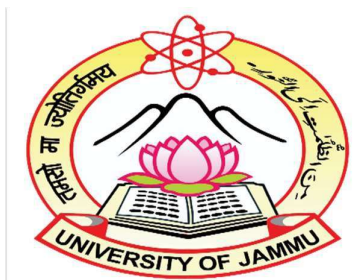


# **The Cultural Essence and Migration Story of Kashmiri Pandits:**

## **Preserving heritage amidst displacement**



## **MAJOR PROJECT REPORT**

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(Design your degree)

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# CERTIFICATE

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## **Abstract**

The cultural heritage of the Kashmiri Pandit community represents a unique and vibrant facet of India's historical tapestry, yet their forced displacement in the 1990s has profoundly disrupted traditional practices, social structures, and collective identity. This study investigates the cultural dimensions of the Kashmiri Pandit diaspora, focusing on themes of preservation, adaptation, and evolution amidst adversity. Key elements such as festivals, rituals, cuisine, arts, music, and oral traditions are examined as vital components of cultural identity. The paper highlights how these cultural elements have been sustained within diaspora contexts and explores the challenges faced by the second generation in maintaining these traditions. Additionally, it discusses the potential role of technology and media in supporting cultural continuity and fostering intercultural exchanges that showcase the resilience and contributions of Kashmiri Pandits to broader cultural discourses. By analyzing the intersection of tradition and modernity, this research offers insights into innovative strategies for cultural preservation through digital archives, multimedia storytelling, and virtual reconstructions of lost heritage. The findings aim to contribute to policy discussions on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage while promoting global awareness of the Kashmiri Pandit community's journey. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of documenting and preserving cultural practices as essential means to sustain identity, foster resilience, and enrich global understanding of this displaced community. It opens avenues for further inquiry into the ongoing legacy of Kashmiri Pandits and their significant contributions to culture in an increasingly globalized world.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this project primarily involves qualitative interviews and the analysis of relevant news articles sourced from the internet. In-depth interviews conducted with members of the Kashmiri Pandit community, focusing on their personal experiences, cultural practices, and perceptions regarding identity and heritage since their displacement in the 1990s. These interviews aim to capture the emotional and cultural narratives that define their experiences and challenges. Additionally, information gathered from various online news articles to provide context and support for the findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the community's struggles and resilience. This dual approach allows for a rich exploration of contemporary efforts to preserve Kashmiri Pandit cultural identity in a rapidly changing environment, highlighting both individual stories and broader societal trends. By combining firsthand accounts with secondary data, this methodology aims to illuminate the complexities of cultural preservation and identity within the diaspora, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the Kashmiri Pandit experience in today's globalized world.

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## What is Kashmir?

Kashmir is often called "Paradise on Earth" due to its sheer natural beauty. Kashmir's name means "land desiccated from water" (Ka = water, Shimeera = to dry up). It's derived from a legend that the valley was once a lake drained by Saint Kashyap. Its cultural heritage enhances its beauty from centuries of history and diverse traditions. Kashmir is the northernmost geographical region of the Indian subcontinent. Till the mid-19th century, the term "Kashmir" referred only to the Kashmir Valley between the Great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal Range. Since then, the term has acquired a broader scope, encompassing the India-administered territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Jammu is known for temples and rich cultural festivals, and Ladakh for its rugged landscape and Buddhist monasteries. However, the focal point of this report is the Kashmir Valley, known for its striking natural beauty, distinct culture, and a lifestyle that differs from others. The way of life in Kashmir is a tasteful fusion of modernism and tradition.



[Landscape Dal Lake Srinagar - Free photo on Pixabay](#)

From vast green valleys to snow-clad mountains, there is a long list of sightseeing attractions. It includes such popular places and tourist attractions as Sonmarg, Gulmarg, Apharwat Peak, Betaab Valley, etc. To the north lies Kashmir, surrounded by the majestic Himalayan mountains, and to the south, it borders the Pir Panjal range. The landscapes here range from alpine meadows and dense forests to beautiful valleys and clear lakes. The region is made even more lush due to the flowing of the Jhelum River. Kashmir is characterized by a cold, snowy winter and a mild, pleasant summer. In some parts of the state, winters can be very severe due to heavy snowfall. Summers are warm but moderate enough to be good for agriculture and tourism.

The Kashmir division is mainly Muslim, accounting for 97.16% of the population, with a very small minority of Hindus (2.45%) and Sikhs (0.81%). Ethnic groups are represented by ethnic Kashmiris as the majority, followed by Pahari-Pothwari and Gujjar-Bakarwal communities. The region has experienced drastic changes, such as the forced migration of Kashmiri Hindus, known as Kashmiri Pandits, in the 1990s. Language-wise, the majority is of Kashmiri, spoken by 85.28% of the population, followed by Gojri, Pahari-Pothwari, and Hindi. Urdu is also understood to a considerable extent in the region.



