

# Cultural Shift and Adaptive Quality in Migrant Kashmiri Pandits

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**Abstract--***The conflict of 1989-90 in the Kashmir valley led to migration of a large number of people belonging to the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities to other parts of the country. These people have been categorised as migrants by the Indian government however they are also called as internally displaced persons.*

*The paper however focuses on the Kashmiri Pandits i.e. the Hindu community of Kashmir. It tries to understand the changes in the culture of this community post migration and how they have adapted themselves socially as well as emotionally with the host community in order to sustain in a different environment. The displacement has altered their culture, specially the dressing, food habits and festivals in particular which was well rooted in the Kashmir valley i.e. their homeland. Besides that it also affected them emotionally to a great extent. The community did modify and change their culture but at the same time they did manage to sustain some part of it.*

**Key words--***Cultural identity, Cultural shift, Internally Displaced Persons, Kashmiri Pandits, Migration.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

India and Pakistan emerged on the world map as independent nations in August, 1947 after the partition of British India. The partition was a herculean task and the problems that emerged during that phase still continue to fester in the external as well as internal matters of India's foreign, defence and security policies. Kashmir is considered to be an issue between Pakistan and India.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) acceded to Union of India on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1947. With the accession of Kashmir to the Indian state, Article 370 came into effect which gave Kashmir a special status in India. The special status to the state of J&K lies in Article 370. It has given certain privileges to the state and makes it very different from the other states in India. Although India is Quasi-Federal system i.e. the powers are divided between the states and centre, article 370 gives J&K the special status of an autonomous state in India. The state has its own constitution as well as a Flag and has been given greater autonomy as compared to other states in India. This article also provides privilege of dual citizenship i.e. citizenship of India as well as J&K.

With the signing of Instrument of Accession (IOA) by Maharaja Hari Singh, three major departments i.e. defence, foreign affairs and communication came under the jurisdiction of the Indian government [15]. This means that the Union government can make laws from its own subject lists i.e. the Union and Concurrent list with the approval of the State government. Hence it places the state of J&K on a special pedestal as compared to other states. The state also has the control over the residuary powers, which otherwise is exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Union government.

The situation of J&K has also been raised in the United Nations (UN) However, a solution is yet to be conceived [16]. It is now a matter of prestige for both the nations.[20]. After the soviet forces left Afghanistan in 1989 and the Mujahedeens shifted their base to the Kashmir valley, the Kashmir issue became complicated and continued to become even more complicated with each passing day [31]. Militancy still continues and has

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now spread to the Jammu region for reasons attributable to the weakened government policy. This has led to insurgencies in Kashmir. The terrorism in the Kashmir valley has forced more than 300000 Hindus to flee from their home land and suffer as refugees in their own country[12]. The government has also not made proper arrangements for the rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandits (KPs). It would be pertinent to mention that arrangements made are not satisfactory and the conditions of the refugee camps were poor and sub-standard to say the least. The refugees have now been allotted a one room flat but the standard of living is poor in those areas [10]. Recently on 5th August, 2019, the Modi government in its historical decision revoked article 370. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is now divided into two union territories; one is Ladakh and the other is Jammu and Kashmir.

However, migration has resulted in a cultural change. This change is so evident that the youth of the community finds it hard to identify themselves with their motherland [36]. In an attempt to adapt with the host community, the KPs have somewhat modified or abandoned some of their social customs altogether.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are to explore how KP community has to migrate in the late 1980's due to the onset of conflicts in the valley. It also studies how a community tries to sustain socially as well as emotionally and then adapt itself, with the host community in a different environment, after being uprooted from their motherland. It is also to find out how cultural shock impacts a community in their dressing habits, food, language, education and social customs.

