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*The Ugly Kashmiri  
(Cameos in Exile)*

*By  
Arvind Gigoo*

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**“I am where I am not, therefore I am not where I am”**

**J. L. Raina\***

**[\*Mr. J. L. Raina is a freelance Journalist based presently in New Delhi.]**

“I am where I am not, therefore I am not where I am”, is no metaphysical riddle, but an apt description of the situation of a person, who has lost roots, cut off from his moorings, and is facing a crisis of identity. That is the story of not only Prof. Arvind Gigoo, but all his compatriots rather Kashmiris, who had basked in the glory of great heritage, complacent, calm and contented, but found themselves suddenly thrown off balance, and are still in the process of making a sense of their lives. This is not his personal journey alone. He has used a different genre, neither prose, nor poetry, nor fiction, but cameos, to put together the different experiences. It is for the reader to take a holistic view and to draw his own conclusions. Mr. Gigoo gives it a subtitle – ‘Cameos in exile’ – clearly pointing out that these are short pieces of conversation, short descriptions, comments, or even one-line observations, but he reminds you that these were written in exile. The beauty of these snaps or short pieces is that these are crisp, blunt, unsophisticated and matter of fact. If read in the background of the on-going turmoil in Kashmir, these short pieces can give a fairly good idea about the psyche, temperament, and approach of a Kashmiri, together with his plight and crisis of identity that he is passing through, irrespective of the fact whether he is in exile or in Kashmir. Sarcasm, satire, humour and self-criticism, are the tools used by Gigoo. He is unsparing in shooting his barbs of ridicule at hypocritical behaviour, pretentious attitude and pseudo-secular views of the self-styled and so called emancipated leaders of the society. He does not leave any aspect of life untouched. There are no separate characters, so to say, in these cameos, because it is not the story of a few characters, but it is the story of all Kashmiris, wheresoever, they may be, in whatever situation. Gigoo looks at things in a dispassionate manner, though he has not been able to camouflage the tone of bitterness. Some quotes from the book would make the effort worthwhile.

Arvind Gigoo hasn't spared anybody or any community or any section of the society, be it Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, security forces, leaders or intellectuals. In a way, these cameos are self-critical and he is not shy about that. He is not shy of admitting his own feelings, foibles or weaknesses. Even the title 'The ugly Kashmir' has a double reference or meaning. It reminds us of people from outside, who would praise Kashmir for its beauty, but denigrate the people, for whatsoever the reasons. At the same time, it is a sort of confession of our weaknesses and a jolt to us, so that we come over our weaknesses, whatever there are. Though the author is very modest, when he says "I am sure about my doubts, vacillations, and uncertainties. I have no answers and solutions to offer", yet he has put forth a collection of snap shots that is thought-provoking and compels us to introspect. Mr. Gigoo's most remarkable trait as a writer is that he never loses his sense of humour and has the capacity to laugh at his own self. His sharp sensibility and unshakable faith in human values are praise-worthy.

### **A Cheque**

"On 19 January, 1990, I got a blank cheque which my grandchildren will cash."

This is a reference to the day, the violent turmoil started in Kashmir, forcing exodus of a community.

### **The King**

"Then the king went to a distant land when his subjects were being killed. And he shed big tears in Great Hall when his throne was restored".

Needless to say that this is a satire on the leaders of Kashmir, who ditched the people at the time of need and shed crocodile tears.

### **Emancipation**

"Listen! How can I talk about the plight of Kashmiri Pandits? I am a secularist"

That is how pseudo-secularists behave.

### **Son**

"Hey, what are you doing? I have always treated you as my son – by – look –stop – you are as – good – as – my- son"

"Freedom!"

A self-explanatory cameo on the behaviour of Jihadis.

### **Between the two soldiers**

“Who is my protector? The soldier in uniform or the soldier without uniform?”

“We are enemies, but both of us will hack you”

The plight of the people in Kashmir, caught between the two guns.

### **Deployment**

“And they deployed the army to enforce curfew to search the people and to catch young boys”.

This is a self-explanatory comment on the behaviour of security forces in Kashmir.

### **The Resolve**

“We resolve to preserve the Kashmiri language without reading it, without writing it and without speaking it.”

“The motion is carried”

It is a satire on the behaviour of Kashmiris, (Hindus as well as Muslims) towards their mother tongue.

### **Rootless**

“I am where I am not, therefore, I am not where I am”.

It is the paradox of identity and has reference to Kashmiri Pandits

### **They and we**

“When they leave we will be bombarded”

“When we leave they should be bombarded “

The different perceptions of the two communities at the time of the migration of the Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley.

### **Hot Potato**

“On Monday there was total hartal in response to the call given by the president of a foreign country.”

“On Tuesday the whole populace welcomed their leader who was a nationalist”.

This depicts the contradiction in the behaviour of Kashmiris.

### **The Middle Path**

“Merge or leave or perish”

‘I followed the middle path. The other two will follow me’.

A comment on the path followed by Kashmiri Pandits, i.e. path of migration, from among the choices they had.

### **Chameleon**

From Pakistan to plebiscite to India to Pakistan to independence to anything and anywhere is one breath.

It is an apt comment on the plethora of viewpoints, and the inconsistency and contradictions in the people’s news.