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Research Article

DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN NON-MIGRANT KASHMIRI PANDITS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989 from the valley has weakened the unique cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits who decided to stay in the valley despite mass migration. Before migration they were living with other communities. The bond between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims was very strong. There were very warm feelings for each other and there was psychological bonding between the two communities. The collective identity of both the communities does not exist now. There is very less interaction between the members of both the communities which has led to the vanishing of old ties. The young generation of both the communities is unaware of that *Milchaar* and *Baichara*. The old generation of this community either has become very old and helpless or expired. The new generation of this community is totally unaware of the time when both the communities lived together. Based on a sample of 150 respondents selected from Srinagar and Budgam districts of Kashmir valley, the study examines the impact of mass migration on the cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. A stratified random sampling technique was used to collect information from non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. For the present study, an explorative research design was used. This paper provides useful insights into the impact of mass migration on the cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits.

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INTRODUCTION

The total population of Jammu and Kashmir, as per a report published in the year 2001 was 1, 00, 69,917; out of this Hindu population in the state was 19, 30,448¹. Prior to migration, Kashmiri Pandits were concentrated in Kashmir valley and constituted nearly 8 percent of Kashmir's population. In the year 1990, migration took place throughout the valley. Prevailing situation at that time forced Kashmiri Pandit families to move out of their motherland, within a short span of one week to fortnight². Wakhlu (2011) carries that Kashmir's association with Hinduism is very old. The very name Kashmir is said to be derived from Kashyapa, one of the seven Rishis in Hindu mythology. Most Kashmiri Pandits are devout Shaivites, however many Kashmiri Pandit families who had migrated into other Indian territories have been ardent vaishnavites as well. Kashmir is home to some of the holiest shrines in Hinduism like *Amarnath*, *Kheer Bhawani*, *Shrine of Sharada*, *Shankaracharya Mandir*, *Hari Parbat* and *Zeethyar*. The religious philosophy of Kashmiri Hindus is rooted in Kashmir Shaivism, a school of Shiva philosophy that originated near Kailesha in Himalayas around 400 A.D³. Sharma (2008) reveals that the Brahmans of Kashmir were in past times

renowned for their learning and scholastic achievements, and are known as Kashmiri Pandits all over India. The Sanskrit word Pandit means 'a learned man' they refer to themselves by the word *Bhatta* which is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit *bhartri*, meaning 'doctor'⁴. Dhar (2006) reveals that Kashmiri Pandits have socio-religious festivals galore. These are celebrated round the year with fervor and gaiety. Kashmiri Pandits are professionally no doubt predominantly office workers and bureaucrats but they can be found in any profession barring menial jobs like scavenging, washing, sweeping etc⁵.

Dabla (2008) points out that International and national migration has emerged as one of the prominent features of grand multi-dimensional process called modernization. The impact of the global level migration has proved so crucial that some countries in the present day world have lost or fast losing the majority character by the aliens in their own country. The mass migration of the Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley to the outside world, which was of the community type migration started from 1989 when the conflict situation started here. While, in the earlier stage the majority of the urban based Kashmiri Pandits migrated to Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua,

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Chandigarh, Simla, New Delhi and other cities in the country, and in the later stage, rural Kashmiri Pandits migrated to some of these cities⁶. The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir had led to a deep impact on identity of Kashmiri Pandits who decided to stay in the valley because they do not want to leave their birth place. But now, the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits who decided to stay here had lost their identity and also their social and cultural linkages are getting weaker with the passage of time. There is a continuous migration of young generation of this community either for employment or for job which is resulting in the population decrease of this community at a rapid rate⁷. The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits has a serious impact on identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. Identity is defined in a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image⁸. Earlier, the cultural identity of Kashmir Pandits was unique and they were living in groups performing customs and rituals together, and sharing their sorrows and happiness with each other, but now due to the mass migration they feel disintegrated. There is lack of 'we' feeling, sound solidarity and they are mostly living in isolation now. Their traditions, customs, rituals are getting vanished day by day because majority of their members have migrated. These Kashmiri Pandits were living in harmony with Muslims sharing many things in common and thus were a part of 'Kashmiriyat'.

