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Migration of Kashmiri Pandits: Kashmiriyat Challenged?

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MIGRATION OF KASHMIRI PANDITS: KASHMIRIYAT CHALLENGED?[*]

Khalid Wasim Hassan[**]

Abstract

The post-1988 period saw the re-emergence of the 'self-determination movement' in Kashmir. The secular nationalist voice within this movement propagates the idea of Kashmiriyat - a shared cultural identity of people from different faiths. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in the early 1990s seems to pose a challenge to the claims of secular nationalists and to the whole concept of 'Kashmiriyat'. This paper will attempt to briefly look at the concept of Kashmiriyat and its conceptualisation by Kashmiri Nationalists, while in detail it will look at the various narratives around Pandit migration to see if and how this migration poses challenges to Kashmiriyat.

Introduction

The post-1988 period in Kashmir saw the re-emergence of the 'self-determination movement' and many political and militant groups challenged the sovereignty of the Indian State. The secular nationalist group, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which was at the forefront of this movement, has always propagated the idea of Kashmir as a nation, which includes people of different ethnic and religious affinities. The Kashmiri Pandits, a minority (*about 4 % of the total population)* in the valley, form an important part of the 'Kashmiri Nation' as conceptualised by secular nationalists. Their secular slogan of *Kashmiriyat* and demand for a secular independent Kashmir made them acceptable among the larger sections of the population in Jammu and Kashmir.

The early 1990 period also witnessed selective killing of prominent personalities supporting Indian rule in Kashmir, mass rallies chanting anti-Indian and Islamic slogans, denouncing of symbols of Indian nationalism and attempts at 'Islamisation'. During this period the state apparatus also failed to control militancy and provide security to minority groups. A majority of Kashmiri Pandits who had been comfortable with Kashmir's accession to the Indian Union could not identify with the *azadi* movement led by Kashmiri Muslims challenging Indian sovereignty. It was in the backdrop of these circumstances that Pandit migration took place from the valley to Jammu and other parts of India. Tens of thousands of Kashmiri Hindus left the Kashmir valley within months.[i] Even after two decades the question of Pandit migration is very much vibrant in the discourses on contemporary self-determination. The notion of secular Kashmiriyat, in general, and the secular credentials of the Kashmiri self-determination movement, in particular, has come under the scanner. In order to understand the migration of Kashmiri Pandits in a broader historical context and not only as an event, it is important to discuss what constitutes (construction - de-construction) Kashmiriyat in general and, in particular, its conceptualisation by secular nationalists.

[*] This paper is based on the secondary sources as well as interviews with the members of the Pandit community, leaders of various pro-self-determination groups and interaction with journalists, human rights activists and intelligentsia in the Kashmir valley.

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Kashmiriyat

Kashmiriyat, as the word itself suggests, is used to denote *Kashmiri-ness* – the common Kashmiri identity of the inhabitants of the Kashmir valley.[ii] There are varied ways in which it is understood and there is a historical trajectory to its usage by religio-political groups at different stages in Kashmiri politics. Scholars have debated for long over *Kashmiriyat*.

Notion of common cultural traditions

The main inhabitants of the Kashmir valley are Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus (called as Pandits)[iii], sharing of a common culture. This common culture and their peaceful coexistence have been used to describe *Kashmiriyat* (Puri 1954, 1995; Akbar 1991). The main tenet of *Kashmiriyat* is the network of socio-cultural and historical ties that bind all Kashmiris regardless of religion, into an independent social collective. While Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits) follow different religions, they share many cultural practices that are a fusion of the elements of their respective religious practices as well as the uniquely Kashmiri devotional and philosophical norms (Punjabi 1992). Communal harmony has been a strong social norm in Kashmir society.[iv] Social harmony and close association between two communities has been regarded as one of the indicators of *Kashmiriyat* (Punjabi 1992; Puri 1995). The local traditions in terms of language, food habits and dress are similar. Members of both communities speak the same Kashmiri language – called Kausher – that, according to Grierson (1919), has Dardic origins rather than Indo-Aryan. They wear the same dress, *pharen*, use *kangari* to keep warm in winter and Kashmiri tea (nun-chai) keeps brewing in both households throughout the day. This commonality and close association has been attributed to geographical and historical factors; geographically huge mountain ranges cut-off its inhabitants from the outside world and helped them form a close-knit community and historically mass conversion to new religions occurred without erosion of earlier cultural traditions.

Notion of religious 'syncretism'

There are scholars (Bazaz 1954; Sufi 1974; Khan 1994; Bamzai 1994) who argue that *Kashmiriyat* is derived from the history of religious 'syncretism' in Kashmir particularly between Hindu Shaivate Vedanta and Sufi Islam, which both draw upon Kashmiri cultural practices. Islam in Kashmir is influenced by ancient Kashmiri culture and the Kashmiri Muslim shared many inhibitions, superstitions and idolatrous practices with his Hindu compatriots that are unknown to 'Islam' as practiced in other parts of the world (Bazaz 1954, Sufi 1974). Sufi saints and *rishis* have played a major role in the spread of Islam in Kashmir on the one hand, and spreading the message of religious 'syncretism' and religious tolerance on the other. *Rishis,* the religious ascetics in Kashmir, who for centuries, preached mutual tolerance and non-orthodox religion, have acted as common points of cultural reference for the development of an ethnic collective consciousness in geographically isolated Kashmir. The mysticism advocated by *Lal Ded* – a 14th century Hindu spiritual woman and *Nund Rishi* - a Muslim saint, considered as *Lal Ded's* spiritual heir - lies at the heart of *Kashmiriyat*. Their poetry, which is respected and recited by members of both communities, has played a major part in the thought process of the common Kashmiri (Khan, 1994). Both communities expressed common reverence at their shrines and

some other shrines too. The *Chare-i-Shareef* was visited by Muslims and Pandits. However, proponents of the 'puritan' form of Islam call this practice as *shirik.*[v]

