

Kamlesh Bamotra

**CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT AND LOSS
OF CULTURAL IDENTITY: NARRATIVES OF
KASHMIRI PANDITS**

Introduction

Displacement occurs due to various reasons such as development projects, construction of dams, industrial development processes, natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, famines, and war and ethnic conflict related circumstances. Different circumstances under which the displacement occurs have different consequences whether it is related to loss of land and uncertainty regarding the rehabilitation. Displacement that occurs due to formation of dams compels people to leave their home and hearths forever. People those who get displaced because of natural calamities, they may reside few days in make shift arrangement and come back to their place according to the environmental circumstances.

However, displacement occurs due to ethnic violence and war related situation leads to loss of home and hearth on the one hand and it has deep psycho-social impact on the people because it leads to loss of social relationships and loss of cultural identity. During the first global war and the Russian Revolution millions of people got evicted from their homes and transformed into refugees. In Indian subcontinent displacement occurred during the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947, transformed the life of the people in various ways with the changing of their nationality. After partition internal displacement in India caused by communal riots, ethnic movements, and in the course of assertion of the identity. The situation on the one hand traumatised people and on the other turned millions of people homeless. For instance the Bodo militant movement displaces about 21,000 persons, during the Sikh separatists movement when Sikhs were getting murdered, various Sikh moved back to Punjab from different cities of India to be within the company of their kith and kin. Similarly, ethnic crises between Sinhala and Tamils in Sri Lanka have displaced Tamils into Tamil Nadu. There are many people displaced due to armed conflict and ethnic violence between groups or communal violence in India. It includes sufferers of communal violence in

Gujarat and Orissa and displaced people of north-east also. (Chari *et al.*; 2003; Nag 2001). The present papers focused on conflict induced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits' from Kashmir in 1990 due to separatist movement.

An attempt has been made in this paper to focus on Indian context specifically Kashmiri Pandits' displacement. Conflict induces displacement of Kashmiri Pandits and its consequences on their culture and identity. In case of Kashmir, only one dominant minority community has been displaced that is Kashmiri Pandits so the accounts of displacement are differed between the communities. Kashmiri Muslims perceive exodus as migration¹ and at the same time Kashmiri Pandits who have been displaced, they perceive migration as "displacement" and "exodus". The paper is based on the perception of Kashmiri Pandits so I am using the term displacement and exodus the way participants put in, rather than migration.

This paper based on field experiences of my doctoral study, is locating the consequences of the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland Kashmir. It represents the perspective of the Kashmiri Pandits specifically on loss of their social-cultural identity, loss of social relationships between the communities and the present perception of Kashmiri Pandits to return to their homeland Kashmir. The accounts of Kashmiri Pandit participants are drawn from the sources of field research that took place in Chandigarh, Delhi, Jammu, Kashmir, and Ludhiana. These accounts of the participants would help to understand their experiences and memories that are formed through the narrative. These narratives will explain that how Kashmiri Pandits as a social group persists and handle the loss of their cultural identity. These narratives are very significant in terms of past, present and future context to understand their world view.

Uprising in Kashmir in 1989: A Brief Review

The insurgency of 1989, led the people of Kashmir on the path of violence; it represents the discontent of an entire Kashmiri Muslim community which suffers from perceived discrimination and deprivation and it comes to believe that its identity is threatened. (see Tremblay 1997). The perception of oppression marked the beginning of uprising in Kashmir.

In 1988, several secessionist leaders crossed the border to the Pakistan-controlled Azad Kashmir, received training and weapons and returned to the Valley and prepared for political insurgency (Chari et al 2003; Tremblay 2001; Verma 1994). Majority of the Kashmiri youth who crossed over to Pakistan following the rigged elections of 1987, were actually supporters of the Muslim United Front (Wani 1994). Since people started losing faith in democracy, they became more tolerant towards extremists. The journey was supposed to begin from the ballot box but unfortunately they were left with only one option, that is, of bullet. Subsequently, the Valley was overtaken by militancy, bomb

blasts, firing, strikes etc. The first militant organisation to start the secessionist movement in the Valley was secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which wants an independent Kashmir on the ground of ethnicity. Its chief is Yasin Malik. The JKLF first struck on 31 July 1988 by exploding a bomb in Srinagar. It was the first secessionist group to provide momentum to the movement. It was like the whole Valley was in euphoria of *azadi* (Behra 2000; Dhar 1998; Varshney 1991).

