
POLITICO-ECONOMIC AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL MOTIVATIONS FOR PANDIT MIGRATION IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Dr. Farooq A. Rather

*PhD (History), Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar
drfarooqarather@gmail.com*

Abstract: The state of Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed a wave of deepening ethnic consciousness and aggressive ethnic articulation, many of which have led to unprecedented misery, conflict, bloodshed and what not. While the basic identity have differed from community to community, from region to region, one factor which has complicated the issues is that some of these have thrown up a serious challenge to peace in the state as well as to the country. The challenge has been of a scale that the very existence of the state as an integral part of the Indian Union has been questioned/threatened with demands for freedom, autonomy, self rule and even independence, predicated on ethnic lines. There is no consensus on the meaning and content of these concepts or terms that have been used to mobilize the people on ethnic lines. As a result, the constant identification and contestation of political and economic issues on ethno-religious lines has altered the relationship between social groups and regions.

Keywords: Kashmir, Conflict, Military, Militant, Families, Compulsions, Employment, Migration.

Introduction: Maharaja Hari Singh ascended the throne of Kashmir in 1925 and ruled the region until the conclusion of British rule in the Indian subcontinent in 1947. On 25 October 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947 and it was subsequently accepted on 27 October 1947 by the then Governor General of India. After the Instrument of Accession was signed, Indian soldiers entered Kashmir with orders to fight and evict the raiders (on 20 October 1947, tribesmen backed by Pakistan invaded Kashmir), but they were not able to expel them fully from the state due to the weather conditions / harsh winter started. Since then the state (Indian part of the Jammu and Kashmir) has been governed by the India very much like the other states of the country.

The sole motive of the infiltration was to overthrow the government. This triggered a sort of petty politics of the state wherein factions formed that either supported accession to Pakistan and those who preferred remaining with India. The Kashmiri pundits, naturally, were tilted towards the Indian state whereas various pan-Islamic groups formed that supported Pakistan. In the mean time Pakistan endorsed guerrilla militancy, the resulting India-Pakistan.

Kashmiri Pandits were the Hindu Brahmin residents of Kashmir Valley. They were the people who were the bearers of the high education and economic status since 15th – 16th century. However, during and after the 19th century, all the Hindus and not only Brahmins, who lived in the Kashmir Valley and not migrated or converted to Islam were given the common nomenclature of “Pandits”. At this point of time they constituted about 4% of the total population in the valley, but in the successive periods their percentage decreased constantly primarily due to large scale out-migration.

The armed conflict in Kashmir valley led killing and displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure, and crumbling of support systems, etc. The Hindus of the Kashmir valley were naturally forced to flee the Kashmir valley. Of the approximately 160,000–170,000 Pandits living in the Kashmir Valley in 1990, only 4,000–5,000 remain there.

Magnitude of Migration: Different accounts give different statistics of the total number of Kashmiri Pandits who fled their homes for their life in the 1990s. While some say around 1,00,000 of them had left the valley, others suggest figures as high as 1,50,000 to 1,90,000.

The number of Pandits exiled ranged from 160,00 to 400,000. According to political scientist Alexander Evans, approximately 95% of the total population of 160,000–170,000 of Kashmiri Brahmins, also called Kashmiri Pandits, (i.e. approximately 150,000 to 160,000) left the Kashmir Valley in 1990 as militancy engulfed the state. According to an estimate by the Central Intelligence Agency, about 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits from the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir have been internally displaced due to the ongoing violence. Most Pandit families fled south, towards Jammu, the Hindu dominated part of the state, where they were initially accommodated in transit relief camps opened by the Central Government in New Delhi as the numbers kept increasing. Most of the Kashmiri Pandit population settled down in and around Delhi and Jammu and in the surrounding areas.

