



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Internal Displacement of Kashmiri Pandits: History, Persecution and Rehabilitation Process

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Kashmir is known as the 'Heaven on Earth' in the world due to its rich natural beauty, its unique art and culture. Maharishi Kalidas, a famous Sanskrit poet, has sung immortal beauty of Kashmir. There are much opinions about the name of Kashmir.¹ According to Neelmatpurana this valley was mostly known as *Kashmira*. In Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* both the names Kashmir and *Kashmira* are mentioned. In various religious texts of Hinduism, *Brihatsamhita*, *Puranas*, *Ashtadhyayi* and *Mahabharata* etc., the word Kashmir has been used for a country and the word *Kashmira* has been used for the people living there.² According to a 'mystical' legend popular over the years is that the region was a mythical lake named 'Satisar' which was derived from the name of the sage Kashyapa, hence *Kashyapa-mar* (abode of Kashyapa) evolved over the centuries to assume the present form Kashmir.³

The history of Kashmiri Pandit's is the history of Kashmir, for the last 5000 years. They are associated with their society, culture, civilization, customs traditions, myths and realities. Kashmiri Hindus popularly known as Kashmiri Pandits are a distinct class of their own and are considered the purest specimen of ancient Aryan settlers in the valley. The Aryan Saraswat Brahmin, who lived on the banks of the Saraswati River, moved to the Kashmir Valley to continue his penance. With the passage of time these people became known as '*Bhatta*' in Kashmir. The word is imitative of Brahmin. He is now called a Kashmiri Pandit or Aryan Saraswat Brahmin of Kashmir, who believes in the mystic combination of Saivism, Kali Bhakti, Shakta worship and Tantra.⁴

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the execution, Persecution and conversion of Kashmiri Pandits in the history of Kashmir.
2. To study the factors responsible for mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, steps taken to their return and rehabilitation and impact of the abrogation of Article 370.

Methodology

Researcher use the historical and analytical methods. In this research work both primary and secondary sources used to collect data and information regarding the internal displacement of Kashmiri Pandits.

Conversion and Persecution of Kashmiri Pandits before Independence Era

Kashmir valley remained a safe home for the Hindus until the end of the 14th century. By the beginning of the 14th century, Islam was slowly seeping into the society and there was no worry about the presence of the Muslims. Lal Ded, who was a Shaivite sect mystic and a Sufi Saint, said in those times:

“Shiv chhuy thali’e thaali’e rozaan
Mo zaan Hyon’d tey Musalmaan”⁵

This mean Shiv is present in all atoms and every life form never differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim.

But After the arrival of Islam in the 14th century, and for many centuries thereafter, Kashmir was dominated by foreign rule, rarely did the invaders and misadventures leave Kashmir alone without invasions that ripped the fabric of its society. Needless to say, Kashmiri Pandits, the natives of Kashmir, had to bear the brunt of brutal religious persecution, which resulted in their mass killings and many departures from Kashmir. Between the first quarter of the 14th century and the end of Afghan rule in Kashmir (1819) there were six major Hindu departures from Kashmir. Almost all the departure occurred when members of this community were cruelly massacred by cruel Muslim rulers driven by religious enthusiasm and *Jehad*. Pandits were offered three options ‘to flee, to die or convert to Islam’, due to which lacs of Kashmiri Pandits were forcibly converted to Islam.⁶

Following the sultanate era, the valley passed Chaks and after that Mughal rulers. Chaks rulers belonged to the Shia sect of Islam and were intolerant toward both Pandits and Muslims. In 1589 Kashmir was taken over by the Mughals. During Aurangzeb’s rule, there were many phases during which pandits were persecuted. His governors was particular brutal towards the community. Hindus approached Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur who sacrificed himself for shielding the Hindus. But Guru Teg Bahadur was tortured and killed harshly after failed attempts of conversion. The Afghan rulers surround a group of pandits with naked swords and ask them to convert. Kashmiri Pandits has no other way to save his lives. They were compelled to convert in Islam, because those who did not comply would be put to death immediately.⁷

But this does not mean that every Muslim ruler is indulging in the cruelty of Pandits. Some rulers treated the Pandits well. The greatest of these was Zain-ul-Abedian, who not only brought back the exiled Pandits but also gave them respect. Radical rulers and tireless missionaries, mostly from outside the Valley, laid the foundation for radical Islam in Kashmir that has survived to this day.⁸

The Muslim rule in Kashmir ended in 1819 AD when Kashmir came under Sikh rule in the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This marked the end of a long period of oppression faced by Kashmiri Pandits during Muslim rule. The Sikh rule lasted for a short period (1819-1846) and was followed by the Dogra rule (1846–1947). During this period of almost hundred years Kashmiri Pandits did not have to migrate and was indeed the most peaceful period for all the residents of the state.⁹