It is the religious 'syncretism' that is said to have made Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits different from their respective co-religionists elsewhere. Kashmiri Muslims recite verses of the Quran and *Darood* (verses in praise of Prophet Mohammad) aloud after *Nimaz* (puritan form of 'Islam' strictly prohibits it) and there is no strict adherence to *hijab* or *burqa* among women. Similarly Kashmiri Pandits follow *Shaivism,* which incorporates numerous tantric rituals that would be considered unorthodox in usual behaviour of Brahmins (Sender 1988). Though there are differences among Brahmins in rest of India, Kashmiri Pandits consider themselves different from the rest of Brahmins and higher in hierarchy and they follow their own rituals and festivals. *Heerath, Navreh* and *Tiky Tsoram* are some of the religious festivals celebrated only by Kashmiri Pandits. One noteworthy point is that while Kashmiri Muslims avoided eating beef, Pandits regularly ate *halal* mutton.[vi]

Notion of pluralism - co-existence

Then there are scholars (Madan 1989; Rai 2004; Wani 2005) who negate the idea of religious 'syncretism' as part of *Kashmiriyat* and assert that the two communities have been always two separate communities as far as their religious practices were concerned. They give more emphasis to pluralism rather than syncretism while defining *Kashmiriyat*. The two communities though conscious of their religious identity and different political and economic preferences, were living in peace and expressing tolerance towards each other. Wani (2005) negates any influence of Hinduism on Islam in Kashmir but he agrees that the variations (reciting Qurarn or Darood loudly after Nimaz) among Kashmiri Muslims made them distinct and attributes it to the traditions prevalent in Central Asia, from where Islam reached Kashmir. According to Madan (1989) the social interaction - visiting each other's homes or attending weddings was not because of a syncretic culture but interaction by co-residence and economic transactions. Besides, in the absence of the lower castes, Madan (1989) argues that Kashmiri Muslims used to do menial jobs for the Pandits.

Its use in local politics

Though understood differently by various scholars, *Kashmiriyat* found usage in the discourses of political movements at different periods. In political movements (against the Dogra rule in the 1930s and self-determination after 1947), *Kashmiriyat* was conceptualised as the establishment of cordiality in a heterogeneous society so that the majority and minority communities are together in the desired political system or movement.

National Conference and Kashmiriyat

Shiekh Abdullah used this concept of *Kashmiriyat* when he changed the name of the Muslim Conference to National Conference to accommodate non-Muslims in the late 1930's in the struggle against the Dogra rule. According to Rai (2004), after 1947 *Kashmiriyat* was propagated by the National Conference. Select cultural fragments from an imagined past were compiled to construct a *Kashmiriyat* that would appeal to Pandits and Muslims. It was used by the National Conference, repeatedly, to show

the distinct cultural identity of Kashmiris to support the demand for autonomy. After the Shiekh-Indra Accord of 1975 it was used to avoid public criticism. While recollecting the popularity of the discourse in the post 1975 era, Ishaq Khan - a well-known historian from the Kashmir valley says:

> *I still remember how the standard-bearers of Kashmiriyat at the Cultural Academy impressed upon me more than once why it was incumbent upon intellectuals to popularize Kashmiriyat as an ideology to thwart the insidious designs of the Congress leadership at Delhi as well as communalist forces in Indian politics against the Kashmiris. Given the despondent state of affairs in Kashmir, assertion of Kashmiri identity under the name of Kashmiriyat was considered to be the only and most viable strategy for combating the cultural and political onslaught of Delhi on Kashmir. It had essentially emerged as an ideology of the exploited and suppressed people for the recognition of their self-hood in the comity of nations which was hijacked by Delhi in order to suppress the identity aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims.[vii]*

After 1989, *Kashmiriyat* again became a slogan for the National Conference to oppose political and militant groups that stood for self-determination. The militant groups, according to Farooq Abdullah, were against social and cultural harmony that the people in Kashmir enjoyed as *Kashmiriyat* and which the National Conference has always stood by.[viii]

Secular Nationalists in contemporary self-determination movement

It is also interesting to look at the conceptualisation of *Kashmiriyat* by the secular nationalist voice in contemporary self-determination movements. The on-going movement for self-determination does not have a monolithic voice; there are many voices within the movement varying across political and ideological issues. Many religio-political groups supporting self-determination are active in Kashmir valley and can be broadly classified as secular nationalists and Islamists. For the secular nationalist groups like the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) the contemporary movement is a political one for the right to self-determination. The 'self' in their conceptualisation of 'self-determination includes all the people who live in an area that was, geographically, the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. *Kashmiriyat* is defined by them as a collective identity of people in Jammu and Kashmir of different religious, regional and linguistic affinities.