And yet there are no precise numbers regarding the migration/exodus of Pandits. Figures from within and figures from the outside are so different. Some say 700,000 left, others say 100,000 left. The chief cause of this variation in the numbers of Pandits in the valley in 1989 can only be adduced from the census of 1941, the last time the Pandits were counted and listed as distinct from the category of Kashmiri Hindus and that census listed a little fewer than 79,000 Pandits in the valley.

It's from this baseline that demographers have sought to work out the number of Kashmir Pandits in the valley in 1990. Using the rough measure of the average decennial growth rate in the state as a whole, available through the censuses up to 1941 and then the 2001 census, the number of Kashmiri Pandits living in the valley before 1990 that they arrive at is about 160,000 to 170,000.

So the number of 700,000 as representing the number of Kashmiri Pandit departures after 1989-1990 is not credible because that exceeds by many hundreds of thousands the total of the Kashmiri Pandit population at the time.

Another potentially misleading aspect of the counting of Pandit departures is that the total put forward often also includes those Pandits who had left the state voluntarily between 1947 and 1990.

According to the political scientist, Alexander Evans, 95 per cent of the Kashmiri Pandits living in the valley left in 1990, i.e. anything between 150,000 and 160,000. However, a 2010 report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council suggests that 250,000 Pandits have been displaced since 1990. And a CIA report suggests a figure of 300,000 displaced from the whole state.

Kashmiri Pandits Living in Various Parts of India

Name of the State	No. Pandit families
Jammu	34,644
Delhi	19,338
Himachal Pradesh	11
Haryana	924
Chandigarh	114
Punjab	319
Uttarpradesh	500
Madhya Pradesh	169
Karnataka	38
Maharashtra	208
Rajasthan	58
Total	56,323 families

Source: Ministry of Home affairs J&K Report on 2000.

A report by the Jammu and Kashmir government says as many as 219 people from this community were killed in the region between 1989 and 2004. According to Indian government, more than 60,000 families are registered as Kashmiri refugees including some Sikh and Muslim families. Most families were resettled in Jammu, National Capital Region surrounding Delhi and other neighbouring states. In 2016, only 2,764 Kashmiri Hindus were left in Kashmir Valley.

Politico-Economic Reasons: In July 1988, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front began a separatist insurgency for independence of Kashmir from India. The group targeted a Kashmiri Hindu for the first time on September 14, 1989, when they killed Pandit Tika Lal Taploo, an advocate and a prominent leader of Bharatiya Janata Party in Jammu & Kashmir in front of several eyewitnesses and a High Court Judge Nilkanth Ganjoo in November 1989. This instilled fear in the Kashmiri Pandit community especially as Taploo's killers were never caught. The Pandits felt that they weren't safe in the valley and could be targeted any time. The JKLF and other Islamists went on to kill many other Kashmiri Hindus including many prominent ones. As a result in 1989, the State of Jammu and Kashmir has been in the grip of the violent militant movement in Kashmir. This along with other political factors like formation of Islamic secessionist movements within Kashmir like the JKLF- Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front and the more radical Hizbul Mujahideen caused the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley to refugee camps in Jammu and Delhi. They were altogether with an anti-India rhetoric and openly pro-Pakistan stance. They looked upon Pandits with suspicion and as a manifestations of Indian rule in the state and as such targeted them who in turn found it more prudent to flee in order to secure their own lives. Many of whom were serving in the state administration, became the more prominent targets for militants.

Warnings were issued by the militants to leave. On the 4th January 1990, Daily Aftab (a Valley based Urdu news journal) published a warning, issued allegedly by the Hizbul Mujahideen, calling for all Hindus in the region to take flight. Al Safa and the Srinagar Times (newspapers) also published such warnings particularly on the 16th January 1990. The common slogans of the day were the slogans like Ae Kafiroo Ae Zalimoo, Kashmir Hamara Chhod Do (You Infidels You Tyrants, Leave our Kashmir) from loudspeakers of mosques and other respective platforms.