By the time the British left India in 1947, the population of Kashmiri Pandits in the valley had declined. Even after that for various reasons, their displacement outside the Kashmir remain continued until the last forced exodus of Hindus from Kashmir in 1990.¹⁰

Terrorism and Mass Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits

After the partition, relations between India and Pakistan were continuously ups and down, but the years following the Shimla Agreement of 1972 were relatively stable for Kashmir. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, difficulties began to mount. Due to this, instability spread to the valley. The Mujahideen were prepared to block the influence of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. The Kashmir region being one of the uncontrolled unemployment, high birth rates and economic uncertainty, youths responded to the enthusiastic, frantic call of jihad with martyrdom in their dreams and a commitment to protect and fight for Islam.¹¹

In the lead-up to the events of 1990, Kashmir was in ferment. Sheikh Abdullah had died in 1982 and the leadership of the National Conference passed on to his son Farooq Abdullah, who won the assembly election in 1983, but within two years, the Congress broke up the alliance with National Conference, and installed dissident Ghulam Mohammed Shah as Chief Minister. This led to huge alienation and political instability. The Jammu &

Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) stepped up its activities and the hanging of the militant leader Maqbool Bhat in 1984 added to the sense of prognostic.¹²

During this time period, the Islamization of Kashmir began with full force. The Abdullah Government changed the names of about 2500 villages from their original names to new Islamic names. The major city of Anantnag was to be known as Islamabad which is quite similar name as the Pakistan Capital. The Farooq Abdullah giving communal speeches in mosques as he used to in the 1930s. Further, in his autobiography he referred to Kashmiri Pandit's as 'mukhbir' or 'informers' of the Indian government,¹³ but this was not the ground reality. Kashmiri Pandit's was devoted to their religion and enjoy their rituals and cultural life.

In 1986, during the time of Gul Shah, the first incident of communal violence against Hindus occurred in the modern history of Kashmir. In this incident of communal violence in Anantnag district, temples and houses of Hindus were damaged by Muslim mobs. Mosques were built over government offices, incidents of posting inflammatory posters in temples and mosques were also formed in Srinagar, due to which all Kashmiri Hindu employees and people went on mass leave. On 7 March 1987, President's rule was imposed after dismissing Gul Shah's government. In 1987 election, Congress and National Conference under Rajiv-Farooq decided to contest together, in front of this alliance Muslim United Front contested and lose the election. Farooq Abdullah became the Chief Minister of the state, but MUF made allegations of rigging in elections, due to which a new era of terrorism started in the valley in the nineties.¹⁴ The year 1988, witnessed an increase in the militant activities in the valley. Farooq Abdullah chief minister of the state also alleged Pakistan of its nefarious designs of destabilizing India by feeding terrorism and brainwashing Kashmiri by vicious communal propagandas through various organizations like Jamat-e-Islami.¹⁵

The separatist movement in Kashmir started with anti-India slogans hoisting of Pakistan flags, pro Pakistani sentiments and exploitation of the youth by the fundamentalist leaders and support from the radical Muslim population. Mosques meant for religious prayers were used to hide arms and ammunition. There was a well-planned strategy that started with selective killing of prominent Kashmiri pandits to create terror. The killing of pandits were celebrated. Those neighbors who had assured these families that they would protect them, watched them die and did nothing. They are tortuous and women were stripped and mistreated. Kashmiri Pandit's were accused of being the agents of India in Kashmir Temples were vandalized destroyed, demolished and set on fire.¹⁶ This was the unfortunately conditions for the Hindu of the Valley in a democratic country like India.

When the Soviet Union army comeback from Afghanistan, the Pakistani Mujahideen with dangerous weapons entered in the Kashmir valley and they sparked Islamic radicalism, fueling separatist and anti-India emotion in the Valley.¹⁷

On January 04, 1990, two local Urdu newspaper *Aftab* and *Alsafa* published a press release issued by Hizb-ul-Mujahideen asking all Pandits to leave the Valley immediately. These warnings were followed by Kalashnikov-wielding masked Jihadist carrying out military-type marches openly. The night witnessed macabre happenings, the like of which had not been witnessed by Kashmiri Pandits after the Afghan rule. Farooq Abdullah, whose government had all but seized to exist, resigned. Jagmohan arrived during the day to take charge as the Governor of the State. A host of highly provocative, communal and menacing slogans, interspersed with martial songs, incited the Muslims to come out on the streets and break the chains of 'slavery'. These appeals urged the faithful to give a final push to the Kafir in order to ring in the true Islamic order. These slogans were mixed with precise and unambiguous threats to Pandits. They were presented with three choices — *Ralive, Tsaliv ya Galive* (convert to Islam, leave the place or perish). Number of thousands of Kashmiri Muslims poured into the streets of the Valley, shouting:¹⁸ "Oh merciless, oh infidels, leave our Kashmir"; "If you want to stay in Kashmir, you have to say *Allahu Akbar*"; "We want Pakistan, along with Pandit women but not their men." Terrorist organizations like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen

issued open threats to Kashmiri Pandits. The law and order situation in Kashmir collapsed; killings, kidnappings and rapes became routine.¹⁹