## **III. METHODS**

The study is based on the interviews conducted in Delhi. The total number of families that have migrated from Kashmir is 59,452 families. In Delhi the total number of families is 19,338 including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. [28]

The subjects of the study are Kashmiri Hindus who migrated in late 1980's or 1990 only. 50 people were interviewed for the study. This study used interview as an instrument for collecting data using judgemental sampling technique. The migrant population was approached in Dwarka where they live in cluster at Satisar cooperative Housing society. The interviews were held in their respective houses. Most of the Kashmiris living in the society migrated in January 1990. We asked specific set of questions relating to the cultural changes faced by the individuals. The questions were open ended and the responses were orated by the interviewees. The questions were divided into five sections which inquired about the language efficiency, dressing habits, food habits, educational orientation and modification of social customs. The questions were self devised after thorough study on the subject. Most of the interviewees responded to all the questions. The interviewer attempted to be as non judgemental as possible during and after the interview. The study intends to show the cultural shift and how this community have adapted themselves in the host community post migration.

The current study is also, based on various sources to explain the adaptive quality of KPs. Various books, articles, journals, internet sources were used.

A wide range of literature has been documented on the different aspects of Kashmir including social, economic, geographical, political, Cultural and biological studies[3,9,22]. Moreover, there is also a wide range of material available on the exodus of KPs particularly after migration relating to the social, economic and

psychological conditions of KPs [4,8,26,32,34]. However, it may be pertinent to note that there is enough literature dealing with the aspect of systematic study dealing with KP and their problems after migration. But no studies have been conducted which examine as to how KPs have used their adaptive quality of culture to survive in the host community post migration.

This paper analysed how KPs have survived with the host community by using “Adaptive quality of culture”. The paper also examined Murdock’s view on the qualitative culture and integrates it with how Kashmiri Pandit (KP) community used the coping strategies to adjust with the host community [23]. Murdock gave seven qualities of culture which has been mentioned in the paper however the paper focuses only on one of the qualities given by him i.e. the Adaptive quality of culture. The changes which took place in the community after migration are visible to a great extent. The changes in food habits, dressing and education patterns, grasp on language and following of social customs have been discussed in this paper.

#### **IV. KASHMIRI PANDITS**

KPs belong to the Hindu community of Kashmir. These Hindus are different from the rest of the Hindu community of India. Their customs and rituals vary to a great extent. They follow the traditions of Sanatan Dharma, also known as Hinduism. They belong to the small caste of Sarasvat Brahmins known as Pandits [14]. Although Brahmins (one of the order in the Hindu fourfold Varna system which divide people into four categories in a hierarchical order i.e Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) they are meat eaters. Rest of the Hindu Brahman refrain from eating meat. They are also known as “Bhatta” which means learned. Hence, the term Pandit is used to address them. KPs are a numerically small yet historically privileged community in the Muslims majority state of J&K. The culture of this community is vivid, unique and distinct. The community has its own language, social customs and food habits [17]. Although KPs belong to Hindu community, but their culture is very different from the rest of Hindus in India [12].

KPs constitute an important part of Kashmir. The community has produced intellectuals from different field of life such as philosophers, writers, poets, therapists and historians. Kashmir was indeed a great centre of learning once. However the community still produces intellectuals from all fields of life [29].

The Nilmata Purana is an ancient Sanskrit text deals with origin of Kashmir, its original inhabitants and also the social conditions of ancient Kashmir [19]. The said text was translated by Ved Kumari. Kalhana’s Rajtarangini also refers Nilmata as a work of great antiquity. Rajtaringani is an extensive work on the history of Kashmir (Kalhana, 1989).

But they had to migrate from Kashmir in the late 1980’s. The exodus which took place in 1989-1990 is the seventh exodus of this community from the valley. In the past, more than six exoduses took place. The first one was enforced at the time of Sikandar Butshikaw [11]. This exodus was on such a large scale that only eleven families were left behind in Kashmir.

#### **V. CAUSES OF MIGRATION**

The causes of migration go back to the time of partition. It is often believed that due to the humiliation of not getting Kashmir, Pakistan has created trouble and unrest in Kashmir. Disturbance through military intrusions in the state are common, there are attempts to create civilisation conflicts in the minds of innocent Kashmiris. All this has lead to the differences between both the Muslim and Hindu communities.