In order to undermine his political rival Farooq Abdullah who at that time was the Chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, the Minister of Home Affairs, Mufti Mohammad Sayed convinced Prime Minister V.P. Singh to appoint Jagmohan as the governor of the state. Abdullah resented Jagmohan who had been appointed as the governor earlier in April 1984 as well and had recommended Abdullah's dismissal to Rajiv Gandhi in July 1984. Mufti was convinced that such a move will irritate Abdullah and make him quit. Abdullah had earlier declared that he would resign if Jagmohan was made the Governor. However, the Central government went ahead and appointed him as Governor on 19 January 1990. In response, Abdullah resigned on the same day and Jagmohan suggested the dissolution of the State Assembly. On 21 January 1990, two days after Jagmohan took over as governor, the Gawkadal massacre took place in Srinagar, in which the Indian security forces had opened fire on protesters, leading to the death of at least 50 people, and likely over 100. These events led to chaos. Lawlessness took over the valley and the crowd with slogans and guns started roaming around the streets. News kept coming of violent incidents and those Hindus who survived the night saved their lives by traveling out of the valley.

Most of the Kashmiri Hindus left Kashmir valley and moved to other parts of the country, mostly to the refugee camps in Jammu region of the state. Scholar Mridu Rai says, there is no evidence of denial of humanity by Kashmiri Muslims to Pandits during the exodus. Several separatist leaders, militants and Kashmiri Muslims allege that the exodus was a willful political decision engineered through government support provided by Governor Jagmohan's administration, in order to defame the separatist movement. Scholars refute this argument, saying that it is unsubstantiated, and that it is extremely difficult to believe, 'political encouragement' was the sole reason for the departure of such large numbers. They assert that the Kashmiri Pandits had felt a distinct threat to their safety during exodus. However they also state that there is the failure of Jagmohan's administration in discouraging or preventing the exodus, which additionally contributed to the Pandits' departure. In his book, *Our Moon Has Blood*

Clots, author and journalist Rahul Pandita gives a timeline of the events that brought about the exodus. In this, Pandita writes about the murder of political activist Tika Lal Taploo in September 1989 and goes on list many more horrid memories.

Here's an Excerpt of This Timeline:

'September 1989: Pandit political activist, Tika Lal Taploo is shot dead by armed men outside his residence.

January 1990: Massive crowds assemble in mosques across valley, shouting anti-india, anti-pandit slogans. The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits begins. In the next few months, hundreds of innocent Pandits are tortured, killed and raped. By the year-end, about 350,000 Pandits have escaped from the Valley and taken refuge in Jammy and elsewhere. Only a handful of them stay back.

March 1997: Terrorists drag out seven Kashmiri Pandits from their houses in Sangrampora village and gun them down.

January 1998: 23 Kashmiri Pandits, including women and children, shot in cold blood in Wandhama Village.

March 2003: 24 Kashmiri Pandits, including infants, brutally shot dead in Nadimarg Village.

2012: Thousands of Pandits still languish in refugee settlements of 8 x 8. After more than two decades, the Kashmiri Pandit community has still not been able to return to their ancestral land. They are dispersed all over from Jammu to Johannesburg."

India has seen several changes ever since that fateful night in 1990. New governments have come and gone, multiple developments have come forth nationwide, but scores of Kashmiri Pandits who were chased out of their homes have still not been able to find a way back.

The roots of the exile date back to 90s in Kashmir valley when an armed struggle backed by Pakistan erupted against Indian rule after several failed attempts of resisting the Indian state through democratic means were scuttled by local Indian proxies. While dozens of people including Indian army personnel, militants and civilians died every day during that time, the militancy resulted in a significant power shift from the state to local gun-wielding youth who enjoyed a vast support from locals, particularly Muslims.