## **Kashmir: Where Tradition Meets Nature**

Kashmir is often termed "Paradise on Earth," and this lifestyle is highly interwoven with its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and complex history. Located in the northernmost part of India, Kashmir's breathtaking landscapes-its snow-capped mountains, tranquil lakes, and lush green valleys-provide the perfect backdrop for a way of life shaped by centuries of tradition and resilience. In the midst of political challenges and economic hardships, the people of Kashmir have kept their way of living unique, blending the old with the new.

The center of Kashmiri life is agriculture. The land of the valley is fertile and supports crops like rice, saffron, and various fruits. This is an agrarian lifestyle that has been the base of the local economy and closely related to nature's rhythms. The natural resources of the valley not only feed the population but also form part of the identity of Kashmiri cuisine and medicinal practices.

Along with agriculture, handicraft forms an important feature in the cultural geography of Kashmir. The valley is famous for its exquisite handicrafts: the Kashmiri carpet, the shawl, and intricate wood carvings. These time-honored skills are transmitted through generations; every piece tells of the scrupulous artistry and the pride of people in their culture.

Kashmir's lifestyle is also influenced by its religious and cultural practices. Predominantly Muslim, with a significant Hindu minority, the region's religious diversity is reflected in its festivals, rituals, and community life. Though modernity is a reality, religious traditions continue to play a vital role in shaping the daily lives of Kashmiris, fostering a sense of unity and spiritual connection.

Tourism, spurred by the natural beauty of the region and attractions such as houseboats in Dal Lake, is another aspect of the lifestyle of the Kashmiri people. While tourism has invigorated the local economy and introduced new influences, the old values and ways of life are still strong in the community.

# Tourism in Kashmir: A Gateway to Beauty and Culture

Kashmir, often called "Paradise on Earth," is one of the most popular tourist spots in the world because of its beautiful nature and rich culture. The region has stunning landscapes with snow-covered mountains, green valleys, peaceful lakes, and beautiful gardens that leave visitors in awe. Kashmir offers not only amazing views but also the chance to enjoy outdoor activities and explore historical sites, attracting people from all over the world.

## Srinagar:

Srinagar is the heart of Kashmir and is famous for its Dal Lake, where visitors can stay on traditional houseboats, floating on the calm water. The Mughal Gardens, like Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh, are also top attractions, showing the area's rich history and impressive architecture. These gardens, with their beautiful flowers, fountains, and green spaces, are a great way to experience the grandeur of Kashmir's past.



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## **Gulmarg:**

Known as the "Meadow of Flowers," Gulmarg is a destination for all seasons. In winter, it becomes a paradise for skiing and snow sports lovers, while in summer, people come for trekking and nature walks. The Gulmarg Gondola, one of the highest cable cars in the world, offers breathtaking views of the snow-covered mountains, making it an exciting spot for visitors.



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## **Pahalgam:**

is a peaceful town surrounded by green meadows and the calm Lidder River. It's a perfect place for trekking, horseback riding, and fishing. Pahalgam is also important to many Hindus, as it marks the start of the Amarnath Yatra, a pilgrimage to the holy Amarnath cave.



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## Sonmarg:

also known as the "Meadow of Gold," is famous for its glaciers and wide meadows. It's an ideal place for adventure lovers, offering activities like trekking, camping, and river rafting. The untouched beauty of Sonmarg makes it a great spot for anyone wanting to experience the pure and natural side of Kashmir.



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Kashmir is one of the best tourist destinations in the world because of its mix of natural beauty, adventure, and rich culture. Whether it's the peaceful Dal Lake, the snowy slopes of Gulmarg, or the charming towns of Pahalgam and Sonmarg, there's something for everyone—nature lovers, adventure seekers, and those interested in learning about the local culture. Despite challenges like political instability and weather conditions, Kashmir continues to attract visitors, offering both peace and adventure. It remains a top destination for anyone looking for an unforgettable experience.

# Cultivating Prosperity: An Overview of Agriculture

Agriculture is a fundamental component of the economy in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), with a significant portion of the population relying on it for their livelihoods. The region's diverse agro-climatic conditions, characterized by fertile soil and abundant water resources, support a variety of agricultural practices.

## Major Agricultural Practices

### 1. Food Crops:

**Rice** is the staple food of Kashmir, extensively cultivated in lowland areas. It is typically planted in May and harvested by late September. Other important food crops include **maize**, **wheat**, and **pulses** (such as peas and lentils). In the Jammu region, wheat is the predominant crop, while barley is also cultivated in certain areas (Britannica, 2024).