By 1990, the movement was at its peak. The situation in Kashmir took a violent turn; violence manifested in senseless killing, abduction and arson. Mercenaries like Hizbul Mujahideen, were increasing their hold with the strength of around 20,000 militants in different parts of the state (Behra 2000), “backed by various agencies and interest “ some of them critically backed by Pakistan” (Hewitt 2003: 89). The Hizbul’s agenda was different from that of the JKLF’s secular ideology. The Hizbul introduced the expression ‘*jihad*’ to justify the political violence in the name of Islam.

This was squarely the hijacking of the secular component of the Kashmiri identity. The minority Kashmiri Pandit community was targeted and the militants created a terrifying atmosphere in the Valley. The Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave their homes. Many secessionists groups called upon the Pandits to agree to live under Islamic laws (Nizam-i-Mustafa) or go away (Behra 2000). Slogans like “*Kashmir Me Rehna Hoga, Allah Akbar Kahna Hoga*” (cited in Thomas 2000: 244) psychologically shattered the minority Kashmiri Pandit community. Islamisation of the movement resulted in selective killing of Pandits and eventuated into their mass exodus in 1990 (Behra 2000).

Implication of Identity and Cultural

The displacement of *Kashmiri* Pandits has proved to be a landmark in changing the socio-cultural patterns and structural character of Kashmiri identity and traditions of Kashmiri Pandits. It is more than two decades now Kashmiri Pandits are living in different part of the country. The Narrative of the Kashmiri Pandits would capture those cultural specificities of their culture as a community, which would explain them as a social group.

The Identity of social group is defined through its culture and culture refers to the customs, practices, languages, and world views that define a particular social group. Cultural identities delineate the collective consciousness and collective representation of the social group amidst other social groups. The collective consciousness and the collective representation can be explained through various symbolic markers, living habits, specific festivals, unique traditions, customs, rituals language, dialect, cuisine and values attached to those various symbolic markers. The instantaneous displacement of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90 took the Kashmiri Pandits on

the crossroad. It further led towards the loss of those values, traditions, customs, local Kashmiri festivals, dress patterns, cuisines and language, which collectively represent the collective consciousness and representation of Kashmir Pandits' at regional and at global level. "The experience of exodus and life in exile combined with selective memories from the past are intricately woven into a complex trajectory of Identities. This trajectory effects the way in which future is perceived both in terms of self, place and collectively maintaining a unique Kashmiri Panditness" (Kilam 2003:5). The narrative of the participants below would throw light on the loss of community at various levels after displacement and future prospects.

Changes in dress Patterns and Ornaments

Binod Sopori thinks that Kashmiri Pandits' have lost their identity. "The way we used to behave in Kashmir, our day to day things were different...everything has changed after coming out of Kashmir". Place, climate and people play an important role in the making of culture and its constant growth. Sujata Pandit said: "We are mixed with *Dogras* [of Jammu] now, our way of living has been changed. Our Kashmiri dress pattern is changed. In Kashmir we used to wear *Pheran*. Our folk dance everything is depleting". When a social being start living in new social settings, it necessitates that consciously or unconsciously new social environment, people and their culture start affecting the social being. Kashmiri Pandits' Diaspora is living in different part of country apparently their culture; dress pattern cannot be in dominant position in the new settings. In the process of adjustments in new places they have to adopt the dominant pattern of majority. As a consequence the culture and the dress patterns food habits of majority community slowly penetrate the Kashmiri Pandits' cultural identity and has been becoming part of their identity and to some extent responsible for superseded the original one.

For instance *dehzoor*, *Pheran* are the important part of their dress pattern but that too is vanishing after their displacement from Kashmir. One important ornament Kashmiri Pandits' women wear after marriage is *dehzoor*. This is the cultural symbol by which Kashmiri Pandit women can be recognized easily but after displacement very rarely one can see the Kashmiri Pandit women wearing this ornament. Specifically it has been restricted to few special ceremonies. The reason behind that might be they want to mingle with new cultural settings and do not want to look different. As a result they limited the specific cultural dresses and symbol to special ceremonies and community gatherings.