Kashmiriyat refers to the universal brotherhood in the Kashmir valley. It means the love and social bondage between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims. It includes the composite culture, harmonious and brethren relationship, mutual understanding, cultural and social values, and respect between the two communities. The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989 from the valley has shaken the concept of Kashmiriyat in the valley. Before migration the two communities were very close sharing their cooked or uncooked food, enjoying festivals, thoughts, beliefs, and visiting shrines was common. But after migration now nothing such happens. The bond between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims was very strong. There were very warm feelings for each other. There was psychological bonding between the two communities. But now everything has vanished. No such bonding exists now. Before migration there was very nice atmosphere in the valley. Both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims would go for a get-together to *Badamwari* taking their children also with them. There was no difference between the two communities. But now nothing such happens everything has changed now. It was found that majority of the Kashmiri Pandits were educated and most of them were doing government jobs. They were not doing any trade so they were completely dependent on Kashmiri Muslims for many other things. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims were dependent on Kashmiri Pandits for the education of their education because majority of the teachers at that time were Kashmiri Pandits. So, there was mutual dependency between the two communities and it still continues to be there to some extent. The old generation of this community still has strong affinity with the Kashmiri Muslims. The trust between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims that had once been established is no more. There is no connection between the young generation of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims so there is no question

of trust between them. The nature of Kashmiri ethnic identity has started shifting after mass migration. Before migration religion was not a boundary marker between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits but now regional identity has been replaced by religious identity. Socio-cultural similarities which were once alive in Kashmir have vanished now. The Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits shared many things in common like culture, history and language.

The mass migration of 1989 has a negative impact on the self-image of the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. Before mass migration the self-image of Kashmiri Pandits was very high but now, it has lost its uniqueness. The non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits have got comprising self-image in the sense that they compromise even on performing certain customs and traditions. Before migration they used to stick to their customs and tradition but now, tradition and culture is losing its rigidity to a large extent and the use of *Tilak* on forehead is rare⁹.

Before migration the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims would mix better with each other easily than with any other community but, now that social balance is not there. The collective identity of both the communities does not exist now. There is very less interaction between the members of both the communities which has led to the vanishing of old ties. The feeling of real love for each other has been replaced by formalities. The respect and love which was the base of the strong bond between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims is no longer there. The young generation of both the communities is unaware of that *Milchaar* and *Baichara*. The old generation of this community either has become very old and helpless or expired. The new generation of this community is totally unaware of the time when both the communities lived together.

The harmonious nature of relationship was one of the important components of Kashmiriyat. But the mass migration has changed the valley culturally as well as demographically. It has not only affected but changed totally the social structure of Kashmir. Once Kashmiri Pandits were a part and parcel of the whole Kashmiri traditional ethos but nothing such exists now. Before their migration both the communities were living harmoniously with each other and would not let their religion come in between them. Migration has created social distance among Kashmiri Pandits. The link between the Kashmiri Pandits which once got broken because of mass migration is reunited only at some places. The shrines act as a place of reunion for these Kashmiri Pandits. The Pandits who migrated from the valley still come to visit these shrines especially *Matta Kheer Bhawani*. The Pandits who stayed here go there to meet their old aged friends. Hence, this sort of atmosphere creates a sense of cohesiveness among the Kashmiri Pandits. The identity of this community has got diluted. The young generation of this community is living outside the valley either for job or for study purpose. This community has remained a small segment of much larger Kashmiri society. Only small number of this community is living in the valley. Now they do not celebrate their social and religious festivals in the same way as they used to celebrate it before migration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Universe and sample of the study

