



REVISITING THE 1989 INSURGENCY AND PANDIT MIGRATION IN KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Dawn of armed insurgency in Kashmir in 1989 brought about new political dynamics to forefront. The abrupt escalation of violent conflict created vicious cycles of action and counter-action between militants and security forces. Marked by volatile situation, insecurity, hopelessness and escalating armed violence in early 90's, the affluent minority Pandit community and a smaller section of Kashmiri Muslim community left the valley. Scholars have mostly used the term "exodus" for such migration which was believed to be temporary by many who left the valley. Kashmir crisis continued for decades and the return couldn't be ascertained for many years. Based on survey of literature and limited personal interviews, this paper examines the nature of real event of exodus in Kashmir in 1990. The paper further tries to examine the current politico-social dynamics that are linked with return of migrants to their homeland and debates around it. The findings suggest that no proper conclusions can be drawn from existing literature on contested claims by the two communities. Further, the research tries to establish that even though there is enough communal harmony and support of separatist and J&K government, the migrant community's mistrust and Kashmir's recurrent political disturbance prevents their en-masse return.

Keywords: *Kashmir conflict, insurgency, Pandit exodus, armed escalation*

1. Introduction: The decade of 1990 represents one of the violent phases of Kashmir Conflict since its inception. Large scale violence became part of politics on all fronts which was totally an exception for the otherwise nonviolent tradition of popular as well as elite assertions since 1947. Scholars deem the 1987 election rigging as final blow to the political process which made inroads for insurgency in Kashmir. Other reasons cited by various scholars are the rising political consciousness, unemployment, economic grievances and central governments arbitrary meddling in state affairs. Rise of insurgency and frequent armed confrontations between security forces and militants coupled by strikes worsened the situation. Killing of some high level officials,



many of whom were Pandits and some worst massacres of Kashmiri Muslim protestors done by security forces under governor Jagmohans's highhanded approach escalated the tensions to extreme level. A significant number of Pandit numeric minority community fled the valley to be relocated in various shelter camps in Jammu. A small section of Muslims also left the valley amid fear, uncertainty and rising violence. The prolonged nature of the Kashmir conflict didn't seem to have given enough opportunity to the displaced minority community along with the other dynamics to return to their native places and establish their once flourished life once again.

2. Historical Context: During the time Partition, the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir became a disputed territory between India and Pakistan. Out of the 550 princely states in British India, most of them had already acceded to one or the other dominion under the "two nation theory". However, in case of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, Prince of Kashmir, procrastinated the Accession to either of dominion thus laying it open for coveting by contiguous newly emerged states i.e. India and Pakistan. Muslim majority and Hindu rule, nature of state became central for the indecisiveness coupled by turns in political developments in previous decades within the vale. The anti-Maharaja rebellion which started from Poonch area covering areas close to Srinagar through Muzaffarabad and subsequently flight of Maharaja and his Accession to Indian dominion on limited subjects became the precursors of the proliferated conflict which exists today. The deployment of Indian army and Pakistan backing of the rebels finally opened a full scale war between Indian and Pakistan within the territory of Kashmir which came to an end by a UN mediated ceasefire line, thus dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan Control areas.

Kashmir Conflict got enmeshed in international power politics after it was listed in United Nations Security Council where self-determination as a basic peoples' right was mandated for resolution of the dispute. UNSC has retained Kashmir as a disputed territory between India and Pakistan to this date. The pre-partition political elite who were involved with pro-democracy movement in Kashmir reorganised and formed the Plebiscite Front in 1955. This came to scene particularly after Sheikh Abdullah, a popular Kashmiri leader who was engaged in institutional process of Kashmir relationship with India was arbitrarily arrested and jailed in 1953. Plebiscite Front was pushing a nonviolent campaign for right to self-determination which was mandated by United Nations and as such was an alternate channel for popular representation. Sheikh remained jailed until the Indra-Abdullah Accord was signed in 1975 and he returned to conventional political. Mass supporters of Front felt disillusioned by this Accord which was seen as a surrender of the demand for self-determination as Sheikh had accepted to run the state government under Indian constitution. Many political parties like Jamaati-i-Islami, Freedom Front, and Peoples Conference opposed this development and anti-NC sentiment also rose. Sheikh Abdullah was now seen as a betrayer of the nation however a sizable section was still influenced by his personality cult and by the Land reforms in 1950 which had benefitted many people, especially constituted by older generation. The growing influence of Islamic Movements across Middle East also attracted young people to join Jamaat-i-Islami and its student wing Jamaat-i-Tulba. The Islamic revolution in Iran served to give inspiration to many youth in Kashmir to bend their politics to Muslim identity. Jamaat-I Islami was running its schools and many young people were attracted to join these schools. Sheikh Abdullah ordered the closure of these schoolsⁱ as he had



predicted the growth in support of his opposition forces even though Jamaat-I-Islami had won a single seat only in 1977 elections.