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## 2. Cash Crops:

The cultivation of **saffron**, primarily concentrated in Pampore, positions J&K as the sole producer of saffron in the Indian subcontinent. This high-value crop is renowned for its quality and aroma. Other cash crops include various **oilseeds**, which are cultivated for local consumption and trade (Kour et al., 2023).



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## Horticulture

Horticulture plays a crucial role in J&K's economy, contributing significantly to its agricultural output. The region is known for its high-quality fruits such as apples, walnuts, and almonds. Kashmir produces approximately 75% of India's apples, with Shopian district often referred to as the "*Apple Bowl of India*." Additionally, **saffron cultivation** employs approximately 30,000 families in Pampore, highlighting its economic importance (CLAWs, 2024).



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## **Economic Challenges**

Despite its agricultural potential, J&K faces several challenges:

- The region is food-deficient, importing about 700,000 metric tonnes of food grains annually due to a gap between production and consumption. The food grain production reached approximately 9.9 lakh metric tonnes by 2013-14 but still fell short of meeting local demand (Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir, n.d.).
- Small and fragmented landholdings limit the scope for mechanization and scientific agricultural practices. Additionally, conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes contributes to this deficit (Kour et al., 2023).
- Climate change poses risks to traditional farming practices, particularly affecting saffron productivity (CLAWs, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

Agriculture in Jammu and Kashmir represents a blend of tradition and potential. While challenges such as climate change and limited infrastructure persist, there are opportunities for growth through modernization and sustainable practices. Government initiatives aimed at improving irrigation systems and promoting organic farming will be crucial for enhancing agricultural productivity and ensuring food security in the region.

# The Cultural Richness of Kashmir: From Food to Traditions

Culture is a concept that encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human society, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, attitude and habits of an individual in these groups. The culture of Kashmir invites exploration into a beautiful world full of diverse traditions, soulful music, and delicious cuisine. From the vibrant festivals to the mind-blowing handicrafts, each element reflects the enduring spirit of a region that cherishes its rich heritage amidst the breathtaking beauty of its landscapes.

If we talk about the traditions, Kashmiri peoples are deeply rooted in its history. From age-old customs to rituals passed down through generations. Known for their unique form of hospitality, where guests are considered a divine blessing, and no effort is spared to ensure their comfort and well-being.

## Culinary Masterpiece of Kashmir

Not only Kashmiri peoples are known for their hospitality but also for the cuisine the culinary masterpiece that mirrors the region's rich history and heritage. At the heart of their Gastronomic journey lies **WAZWAN**, a multicourse feast, where aromatic dishes take center stage. From the iconic **Rogan Josh**, *a slow cooked lamb curry infused with a symphony of spices*, to flavorful **Yakhni**, *a yoghurt based stew*, **Goshtaba**, a dish that requires a certain level of expertise, minced mutton meatballs, cooked in yoghurt and infused with fragrant spices, **Matschgand**, meatballs cooked in a spicy red gravy, the smokey flavor of meat with a spicy red gravy perfectly pairs with pulao, **Mujh Gaad**, this unusual mix of fish, radish and nadur takes center of the stage, **Tabak Maaz**, a kashmiri style lamb ribs. Slathered in the spices and yoghurt or milk, the lamb pieces are often left to marinate overnight, cooked until they are tender and deep-fried, these dishes have been passed down through generation. Delicacies like **Dum Aloo**, *a spiced potato curry*, **Lyodur Tschaman**, another classic dish filled with plenty of turmeric and infused with fennel, black pepper, and ginger powder, **Chok Wangun**(tangy eggplant curry), the brinjal is fried until it reaches nice golden hue and the tangy flavor of tamarind adds a touch of zestiness making it different from other gravies, **Nadru Monje**, a famous street food in Kashmir made by frying lotus stem dipped in rice flour, deep fried in oil till they turn into a nice reddish color with perfect crispy texture, **Gogji Nadir**, the turnip and lotus roots are cut and fried with salt and chillies and are cooked in a pressure cooker and sautee with spices, the dish is complete when the turnips are soft and you can

smell the aromatic blend of the spices. Keshur Haak (Kashmiri Haak), a popular dish in Kashmiri Cuisine and is prepared in the majority of Kashmiri Households. It's simple, healthy, and is filled with a lot of flavors of Kashmiri Authentic Kashmiri Spices, sweetly fragrant **Modur pulao** are also included in these delicacies. Infused with unique flavours and a blend of spice Kashmiri cuisine is not just a meal but a sensory exploration of the region's cultural richness. Beyond the savory delights, **Kashmiri teas** such as, **Sheer chai**, a salty tea with a slight of creaminess with a hint of bitterness, next comes **kahwa**, infused with saffron, cardamom, and almonds, these traditional teas not only warms the soul but also captures the essence of Kashmir's hospitality. The cuisine's diversity also extends to its bakery delights, with the crispness of **sheermal** and **katlam** and the sweetness of **khathai**. Kashmiri cuisine, with its unique flavours and culinary traditions, is an integral part of the regions identity, inviting both locals and visitors alike to savor the richness of its cultural heritage through every bite.