The perception of outside rule being hostile to cultural identity supported nationalist arguments of *Kashmiriyat* as a distinct cultural and political identity. The advocates of Kashmiri nationalism divided the history of Kashmir between the periods of Kashmiri rulers and outsiders and not between Muslim and non-Muslim rule. As such Mughal (1586-1757), Afghan (1757-1819), Sikh (1819-46), Dogra (1846-1947) rule is considered foreign and now Indian rule is included in this list. In an interview to a foreign journalist in early 1992, Gulam Abass Beig, then secretary-general of JKLF said,

> *The azadi movement is a reaction to a history of centuries of subjugation and deceit. Our Kashmiriyat culture is unique, our customs and way of life are unique - we feel Kashmir is our own country. Now, the Indian authorities are a threat to this culture. We want to build our own country, in our own way, according to our own culture.[ix]*

It is the sense of belonging and common aspirations to be an independent nation that gives some weight to the Kashmiri nationalistic argument. According to Prof Shafi Shauq who heads the Kashmiri Department in University of Kashmir, *it is the distinct cultural identity which comes from our language, local traditions and perception of outside rule as 'other' which form the constituent of Kashmiri Nationalism.*[x] Bashir Ahmad Bhat, who is Vice-Chairman of JKLF, while narrating his personal experiences in the self-determination movement, besides other things talked about *Kashmiriyat*. According to him,

> *For me self-determination is a movement for the people of all faiths living in the state*
> *of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed before 1948. The harmonious social relations*
> *between Muslims and Pandits and respect to each other's faith, is Kashmiriyat.*
> *Kashmiriyat is our nationalism but not what India tries to show.*[xi]

The Kashmiri nationalists see it as equivalent to nationalism and not as sub-nationalism as regarded by the Indian Sate. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India regarded the Kashmiri identity as an asset for the Indian nation, but only as a sub-set of the Indian identity. Kashmiri identity, like all sub-national identities - Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali - must be integrated into the larger collective of the nation (Behera 2000). Due to the appropriation and official use of the concept *Kashmiriyat* by the Indian State, the pro self-determinations groups who used the slogan of *Kashmiriyat,* have become apprehensive of using it publicly.

Change in Kashmiriyat: Internal and External Factors

In the recent past there was a shift in the Sufi form of Islam practiced in Kashmir, which had an impact on the discourse on *Kashmiriyat*. One the one hand socio-religious groups like *Jamat-i-Islami* and *Jamat-i-ahl-Hadees* in Kashmir that were started as reformative organisations propagate the 'puritan' form of Islam through their literature and schools. They consider the Sufi practices as idolatrous and not part of 'true' Islam. The Jamat gives more importance to the 'Muslim identity' of Kashmiri Muslims and is critical of *Kashmiriyat,* which 'has brought dilution in that identity. Faheem Ramzan who is a senior member of Jamat-i-Islami and past-president of the *Jamait-e-Tulba,* the student's wing of Jamat, says,

> *The concept of Kashmiriyat is being propagated for personal interests by people of*
> *secular nationalist as was done by Shiekh Abdullah. It is being misquoted as religious*
> *assimilation to make the Indian occupation permanent.* [xii]

On the other hand, there were 'external' factors, such as the Iranian revolution, Palestinian *intifada* and the Afghan war against the Soviets, which had an impact on the way Kashmiri Muslims perceive their identity and on the discourse on *Kashmiriyat*. The photographs of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the Iranian revolution, were displayed on the streets of Srinagar in the late 1980s and Friday prayer sermons included special prayers for the 'Mujahideen' of Afghanistan and Palestine.[xiii] Both these factors (role of *Jamaat* and external factors) led to a change in the perception of 'US' and 'THEM' - 'us' became the Muslims of the world and 'them' as non-Muslims which included Pandits.

Kashmiri Pandits

Like the Kashmiri nationalists demanding self-determination, most of kashmiri Pandits also consider Kashmir a culturally distinct nation but politically they consider it a part of India. Though Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits share the same cultural traditions, there are differences in the resepective socio-economic status and political aspirations.[xiv] While referring to Kashmiri Muslims, Vikram Dhar, a Kashmiri Pandit, wrote in a letter to an English newspaper in Srinagar:

> *We have all love and respect for you people because you are our own people. Our culture, our history, our traditions, our tastes, our language is same. Outside Kashmir whenever we meet our fellow Kashmiri Muslim we bring him to our place, prepare sheer chai with best Malai on top - why? Is he our relative - No! So why we cook Kashmiri dishes and eat together - why? Is it appeasement - No! It is love for motherland, we get psychological satisfaction.[xv]*

A Kashmiri Pandit I met in Srinagar sighed when I asked him about Kashmiriyat and said:

> *Our distinct culture, Milchaar (love towards each other) and Boijut (Brotherhood) among Pandits and Musalmaans of Kashmir is Kashmiriyat which makes us different from others. But, we form the part of larger Indian Nation. We share a common ancient history and it's always better to be part of modern secular India.[xvi]*

For Kashmiri Pandits, Kashmiriyat is about their distinct history and cultural identity but they conceptualise it within the parametres of Indian nationalism. In the post-migration period, there was a change in the politics of Kashmiri Pandits, which in turn led to changes in their conceptualisation of Kashmiriyat.

Pandit Migration - Different Narratives

The narratives on the causes of Pandit migration vary from source to source - government records, Pandit migrants, Pandits still in valley, pro-self-determination groups and Kashmiri Muslims in general.

