper appreciates her efforts in these words. The goal of the book is made clear with this meeting of the two characters. It would mean, in stark political terms, visualizing Kashmir as a place where the histories of the Muslim and Pandit people finally come together in a loving embrace that was torn apart by sad circumstances. Characters like Leon and Keya struggle through their tricky situations to achieve what Salim Sinai, in *Midnight’s Children*, appropriately described as “a new way of being.” Residue should be read by everyone because of how this is accomplished and how well the politics of this endeavor are captured in the book. It is a novel full of opportunities.

Unlike most people, Leon Ali and Keya Raina actively pursue their goals.

We need more people like Leon Ali and Keya Raina in the world, but they don't exist. The political questions that *The Residue* poses and attempts to address will live on in its legacy (Kaul). At the very onset of the novel, she starts with her agenda; Leon her character hates his name, or the fate he was destined to; he is compared to a revolutionist and his revolution begins at the very onset of the story. In the very first line of the novel, he says “what kind of name is Leon anyway”-(Kaul 1) Like Trotsky his life is a roller coaster—an emotional roller-coaster and many are yet to come. The exceptionally low phase of the roller coaster is depicted by his being an underrated student for opting for humanities a stream; the world did not believe that Leon will ever have a good future, and it is a doubt to million minds. Even people today judge the intellect of humanities students,

“What is your plan after the twelfth standard? —it was the opening line of uncle Siraj from last two years”-(Kaul 1) The very quest for identity of Leon begins with the mockery of his choices, his domain of study is always questioned by his relative, asking to make him a competent man; Here, he is challenged in two ways; (1) student with no future and (2) man of his words. As the story advances so does the character of uncle Siraj, we can see him in the lines “He had four daughters and no son that lead him to leave him no opportunity to tell me what to do with life”. (Kaul 5)

Uncle Siraj and Leon have a different relationship, Siraj considers him a son and wants to mold Leon as per his Ideology of perfection, but Leon loves his imperfection and his Boyish attitude towards life. He believes his being a little spoilt kid and stealing fruits from the garden has made Uncle

Siraj hold such a perception, but later in the development of the novel we see this relationship improving but not reaching its ultimate destiny.

When the police visit Leon's apartment, Uncle helps him calm down, and deal with the police with patience., later, he had respect for Siraj, but he does not obey him for the rest of the novel. The relationship between Leon and Siraj also shows his lack of a male role model in his life. He does not have a father, thus he has difficulty adjusting to life as a whole, and even till the end of the novel we do not see his uncontrollable aggression. As the story develops Leon displays his desperate need to be fathered by his Late Father Mir Ali, though he tends to subdue it, but cannot help it come to the surface. His wandering attraction to substances and wrong women displays that he needed to be appropriately guided in life.

In scientific research on children in the united states, it was revealed that being a child of a single parent is more difficult; it causes mental dysfunctions— especially., father's involvement in child development is not Particularly in the contemporary environment of corporate class family, growing involvement may help to improve family relations, due to which a child loses the opportunity to direct benefits from fathers' engagement by receiving both of their parent's attention.

In addition to it, his involvement increases a child's social skills, and exposure to the outer world, and increases their access to emotional and practical support. The degree of parental participation varies across society; in the modern time a society where limited resources and clichéd gender norms continue to place males in the role of home providers, it is reasonable to assume that fathers will have a harder time getting involved in their children's lives when they pursue paid employment. However, data suggests that working momsprioritize time with their children despite longer hours spent at work, while a recent study from the United States found no significant

relationship between work hours and father engagement.

This increase in father participation boosted the child's emotional and mental health. Leon was unfortunate to not have a father with him, his mother Albena was not enough to teach him life skills, he kept quiet and was bullied in middle school; had he had a strong father by his side he would not have had to bear such a plight. Albena in many ways was not able to guide Leon, she let him be in a protective and quiet shell. "We cannot makestories of my father being in the gulf anymore, as I was a grown-up". (Kaul 3)Albena being against patriarchal society had difficulty raising Leon alone; keeping distant from men in the society she lives in; hanging only in a female majority group and being a single woman keeping her pitch and behavior submissive.

Leon must act docile in his exceedingly early years of life, which converts into anger in his adolescence. It is depicted in the lines "I couldn't take it home, but it would be a shame to waste such good fag". (Kaul 6)

He becomes a chain-smoker, which even Albeena finds later, and feels bad about it; Now when Albena and Leon are talking to each other about his addiction, Leon promises to not repeat but when he watches life in London, it is the non-formidability of smoking substance what attracts him, and makes him London attractive

Later in the story when does an internship or a little job in the khan market, the only good thing he learns from the market was women and his indulgence in spoiling innocent women. He even in his college, is attracted by the superficial posh lifestyle of the day scholars, that came in expensive cars; his level of watching at the superficiality is, that he sees himself as one, who will not have an amazing introduction because he does not belong to aristocratic society.