After Sheikh Abdullah's death in 1982, his son Farooq Abdullah inherited his political legacy as CM. To prove his worth, he pushed the Resettlement Bill to the political scene which was duly endorsed by Jamaat-i-Islami, Awami Action Committee and other local opposition groups. The bill intended to give citizenship to people and their descendants, who had fled Kashmir prior to 1954, to return to Jammu and Kashmir and claim their properties as long as they swear allegiance to India and constitution of Kashmirⁱⁱ. The bill and pre-poll alliance, which didn't come to fruition between Farooq and Indira Gandhi, created rift between them. Further Awami Action Committee's support to National Conference during the process of Resettlement Bill and its alliance with National Conference with the intentions of Muslim solidarity against the outside dominationⁱⁱⁱ, further charged the atmosphere. As Naqash^{iv} further write that the campaign of elections was directed at the threat faced by Kashmiri Muslims against the outside domination by "alien" Congress-I which Abdullah alleged had indulged in communalism and regionalism. Indira took extraordinary interest personally and started a fierce campaign which often created viciousness and vulgarity. Farooq was playing the card of Autonomy and protection of Article 370¹ to regain the supporters of National Conference who had turned averse after the 1975 Accord. Indira Gandhi campaigned along the communal lines in Jammu Hindu Belt, accused by L. K. Advani for playing the Hindu cards in Jammu and Kashmir. Elections went to Farooq's favour with National Conference winning 47 and Congress-I 26 amid wide accusation of rigging by Congress patron Mufti Sayeed.

Farooq Abdullah unlike his father moved a step ahead by entering national stage with seventeen parties in an organised conclave meet in Srinagar on 5-Oct-1983 to discuss Indian federalism and to form real federation and limiting the powers of centre to influence the states. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Akali Dal of Punjab also joined the campaign for regional autonomy and form an alliance against the Congress-I^v. Indira was herself into the drive of centralising the federation and the three day conclave led her to grave insecurity and threat. This enraged her and thus set a stage to oust the Farooq. In the coming days Chief Justice of High Court was appointed by Centre directly. In a Cricket match held in Bakshi Stadium, people hooted against Indian team and cheered for West Indies and some Jammata-i-Islami activist raised their party flag which resembled the Pakistani flag. Indira was also humiliated by people in Iqbal Park Srinagar during her election campaign, which was also attributed to Farooq Abdullah. He was accused of patronising the secessionists and anti-national elements, and indulging in unconstitutional and undemocratic behaviour. The incident of kidnapping the Indian diplomat M. H. Mehta on 3-Feb, 1984 by a group claiming Kashmir Liberation Army (KLA) believed to be associated with JKLF, demanded release of JKLF leader Maqbool Bhat sentenced for

¹ Article 370 granted "special status" to Kashmir after Maharaja's Accession to India in 1947. This was based on clause 7 and 8 in Instrument of Accession signed by Hari Singh to safeguard his sovereignty. This article of Indian constitution of 1950 applies to Kashmir and allows the Central government's jurisdiction to defense, external affairs, and communications in Jammu and Kashmir.



death in 1980 on the murder charges of a police officer. Congress in reprisal immediately hanged Maqbool bhat on 11 Feb 1984.

Congress accused National conference of having links with KLA and other groups like jamaati-i-Islami, people's league and Freedom Front etc and nurturing anti-national elements. National Conference and Awami Action Committee alliance was questioned and finally Farooq was accused of providing space and training for Sikh militants (All India Sikh Students federation) which led to ousting of Farooq by Governor Jagmohan. He personally ensured the defection of thirteen members of National Conference and did not allow Farooq to prove the majority on the floor of the house^{vi}. He was dismissed on July 2, 1984

G.M Shah, who had broken away from National Conference and established his own "Awami National Conference" Party, was placed as Chief Minister by the Indira Gandhi. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi extended his support to Shah till 1986 when communal violence broke in the valley. 26 members withdrew support to Shah and he tendered his resignation. Jagmohan imposed Governors rule without dissolving the state assembly which was followed by presidents Rule. After the assembly was dissolved in late 1986, fresh elections were announced for 1987.