Migrant Pandits

According to the majority of the Kashmiri Pandits who have settled down in various cities of India, the 'displacement' of their community took place in an atmosphere of fear created by Muslim separatists who killed members of the Pandit community. It is noteworthy that Pandits use the term 'forced displacement' instead of migration.[xvii] A Kashmiri Pandit living in Delhi says that he has always been sympathetic towards the cause of Kashmiri Muslims but the statements of militant groups in Urdu dailies telling us to leave the valley and the slogans like *Ae Kafiroo Ae Zalimoo, Kashmir Hamara Chhod Do* (You Infidels You Tyrants, Leave our Kashmir) from loudspeakers of mosques disturbed him. He also mentions incidents of young Muslim boys teasing him with the slogan *Asi gache Pakistan, Batav ros Batnev san* (We want Pakistan, inclusive of pandit women and exclusive of Pandit men).

There were also warnings and threats from militant outfits, which were carried in the local newspapers. Two Srinagar-based newspapers, *Alsafa* and the *Srinagar Times*, carried direct threats in April 1990, allegedly issued by the Hizbul Mujahideen, ordering Kashmiri Hindus to leave the valley or be killed. According to Panun Kashmir the mouthpiece of migrant Pandits, *the fact is that Kashmiri Pandits were driven from their homeland after a campaign of intimidation and harassment was launched against them by the military-wing of the secessionists.*[xviii] It was done, it (*Panun Kashmir*) argues, to create a minority-free Kashmir where the goal of 'Islamisation' could be easily forced on ordinary people.

A Pandit migrant in Jammu notes that posters were put up outside mosques labeling Kashmiri Pandits as agents of India and *that they had always and invariably acted as traitors and stabbed Kashmiri Muslims in the back.*[xix] Mosques and shrines - the places of large gatherings - were used as places of protest, which Puri (1990) and Bose (2003) attribute to lack of democratic space to launch a protest. Militant groups used to communicate their messages and warning to those alleged to have affiliation with the National Conference, the police, administration or intelligence (which included Muslims and Pandits equally) by putting up posters and distributing pamphlets inside Mosques.

More than real attacks it was the atmosphere of fear and the threat perception from the 'other' that played a major role in driving Pandits from the valley in large numbers. Kashmiri Pandits shared the ethno-nationalist identity of their Muslim counterparts, but as the self-determination movement gained momentum in 1989–90, they began to feel an increasing sense of vulnerability and insecurity in response to what they perceived as a threatening atmosphere in the region (Behera 2000; Evans 2002). According to a report published in the Economic and Political Weekly at that time, "the exodus of Hindu refugees... is due to the tremendous fear created by the large rallies and angry demonstrations against the Government by the majority community. The Muslims claim and the refugees agree that there were no communal incidents or burning and looting of houses, misbehavior with women etc. The refugees say that they left their houses because they feared that something of this kind would happen soon. The Muslims feel that they have been insulted by the Hindus because although there was no danger to their lives or properties, they left the valley and so defamed the whole Muslim community".[xx] Manohar Nath Tickoo who had migrated to Jammu in early 1990s says,

> *Me and my neighbours never wanted my family to leave Kashmir but there was definitely a massive psychological fear created by unknown agencies against Kashmiri Pandits which forced us to leave. Although the fact remains that not a single Muslim forced us to leave.*[xxi]

Pandits in the valley

There are Kashmiri Pandit families living in the valley that did not migrate in the 1990s and there are some who returned after leaving the valley for some time. Their narrative is different from those who migrated to Jammu, Delhi and other parts of India. Though they do not agree that the exodus of Pandits was Governor Jagmohan's conspiracy, they are nevertheless critical of the State's inability to provide security to minorities. They do not hold the entire Muslim population of the valley responsible for the migration and acknowledge the support and protection provided by the Muslim neighbours.

There were numerous reports of Muslim neighbours and friends looking after the houses, farms and places of worship of the Pandits.

"If anyone could have run away from the valley, it would have been Muslims," says a Kashmiri Pandit who lives in the valley along with Muslim neighbours, while talking about the atrocities committed by the para-military troops on the common people. He is sympathetic towards self-determination movement but feels that slogans like *Allah-u-Akbar* hardly provide any space for non-Muslims in it.[xxii]

The Pandits in Kashmir (who stayed back) formed an organisation called *Kashmir Pandit Sangarish Samiti* (KPSS) which interacts with pro-self-determination groups on various issues and often supports them.[xxiii] Unlike Panun Kashmir, the KPSS is not in favour of a separate homeland for the Pandits. Its narrative on Pandit migration also varies. Sanjay Tikkoo who heads *the* KPSS is of the opinion that *though there were threats and killings by militants of Kashmiri Pandits in early 1990s but a common Kashmiri Muslim was not against us.*[xxiv] He added that *it was because of his Muslim neighbors that he and others like him did not leave Kashmir in the period of turmoil.* He was critical of the *Panun Kashmir* of migrant Pandits, which according to him is under the influence of pro-Hindutva political groups. In 2007 Kashmiri Pandits also started their own political party, the Jammu Kashmir National United Front and it was recognised by the Election Commission of India. According to its founding members they can no longer depend on political parties like the BJP and Congress and in the time of coilation politics a political party of their own can better serve the interests of Pandits.