In the backdrop of all the ensuing violence, the members of minority Kashmiri Pandits in Muslim majority valley were killed by militants, prompting a wave of fear among them which ultimately resulted in Pandits migrating to the plains of peaceful Jammu region of the state. Every day dozens of Pandit families would pick up whatever little they could and cross the Banihal tunnel to reach Jammu where they had to live in camps and tents in almost inhuman conditions. Houses brimming with families and people turned deserted in matter of days. But there were still many who didn't leave and decided to face whatever was in the store.

Hence to conclude we can say that the Jammu and Kashmir Government and Government of India have failed squarely to protect the Kashmiri Pandits against Islamic terrorism.

Religio-Cultural Motivations: Walls were plastered with posters and handbills, summarily ordering all Kashmiris to strictly follow the Islamic dress code, prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks and imposing a ban on video parlours and cinemas. The masked men with Kalashnikovs force people to re-set their watches and clocks to Pakistan Standard Time.

Shops, business establishments and homes of Kashmiri Pandits, the original inhabitants of the Kashmir valley with a recorded cultural and civilisational history dating back 5,000 years, are marked out. Notices are pasted on doors of Pandit houses, peremptorily asking the occupants to leave Kashmir within 24

hours or face death and worse. Broadcasting vicious Jehadi sermons and revolutionary songs, interspersed with blood curdling shouts and shrieks, threatening Kashmiri Pandits with dire consequences, became a routine 'Mantra' of the Muslims of the Valley, to force them to flee from Kashmir..." 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). Tens of thousands of Kashmiri Muslims poured into the streets of the Valley, shouting 'death to India' and death to Kafirs...

Few slogans are repeatedly played the whole night from mosques: 'Kashmir mei agar rehna hai, Allah-O-Akbar kehna hai' (If you want to stay in Kashmir, you have to say Allah-O-Akbar); 'Yahan kya chalega, Nizam-e-Mustafa' (What do we want here? Rule of Shariah); 'Asi gachchi Pakistan, Batao roas te Batanev san' (We want Pakistan along with Hindu women but without their men), tere hathoon main sabaz lakeer nahi, Kashmir tere baap ki jagir nahi, etc.

In the preceding months, 300 Hindu men and women, nearly all of them Kashmiri Pandits, had been slaughtered ever since the brutal murder of Pandit Tika Lal Taploo. Soon after that, Justice N K Ganju of the Srinagar high court was shot dead. Pandit Sarwanand Premi, 80-year-old poet, and his son were kidnapped, tortured, their eyes gouged out, and hanged to death. A Kashmiri Pandit nurse working at the Soura Medical College Hospital in Srinagar was gang-raped and then beaten to death. Another woman was abducted, raped and sliced into bits and pieces at a sawmill. Following methods were commonly used by the militants to exterminate the Pandits from the valley:

1. Killing of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir by terrorists clearly depicts extreme sadism. All victims have been subjected to extreme torture and terror.
2. Torture deaths have been brought about by such inhuman practices as:
 - Strangulation by using steel wires
 - Hanging
 - Impaling
 - Branding with hot irons
 - Burning alive
 - Lynching
 - Bleeding to death
 - Gouging out of vital organs
 - Dismemberment of Human bodies
 - Drowning alive.
3. Terrorists have frequently indulged in barbaric acts like performing 'death dances' after killing their target.
4. Many a time, dead bodies were not even allowed to be properly cremated.

In response to this situation tens of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits across the valley take a painful decision: to flee their homeland to save their lives from rabid jihadis. As many as 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits have fled their home and hearth and been reduced to living the lives of refugees in their own country. Two-thirds of them are camping in Jammu. The rest are in Delhi and in other Indian cities. Many of them, once prosperous and proud of their rich heritage, now live in grovelling poverty, dependent on government dole and charity.