The universe of the present study constitutes non-migrant Pandit community of district Srinagar and Budgam of Kashmir valley. As per the census of Jammu and Kashmir, 2011 the total population of Srinagar district was 12,36,829 and the literacy rate as 71 percent and the total number of households in Srinagar district as 1,91,678. The same census of 2011 reveals the total population of Budgam district as 7,53,745 and the literacy rate as 57.98 percent. The total number of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit households is not available as no information is recorded in censuses of Jammu and Kashmir. However, as per the President of Kashmiri Pandit Sangharsh Samiti (KPSS, 2015), the estimated number of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit households in Kashmir is 651 residing at 192 places, out of which 171 households are residing in Srinagar and 47 in Budgam, respectively. The total population of Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir valley is approximately as 2,765 persons. The present study is based on sample of 150 respondents, 110 from Srinagar and 40 from Budgam district. A stratified random sampling technique was used to collect information from the respondents. To carry out this study, the technique of interview schedule and observation were used to get objective and reliable findings.

Hypothesis of the study

The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley has a serious impact on the cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits, Earlier, their culture was unique and they were a part of composite culture of Kashmir but now their cultural identity has got diluted and they are living in isolation from their own community members who have migrated to other places.

Objectives of the study

1. To trace the link between mass migration and cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits.
2. To explain the nature and dimensions of cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits
3. To analyse the impact of mass migration on the cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits.

Dynamics of cultural identity in non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits

Culture refers to the customs, traditions, ideas, knowledge, values, beliefs, experiences of a particular group or community. It refers to a way of life. The Kashmiri Pandit community was culturally very rich but the mass migration had a very strong effect on their culture. In order to find out the impact of mass migration on the culture of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits the respondents were asked certain questions. The responses provided by the respondents are presented in the table given below:

Table 1 shows that out of 150 respondents, 111 respondents (74.00 percent) said yes socio-religious activities is not being practiced now and 39 respondents (26.00 percent) said no.

Table 1 Identity and culture of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Socio-religious activities of your community is now not being practiced	Yes	111	74.00
	No	39	26.00
Total		150	100.00
If yes, what are the reasons			
Majority of the temples are closed after mass migration of 1989		39	35.13
Dispersion of your community after mass migration of 1989		64	57.65
Priests are not available		8	7.20
Total		111	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
You celebrate your social and religious festivals in the same way as were used to be celebrated earlier	Yes	52	34.66
	No	98	65.33
Total		150	100.00
If no, what are the reasons			
Non availability of your immediate relatives		74	75.51
Less interaction with your community members		18	18.36
Lack of sense of oneness		6	6.12
Total		98	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Cultural identity of non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits is at stake	Yes	148	98.66
	No	2	1.33
Total		150	100.00
If yes, what are the reason			
Cultural traits are lost		107	72.29
Adaptation of new customs		40	27.03
Lost of mother tongue		1	0.68
Total		148	100.00

Source: - Field work 2015, carried out in Budgam and Srinagar

The various reasons found for the response that they do not practice it now were like 64 respondents (57.65 percent) dispersion of your community, 39 respondents (35.13 percent) majority of the temples do not exist now, 8 respondents (7.20 percent) priests are not available. It was found that the socio-religious activities which were once celebrated jointly are now celebrated at individual level because their community members are not available. According to the Sanjay Tickoo president KPSS (Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti) before migration there were 854 temples all over Kashmir but today only 34 temples among them are functional now. For doing any religious activity they need the assistance of a priest who is not now available in the valley. The only option left with them is that they have to bring priest from Jammu but this process becomes very costly for the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits.

Again, out of 150 respondents, 98 respondents (65.33 percent) revealed that no they do not celebrate social and religious festivals in the same way as were used to be celebrated earlier and 52 respondents (34.66 percent) said yes that they celebrate them in the same way. The different reasons found for the response that they do not celebrate it in the same way were like 74 respondents (75.51 percent) non availability of your immediate members, 18 respondents (18.36 percent) less interaction with your community members and 6 respondents (6.12 percent) lack of sense of oneness. The culture of every community is continued and maintained by its members but majority of the members of this community are living outside the valley so this community is not able to celebrate its religious as well as social festivals in the same way as before migration. It was observed that the feeling of oneness is lacking now because of less interaction with the community members.