The various Islamic parties came together and formed a coalition named as Muslim United Front (MUF) in 1986. It became a common man's platform and posed a threat to NC and Congress. Jagmohan's Hindu bias among the other factors made it more appealing. The elections were held on 23, March 1987 and an overwhelming participation with 80 percent was recorded in the valley. National Conference-Congress alliance swept the elections by sixty six seats, MUF won four and BJP two. A widespread rigging was reported by MUF whose activists were thrown out of polling stations as soon as the counting began. Mohd Yousuf Shah now a chief of Hizbul Mujaheddin was expected to win by a large majority from the Amira Kadal constituency, lost the elections.

The large scale rigging was a blot on the democratic participation and peaceful method of political participation. People were disappointed and disillusioned which manifested itself in ubiquitous protests and demonstration throughout the valley. Brute force was unleashed on the dissenting voices, with scores of MUF activists incarcerated under dubious charges. The apparent breakdown of nonviolent modes of political participation to an ethnic group often leads to them seek other ways of asserting themselves. "Where the state suspends access by nationalist minorities to the political process, militants often emerge to demand autonomy or secession by violent means^{vii}". The decade long disarray in political relationship between central government and state political elites ushered in a new politics, a politics by guns.

3. Rise in armed militancy: JKLF: During the period of 1987-9 some significant changes were taking place in world politics. Cold war was coming to an end which was marked by a wave of resurgence of nationalities demanding rights. Taliban with support from U.S. had forced USSR out of Afghanistan which was viewed as victory across Muslim world, also developed a rationale for many movements across Muslim world



that they can win. As the USSR was collapsing, various nationalities ‘blinked in disbelief as statehood was theirs for the taking’. The instances of Romania and Afghanistan became particular influence to Kashmir. “Romania was important because televised images of the people-power that seemed to topple Ceaucescu were beamed into many a Kashmiri home. Afghanistan mattered because the impression in Kashmir was that the *mujahedeen* had defeated the massed forces of the Soviet Union”^{viii}. The simmering effect of political landscape in the previous two decades developed a rationale in synchronisation with international developments which gave motivation to the youth in Kashmir and the scenario after disillusionment with institutional politics of India became a ready situation for Kashmiri mobilised youth to look for alternative.

New generation of Kashmiri youth, supporters of MUF, were immediately arrested after the rigged elections and lodged in different jails with no apparent charges. It was in the police control rooms and Kashmiri jails that the first generation of Kashmiri militants were born^{ix}. During 1987-88, four promising young Kashmiri men, Muhammad Yaseen Malik, Ashfaq Majid Wani, Sheikh Abdul Hamid, Javed Ahmed Mir joined the JKLF which was already active in Kashmir and slipped into Azad Kashmir for training. Called the HAJY (Hamid, Ashfaq, Javed and Yaseen) group, “they became the core of the organization that declared war in 1989”^x. The term HAJY in Urdu and Kashmiri language means one who has returned from the obligatory pilgrimage of Mecca a religious duty, evoked sensitive frames of sacredness, necessity and to some extent un-questionability of the group and the movement, beyond serving the motivation for participation by large numbers.

31 July 1988 marks the beginning of the armed movement in Jammu and Kashmir with active involvement of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The armed campaign against the Indian rule became imminent when the pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Force (JKLF) hurled bombs at the Central Telegraph Office and Srinagar Club. While the bomb caused no human casualties, it was portentous of the events to come^{xi}. The group's origins go back to at least 1971, when it came into prominence through the hijacking of an Indian airliner. But the movement had failed to excite much following in the valley of Kashmir, according to Amanullah Khan, current chairman of the JKLF, since most of its organizers were not in fact from the valley but from Azad Kashmir, which though also predominantly Muslim, is culturally and linguistically distinct from the Kashmiris in the valley^{xii}.

On 8 December 1989, the JKLF militants as a planned strategy kidnapped the daughter of the then Central Home Minister Mufti Muhammad Sayeed, Dr Rubia Sayeed and demanded the release of five of their jailed colleagues in exchange for her release. The government conceded to the demands of militants and Dr Rubia Sayeed was released and received safely in exchange for the prisoners. The released persons were Hamid, Altaf, Javed, Noor Mohammad, and Gulam Nabi, younger brother of Maqbool Bhat. JKLF and its supporters saw it as a breakthrough on both fronts, in terms of reaching to negotiation table and exerting power at the negotiating table. People welcomed it as a victory raising the morale of JKLF in public. Celebration started in Srinagar, people came to streets which sparked a police shooting at the gatherings that left several dead. The CRPF along with Kashmir police started widespread house to house search operations and disturbed the calm in localities of



Srinagar. Public protests redoubled, this time against alleged abuses including rape, theft and torture committed by the police and CRPF in the course of the search operations^{xiii}.