These slogans, broadcast through loudspeakers of every mosque, numbering roughly 1100, exhorted the hysterical mobs to embark on Jihad. All male Muslims, including their children and the aged, to be seen participating in this Jihad. Those who had organized such a show of force in the middle of a cold winter night, had only one objective- Jihad.²⁰ After the brutal killings and mass exodus, they were forced to migrate Hindus from their motherland. They lost their roots, history culture, identity, traditions and ancient heritage.²¹

Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits

The state and central governments have been failed to stop flee of the remaining Pandits in the valley. A large number of peoples had to migrate from their homes, which resulted in the mass exodus of Kashmiri Hindu's along with few Sikhs and Muslim families. Nearby 60,000 families displaced outside from the valley. During the turmoil the majority of these families preferred to settle at Jammu and Delhi, whereas about 23000 such displaced families settled outside the Jammu and Kashmir. Although most Pandit families had left Kashmir in 1990, only few hundred families stayed there. To deal with the various Problems of displaced Kashmiri Pandit living in various migrant camps, various relief actions have been provided by the state and Centre government including cash relief, ration, shelter and free medical facilities etc.²²

After the mass exodus, lots of displaced peoples took shelter in temples, schools, Serais (inns), community halls and government buildings, street corner and mostly under the open sky. The government had failed to provide shelter to the traumatized community.²³ In the initial years of exile, thousands of Pandits succumbed to abnormal weather, caleture, snake bites, and other diseases. The trauma of losing their home slowly and silently affected Kashmiri Pandits, particularly the elderly.²⁴

The government of Jammu and Kashmir in 1990 set up Relief Organization for looking Kashmiri displaced persons and to provide them immediate relief such as cash assistance, free ration, shelter, education, health etc.²⁵ Kashmiri displaced persons at Jammu are also being provided monthly dry ration assistance, eg. 9 Kg rice per person, 2 Kg Atta per person and 1 Kg Sugar per family.²⁶ The central and state governments have announced various schemes or packages to encourage the return and rehabilitation of the Kashmiri displaced persons. On the recommendations of the inter- ministerial team (2004), a project for construction of 5242 two room residences with an estimated cost of 345 cr. was sanctioned and construction of residences was taken up in phased manner from December 2005 onward.²⁷

The Government has planned policies for Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants, under the Prime Minister's Packages in 2008 and 2015 for Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants to Kashmir Valley.

Various components of these plans are given as below: -

i. Housing

In order to encourage the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants, the government announced the following incentives in order to help those families which were desirous of settling back at their original residence.

- a. Assistance of 7.5 Lacs for repairing their damaged house.
- b. Assistance of 2 Lacs for dilapidated/unused houses.
- c. Assistance of 7.5 Lacs for purchase/construction of a house in group housing societies for those who have sold their properties during the period after 1989 and before the enactment of JK Migrant Immovable Property Preservation, Protection and Restraint of Distress Sale 1997.

ii. Enhancement in cash assistance-

Cash assistance has also being provided to Kashmiri Migrants, which has been increased from time to time, such as 500 per family in 1990 is raised to 13,000 per family in present and 3250 per person.

iii. Employment

Out of a total of 6,000 posts announced under PM Relief Packages, nearly 3,800 Kashmiri Migrants have been rehabilitated directly by way of providing government employment. These employees are working in various districts of Kashmir Valley. Remaining posts are also at final stages of recruitment.

iv. Construction of Transit Accommodation-

In order to provide accommodation to the 6000 Kashmiri Migrants, who are getting employed in the Government of Jammu and Kashmir in the valley, 6000 Transit accommodation units are being constructed for Kashmiri Migrants employees in various districts of Kashmir Valley at an estimated cost of 920 Cr. So far, 1025 apartments have already been constructed which include 721 apartments in the district of Budgam, Kulgam, Kupwara, Anantnag and Pulwama. Another 1488 apartments are under construction and land has been identified for about 2444 apartments.²⁸