Further, out of 150 respondents, 148 respondents (98.66 percent) said that they feel that cultural identity is at stake and 2 respondents (1.33 percent) said no they do not feel it. The various reasons found for the response that they feel their identity is at stake were like 107 respondents (72.29 percent) cultural traits are lost, 40 respondents (27.02 percent) adaptation of new customs, and 1 respondent (0.68 percent) lost of mother tongue. It was found that almost all the members of non-migrants feel that their identity is at stake because their cultural traits are getting lost. Majority of the members of this community are giving up their old customs and traditions like wearing of “Dejhoru” by women folk. The life style and dress code has changed to a greater extend. The young generation of this community who are living outside the valley has adopted and continued to live in non-local cultural environment. All these activities are giving this community the sense that their cultural identity is at stake.

Identity and Kashmiriyat

Effect of mass migration on kashmiriyat

Kashmiriyat refers to the universal brotherhood in the Kashmir valley. It means the love and social bondage between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims. It includes the composite culture, harmonious and brethren relationship, mutual understanding, cultural and social values, and respect between the two communities. The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989 from the valley has shaken the concept of Kashmiriyat in the valley. In order to find out the impact of mass migration on the Kashmiriyat the respondents were asked certain questions. The responses provided by the respondents are shown below:

Table 2 Mass migration has affected the composite culture of Kashmir

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Mass migration has affected the composite culture of Kashmir	Strongly agree	90	60.00
	Agree	54	36.00
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00
	Disagree	5	3.33
	Strongly disagree	1	0.67
Total		150	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Kashmiri Baichara is surviving till today	Strongly agree	8	5.33
	Agree	50	33.33
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00
	Disagree	64	42.67
	Strongly disagree	28	18.67
Total		150	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Co-existence and cultural unity between the two communities (Milchaar) is lost	Strongly agree	52	34.67
	Agree	61	40.67
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00
	Disagree	31	20.66
	Strongly disagree	6	4.00
Total		150	100.00

The table 2 depicts that out of 150 respondents, the majority of 90 respondents (60.00 percent) strongly agree and 54 respondents (36.00 percent) agree that the mass migration has affected the composite culture of Kashmir. It was found that

before migration the two communities were very close sharing their cooked or uncooked food, enjoying festivals, thoughts, beliefs, and visiting shrines was common. But after migration now nothing such happens. Minority of 5 respondents (3.33 percent) disagrees and 1 respondent (0.66 percent) strongly disagreed saying that no mass migration has not affected the composite culture of Kashmir. These respondents denied the fact that it has any affect on composite culture. These respondents are of the view that they are living in the same way as were living before migration. Further, out of 150 respondents, the majority of 64 respondents (42.66 percent) disagree and 28 respondents (18.66 percent) strongly disagree that the Kashmiri *baichara* is surviving till today. It was found that the bond between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims was very strong. There were very warm feelings for each other. There was psychological bonding between the two communities. But now everything has vanished. No such bonding exists now. 50 respondents (33.33 percent) agree and 8 respondents strongly agree that the Kashmiri *baichara* is surviving today. They were of the view that *baichara* is still there. The friendship and love still persist but to some extent.

Again, out of 150 respondents, the majority of 61 respondents (40.66 percent) agree and 52 respondents (34.66 percent) strongly agree that the co-existence and cultural unity between the two communities (*Milchaar*) is lost. It was found that before migration there was very nice atmosphere in the valley. Both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims would go for a get together to *Badamwari* taking their children also with them. There was no difference between the two communities. But now nothing such happens everything has changed now. Minority of 31 respondents (20.66 percent) disagrees and 6 respondents (4.00 percent) strongly disagree that the co-existence and cultural unity between the two communities (*Milchaar*) is lost. These respondents were of the view that (*Milchaar*) is not completely lost it is still there especially in rural areas.