Changes in Food Habits

Food and cuisines are most powerful symbol of who we are. It has central role in every culture that is the reason the eating is not just an activity to keep human being alive. However it is a symbolic representation of any

culture. Pizza is associated with Italian, Chow mien with Chinese; “English” muffins and “French toast” so on and so forth. Ethnic food becomes the identity marker for any ethnic group. Similarly Kashmiri *wazwan* is a Kashmiri cuisine which is considered as representation of Kashmiri culture and identity. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits both take pride in associating with this Kashmiri cuisine known as *wazwan*.

For instance Kashmiri Pandits are meat taking Brahmins. Most of the Kashmiri cuisines are meat-based so as *wazwan*. Meat eating might have had become food habit because of climatic conditions. However, in cultural context meat taking is just not the food habit for Kashmiri Pandits but an important part of their culture. On *Shivratri* festival it was must for them to have fish or trout. But after displacement many Kashmiri Pandits have left eating meat that has also been observed as cultural change. Phulla Koul who is still living in Kashmir also observed that “those Kashmiri Pandits who have migrated from Kashmir they do not eat meat now, some of them have completely left eating non-vegetarian food We used to have meat on *Shivratri* but now they have become vegetarian”. Food has become an interesting concept in ethnographic studies. Anthropologically it has become one of the medium to examine the cultural differences. Hence sociologically the food is the reflection of diverse social and cultural significance (Scott and Marshal, 2009). Although Kashmiri Pandits also observing changes coming in their food habits after displacing from Kashmir whether it is becoming vegetarian as it is said by Kashmiri Pandit Participant: “Yahn Jammu main aa kar humne meat khana chodd diya hai”, or adopting the cuisine of the place where they are residing at present. Consequently the sociological and cultural significance of Kashmiri food in terms of representing the cultural identity of Kashmiri Pandits is diminishing.

Less celebration of Local Kashmiri Festivals

Similarly the festivals have its own importance in the making of any culture. Festivals are a kind of collective representation of a community. As Kashmiri Pandits are scattered so it is very much the fact that they are not celebrating the festivals as they were celebrating in Kashmir. Meenakshi talked about vanishing of particular Kashmiri festivals. “There were two-three festivals that my mother remember and we used to celebrate but now I as a working women I cannot continue those traditions. Our traditions basically have finished...” Similarly Phulla Koul observed: “Our children do not know our festivals ... [our] specific cultural festivals are vanishing. There is one festival is called *Shisher Sankranti* about that Kashmiri Pandit children having not much knowledge... small-small festivals are finished”.

The accounts of Kashmiri Pandits who have lived in Kashmir, have celebrated all the festivals that are in cultural context representation of Kashmir Pandits culture. In Kashmir, people affiliated to different faiths have

lived together and celebrated festivals together whether it is *Navreh* or *Novroz*, *badda din* related to anniversary of a Sufi saints, *Dewali*, *Eid* or *Janmashtmi*. The culture of Kashmir which includes cultural practices such as the distribution of wet walnuts on Shivratri or saying *Eid Mubarakh* and having that salted tea called *noon chai/namkeen chai/kheer chai*. These festivals are cultural marker of the collective identity shared by more than one community. This was once lived reality of Kashmir. The generation which is born and brought up out of Kashmir definitely they have no knowledge and interest about that once lived reality of Kashmir that has been in the archives of memories of their elders.

Losing the treasure House of Kashmiri Language

Alferd Schultz called language “the typifying medium Par excellence”. He explains Language as a treasure house of typologies that we use to make the sense of the social world (cf. Ritzer 1999). The Kashmiri language particularly the dialect that Kashmiri Pandits use is getting obsolete that Kashmiri Pandits used to interpret their social world. Younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits does not speak in Kashmiri. As accounts of the participants stated that, for instance Tina Suthu understands Kashmiri but she cannot converse in Kashmiri, she said: “My parents speak in Kashmiri. But me and my sister cannot converse in Kashmiri although I understand Kashmiri and I do not have interest in Kashmiri language”.