Muslims started demanding greater share in the governance and socio-economic fields. It was a widely prevalent notion that the ill fate of Kashmiri Muslims (KMs) was because of KPs. However, the fact of the matter remains that because of the educational qualifications of the KPs, the KPs secured better opportunities [5]. The difference between the two communities widened. Due to the majority of Muslims in Kashmir, which constitute a vote bank, the policies framed favoured neither KMs nor KPs.

There was a clear discriminatory policy working at that time in Kashmir. The agrarian reforms were introduced and KPs were hit the most by these reforms. They were deprived of their land holding, as they were reduced to half. Entry into the educational institutions became tough; however they still struggled to live in the valley. Starting from 1964, a lot of armed infiltrators supported by Pakistan were witnessed in order to radicalise the minds of Muslim youth. This poisoning of youth minds started at a great pace in the valley during the late 1970's [7]. The radicalization resulted in construction of mosques at a large scale, there were mosques constructed at every kilometre in the valley area. The funding was coming from Saudi Arabia & Iran [11]. The youth was also trained in handling arms and explosives.

Rahul Pandita in his study mentions about the slogans prevalent in Kashmir at that time. The slogan *Hum kyachaahte - Azadiiii* (What do we want – Freedom!) is prevalent from those days. There were threat warnings directed towards the minorities and the public warnings and threat notes were pasted on the doors of minority community houses [25]. There were lootings, killing, rapes and bomb blasts. They were ill treated till the end of October 1990, there were 319 killings of KPs [11].

The centre and state governments were mute spectators; governor's rule was imposed in 1989. There was complete breakdown of law and order in the valley. Due to inaction of the government, the KPs had no other option but to migrate, because their numbers were not enough to constitute a vote bank for any political party and hence no government till date has done anything significant to create facilities for them.

What is unfortunate is that there is a cultural shift in the practices of this community. The youths are abandoning their rich culture and the language. The KP culture is gradually fading away. It must be acknowledged that KPs themselves have almost forgotten their links with this matrix even though there is an urge in the minds of some of their post-exodus intellectuals to somehow access it [36].

The migration had impacted them to a large extent. The migration has made a mark on their cultural identity. In order to mix up with the host communities they have undergone major changes, which have put a question on their cultural identity. This led them to form associations and engaging themselves in the preservation of cultural identity, values and traditions under this large social change. The elder generation has been living out of the valley for more than two decades now and the new generation has altogether not been in touch with Kashmir. The paper has analysed the visible cultural shifts in this community.

## VI. CULTURE

In the simplest of sense, culture means the way of life for a group of people i.e. how they live their lives. To define culture is quite complicated in itself as culture is something intangible and covers all the aspects of human life which are generally attached to person's emotional self. However, a number of attempts have been made to define the concept of culture. "Culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation." [35]. E.B. Taylor states that "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits

acquired by man as a member of society.” [33]. “Culture is all learned behaviour which is socially acquired, that is, the material and non material traits which are passed on from one generation to another.” [24]. Culture is an invention by humans and it plays a vital role in a population’s adaptation to its environment. Culture includes the basic features of collective life such as norms, values and languages as well as material objects. Humans have made language to communicate with the other human beings and that communication has led to the creation of culture. Human beings have created society so as to live close to each other as man is a social being. In society, social interaction is inevitable and culture is one of the most important aspects of social interaction. Kroeber explains that the source of social inheritance is very wide. It is not restricted to family only but is influenced by a variety of social agencies such as individuals, dead or living and sometimes even from juniors; one can be the inheritors [18]. Culture goes through a lot of changes with social interaction and is passed on from one generation to another. It is basically the transmitting of symbols to the next generation. Human beings are bound by their society and they try to exhibit those actions which are considered moral by the society. Any act of them which is not prescribed by their society, instantly becomes a Taboo, hence human beings are bound to follow the mores and rituals.