Between 2002 and 2005, researchers in the Cape Area assembled a panel to learn more about American youth. Detailed individual and family background variables were controlled to study the income disparity effect on the sexual behavior of youth, wherein household income and economic conditions were found extremely significant. Household income was found to be directly related to sexually risky behaviors among the sample of young adults in urban Cape Town.

There is a strong and intimate connection between alcohol and sexual behavior. Some women use alcohol to signal sexual interest or to reject sexual attempts head-on, while men use it to initiate sexual encounters. The fact that late-night partying can enhance indulgence in sexual activity and that very few of our individuals agreed with this is concerning. Constant drinking is a common result of late-night parties, which is harmful to health. Therefore, pupils also need to be taught the additional negative consequences of alcohol use.

An intimate fantasy refers to a private or covert experience in which the imagination of desirable sexual activity with a partner, a study on high school students of Mumbai showed that for a student, a classmate is the most fantasized person in both sexes. It was found that fantasy rarely changed, and boys of the same class had more intimate relationships than female classmates; their fantasy level is positively correlated with a greater range of sexual activity.

Few girls reported having indulged in sexual activities for curiosity whereas, among the boys, uncontrollable desire and fun were the main reasons for indulging in intimate activities; some boys reported having the first move from the opposite sex. Thus, adolescents are attracted to intimate advances and behavior as an opportunity to experience new recreation, they fantasize and pursue a person based on their basic instincts.

Drawing parallels between this research and the Character of Leon, we could see Leon is very much driven by his basic instincts: his first indulgence in a smoking cigarette because of his stress, his Indulgence in Alcohol for fitting in the college group, his baseless relationship with his college girlfriend Maya that her losses because of irresponsible attitude toward life and interest in a cricket group. He wanted to gratify his instincts to be considered, no matter, whether it was smoking, Alcohol, or having a Girlfriend it was a mere need to keep up with the crowd. His instincts had a more violent streak, we could tell him speak in the novel "I cannot immerse myself in music in that mode. I need to hear it loud and clear, thumping through everything around me, so that I can feel it." (Kaul 7) He was not the sole person responsible for it, Albeena, his mother was the real cause behind his violent instincts,

Albeena was a weak woman, as a wife, she lost Mir Ali, and as a mother was not able to handle his child; it was her wound of losing his husband that made her weak enough to accept the world as it is. She would not allow Leon to listen to music at a high volume as she feared intervening in the busy life of her neighbor; being a moralistic woman and detergent worker, she had a very straight approach towards life, that is to stay silent. Leon's silent childhood and rebellious adolescence, point out that Leon lacked something called the lesson of being men, his uncontrollable aggression is because of is not educated to keep in control. There were many subjects that Albeena had put a censure on discussion, we can read in the novel Leon say "Get a better grasp of the topic that could not be broached with Ammi— 'Father,' 'Kashmir', 'Politics'— and to these I add 'career' and 'home'." ( Kaul 9) Her censure on the topic made Leon first accept bullies like a docile kid, to which he later rebelled in adolescence, his rebellious nature was ambitious to gain what others had and he did not.

But it is not just Albena who shows docile nature, the same is with Shula: the lover of Mir, wife of Abhilash, and mother of Keya. Shula in her diary narrates Abilash's fidelity towards her and his dominant psychopath nature that does not allow her to free herself from her unfortunate marriage; she wants to be free, but she could not gain courage, and it took cost of Mir's life to give her strength to rebel. Though it took her years to release herself, she was successful but, the wound in her heart did not heal, as she kept her daughter blind to her past; we could see it in the novel— Leon utters after learning the reality of Abhilash "it would break Keya if she learned about Abhilash," thus, Keya was completely ignorant of his dad's cruel nature and mother's extramarital affair.

When Leon discloses her, she refuses to believe it " You mean your father and my mother loved each other, are you kidding me?" (Kaul 313)

Keya has a jovial persona; her persona is a defense mechanism against the void she has of not having his father Abhilash with her. In a study by students of Temple University's Institutional Review Board. Conducted research on Daughters of single parents to test the Psychopathic nature of children of single mothers and the study revealed a deep connection between single parents mal adjustments of the child in society psychologically. Though it is not the total factor, a factor contributing to a small amount; it was found that socioeconomic status, stressful childhood experiences, techniques used by a single parent to handle a child's mental issue, and rejecting parenting behaviors are also contributing factors to make an adolescent at the psychopath.

More precisely, the wrong psychological technique uses to tackle child's problems were the main cause of their ill-psychological health and adolescent depressive state; these wrong techniques usage was more prevalent in single mothers than cohabitating mothers. It is interesting to note that in

households with a single mother regulating activities. Therefore, pointing out the need for a father in a family.

Keya's nature or persona was her denial of her life without their father. Leon and Keya, though believed in the end that their life both should visit Kashmir, because they were born there, and they had their people over there and it is the homeland where their belongingness lay, but it is Leon's realization, or act out of his remorse due to which, he decides to pacify his desire by going to the Kashmir and reading death sermon on any random grave. Keya and Leon were able to forge a bond because of their commonality and childhood experience, Kashmir was just a secondary factor, even in the case of their sheer loneliness.