While the Government of India has till date not conferred the status of Internally Displaced People (IDP) to displaced Kashmiri Pandits but has recognized them as "Migrants" and They have been given much less aid and protection than other internally displaced people in India.²⁹

Demands of Various Organization of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

The 'Panun Kashmir', an organization of displaced Kashmiri Pandits, demanded its numerous demands including permanent rehabilitation based on principles of non-refoulement, compensation to the sufferers, creation of a Board and Commission for fare investigation to look all the criminal and religious genocide aspects which include enquiry, procedure of trial, fixing of obligation for the crime of genocide and punishment to the culprits.³⁰

'Kashmiri Pandit United Coordination Committee' was demanding a financial package for KPs youth who have crossed their over-limit, to compensate every migrant family for the damage done to their properties in the Kashmir Valley during the migration and to provide medical facilities, drinking water.³¹ They were demanding to ensure proper infrastructure including proper supply of electricity.

Various other organization leaders of displaced Kashmiri Pandits demanded reservation of at least five Assembly seats in state assembly.³²

Abrogation of Article 370

The abrogation of article 370 fulfilled a long-cherished demand of the RSS-BJP, since the days of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, whose founding leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee died in a Kashmir, campaigning against the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. The abrogation of Article 370 was one of the main slogans of the BJP and it culminated in BJs *Ekta Yatra* from Kanyakumari to Kashmir when BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi along with some other colleagues including Narendra Modi hoisted the National flag at Lal Chowk in Srinagar.³³ It is the decades old ideology and commitment of BJP (Jana Sangh also had committed to this) that there should be one "Vidhan (constitution), one Nishan (national emblem) and one Pradhan (head of the state)".³⁴ The BJP advocated for 'the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the land of their ancestors with full dignity, security and assured livelihood' in its 2014 election manifesto and 'the safe return of Kashmiri Pandits' as a part of its 2019 election manifesto.³⁵ Both manifestos also talked about the annulment of Article 370 and 35A.

At last in August 2019, Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government move to revoke Article 370 of the Constitution that gives special status to Jammu and Kashmir. This move has been welcomed by Kashmiri Pandits, which called it a “decisive decision”. Ajay Chrangoo, chairperson of the Panun Kashmir, a frontal organization of the internally-displaced Kashmiri Pandits and which has pitched for a separate homeland for the community, said, “This is the first decisive step towards the dismantling of an Islamic state, and this will pave the way for a permanent reversal of the genocide.”³⁶ Two Kashmiri Pandits and an apex body of various associations formed by the community have moved the Supreme Court in support of the government's decision to abrogate provisions of Article 370 that gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.³⁷

And another prominent Kashmiri activist Sushil Pandit told “It’s an announcement of intent, which is yet to be implemented. By abrogating Article 370, we’ve declared war on jihad, but not won. It’s a long tough journey and a painstaking effort. Abrogation of Article 370 by the government has revitalized hopes among Kashmiri Pandits as well as others who got displaced, to go back to their homes in Jammu and Kashmir almost after three decades. The minority population that left their homes and migrated seeing no hope in the state due to the discrimination between minority and majorities, is upbeat.”³⁸

Conclusion

It is difficult to believe that only before seven centuries, Kashmir turns hundred percent Hindu population that was now turns hundred percent Muslim population. Whereas Islam had conquered Sindh in 8th century, in Kashmir it could do so only by the middle of 14th century. Extensive use of swords, coupled with aggressive proselytising Islam in Kashmir at a time when the power of Hindu Raja’s was in decline. From that time Kashmir valley has rarely seen peace for any appreciable length of time in its history. Sectarian violence among Muslims and persecution of Hindus have become the major problem. The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 was the latest example of persecution of Hindus in the Kashmir history. This was a well-planned strategy that started with selective killing of prominent Kashmiri Pandits by the Muslim Jehadi’s to create terror. The killing of Pandits were celebrated. Temples were vandalized destroyed, demolished and set on fire. Pakistan and Muslim separatist flanks in Kashmir directly responsible for this. This led to the Kashmiri Pandits, being threatened, killed and eventually being thrown out of the Kashmir valley. This was the unfortunately conditions for the Hindu of the Valley in a democratic country like India.

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gives the special status to the state, also provided a breeding ground for the radical elements to strengthen themselves. Because it allows Jammu and Kashmir to have it is own constitution, a separate flag and gives special privileges under Article 35A. It helps to protect the state’s distinct demographic character as the only Majority state in India. But after the abolition of article 370 by BJP led Central Government arise hope among Kashmiri Pandits to return to the valley. Now central government took important steps in the favor of Kashmiri Pandits to rehabilitate them to their aboriginal place.

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