## VII. CULTURAL CHANGE

Cultural changes happen with time, while transmitting it to the next generation. Some changes are bound to happen with the passage of time. Change also occurs when a culture intermixes with other cultures, when one changes the place or leaves certain customs assuming it to be redundant. In today’s world of globalisation, intermixing of cultures is inevitable [1].

But what happens to a culture when it undergoes a sudden change? It starts losing its originality. In the case of KP community, migration has resulted in such a cultural change. The change is so evident that the youth of the community finds it hard to identify themselves to their motherland. In order to adapt themselves with the host community the KPs have modified and also abandoned some of their social customs. In the late 1980’s when these people migrated to other parts of the country and even abroad, they went through a cultural shock. “Cultural shock is a phenomenon associated generally with a culture change cycle that terminates not with successful rooting in the new culture but with a final re-transplantation back to the mother culture. However in case of emigration the cycle terminates with repatriation[2].”

Although, culture goes under a lot of changes but it never lets go of us. Because human beings have created societies so that they can live together and get benefitted by each other and there is no culture apart from society.

To understand deeply, we need to know the characteristics of culture and how it is being passed on from one generation to another. These qualities of culture are discussed by George P. Murdock. He talks about seven kinds of qualities of culture. *Culture is learned* i.e. Culture is something which is learned. It is a learned behaviour and is not biological. It includes fulfilling the group expectations. *Culture is inculcated* i.e. Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. *Culture is social* i.e. in a social group members share certain expectation which are acceptable. *Culture is ideational* i.e. a particular group’s pattern of behaviour is considered ideal to which the group conform. *Culture is Gratifying* i.e. Culture is something which satisfies the wants of humans, these wants can be biological or socio economic, these wants arise with group interaction and are thus transmitted. *Culture is Adaptive* i.e. Culture must also adapt to forces outside itself. The most obvious

form of such adaptations involves the geographical environment, and people must be able to feed, clothe and house themselves by adapting to their surroundings. *Culture is Integrative* i.e. culture develops with integration of the society. A society cannot exist without minimum cultural integration[23].

Although according to Murdock this cultural change occurs with time and everyone experiences it. But in the case of migration the impact of cultural change is much higher than that of a natural change. As Anderson observes that a person goes through cultural shock in case of emigration[2]. It is thus evident that due to the cultural shock experienced by Kashmiri's during migration has lead them to alter their culture in order to feed, clothe and house themselves.

## VIII. CULTURAL CHANGES IN KASHMIRI PANDITS

Department of Political Science, University of Jammu in 2001 undertook a survey on the study of migrant KPs [27]. The report is based on the interview of 50 people for different camps of Jammu, which included Missriwala, PurkhuMuthi, Nagrota and KathnaCamp. The survey focused on the socio – economic and political aspects of those people. The main observations were that 90% of the people were not happy with their income status as they were getting more income in the valley as compared to the present income. It was also observed that most people were satisfied with the policies of central government but were dissatisfied with the J&K government. The major problem which was noticed is that of unemployment among youth. It was observed that privacy also was lacking because the migrants were provided with one room per family Hygiene conditions were miserable and it added to their sorrows. The education facility also was inadequate and the migrants mentioned that the officials visited only during the elections. What important was observed by the report is that the young children mostly speak Hindi or English or the local language of the area and there is hardly any young boy or baby who speaks Kashmiri. The report also observed that if this trend continues then after 10 to 12 years KP community would become a part of history of Kashmir.

The study on Effects of Displacement on the migrations of J&K based in government Camps in Jammu with reference to Socio- Cultural aspect, the study aimed at understanding effects of displacement on the Kashmir families living in a selected camp Muthi Phase I in Jammu.[6]. The objective was to study effects of displacements on social, cultural, economic and the health status of the migrants. The researcher found out that the respondents lacked basic facilities such as proper drainage system, water facilities and electric problems. Their economic condition is not satisfactory and culturally their values have diminished. The researcher pointed out that the mass migration resulted in the breaking of entire social order of the community. It was also found by the researcher that migrated has its effects on food, dress and festival patterns of this community. Kashmiri language is gradually losing its speakers as the migrants move have to use other local languages in order to communicate with the host community. Majority of migrants seems unable to adapt the new climate which caused skin diseases and other air born diseases. However, it was noted that the majority of respondents wish to return to the valley if militancy is eliminated.