In the early post-colonial era, Kashmir has already been in conflict, as a case, it was natural for anyone from Kashmir to face prejudice in early post-colonial India. Nitasha Kaulin a conference Nitasha held in the United States of America, Washington spoke about the Kashmir issue. "Kashmir issue is not at all communal its political, it's nothing people being Muslim, it's with people being Kashmiri".(Kaul) According to, history before in post-Independence in 1932, Sheikh Abdullah passed a law in Kashmir before the end of his reign, it was the law of land holders to be occupied by tilter rather than owner, which was for land reforms in the state. Law was carried out by the first government throughout India.

Coming back to 1932, the Dogra king of Jammu attack the tilter's land to occupy it. This was a revolt by a militant who was affiliated with the Pakistan terror group (a group that want to establish dominance after Sheik Abdullah's reign) to counter the attack Indian government sent his most trained Military agent, which was found dead in the UK by the hand of Militant, put the government in rage, convert into the attack on the terrorist.

"A peace treaty was proposed by the Indian government but witnessed an attack

from neighboring country Pakistan, they wage war against them, resulting in the Kargil war. When Pakistan witnessed defeat in the war, it again tried to attack in several unique ways, which is a Muslim nation that created a bad impression of Muslim people in Indian minds. Conflict on conflict created a rift between the non-Muslim and Muslim communities, which further resulted in Kashmir Exodus. Rifting and Rifting cater to hatred against the community, but the rift cause was not even communal it was economic, the rich against the poor and the attacker against the inhabitants. It is the power clash between two nations, India, and Pakistan that kept and disturbed the situation in Kashmir, People merely bluffed the inhabitants, just to create chaos to rule it. The innocence of ancestors is yet a cause of mistrust between two parties and leaving land susceptible to be prone to be land of non-trustworthy. Thus, memories of the past haunted people like the holocaust of Jews at the time of the world " (outlook 1)

Leon being a Kashmiri was prejudiced to be non-trustworthy in Delhi, though not by the whole of Delhi but a small part of Delhi. London was also, very friendly to him until the situation of disturbance happened in Kashmir, though his being Kashmiri was not a reason immensely powerful to make him an outcast of the society, it was his mother's docile nature that made his survival difficult.

A right to live as a sovereign human was not seized by the law, but Albeena's weak willpower made her believe that a small fragment of society was enough to turn an outcast one day. A similar outcast was Keya, who because had an incomplete family and a heartbroken mother in trauma was not able to come out of the shocks of childhood and made Repression as a defense mechanism to deal with the situation. She kept repressing and things kept ruining for her, her very start was wrong.

## Conclusion

Homeland is where belongingness is, belongingness is where we can dwell in a

content home and content home is where we have happy memories. Leon and Keya were an outcast because of their traumatic childhood; Leon being more discussed to be an outcast because of his ethnicity in Delhi while living with his mother, but closely looking at the novel we do not his ethnicity to be a major but the environment in his home; Albeena being a heartbroken wife who was cheated by her husband was not able to handle her world though she tried to be a brave mother.

Her husband's cheating left her in defeat and assuming herself as defeated, she took all as it was provided by her fate; she rarely protested, kept her distance, and taught his son to do the same. Thus, it's not one's ethnicity or social identity that makes one an outcast but it is their mental makeup that makes a person believe one is— in short, it is the schizophrenic mind of a human that makes one believe that one an outcast in the society; a proper mental nurturing is necessary to feel that one belongs to place or one is at home; there is magnificent of parents' mental health in shaping home for the children. Thus, homeland is where belongingness is, belongingness is where we can dwell in a content home and content home is where we have happy memories.

## Works Cited

1. Kaul, Nitasha. "Residue." <https://www.nitashakaul.com/RESIDUE.html>.
2. Kaul, Nitasha. *Residue*. Rupa & Co, 2014.
3. Dr. Nitasha Kaul's expert testimony on Kashmir U.S. Congress hearing, Youtube.230ct2019, <https://youtu.be/b-s8xynlcgY>. Accessed 4 Dec.2022.
4. McMunn, Anne, et al. "Fathers' Involvement: Correlates and Consequences for Child Socio emotional Behavior in the United Kingdom." *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 38, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1109–1131., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x15622415>.

5. "Nitasha Kaul." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 26 June 2022,
6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nitasha\\_Kaul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nitasha_Kaul).
7. Ramadugu, Shashikumar, et al. "Understanding Sexuality among Indian Urban School Adolescents." *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2012, p. 49., <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-6748.98416>.
8. The History of Kashmir Conflict and Its Various Phases. <https://www.outlookindia.com/>, 3 Apr. 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/the-history-of-kashmir-conflict-news-189840>
9. Winkelman, Taryn, et al. "Household and community income, economic shocks and risky sexual behavior of young adults: evidence from the Cape Area Panel Study 2002 and 2005." *AIDS (London, England)* vol. 21 Suppl 7, Suppl 7 (2007): pp. 49-56. doi: 10.1097/01.aids.0000300535.05226.a9