Meenakshi Bhan also narrate that to mix with local people in Jammu her parents start conversing in Hindi: “My parents wanted us to mingle with other, then they also started speaking in Hindi with us so that we can learn and adjust in new atmosphere...we all speak in Hindi now. Earlier we used to speak maximum in Kashmiri”. Similarly Sagrika Pandit said: “Kashmiri culture has vanished to a great extent. If we would have been in Kashmir we would had been complete Kashmiri. Children would speak in Kashmiri language; Kashmiri Pandits’ children then would be completely Kashmiri as their parents” [sic].

Language is an important part of identity. Before migration Kashmiri Pandits used to speak the Kashmiri Language predominantly. It was absolutely impossible to think the Pandits celebrating their rituals festivals and other socio-religious customs without the aid of their mother tongue. After migration the Kashmiri Pandits present generation is facing peculiar situation where they have to learn multiple languages which ultimately may lead to erosion of a specific dialect of Kashmiri language usually spoken by the Pandits. The older generation of Kashmiri Pandits trying their bit to keep the language breathing, they want to strengthen their cultural values by reinforcing speaking Kashmiri at home at least. The young generation has been brought up in different plural settings so they do not feel the importance of Kashmiri language. Language is obviously a very significant part of the culture as a

whole. Kashmiri language specially that the Kashmiri Pandits speaks has been eroded, and then to save the culture is very difficult. The younger generation is to carry the ethos of the culture if they have no interest in that, then apparently it is going towards erosion only.

Narayan Raina talked about the struggle that Kashmiri Pandits faced after the displacement. According to him struggle has changed the “priorities” and his generation could not communicate to present young generation and coming generation about the culture and history of five thousand years. “The tragedy is that the whole gap came in the generation... I am the bridge between the history and in these twenty years. Our responsibility is to educate the coming generation of Kashmiri Pandits about the history...”. Instantaneous displacement did not give much time to Kashmiri Pandits to think about preserving their culture and language. It was more important to save their lives, think about their survival at that point of time rather than to think about preserving their culture.

Although Kashmiri Pandits trying to preserve their cultural symbols and cultural festivals as a community. As Vrinda Koul explained that “the children are able to grasp through community cultural programme which aimed to tell the children about our culture and to preserve the culture” She also talked about the replica of temples that Kashmiri Pandits’ have built in different places out of Kashmir “Kashmiri Pandits have built replica of Hari Parbat in Faridabad and replica of Kheer Bhavani in Jammu. In Ghaziabad also there is Kheer Bhavani temple”. However, despite of these efforts by the community Kashmiri Pandits’ cultural identity is constantly on the verge of depletion.

Kashmiri Pandits are going through the dilemma one side they have this feeling that they are trying to preserve their culture and identity by making replicas of temples outside the Kashmir, there they can meet, communicate, and trying their bit to keep and pass those values and traditions to next generatio as a community. These monuments are also a kind of symbolic representation of the community outside the Kashmir. But there is also one truth they are realising that they are not able to pass their cultural patterns, their language, and peculiarities of the specific festivals they used to celebrate in Kashmir. It is not easy to keep that identity and culture intact by meeting once in a six month in a temple and interact with the community. Day to day things, various festivals, language, and every day interaction is significant to construct and maintained the nuances of culture and identity.

There are voices among Kashmiri Pandits those raised the question of belongingness to Kashmir and Kashmiri language and traditions. As Avinash Bhan said, “I am giving a drastic statement there will not only be any difference in belongingness, [as compare to their elder ones] there will be no belongingness at all to Kashmir”. Reena said. The displacement led to miss the completeness of being Kashmiri which includes changes in many ways.

Inter-Ethnic Marriages

As Phulla Koul who is not migrated, describes the changes in present Kashmiri identity has been taking place due to interethnic marriages: "The migration Kashmiri Pandits has divided Kashmiri identity into two parts (in terms of Hindu and Muslims) on the one hand and the other hand the Hindu part of the Kashmiri identity has been vanished. Kashmiri Pandits' younger generation are getting marrying in different culture and communities. This has its consequences on Kashmiri Pandits culture. Kashmiri Pandits as a social group is finishing".