Jagmohan Malhotra who had previously asserted the authority in Jammu and Kashmir in 1980's and worked the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah, was again appointed as a governor on 19, January 1990. Farooq resigned in protest for earlier treachery and rivalry on the part of Jagmohan. "Soon after the imposition of Governor's rule, the people in Kashmir were administered as severe shock. At 5 am on 20 January 1990, security forces cracked down on a part of Srinagar city and conducted a house-to-house search and rounded up over three hundred persons most of whom were, however, released later"^{xiv}. Next day people defied curfews and alleged excessive use of force in search operations and ill-treatment of women. Protest demonstration took place all around the city and suburbs and large number of peaceful protesters including women and children met at Gau kadal. CRPF started indiscriminate firing killing at least fifty persons and injuring hundreds. After the rise in militancy this was the first large scale killing of civilians, now remembered as Gau Kadal Massacre. Blame game between Governor and Farooq Abdullah started over the episodes of violence which Farooq blamed on governor upon taking his office however no public enquiry was ordered in both the incidents. "Such incidents continued to recur, taking an even higher human toll, and with allegations of worse excesses"^{xv}.

The protest rallies by unarmed civilians against the excesses by government forces gathered momentum by 21 and 22 January. The CRPF engaged in a series of confrontations with these protestors around the city, leaving at least 130 unarmed protesters dead. The eyewitness will recall how the CRPF men moved among the dead, kicking and laughing, and searched to shoot if anyone survived the bullets^{xvi}. The CRPF's butchery of civilians infuriated the Kashmir police, some of whom went on strike while others reportedly came to blows with CRPF men^{xvii}. CRPF didn't even spare the Kashmir police personnel killing at least three, against which "about 200 personnel of state police held a protest demonstration on January 22." They demanded the dead bodies be handed over to them. All of the local police and the local officials were considered to be disloyal, even the senior IAS and IPS officers were sidelined who couldn't be trusted for the new policy of state. "The occupant of Raj Bhawan with his image of himself as a messiah was determined to rescue Kashmir from the Kashmiris. He was determined to fight single-handed on all fronts. In such a situation, excessive distrust became as counterproductive as blind trust could have been"^{xviii}.

Jagmohan subtle warning didn't go smooth with the people "I have come here as nurse . . . I promise you a clean administration. But if anyone creates a law and order problem, the cards of peace which I am carrying will slip away from my hands"^{xix}. In the subsequent weeks he further polarised Kashmiri opinion by "insisting repeatedly that the security forces were blameless, and that there was by no human rights problem in Kashmir except that brought about by 'terrorists'. As he said in an interview with the *Times of India*, the Kashmiris' alienation was a 'theoretical issue' and that Kashmiris were just 'frightened pigeons in the net of terrorism'^{xx}." "Frenzied crowds of unprecedented size comprising men, women and children, belonging to all sections of the society including government servants, often under the banner of their respective departments, moved on to the streets of Kashmir



demanding Azadi^{xxi}.” The state response was continued curfews at a stretch for weeks, shoot at sight order issued; all avenues were closed for public only a break for two or three hours in a day to collect the essential commodities.

By February, Kashmiris in Srinagar were turning out in groups of several tens of thousands to march on the United Nations' office in Srinagar (UNMOGIP was established in 1953 as part of the United Nations mission to monitor the line of control), and the ambivalence of young Kashmiris had also turned to militancy. The Kashmir police, as well as the civil administration, had become sullen and uncooperative, and they openly expressed sympathy for the rebels^{xxii}. It was the logical outcome of such a reckless and ruthless policy that ten thousand desperate Kashmiri youth went to Azad Kashmir for training. “It was unofficially explained that this could happen not on the account of lack of check on the borders but due to a deliberate policy to get rid of the Kashmiris youth who were not to be allowed to return”^{xxiii}. With these incidents of state response, the militancy entered a new phase. “It was no longer a fight between the militants and the security forces. It gradually assumed the form of a total insurgency of the entire population”.

The January massacres, Jagmohan's hard-nosed attitude, and the strict regime of constant, round-the-clock curfews, search operations, and severe harassment (illegal detentions, torture, random killings) as well as Jagmohan's 19 February dissolution of the state assembly, all contributed to a massive surge of support for the JKLF^{xxiv}. Jagmohan was finally dismissed in May 1990, after the CRPF opened fire on the funeral procession of Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq, a reputed religious and political leader in Srinagar, well known for his leanings towards Pakistan, and killed more than fifty mourners which included four women mourners.