Main Camp Sites in Jammu:

- Muthi Camp, Jammu
- Transport Nagar, Jammu
- Purkhoo Camp, Jammu
- Stadium Camp, Jammu
- Jhiri Camp, Jammu
- Nagrota Camp, Jammu
- Mishriwala Camp, Jammu
- Battalbalian Camp, Udhampur

Main Camp Sites in Delhi

- Nandnagri
- Sultanpuri, Kailash Colony
- Maviya Nagar
- South Extension
- Palika Dham
- Lajpat Nagar
- Aliganj
- Bapu Dham
- Amar Colony
- Mangol Puri
- Patel Nagar
- Sultanpuri
- Moti Nagar
- Begampura

Since 1989 when armed conflict started in the valley, property worth hundreds of thousands was raised to the ground or else destroyed. It led to social disorder, disorganization, educational backwardness, physical and mental health deterioration, mass psychological depression, mass humiliation and extreme helplessness and the degenerated cultural aggression. The conflict had resulted in loss of a significant number of people. According to conservative official estimates nearly 40,000 people have been killed since 1989, however unofficial estimates put the figure around 80,000 (half of them were civilians). The death to family member has created a challenge to the family as a whole, socially as well as economically. Most alarming aspect of the conflict is that prominent victims of violence during the last two decades were the youth. They at once become the targets, perpetrators as well as survivors of conflict. While their childhood was lost in the incidents of armed conflict, they could not be socialized in proper cultural and religious ethos of Kashmir.

During the last two decades the Kashmir society has scattered, leaving children either orphaned or as household heads. The loss of a family member generated a number of problems which has to be reflected practically in a number of ways in day to day life of the leftovers. More commonly the widows has to be psychology under stress and economically dependent on the labour of their children.

Conclusion: Conflict destroys the safe environment provided by a house and a family, leads to inadequate nutrition, education and unemployment. The civic services became inaccessible. Education, civic amenities and health care, etc. remained there in name. As many as 891 schools have been destroyed since 1989 in Kashmir during the course of military confrontation. Strikes, security threats, bomb blasts, arrest of teachers and absenteeism have left the educational performance and Health care facilities in the Valley paralyzed on the one hand and on the other hand the number of patients is increasing constantly. A large percentage of population is on medication these days. In this conflict-ridden society, some dreaded disease could not be stopped to emerge with dangerous implications. At average every family on an average the conflict has rendered family members as patients of cardio logical, neurological, oncological, cancer related and other dreaded diseases. However, the most common disorder developed as a consequence of the conflict is of psychological nature. The number of patients who visited Srinagar's only psychiatric hospital increased from 6 per day in 1990 to 250-300 in 2000 per day. The total number of patients rose from 1,760 in 1990 to 18,000 in 1994, to over 50,000 in 2003. And in 2006 the number patients had increased to 82000.

References:

1. Rahul Pandita, "Our Moon has Blood Clots: The Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits" , Random House India Publisher, 2013.
2. Bhan, K.L, "Paradise Lost: The Seventh Exodus of Kashmiri Pandiths", Kashmir News Network, 2003.

3. Bhati, Avanti, ed. "Kashmiri Pandiths: Problems & Perspectives", New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2005.
4. Kaw, M.K, et.al —Kashmiri Pandiths: Looking to the Future| New Delhi, APH Publishers Corporation, 2001.
5. Kilam, Jiya Lal, "A History of Kashmiri Pandits", Srinagar: Gandhi Memorial College Publications, 1955.
6. Koul, Anand, "The Kashmiri Pandit", Delhi: Utpal Publications, 1991.
7. Pandit Som Nath, "Kashiren Batan Hend Rasam ti Rewaj" (Traditions & Customs of Kashmiri Pandits), P.G. Kashir Department, Kashmir University Srinagar, Publisher Gh. Hassan, 1983.
8. Pandit, M.L. & T.N Pandit, ed. "Kashmiri Pandits", New Delhi: A.P.H publishing corporation, 2005.
9. Pandita, Rahul, "Our Moon has Blood Clots: The Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits" London: Random House Publishers, 2013.
10. Sender, Henny, "The Kashmiri Pandits: A Study of Cultural Choice in North India", Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988.