The narrative of Phulla Koul suggests that one of the repercussions of turmoil is the division of Kashmiri identity. Kashmiri identity was fusion of different cultures but now the Kashmiri Pandits' culture has been vanished from that blending. It was also come out that after the displacement marriages out of the community are frequent. Earlier Kashmiri Pandits was an endogamous group, rarely used to marry outside the community. This is another reason given for the erosion of culture and identity. Kaveri Dhar explained it by giving an example of his brother: "Our identity is gone, my brother want to marry non-Kashmiri girl so where will be our identity. She does not know Kashmiri ultimately she does not know our culture and whether she will adopt Kashmiri culture or not".

The younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits also feel that they do not speak in Kashmiri language, they are getting married in other communities, their customs and traditions are getting obsolete, their food habits are changed, folk culture, folk dance everything has left behind.

Doubts and Dilemma of Kashmiri Pandits

Kaveri Dhar (school teacher) expressed that even being living among Hindu Dogras of Jammu "they do not feel connected to them", she further said: "Our culture is different, our language is different". Similarly, Tirthnath Koul said: "I have been in Bombay for past many years I was in abroad but forget that I lived so many years in Bombay. I cannot say that I am part and parcel of Marathi community or ethos". Displaced Kashmiri Pandits living among other cultural spaces would not be able to accept the other culture as their own. Although, unconsciously the other culture is becoming the part of their lives but consciously to accept and to become the part of the others' culture is difficult for any community. The treasure of memories related to Kashmir and Kashmiri Pandits' identity will also vanishing slowly. Rajeev Ganjoo thinks that his children do not need to know about Kashmiri identity because "they do not have to return to Kashmir they are settled in this culture" (Staying in Jammu hence Dogra culture). While living within plural setting, Kashmiri Pandits might not have forced to adopt the culture of the surroundings but repetitive impact of the other culture and people, dilute the originality even if not obliterate the culture.

However, displacement also forces Kashmiri Pandits to perceive culture as “baggage” for instance, Anmol Bhat said, “culture is a baggage, we should done away with it because culture make factions. Less cultural differences are better”. Narrative explained that memories and pain of displacement has make Anmol Bhat to think that sometimes cultural differences become cause of conflict, doubt and dilemma. In case of Kashmir Kashmiri being associated with Hindu cultural ethos and Kashmiri Muslims being associated with Muslim cultural ethos become cause of conflict and forced migration also.

Most of the Kashmiri Pandits like Rajeev Ganjoo does not like to talk to his children about past realities because he thinks “Kashmir is tourist place for them (his children) now, that culture is finished that roots are finished, when roots are no more, how can culture survive?” This is a big question mark whether Kashmiri Pandits would return to Kashmir or not. Various policies of the Indian government would trying to encourage them to move back to their original home and hearth that they consider as a tourist place now

More than Two Decade Gap and Its Implications

Narrative accounts of research participants expressed their views that have shaped their present relationship with their lost homeland. More than twenty years of displacement transformed their way of perceiving their homes and hearth that they have left in Kashmir. With this changed understanding of their relationship with Kashmir, it is very difficult to say that at present that Kashmiri Pandits would return to Kashmir.

A particular place or region in which particular culture and identity has developed has its own significance for the further growth of that culture and identity. Similarly for Kashmiri Pandits, Kashmir as a region has its tremendous significance to save their culture and identity. To return to homeland is not easy when the displacement happened due to conflict ridden situation. It has been more than twenty years of exile for Kashmiri Pandits. There are speculations whether they will return to their homeland or not. There are various efforts by the governments such as providing them jobs over there in Kashmir and offering them packages to encourage them to return to Kashmir. Leaving Kashmir suddenly in one night, was not easy for Kashmiri Pandits. The situation did not give them much time to think but they might have thought when they left that they will return soon to Kashmir. But that “soon” took more than twenty years.

This gap of more than two decades has been raising many questions and doubts whether they should go back to Kashmir or not. Whether Kashmir would be same or not as they left twenty years ago, even the various packages failed to encourage Kashmiri Pandits to return to the Valley, as Ganesh Tikku said, “nothing, this is all politics, government just wants to fill up the posts...

There is no question of my returning to Kashmir. No one can live there permanently. The atmosphere has changed now". Thus, despite various government's schemes and policies, Ganesh Tikku does not like to give a thought about returning to his homeland. His doubts about security and experience of his visit after migration have made him think like that. The place which was once his homeland is changed now. The changed atmosphere, mistrust and fear are obstacles that may not allow him to think of returning to Kashmir.