There are views that the governor's heavy hand approach had done considerable damage to India's cause by inciting a relatively minor insurgency into a full-blown popular revolt. “As Ashok Jaitley, a highly respected senior officer of the Indian Administrative Service (the national administration cadre), who worked under Jagmohan in 1990 and became one of the governor's most severe critics said 'What Jagmohan did in five months they (the militants) could not have achieved in five years’”^{xxv}. The greater the repression by the state, the more people joined the militancy. Once the explosion of freedom sentiment took place, young Kashmiri men began to cross into Pakistan Administered Kashmir by the hundreds in search of weapons and training, the Pakistani military and intelligence services quickly woke up to the opportunity at hand. Jamaat Islami, which has from the inception shown its inclination towards Pakistan, was now supported by Pakistani Agencies.

4. Militant tactics: Insurgency remains a highly political act, arising from some sense of grievance or upon the exploitation and manipulation of grievance^{xxvi}. Often ethnic groups resort to violent means when normal political processes don't yield desired results. When the conflict is asymmetrical the weaker groups that can't stand huge armies undertake hit and run tactics to inflict damage. The armed groups with their relatively weaker position strategise to prolong the war and inflict economic and human costs on the opponent. Generally



the armed groups “operate in difficult terrain- mountain, desert, forest, swamp and jungle- of which they often possessed local knowledge denied to their opponents”^{xxvii}.

The ethnic uprising is seen as natural reaction of indigenous groups against the oppression or occupation when inclusive political processes and institutions are dysfunctional or have lost their legitimacy. The militants in Kashmir used force effectively to achieve the immediate political objective of paralysing the state apparatus and delegitimizing institutions that had failed to articulate and address the political aspirations of Kashmiris. “They sought to defy the state authority; transfer people’s allegiance and loyalty to themselves; attack the state symbols; and render every state institution that could potentially meet their political challenge dysfunctional.” strategy of militants also seemed to intimidate political activists of the pro-India parties in order to compel them to dissociate themselves from the party, ultimately leading to a complete breakdown of the political process. In one of such incidences, a National Conference worker Halwai was killed and “a placard on the Halwai’s body identified the JKLF as responsible for his death^{xxviii}.”

The ethnic militancy of Kashmir was an outcome of failed political process in which most of the excluded political organisations themselves formed militant groups. These political organisations gave credibility to these armed groups in representing the public opinion and sentiments. A high degree of local ethnic cooperation and willingness to support the militants exists in the society and give heroic status to the armed fighters who fight for their cause.

The beginning of armed movement saw people especially youth joining the armed ranks all over the valley. When the operational strategies for the groups were restricted in urban area, rural areas became their home. Villages are usually in proximity with forests, armed deployment was less dense, and some militants were working in their own localities. People treated them as guests provide food, and other necessities etc with love and pride.

Azad Kashmir supplied weapons, held training camps and provided sanctuary to Kashmir militants. Sardar Abdul Qayyum, president of Azad Kashmir which is under the control of Pakistan, described it as the ‘base camp of the Kashmiris freedom struggle^{xxix}. Due to geographical contiguity most youth will move through the LoC and receive training in camps established by JKLF and later Hizbul Mujaheddin. In an interview of the then chief of Hizbul Mujahedin, Ahsan Dar, with Edward Desmond, in October 1991, Ahsan claimed that Hizbul Mujaheddin has three stages strategy. The first was arousing Kashmiri consciousness to join the rebellion which he thought was accomplished. The second was to make the rural side impassable and inaccessible for the Indian forces and third, they wanted Indian soldiers to restrict them to their camps and attack them there. Last two seem to appear as distant proposition^{xxx}.

The warfare tactics used by the militants groups were all common. A militant would fire on CRPF Sand bunker and run away from the sight and disappear. As the intensity of conflict grew, armed groups also started preemptive attacks on military and CRPF installations. In June 1990, the Muslim Janbaz Force, armed group used



for the first time rocket-propelled grenade launchers and by 1991, the militant groups used RPGs widely in attacks. Militant groups seemed to possess large stocks of anti-vehicle mines, “but they were not widely in use, perhaps out of fear of accidental harm caused to other Kashmiris”^{xxxii}.

The tactic of kidnapping by the rebel groups seemed excelling because the government most often gave in to the kidnappers demands. Armed groups used the kidnapping to bargain the release of their comrades.