Pro-self-determination groups

Apart from attacking security forces and blasts in government buildings, the early militancy witnessed attacks on prominent personalities, which included MLAs, National Conference party workers, police officers, intelligence officers, judges and so on. Some prominent members of the Pandit community were killed.[xxv] The JKLF and other pro- self-determination groups that were part of the armed struggle in the early 1990s, claim that there were some killings at the beginning but not on the basis of religion. *Whosoever worked for Indian agencies or acted against the movement was killed irrespective of religious identity, which is why Muslims killed by militants outnumbered Pandits,* is the claim made by most of the pro-self-determination groups. However, they also agree that some innocent Pandits as well as Muslims got killed 'due to personal revenge or infiltration of bad elements in movement'.[xxvi] This argument has been supported by the works of Madan (1993) and Bose (2003) who argue that Muslims also were killed by militants in the early 1990s and the number of Muslims killed was three times more than that of the Pandits. But this rational of understanding of targets of militant attacks (both Hindus and Muslims were killed if they happened to be pro-India or Informers) is not possible among the minority community which had to live in a highly surcharged environment

The secular credentials of the self-determination movement in general and the nationalist groups in particular, were challenged by the migration of Kashmiri Pandits. The movement was being questioned on the ground that the people who violate the basic rights of their own minorities could not possibly have a moral right to demand self-determination. The self-determination movement, claimed as a political movement by most of groups in Kashmir, was being seen as part of pan-Islamic

fundamentalism. Teng and Kaul (1992) while referring to pro-self-determination groups in Kashmir argue that 'if there are any groups involved who call themselves secular their... actions against religious minorities belie their self-serving pronouncements. They could have stood up for protection of Hindus right from the beginning'.

Blame on State machinery

The other narrative holds the State machinery responsible for the migration of the Pandits. Most of the pro-self-determination groups, irrespective of their ideological differences, blame Governor Jagmohan for facilitating the migration of Kashmiri Pandits in order to stigmatise the political movement for self-determination as communal. During his regime, Jagmohan acted as the sole authority in Jammu and Kashmir. Under Article 92 of the State Constitution, Governor's Rule implies absolute power, which unlike President's Rule in other states, is not accountable to Parliament. He dissolved the State Legislative Assembly and justified it too - without dissolution there was no moral legitimacy to use force, nor was it possible to secure obedience of orders from local officials (Jagmohan 1990). The state machinery, especially the police and bureaucracy came directly under his control, he even controlled the press - press releases issued by Governor Jagmohan's office in Rajbhawan was the main source of news for the media (Puri 1993).

According to Schofield (1996) there was a widespread feeling that Governor Jagmohan, who had a reputation of being anti-Muslim, dating back to the days of the Emergency, played a role in the migration of the Hindus. While calling Governor Jagmohan's response to the azaadi movement as a combination of pure terror and politics of pure manipulation, Akbar (1991) argues that he (Jagmohan) encouraged the already frightened Pandits to migrate to generate a support for his whip-hand tactics. In popular perception in Kashmir valley Governor Jagmohan represents a 'hate figure' *sent from Delhi to evacuate Pandits from the valley and suppress the Muslim population there for whom he had a paranoiac feeling that all of them are Pro-Pakistani terrorists.*[xxvii] Among other slogans in the pro-azadi processions, people used to raise slogans against Governor Jagmohan; one used very often was *Jagmohan-nen Kabar Kashmeeri Naibar* (the Grave of Jagmohan - outside Kashmir).

These allegations are backed by the evidence presented in a report by an independent committee that visited valley in early 1990 - government transport was provided to fleeing Pandits and government employees among them were assured their salaries in Jammu. R K Takkar, then Chief Secretary of Jammu and Kashmir, claims that transport could have been provided by individual government officials because it was not the policy of the state government. He agrees about the promise of salaries to Pandit government employees. He has also revealed that only a few Pandits faced real threat from militants for whom security could have been provided. [xxviii] Baruah (1990) says that "Even in Srinagar, prominent citizens made efforts to persuade the minority Pandits not to leave. A small committee was formed for the purpose, but the efforts were unsuccessful. Governor Jagmohan, it is alleged, encouraged the migration." Apart from some independent committees and pro-self-determination groups accusing Government, particularly Governor Jagmohan, for encouraging Pandits to migrate, some Kashmiri Pandits also made some sensational revelations through their letters to newspapers and their Muslim friends. One such letter published in a local Urdu newspaper states:

In the first week of February 1990, a word was sent to the members of the Pandit community in Kashmir and they were asked to migrate to safer places. This message from the former Governor Jagmohan was conveyed to the Pandit community through some self styled Pandit leaders. Pandits were told that the government had plans of killing about one lakh to one lakh fifty thousand Kashmiri Muslims particularly, the youth in order to overcome the uprising against India. Pandits were assured that they would be looked after well, that they would be provided free relief, free ration, jobs and free accommodation. Pandits were assured that once the proposed massacre of the Kashmiri Muslims was completed and the movement was curbed, they would be sent back to the Valley. That is how the Pandits left.[xxix]

Rajnath Turki (a Kashmiri Pandit) writes in a letter to his friend Mushtaq,

... hope by God's grace everybody is fine there. I tried to write to you earlier but due to ill health had to postpone it. Anyhow how is everybody there? I came here in end July that too when security people at Karan Nagar forced us to leave.[xxx]

However, considering it merely as allegations, Jagmohan strongly refuted:

What can you say of a committee which comes out with a proposition that it is not the fearsome environment, it is not the brutalised landscape, it is not the ruthless Kalashnikov of the marauders, it is not the bomb explosions and fires, it is not the threatening telephone calls, it is not the hysterical exhortations for "Jihad" from hundreds of loudspeakers fitted on the mosque...but the inducement of the trucks that have impelled the Kashmiris to abandon their homes and hearths in the cool and crisp valley and to move to the hot and inhospitable camps of Jammu? (Jagmohan, 1990)

Even the organisations of Pandit migrants like *Panun Kashmir* denied the argument of pro-self-determination groups that in 1990 Kashmiri Pandits left Kashmir willingly, having been "tricked" by then Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan.