Vishan Dhar said: "What will I do in Kashmir now. I will not have freedom of expression there". Most of the Kashmiri Pandits do not want to return to Kashmir because of their settlement in other places. Phulla Koul also said that the Pandits who had not migrated earlier are also planning to leave; she is also one of them who do not want to live in Kashmir any more. Jagannath Ganjoo might have longing for Kashmir, but he is sure his children do not have that and says that, "fear is established in our heart. Kashmir is a sort of history for us now [laughs]". Kashmiri Pandits who visited Kashmir after displacement saw changed Kashmir and feel it is impractical to think of return.

However Sanjay Tikku expressed different views and thinks that "it is high time that Kashmiri Pandits should return to Kashmir". Sanjay Tikku also emphasises that one has to remember the good experiences of living together to return to Kashmir rather than focusing on experiences of the turmoil. The longing to return to Kashmir will be there in the heart of the older generation of Kashmiri Pandits, but they do not dare to return to Kashmir.

Ashwini Bhatt regrets that no effort has ever been made by the government to take Kashmiri Pandits' children to Kashmir as the government is doing for Kashmiri Muslim children to take them to different parts of India for interaction with the outside world. But "no interaction has taken place between Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit children in Kashmir", no such kind of camps in Kashmir were organised by government where young generation of both the communities could interact so that the fear that has established in mind and heart of the people could subside.

Suchitra Koul also thinks the new generation will not able to adjust with each other: "Kashmiri Pandits' new generation does not know anything about Kashmir. Even the Muslims, I do not think, have this concept that they will live like friends..." For Kavita Dhar, trust is an important factor that has eroded between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits: "... Earlier there was trust, but we cannot trust the new generation. Even those with whom we have lived earlier it is difficult to trust". This explains that Kashmiri Pandits' community is not sure whether the new generation of Kashmiri Muslims will accept Kashmiri Pandits. The doubts of Kashmiri Pandits are very much

evident in their accounts about their returning to Kashmir. The fear uncertainty, lack of opportunity and lack of economic resources are various reasons that are standing in the way of their return to Kashmir. Even those Kashmiri Pandits who have taken jobs in Kashmir expressed that they do not want to settle down in Kashmir forever and they will leave when they get any better job outside Kashmir. Because perception prevails that there would be “religious problem”, there would be “political problem”, there would be “social problem” and there would be “security problem”. However most of the Kashmiri Pandits support the idea of separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir.

Demand for Homeland

Most of the Kashmiri Pandits do not want to return to Kashmir in present condition of uncertainty and insecurity, and a state of constant fear. Keshav Bhatt who has not migrated from Kashmir said : ...the only way Pandits can come is that we should have a separate area for Pandits... That is the only way people will come, otherwise not... Now that time of composite culture is gone. On the other hand, Abha Bhan is not in favour of a separate home land for Kashmiri Pandits: I do not think that it is good idea to be alienated.

Girdhar Koul is also in favour of separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir, he said: “Kashmiri Pandits’ organisation “Pannun Kashmir”² has given this concept that there should be a separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir. Whether it is visualised or not, but this slogan will be there that Kashmir is mine also. We can claim it, nobody can say no to us. This is our right. But the question is whether there will be any area in Kashmir without Kashmiri Muslims, will the government give us such place? I think Kashmiri Muslims want Kashmiri Pandits back, but only as tourists not forever”. Thus, Girdar Koul doubts that if demand for a separate home land for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir will be fulfilled.

Narayan Raina is categorical that there will be no homecoming for Kashmiri Pandits until there is a separate homeland: I tell you, if we return to Kashmir, we will return permanently. Our organisation Pannun Kashmir said this... We will not go to Kashmir which is islamised, where there is vandalism and intolerance. Thus, Kashmiri Pandits perceive that at present Kashmir is Islamised and it is not possible for Kashmiri Pandits to live there. Kashmiri Pandits want a separate homeland and with the “status of a union territory”. One reason why Kashmiri Pandits want their separate homeland is that the religious tone of separatist leaders has created the perception among Kashmiri Pandits that there will be Islamic dominance in Kashmir and in that kind of atmosphere they cannot live.