Some of the symbolic tactics were also used by militants, for example observing Friday as holiday instead of Sunday, even public offices tacitly followed their orders and almost everyone, complied with its curfews and blackouts. The campaign to replace state sponsored events for example shutdown strikes were observed on the Independence Day and Republic Day of India, events of burning Indian flag were observed, nomenclature for “Accession day” changed to “Occupation day”. The death of Maqbool Bhat was commemorated with rigor and passion while Sheikh’s death was celebrated as Yome-Nijat (Day of Deliverance)^{xxxii}.

5. Pandit exodus: Kashmiri *Pandit* community, a small Hindu minority community indistinguishable from Muslims had a swift departure from Kashmir valley in the immediate of armed insurgency. Semantics vary over the issue- some *Pandits* call it ‘ethnic cleansing’ and go to the extent of calling it ‘genocide’, while many scholars find the term “exodus” more appropriate. It is very difficult to choose the appropriate vocabulary in a conflict which has affected millions of lives directly or indirectly, and put the people of same community on opposite tables, at least politically. With the rise in political violence, armed nationalists started selective targeting of government officers who they saw as a threat for their movement. Some of these selective killings included Kashmiri *Pandits*. IJK’s population was 65 percent Muslim, but of 22 senior-level officers in the IJK branch of India’s professional civil service, only five were Kashmiri-speaking Muslims, and the Valley’s tiny *Pandit* minority was hugely overrepresented in IJK’s own civil service and among officers in its banking system^{xxxiii}.

By the matter of this proportional inequality some of those targeted happen to belong to *Pandit* Community “between September 1989 and February 1990, although Muslim victims numbered three times as many. High-profile *Pandit* victims included the president of the Kashmir Valley unit of India’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in September 1989, the retired judge who a decade previously had sentenced the JKLF cofounder Maqbool Butt to death in November 1979, and the director of the Srinagar station of India’s government-run television network in February 1990”^{xxxiv}, what happened in early 1990 when *Pandits* departed en masse needs some elaboration.

Kashmir was in mass revolt demanding self-determination, protest demonstration and mass rallies were all across the valley. The en masse participation was nonviolent but underground movement of JKLF’s armed campaign was also gathering pace “symbolizing complete rejection of state authority, putting the Indian state on its weakest footing yet. India now recognized the need for a radical shift in its Kashmir strategy. It was no longer a problem of internal “law and order” but of “cross-border terrorism,” which required a counterinsurgency strategy^{xxxv}. “Jagmohan, IJK’s New Delhi-appointed governor, who had assumed the post



three months earlier after the previous governor apparently refused to collude in conspiracies, a one-man crusader, instead of revitalising and mobilising the governmental and political institutions, he centralised all the important decision-making powers in himself^{xxxvi}.

Some of the *Pandits* had received threats through letters and posters pasted on the walls of their houses. Two Srinagar based newspapers, *Alsafa* and *Srinagar times* carried threats against the *Pandits* on 16 April 1990, allegedly supported by both *Hizbul Mujahedeen*, a group which was in its infancy at time. Although in the situation of chaos it was difficult exactly to identify the agency behind these reprehensible acts. By January and February 1990, some affluent *Pandits* started moving to their second homes in Delhi and Jammu for their safety. Jagmohan, reputed for his anti-Muslim predisposition, as a counterinsurgency measure ordered nocturnal crack downs in Srinagar upon taking his office. Some 300 youth were arrested; reports of rape, and other violation appeared which further infuriated people. People started sloganeering on Loud Speakers, *Azaadi, Yeha kya Chalay Ga Niyamay Mustafa*, reciting *Kalimas* (invoking God), *Aye kafiro, aye Jabiro kashmir humara chodao, Kashmir Baneja Paskistan*, in desperation. Kashmiri *Pandits* amid the deteriorating security situation, in the valley starting feeling insecure, coupled with killings of some of the prominent *Pandits* of State administration decided to leave the valley.

The separatists claim that there was conscious political agenda of government under Jagmohan, who provided state transportation to *Pandits* and assured them that government has already arranged their accommodation in Jammu. Given the grave nature of situation no facts could be established whether transport was provided or not. Division commissioner *Wajahat Habibullah*, a senior Indian Administrative Service officer conceded that there may have been odd examples of official transport being made available but state administration did not encourage the *Pandits* to leave. In March 1990, a delegation of about 300 Muslims came to *Habibullah*, who was placed in district *Ananthnag* at the time, led by an MLA to stop the *Pandits* from leaving the valley. *Habibullah* recommended to Jagmohan to make a Television broadcast who instead chose to announce the establishment of three refugee camps in Jammu and also maintained that salaries of displaced civil servants would continue to be paid^{xxxvii}.