In 2006, an elaborate report on the impact of migration on the socio-economic conditions of Kashmiri displaced people was published [13]. It is an extensive empirical study conducted by J&K Centre for minority studies. The report has covered almost all the important aspects about the displaced KPs including their employment and occupational status, property, health, socio and cultural changes, political aspects and return and rehabilitation. The major findings of the study were that the primary cause of migration among KPs and

other minorities was due to insecurity of life and honour. It showed that 94% migrant families moved out of Kashmir valley from January 1990 to May 1990. The study showed that the proportion of educated and trained population has increased marginally during the post migration period as compared to the rate of increase in literacy rate for other communities of the state except for those living in the camps where it was low particularly for the rural families. The crude birth rates have increased substantially during the post migration period as compared to the pre-migration period. It was found that significant number of families had abandoned their movable property. The socio cultural aspect of the study showed the less use of Kashmiri language within the younger generation. It was also observed that the dress code, food habits and methods of celebrating festivals and other cultural activities has changed. The report pointed out that the identity of the KPs as a socio cultural group with its own uniqueness is under a great deal of pressure and there is a danger of its erosion.

Malhotra in her study focused on internally displaced people (IDP) from Kashmir[21]. There is an attempt to clarify the concept of IDP's and refugees, where the refugees cross the international borders but not IDP. The study defines how Kashmiri people can be identified as IDP. The assumption used in the study was that IDP brings about new modes of social organisation, who uses various response strategies to integrate in the host community and how they try to adjust socially and culturally which is beyond just physical survival. The paper also pointed out the fact that the displacement has impacted the social organisation of the Kashmiri people. The field research area of the study included s camps in Jammu region and apartments in Noida. The research focused on the determinants with which the displaced people integrate with the local population, these determinants includes ethnic, family and religious affiliations. The observation of the research shows how the internally displaced people living in Jammu camps are more miserable than the people living in Noida, as in Noida there are proper housing facilities where as in Jammu only one room tentments were available to the internally displaced people. A more peculiar feature was that the people living in Jammu camps belonged to the villages or rural areas of Kashmir such as Kulgam, Kupwara, Anantnag, Barramulla, on the other hand people living in Noida were from Srinagar city.

## **XI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The outcome of the data collected in interviews shows about several changes which the community made in order to adapt in the new environment. The changes which took place in the community after migration are visible to a great extent. There are major changes in the dressing pattern and only minor changes in the food habits.

### **Dress**

The dressing habits have gone through considerable changes. The most important factor is the climatic conditions. Here geographical environment plays an important role in the abandonment of dress. In order to settle in a different geographical environment the Kashmiri people modified their dressing since Delhi's winter season is not as harsh as that of Kashmir. However, it was also noted that wearing *Pheran* (long robe worn by men and women both in winter) is not a very acceptable fashion outside Kashmir and hence these people abandoned this cultural attire. It is also noted that the young girls are not wearing the traditional attire and head gear on the wedding day. *Saree* and *Tarang* (headgear) are part of the Kashmiri dress style. However, this is now replacing fast with the contemporary dressing style. The girls are choosing *Lehenga* over *Saree* and choose not to wear the headgear to a large extent.

## Food

Cuisine is the only thing they have kept with themselves. Food is one of the factors which still connect the migrated Kashmiris across India. Although few alterations have been done considering the hot climatic condition of the host cities. But more or less the food habits remain the same. Kashmiri food is liked equally by the youngsters. Most of the families prepare Kashmiri food almost daily. However, the new cuisines have taken over on the special occasions such as Chinese, Continental and Italian. Preparing *Tahar* on special occasions (Yellow rice prepared on auspicious days) is still a relevant practice in KPs. A young migrant commented that, “*Kuchbhi change ho saktahai par hamarakhananai, it connects us as a community.*”(Anything can change but not our food).