Problems faced by Pandit migrants

The Pandits who migrated to different parts of India had to face socio-economic as well as cultural problems. The Kashmiri Pandits with distinct cultural practices and food habits and having lived in different climatic conditions found it difficult to adjust in other places. The affluent among them could afford to have their second homes in Delhi, but the vast majority was housed in tents in more than 50 camps on the outskirts of Jammu and Delhi. Those who had lived in migrant camps in Jammu talked about the unhygienic conditions and harsh climate; the heat in summer and insects and snakes in the rainy season (Schofield 1996).

Most affected among them were the rural folk uprooted from their farms and orchards in the valley; lack of professional qualification made them more vulnerable than the urbanized Pandits. According to a Kashmiri Pandit who had migrated to Jammu in early 1990, "*We were not welcomed by*

Hindu Dogras our co-religionist in Jammu who felt that we will compete with them for jobs and business on the one hand, and on the other we never felt close to them culturally as we used to feel for Kashmiri Muslims... the respect which Kashmiri Muslims used to give us was a distinct dream in Jammu."[xxxi] The migrant Pandits always complained about the State and Central Government for not taking good care of them and leaving them in camps at the mercy of social and religious Hindu organisations. Some prominent Hindu organisations had centres around *Geeta Bhavan* – the main migrant camp of Pandits in Jammu - taking care of the migrants and instigating them to organise demonstrations in Jammu, Delhi and other places in India and used their sufferings to gain political mileage. In Delhi, it was the *Kashmir Samiti Delhi* (KSD) which represented the interests of displaced Pandits and helped them in getting jobs and starting small businesses in the city. The migrant Pandits also faced double displacement as they were shifted from the places where they tried to establish their small businesses to different places in Delhi (Duschinski 2007).

Rise of Hindutva and Pandit Migration

Traditionally majority of Kashmiri Pandits in valley were supporters of the 'secular politics' of the National Conference and at the national level the Congress was their choice. The *Praja Parishad*, which was formed in early 1950s as the vanguard of the Jana Sangh in Jammu and Kashmir had little appeal among Kashmiri Pandits.[xxxii] This scenario changed in the beginning of 1990s. One the one hand the armed struggle by Kashmiri Muslims challenging Indian sovereignty started and on the other side there was the rise of the BJP in Indian politics

According to Trembley (1996-97) Kashmiriyat as a concept of ethnic identity distinct to the valley and uniting Hindus and Muslims came under serious attack on the one hand from fundamentalist groups such as the *Hizbul-Mujahideen* and on the other by the association of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community supported by the Sangh parivar. The Hindutva groups, like the RSS and Bajrang Dal, supported the Kashmiri Pandit migrant organisations like Panun Kashmir, which in turn started using their language, *Hindu Rastrya*, *Kashmir's full integration into India* and accused the Congress of *appeasement of Muslims* in general and Kashmiri Muslims in particular. The close association of the Pandit migrant organisations led to a change in their conceptualisation of Kashmiriyat and created a wedge between them and Kashmiri Muslims who started to see them as part of communal politics. It also served the interests of Islamists in Kashmir valley who support the two-nation theory because they always accused Kashmiri Pandits as being anti-Muslim.

The migration of Kashmiri Pandits provided a platform to the BJP. The abolition of Article 370, which gives special status to Jammu and Kashmir, was one of the main slogans of the BJP and it culminated in Ekta Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir when BJP leader M M Joshi hoisted the Indian flag in Srinagar. According to Nandudar (2006), the BJP's Hindutva politics worked on the perception of 'Muslim threat' to Hindu majority, which created the exodus of Pandits from a Muslim majority state and served their ideology. In one of their publications, the Hindu right-wing political group RSS, documenting the 'genocide' of Kashmiri Pandits claims that 600 Pandits were murdered and 36 temples desecrated.[xxxiii] The leaders of the BJP, RSS and Bajrang Dal raised the issue of Kashmiri Pandits in their speeches. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, then BJP president L K Advani, in response to

criticism of his party said, "*none raised the voice when 40 odd temples were desecrated in Kashmir. Why these double standards?*" [xxxiv] The powerful Hindu religious nationalist political parties continue to highlight the plight of the Kashmiri Hindus as part of their own critique of the prevailing forms of Indian secular nationalism. In this way, the community got embroiled in highly politicised national debates concerning secularism in terms of politics, governance and the state's responsibility towards its citizens.