Table 3 Feeling of isolation after mass migration in Non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Your community is living in isolation	Strongly agree	138	92.00
	Agree	12	8.00
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00
	Disagree	0	0.00
	Strongly disagree	0	0.00
Total		150	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Trust has been replaced by suspicion and co-existence by compromise	Strongly agree	61	40.67
	Agree	35	23.33
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00
	Disagree	43	28.67
	Strongly disagree	11	7.33
Total		150	100.00

Source: - Field work 2015, carried out in Budgam and Srinagar

The above table shows that out of 150 respondents, the majority of 138 respondents (92.00 percent) strongly agree and 12 respondents (8.00 percent) agree that their community is living in isolation. It was found that all the respondents are of the opinion that they are living in isolation. They are cutoff from their relatives and friends. The identity of this community

has got diluted. The young generation of this community is living outside the valley either for job or for study purpose. This community has remained a small segment of much larger Kashmiri society.

Again, out of 150 respondents, 87 respondents (58.00 percent) agree and 59 respondents (39.33 percent) strongly agree that visiting shrines is an important element in the cohesiveness for Pandit community. It was found that migration has created social distance among Kashmiri Pandits. The links between the Kashmiri Pandits which once got broken because of mass migration gets reunite at these places. These shrines act as a place of reunion for these Kashmiri Pandits. The Pandits who migrated from the valley still come to visit these shrines especially *Matta Kheer Bhawani* the Pandits who stayed here go there to meet their old aged friends. Hence, this sort of atmosphere creates a sense of cohesiveness among the Kashmiri Pandits. Further it was found that 2 respondents (1.33 percent) disagree and 2 respondents (1.33 percent) strongly disagree that visiting shrines is an important element in the cohesiveness for Pandit community.

The findings depict that out of 150 respondents, the majority of 61 respondents (40.66 percent) strongly agree and 55 respondents (23.33 percent) agree that trust has been replaced by suspicion and co-existence by compromise. It was found that the old generation of this community still has strong affinity with the Kashmiri Muslims. The trust between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims that had once been established is no more. There is no connection between the young generation of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims so there is no question of trust between them. 43 respondents (28.66 percent) disagree and 11 respondents (7.33 percent) strongly disagree that trust has been replaced by suspicion and co-existence by compromise.

CONCLUSIONS

The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989 from the valley has shaken the concept of Kashmiriyat in the valley. Before migration the two communities were very close sharing their cooked or uncooked food, enjoying festivals, thoughts, beliefs, and visiting shrines was common. But after migration now nothing such happens. The bond between the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims was very strong. There were very warm feelings for each other. There was psychological bonding between the two communities. Before migration the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims would mix better with each other easily than with any other community but, now that social balance is not there. The collective identity of both the communities does not exist now. There is very less interaction between the members of both the communities which has led to the vanishing of old ties. The young generation of both the communities is unaware of that *Milchaar* and *Baichara*. The old generation of this community either has become very old and helpless or expired.

The new generation of this community is totally unaware of the time when both the communities lived together. The harmonious nature of relationship was one of the important components of Kashmiriyat. Once Kashmiri Pandits were a part and parcel of the whole Kashmiri traditional ethos but nothing such exists now. Before their migration both the communities were living harmoniously with each other and would not let their religion come in between them. Migration has created social distance among Kashmiri Pandits. The findings reveal that the socio-religious activities which were once celebrated jointly are now celebrated at individual level because their community members are not available. For doing any religious activity they need the assistance of a priest who is not now available in the valley. The only option left with them is that they have to bring priest from Jammu but this process becomes very costly for the non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. Majority of the members of this community are giving up their old customs and traditions like wearing of "*Dejhoru*" by women folk. The life style and dress code has changed to a greater extend. The young generation of this community who are living outside the valley has adopted and continued to live in non-local cultural environment. All these activities are giving this community the sense that their cultural identity is lost.

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