## Education

The KPs being an educated community immediately secured job and higher education opportunity post migration. It has to be noted that the community shows highly adaptive feature when it comes to economic terms. Most of them stress on the fact that migration was a blessing in disguise as it helped the community to achieve better standard of living. They agree that if they had not migrated the circumstances would have been different. Migration has helped them in securing better opportunities. This all happened because of their zeal to live life to the fullest. They planned their finances and directed them towards education which helped them achieve a good standard of living after twenty eight years. However their struggle after leaving the valley is beyond praise. One migrant remarked, “*Humkohamare intellect ne he bachaya*”(Our intellect saved us to sustain after migration). Commenting further that, “*a Kashmiri parent would not spend the money on decorating the house but will be focused on getting their child educated with no discrimination between a boy and a girl child.*”

## Language

In order to mix up with the host community the KPs have abandoned their own language. This is one of the coping strategies, post migration. The language plays an important role in one's life. It is a must that we communicate with each other in order to survive.

After migration of KPs from Kashmir Valley to different parts of the country, they adapted new languages as per their requirement. They are able to understand languages of the host community even if they can't speak it properly. The youth do not show much interest in their own language because it is not helping them in the competitive world in anyway. They are learning new languages to adapt in the host environment. This show how adaptive is this community. One of migrant observed that “*inter-caste marriages after migration have increased drastically and hence the mother who does not know Kashmiri language is unable to pass it on to the kids.*”

## Social Customs

A lot of changes have been made in the social customs of KPs. Due to the climate change they are not able to carry their social customs the way they used to do it in the valley. Most of the customs were performed according to the season in Kashmir. Due to the climate change a lot of customs had to be dropped. The use of *Kanger* (fire pot with coal used in winters to keep oneself warm) has now become a rarity as the climate conditions of the host communities are not as cold as in Kashmir. Most of the migrants mentioned that there are



other convenient options such as electric blankets which are easy to use and are hassle free as compared to the coal *Kanger*. Similarly few customs have to be dropped in order to facilitate their adaption to the people of the host community. In the *Navratri* festival (nine auspicious days celebrated in Hinduism, devoted to goddess Durga) the K.Ps. used to cook non- vegetarian food on first four days, this was a wide practice among KP's however after migration they refrain themselves from non-vegetarian food in order to adapt themselves with the host community. One of the migrant remarked "*when in Rome do as the Romans do.*" He mentioned that "*the host community has influenced their customs however these modifications are not forced but to adjust in society some changes have to be made.*"

The prevalence of Kashmir folk songs and *Rouf* dance has also decreased. Because in social functions and gatherings there are people from the host community as well and hence only popular music or dance can be played.

## IX. CONCLUSION

KPs have modified or dropped their customs in order to feed, clothe and shelter themselves in the host community. The cultural shock post migration has impacted them in certain aspects, the most important being the physical and psychological aspect. Migration to hotter places caused a lot of health issues, specially skin related problems as they were not accustomed with the hot and humid climate. Psychologically and emotionally they have felt isolated and neglected which impacted the overall performance of youth in achieving the best in life. However, the community adapted themselves with the host environment quite well and has also made peace with the said change, because of their adaptive quality. The modifications are largely seen in the dressing habits, learning new languages, grabbing new economic opportunities and adjusting the social customs according to the norms of the host community. However, it may be noted that the food habits are more or less the same; the community is very much fond with their cuisine and try to maintain its authenticity. Hence, we can say that food is something which binds this community. They are now settled and have adapted the new environment; it has been almost twenty seven years since they parted with their homeland. Some of them mentioned that they do not want another migration by returning to their homelands because they are not ready for another emotional turmoil and there are few who are haunting to go back. However the fact remains that this community still does not have a homeland which is their own.

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