Shift in Pandit discourse on Kashmiriyat

As a minority in the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Pandits have always seen themselves politically as a part of secular India, but culturally they used to distinguish themselves from their co-religionists in the rest of India. There has been a shift in their perception of their distinct cultural identity - from 'Kashmiri Pandits' to being a part of the larger 'Hindu identity' of India. Punjabi (1995) observes that *Kashmiri Pandits who had laid foundations of this Kashmiriyat and played a pivotal role in developing the identity of Kashmir, started identifying themselves with the larger Hindu religious majority of India. For various political and economic reasons, they abandoned their indigenous beliefs and traditions and started merging with the traditions and beliefs of India's majority religious community.* The Kashmiri Pandit migrants claimed to be the original inhabitants of the valley and regarded their Hindu ancestors as the aboriginal founders of Kashmiriyat.[xxxv] *It is our ancestors that watered Kashmiriyat with their blood*, writes P N Tikoo in an English daily while discussing Kashmiriyat.

Emphasising Kashmiriyat's Hindu origins (brushing aside its Muslims and Buddist antecedents, in other words) lends historical weight, of course, to the demand of the *Panun Kashmir* - that an autonomous enclave, *Panun Kashmir* (Our Kashmir), be carved from the valley and placed under Pandit administration. *Panun Kashmir's demand for separate* "homeland" within the valley, according to Trembley (1996-7), would amount to nothing less than religious apartheid. It has proposed a sterilised Pandit Homeland in the valley, which would cover 55 per cent of valley's land area and contain the four major towns of Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramullah and Sopore. For the Panun Kashmir the accession of Kashmir to India by Maharaja Hari Singh was final (Kashmir being *atut aang* of India) and the ongoing self-determination movement a part of the Islamic terrorism supported by Pakistan.

Conclusion

Looking at the conceptualisation of Kashmiriyat by different scholars and different political groups, it has been seen largely as a relationship between the Muslim majority and the minorities from other religions while more stress has been given to the relationship between Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits from valley to different parts of India had a negative impact on this relationship. No doubt, there have been differences between the two communities on various socio-economic and political issues, but till the late 1980s it never led to confrontations on a scale that would make one of the communities feel insecure in their own homeland. It was the toleration, defined in terms of Kashmiriyat, which kept the two communities together. The migration of Pandits posed a threat to the secular fabric of Kashmiriyat. There has also been change in the conceptualisation of Kashmiriyat by Kashmiri Pandits after migration. Living away from the homeland and close association of some of their organisations like the Panun Kashmir with Hindu right-wing groups widened the gap

between them and members of the Kashmiri Muslim community. They stressed on the 'Islamic identity of the Kashmiri Muslims rather than their Kashmiri identity, and saw them as a part of the larger Muslim community.

The narratives on Pandit migration varies across different actors involved in Kashmir politics and within the Pandit community too. Allegations and accusations were traded between one party and another. Though no one agrees on a single cause about Pandit migration, it is interesting to see that even after two decades of their migration, the debates on the subject still continue. Besides, the divergent political demands of Kashmiri Pandits bring in the deeper theoretical question of 'minorities in self-determination' which pro-self-determination groups have to deal with while conceptualising the movement. The question as how 'self' and 'other' is being defined in a movement comes into the picture. The secular nationalists made 'self' inclusive by including Pandits and other minorities as part of self-determination and part of their envisioned Nation. However, Pandit migration repudiates this inclusiveness of 'self' in self-determination. The Kashmiri self-determination movement has come under moral scanning - people who violate the basic rights of their own minorities cannot possibly have a moral right to demand self-determination for themselves. The important thing to note is that the application of the right to self-determination in modern multi-ethnic multi-cultural societies can be extremely unsafe for minorities because it seldom happens that wholly homogenous societies are co-existence with specific territories.

Notes

[i]   The number of Kashmiri Pandit migrants remains disputed. Evans (2002) estimates on the basis of census data and demographic figures that 155,000–170,000 Kashmiri Pandits have left the Valley as migrants since the onset of violence in 1989.Evans (2002) estimates on the basis of census data and demographic figures that 155,000–170,000 Kashmiri Pandits have left the Valley as migrants since the onset of violence in 1989.

[ii]   Some of the scholarships on Kashmiriyat have taken a lead from the travelogues of foreigners and the poetry of local poets. Lawrance (1895) as well as Younghusband (1909) in their works on Kashmir have written about 'innocent' Kashmiris living in harmony. Similarly the Kashmiri poets like Mahjoor (1940s) bring out the ideal picture of Kashmir in his poetry.

[iii]   According to 1981 census, the percentage of Muslim and Pandit population was 94.96% and 4.59% respectively, in Kashmir valley and others constituted 0.5%. The 1991 census was not conducted and the 2001 census shows two communities as main composition of population.

[iv]   Most often Gandhi is being quoted when he said in midst of communal riots at the time of partition that he can see a *ray of hope in Kashmir.* Even during my interaction with the people in Kashmir (summer 2008), most of them were referring it to explain the cordial relationship that existed between Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits

[v]   Literally it means to consider anyone on par with Allah, which is considered as the highest (worst?) form of sin in Islam.

[vi]   Sanjay Raina who migrated to Delhi in early 1990s besides other things was complaining about the difficulty of getting *halal* meet in the locality

[vii]   In a personal interview with me at his residence at Rawal Pora, Srinagar

[viii]   In an interview to local newspaper, April 1990.