In 1990, *Balraj Puri* also visited the valley for the second time. Earlier in 1986, Jagmohan on Goodwill Mission had successfully reversed the decision of *Pandits* to migrate. By this time a new wave of repression was unleashed by Jagmohan, Kashmiri Muslims were in angry mood but Muslims expressed a genuine regret over *Pandit* departure and urged to stop and reverse it. Encouraged by this popular mood, *Balraj Puri* helped in constituting a joint committee of two communities, with former Chief Justice of high court *Mufti Bahuddin Farooqi* as its President and Kashmiri *Pandit* leader *H. N. Jatto* as vice president in order to allay the apprehensions of Kashmiri *Pandits*. Many Muslim leaders and parties including militant organisations, appealed *Pandits* not to leave the valley. *Jatto* welcomed and endorsed their appeal, but soon Governor *Jagmohan* sent a DSP to him with an air ticket, a jeep to take him to airport, accommodation at Jammu and an advice to leave Kashmir immediately. Governor did not believe to give a trial to inter-community understanding and



rapprochement^{xxxviii}. While it may occur that government didn't orchestrate the *Pandit* departure, but its complicit role became evident in failing to stop the *Pandits* from leaving.

Total number of *Pandits* who left the valley in 1990 could not be ascertained through government records, census of 1981 and prior are the records from which different inferences are drawn. There are certain *Pandit* groups that claim varying figures of 260,000 or 350,000. Panun Kashmir a *Pandit* organisation displays a figure of 700,000 while the actual figures are fewer than 140,000 for Kashmiri *Pandits* who left Kashmir in wake of insurgency. "A consideration of the available evidence reveals that these allegations are, largely though not entirely, a potpourri of fabrication and exaggeration"^{xxxix}. Based on the empirical study on modern parameters, Elaxander Evans deduced that the number of *Pandits*, who resided in the valley in 1990, can range to maximum of 160,000- 170,000 out which a sizable portion stayed back in the valley. The number of those who migrated could be put to an approximate of 90,000-100,000. The census of 1981 provides the numbers of other minorities 33,117 Sikhs, 466 Christians, 189 Buddhists and 62 Jains, who remain in the valley^{xl}.

The number of *Pandits* killed in early 1990 which is considered the prime reason for *Pandit* flight varies. Number of *Pandits* killed after the *Pandit* departure was complete was thirty two as stated by All India Kashmir *Pandit* Conference on March 15, 1990^{xli}. Figures varying from few hundred to thousands appeared since then; the government puts the number at 228 while 1138 Muslims were also killed from 1989-91^{xlii}. The exaggeration of numbers is a part of communal bend of politics which is used as a smokescreen to hide the reality from the international community. At this time, RSS and VHP, Hindu right wing organisations coupled with the BJP had led to demolition of Babri Masjid in the north Indian town of Ayodhya in December 1992. RSS was banned in Jammu following the two incidents of bomb blasts involving *Pandit* youth and one blast in RSS office while allegedly assembling a bomb. In another incident one *Pandit* was killed and another injured after an abortive attempt to blow up an examination centre. State government banned the RSS following a ban on the organisation in the rest of the country. The incidents were orchestrated to give a communal shape to Kashmir movement. Following the ban, BJP leaders and rightwing Hindu politicians made persistent allegations about "desecration and destruction of scores of Hindu temples and shrines in the Kashmir Valley". A leading Indian news magazine took an initiative to investigate the matter.

Its journalists were armed with a list of twenty-three such sites supplied by the Delhi office of the BJP—whose top leader L. K. Advani (India's interior minister post-1998 and deputy prime minister since 2002) said..... "Nobody raised a voice when over forty temples were desecrated in Kashmir. Why these double-standards?" The investigators, who inspected and photographed each site, found that twenty-one of the twenty-three shrines were completely intact (the other two had sustained minor damage in unrest after the razing of the Babri mosque). They reported that "even in villages in which only one or two *Pandit* families are left" since the exodus of 1990, "the temples are safe . . . even in villages full of [armed] militants. The *Pandit* families have become custodians of the temples. They are encouraged by their Muslim neighbors to regularly offer



prayers.” This is consistent with a syncretistic feature of Valley society, in which shrines and saints are often revered by people cutting across formal religious boundaries^{xliiii}.

Consideration of the available evidence reveals that the communalisation of the Kashmiri movement’s claim for right to self-determination is obviously wilful creation to justify that people who wantonly violate the rights of minorities cannot have a moral right to demand Self-determination.