The experiences of parents and the memories of turmoil are letting the younger generation perceive that the minority is not protected in Kashmir.

Job policies are also perceived as one of the “tactics” to drag Kashmiri Pandits to Kashmir and force them to live in whatsoever is the situation there. So the Kashmiri Pandits do not see them as enough positive steps in their rehabilitation in Kashmir. As a community they aspire for separate place for Kashmiri Pandits and that should given the status of “union territory under Indian Constitution” as said by Manish Koul, he further added, we want that kind of structure where Indian constitution would apply completely, Manish Koul said. “Kashmiri Pandits do not see future in Kashmir with Kashmiri Muslims. If there is anything that creates the possibility of their return, it is the separate homeland or union territory”. Vishal Bhatt said, “he agrees with the demand of separate homeland but his sister Rita Bhatt again interrupted and said: “But if militants will throw bomb there, then all the Kashmiri Pandits would get killed”. Meenakshi Bhan thinks that separate homeland is a good idea, but she rather prefers “separate Kashmiri societies in various other cities of India rather than in Kashmir”.

Thus, the idea of a separate homeland is not adequate to move Kashmiri Pandits to their homeland Kashmir. It does not appear to reduce the fear among them. The discussion above brought out that most of the Kashmiri Pandit Participants do not want to return to Kashmir and some of them support the idea of a separate homeland.

Conclusion

The narratives and memories of the participants’ in the above discussion described the social formation after the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits. The process which is the result of the movement that started in late eighties against the Indian state. As a result of this movement Kashmiri Pandits had to leave their home in Kashmir. “Home, in the sense both personal space of house and ...[region] and of national homeland...” (Ilana Fledman: 2006: 10). Since then Kashmiri Pandits’ relationship with their home, culture, identity and language is in the process of transformation. However many other identities such as-migrant Kashmiri Pandits, displaced, and refugees (many anguished participants called themselves as refugees in agony) in their own nation, they have acquired as a community.

The roots of belongingness are declining as time is moving. The older generation of Kashmiri Pandits and their archives of memories are the only source to hold that culture and identity that are related to being living in Kashmir as Kashmiri Pandits and have celebrated life there once. The culture the language and identity is associated with that land and that region is vanishing and how long and with which kind of possibilities it is possible to keep that alive out of their homeland. The Kashmiri language is the most important part of identity that is also becoming less important as means of communication among Kashmiri Pandits youth. While discussion it also came out that before displacement Kashmiri Pandits community was more

endogamous and marriages out-side the community was very rare. This is also one age old way of communities to keep intact your culture and identity from one generation to another. But after displacement Inter-ethnic marriages are also more prevalent among the Kashmiri Pandit youth. Accordingly it is perceived that the person from outside the community would not be helping the community to transform their ritual and traditions to one generation to another.

They refer Kashmir as “tourist” place not their homeland. Here we can see the transformation of their relationship to their home and homeland “Kashmir” to their identity and culture. The identity is somewhere vanished because they are no more living in Kashmir now, only the residues (in terms of those few Kashmiri Pandits family who are still living in Kashmir) would be there but how far and how long? The question mark would be there as long as Kashmiri Pandits return to Kashmir as a community as they left their home-land overnight as a community under the then situation of fear and uncertainty. This social formation in terms of community relationships and transforming the cultural identity effects the way in which Kashmiri Pandits are looking forward towards their future. Somewhere the reality has been accepted that to what extent they can preserve collectively that unique cultural trajectory whether through self or through archives of memories in the absence of that place called Kashmir which is the important part of their cultural identity.

NOTES

1. However Kashmiri Pandits are recognized as migrants by the government of India and not given the status of ‘internally displaced persons’, despite that Kashmiri Pandits’ petition to the National Human Rights Commission in 1995 to grant them the status of ‘displaced Persons’. Kashmiri Pandit community stated that they are forcibly displaced, so they are not migrants who have choice to go back to their native place without any fear and suspicion. There is a difference in leaving the place forcibly and willingly and Kashmiri Pandits have not left Kashmir voluntarily. The displaced Kashmiri people wish to be identified as ‘internally Displaced Persons’(Saha 2000)
2. *Pannun* Kashmir is an organisation of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. It has raised the slogan of separate homeland for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir

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