[ix]   As quoted in Cockell, John G (2000), 'Ethic National abs (and?) subaltern political process: exploring autonomous democratic space in Kashmir', *Nation and Nationalism*, p 319-345

[x]   Interaction with Shafi Shauq at Kashmir University Campus in May 25th 2008.

xi   In a personal interview with me at JKLF office, Bohri Kadal, Srinagar.(15th May 2008)

xii   In personal interview at Yateem Trust (orphanage), Bemina Srinagar where he works as head clerk now

xiii   Personal memory of researcher.

xiv   There was a perception among Kashmiri Muslims that even after end of Dogra rule, Kashmiri Pandits have been close to political power. A common saying among Kashmiri Muslims that prevailed in 1970s was, "If you talk aloud in front of Kashmiri Pandit, he will directly call-up Indira Gandhi" and "If you mess up with Pandit, he will not harm you physically but can cause you more harm with the stroke of his pen".

xv   Letter published in English Daily - *Greater Kashmir* on October 19, 2008.

xvi   In an interview during my fieldwork in October, 2008.

xvii   Kashmiri Pandits who have left valley in 1990s did not like the term 'migration' as according to them they did not move out of Kashmir valley of their own choice, instead they were forcibly displaced. In my interaction with the members of Pandit community in April-June 2008

xviii   Panun Kashmir is an organisation founded by Pandit migrants in 1991. It means 'Our own Kashmir'. www.panunkashmir.com (Checked on 22/03/09)

xix   Interview with Kashmiri Pandit who hailed from Habba Kadal area of Srinagar. He was living in a migrant camp at Jammu for 3 years.

xx   A Report by Rashira Seva Dal (RSD) which visited Jammu and Kashmir during the first half of April 1990. It was published in the Economic and Political Weekly (5-12 May, 1990, p.978)

xxi   'Two decades of Exile'- interview of Manohar Nath Tikko on Kashmir-watch, posted on 18th February 2009. Tikko used to live in Anantnag where he worked as school teacher before he left Kashmir in 1990

xxii   Kashmri Pandit who is a member of Bar Association and Human Right's Activist. (Identity kept anonymous as told by respondent).

xxiii   Recently in June 2008 KPSS supported pro-self-determination groups on the Amarnath land transfer controversy.

xxiv   In an interview with Sanjay Tikkoo in Srinagar on October 16,2008. *Kashmir Pandit Sangarish Samiti* (KPSS) - organisation of Kashmiri Pandits who live in valley - was formed in 2003 but came before masses in 2006. The organisation has been interacting with separatist groups in Kashmir. KPSS is trying to build up spaces of interaction between Pandits and Muslims and it's also trying to persuade Pandits to came back

xxv   Ali Mohammad Watali - Director General of Police survived the attack by militants. Mohammad Yusuf Halwai - National Conference party worker was the first one killed by militants in valley. It followed the assassination of leading Pandits like Tikka Lal Tapoo - BJP leader and Neel Kanth Ganjoo - the judge who had sentenced Maqbool Bhat to death.

xxvi   In my interviews with members of JKLF, Hurriyat Conference and Jamat-i-Islami (April-May, 2008).

xxvii   From my interviews with people from different sections in the valley. In Kashmir valley Jagmohan was being identified with communalist forces due to BJP's backing for the repressive measures he adopted through para-military forces. But most of the Pandit migrants considered him their savior as he took them to safer places, though among Pandits also he is being criticised for his wrong policies.

xxviii   A report by team that visited Kashmir in March 1990, published in EPW, 'India's Kashmir War', p.654)

xxix   Letter written by K L Kaul from his ancestral house Chaman located in Chanapora in Srinagar to daily Al-Safa newspaper, published on September 18, 1990 .

xxx   Another letter written by Rajnath Turki to his friend Mushtaq Wani who was manager in Brick and Tile factory, Pampore. It was written on an Inland letter and posted on 20-12-1990. I found this letter at the residence of Zaref Ahmad Zareef' - a Kashmiri poet during my fieldwork in June 2008.

xxxi   In an interaction with Mr Ban who used to live in Karanagar area of Srinagar. He used to run coaching classes

for Medical Entrance Test, which both Pandit and Muslim students used to attend.

xxxii At the time of the formation of the Jana Sangh, its founder Syma Prasad Mukerjee drew the attention of members to two issues: the special relationship of Kashmir with India and the condition of Hindus in East Bengal. Its manifesto focused on Bhartiya culture, Hindi as link language, full integration of J&K and denial of safeguards to minorities.

xxxiii As far as destruction of temples as claimed by RSS and BJP, it was proven wrong by investigative team from India's leading news magazine, which visited each and every site and found that all temples intact. They found that even in villages with one or two Pandit homes, the temples were safe As reported in India Today, February 28, 1993

xxxiv After the Gujarat riots (2002) Parveen Togadia and Narendra Modi used the Kashmir Pandit migration as a point to justify what happened to Muslims in Gujarat. Speeches of Togadioa and Modi as recorded in Anand Patwardan's documentary on the Gujarat riots called *Final Solution,* which was made in June 2002.

xxxv The introduction of the websites maintained by Kashmiri Pandit organisations like Panun Kashmir, Roots in Kashmir which came into existence in the post-migration period read as 'Kashmiri Pandit's - the original inhabitants of Kashmir valley...' Even there has been change in historiography - the history is being seen as divided between Hindu period which they call as Golden period and the Muslim period which they call dark period as Kashmiri Brahmins faced persecution or were forced to convert, see Bhan, K L (2003), *The Kashmir Series - Paradise Lost Seven Exoduses of Kashmiri Pandits*, Kashmir News Network.

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