6. Current politico-social dynamics: One of the vocal groups ‘Panun Kashmir’ claiming to represent the Pandit Community is maintaining their position that a sizable portion of Kashmir valley to for establishment of a separate homeland within valley. An ideology that is largely believed to be divisive and impractical for various other reasons², is far from mainstream even in the Pandit community. Another group that has remained behind in wake of insurgency and are living with Kashmiri brethren have subtly maintained their Kashmiri identity transcending the religious and other political overtones to it. But when we see the migrants, they at least constitute two classes. One, the affluent class who has economic and political resource at disposal and two, the dispossessed class who becomes pawns at the hands of state. The former have moved ahead with their lives and settled in different parts of India and elsewhere. The later is lodged behind in migrant settlement camps where their condition is pathetic and hover in that perpetual dismay.

During the same time, some 35000 Kashmiris Muslims had also fled Indian Kashmir fearing the Indian onslaught to settle in Pakistan. Decades later, 40 percent of them are yet to gain access to Pakistani citizenship. On the Pakistani side, these group of people maintain the spectre of humanitarian crisis of Kashmir dispute for Pakistan and affirm their right to self-determination (Ahmed:2010). On the Indian side such groups in migrant camps help India to negate the right to self-determination on the pretext that such travesty of minority rights by Muslims majority in valley reflect that they don’t respect the rights of minorities and therefore their right cannot be justified.

On the rehabilitation front, the govt. of Jammu and Kashmir has taken many initiatives for the return of Pandit migrants. Among the prime initiative, land has been identified and allocated in various districts for the settlement and rehabilitation. On the employment front, separate jobs are created and advertised for the migrant community and a special care is taken in such recruitment. But the question haunts all such efforts. In times of peace and political stability in valley, some Pandit families return to valley on their job placements and other chores but as soon as the some kind of disturbance happens in the valley, most of them return back to Jammu. During 2016 unrest, the Pandit employees held many demonstrations in Jammu asking govt. to shift their postings permanently to Jammu as they can hold back in valley amid such turmoil.

Nearly after the two and half decades since the exodus of Pandits, their new generations are not much enthusiast about Kashmir. The new generation has forgotten about the language, culture and find it very different space to adjust. For example Sandeep who had migrated in 1990’s as a young kid has memories of the valley, having a

² For example see the Christopher Sneddens book “Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris”



big mansion and a lot of friends coming to play cricket with him and going out with friends fearlessly. After decades when he sees back from the Delhi, where he is presently settled, he finds himself lucky for he had moved much ahead in terms of employment and other amenities he is enjoying comparing to if he had stayed back. About culture, language and identity, he believes that his young generation and elder generation have differences. For he aptly puts that they used to speak in Kashmiri to their kids but later schools admin complained that the kids were using some strange words while speaking English and we stopped speaking Kashmiri with them. More than language, we care about their future and if they learn it latter that is good. Second he said that his cousin married a Marathi Girl and there was hue and cry in relatives. But gradually everyone has accepted and are proud of her, for she has proved much better persons, we could have expected from our own community.

On the political front the Hurriyat Conference and other separatist organisations have consistently maintained their position that Pandits are welcome and can settle at ease on the places they have left and other places with their Muslim brethren. On the other front they are against any settlement in separate colonies which they perceive as a ploy for dividing the society and demographic change. The armed groups like Hizbul Mujeheddin have also time and again invited the Pandit community to return and claim their properties and settle in the valley as normal citizens in the valley. Much of Pandit community, who are settled elsewhere, might not find it lucrative or even appealing to come back to a space which has scant incentives. Neither there are prospects for large scale employment in near future nor does the place exhibit any recreational space for a flourishing life. The events of 2008, 2010 and 2016 popular uprising which saw a complete halt of life for months yet again fostered the dismal image of Kashmir for Pandits who think they are better off where ever they are. To the extent even the affluent Muslims of valley also find it frustrating and choking to live under continue turmoil and political unrest for months. The education of children seems the biggest challenge and most of the haves' prefer sending their wards to better schools and universities in India and elsewhere for uninterrupted education.

7. Conclusion: Based on the popular perception, it can be said that vast majority of the valley population recognise and accept the Pandit claim for their return and want them come back and settle. Further most of older Pandit generation have maintained their ties with the valley through family, business and other means. People are connected through information and communication technologies and visit each other in their leisure times. There is a harmonious feeling for each other among the people of two communities and the accounts of hostilities seem frivolous if not totally false on the ground as is displayed in few biased literary works. Major political groups in Kashmir valley genuinely want the return of the Pandit community and all Central and states governments have proactively approached this issue. But the total decline of the social, economic and political life into chaos for fast few decades have created negative perceptions among the Pandit community. This uncertainty certainly does not at all give lucrative idea to Pandit community to return and settle.



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