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## **Traditional Dresses-Reflecting rich cultural Heritage**

The traditional dresses of Kashmir reflect the region's rich cultural heritage and climatic conditions. For men, the traditional dress is the “**Phiran**”, a loose fitting, knee length robe made from wool or Jamawar fabric, often adorned with intricate embroidery known as “**Aari**” or “**Sozni**” on the other hand Kashmiri women's wore the elegant and vibrant “Pheran”, a floor-length gown with wide sleeves. The Pheran is typically made from colourful fabric, featuring beautiful hand-embroidery, and is often paired with a headscarf known as the “**Kasaba**”.

Not only these things show the rich heritage but also the festivals and weddings reflect the cultural depth and heritage of the region.



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We will talk about Kashmiri wedding and the rituals that take place and also about few of the main festivals that showcase the uniqueness of Kashmiri such as Pann-the Kashmiri version of celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi, Herath(Shivratri), KawPunim(CrowPurnima), Khechmavas

(Khichdi Amavasya). If we talk about weddings then it's the time where family and friends spending those weeks together with everyone having enough time to spare. There was no rush. Although being a Kashmiri I have attend a lot of weddings occurred in my Family but never knew what an actual Kashmiri wedding look like, so, I talked to my mother and few of my relatives that how a Kashmiri wedding actually looked like what they told me was that those were a simple yet an elaborated affair, with rituals spread over weeks. Although everything was self managed, yet carried out with utmost beauty and fineness.

The main ceremony mostly be a day time affair, with only some opting for evening event . Every ceremony practically happened as per as **SAATH-a** day time chosen after consulting the **Gor(priest)**, who would pick a suitable time for everything from the Janthri- the kashmiri hindu calander. All events were usually conducted in the compound of your own home. Most of the Matrimonial Alliances would be arranged after a thorough matching of Tekinye(Horoscope/Kundli) with the help of the **Manzimyor(Matchmaker)**. Preparations would begin months early. In afternoon, after finishing daily chores, the womenfolk of the house and those of the neighbours and relatives would sit together and clean sacks full of rice which would then be stacked up for later use. The belongings called **Vardan**-which consisted mostly silk sarees and pashmina shawls would get readied over years, very painstakingly. Since, everything around wedding was managed on your own, it meant managing everything on your own. Closer the wedding day, closer to the wedding day, utensils like Deech'e (huge cooking pots made of brass), Thaal (plates) and glasses would be organized, with the neighbours alsopitching in with whatever they could spare. An entry would be made in the diary for the items borrowed, so that, post the wedding, they would be duly returned to them.

**KASAM DREI&GANDUN**-giving your words – is when the *families of the boy and the girl agrees to the alliance in the principle, and decide to go ahead with marking the marriage*. An important pre-condition is that the **Tekinye** of the boy and girl must match, which is almost an important custom.

**Gandun** which can translate as tying up is the formal engagement ceremony and happens at the respective homes of the two. On this day, the *sister or sister-in-law of the groom goes to bride's home with a gold Tyok(Tikka) and a golden thread Narivan(Mauli)* for the bride. She applies the Tyok to the bride's forehead and ties

the Narivan on her wrist. Along with these she carries gifts like saree, shawl, Silver cup with cream in it which is fed later to the bride, salt and sugar for the bride. She also hands over the **Zaatukh(horoscope scroll)** of the groom which stays with the bride's family until the wedding is over. The sister on her return is given gifts for her, clothes and jewellery for the groom and several blocks of crystallized sugar called Nabad Noet.

**LIVUN** is when you daub the surfaces like the walls and floor. It is the ceremonial cleaning of the house. In old time mostly kashmiri peoples lived in mud houses, which on this day, were cleaned, washed and a fresh coat of mud/clay was applied to improve the appearance of the house.

The **Poff(father's sister)** unties the hair of the bride which then stays open until the wedding day. This ceremony is called **Mas Muczravun**. The womenfolk burn **Isband(wild rue seeds)** in the **Kangir(fire-pot)** after touching a pinch of the seeds to each other's shoulders and head with, *the fragrant fumes of which are supposed to ward off the evil. The womenfolk get together and sing traditional Kashmiri folk songs and wedding ballads. This distinct style of singing is called Wanvun.*

The poff then has to prepare a savory rice porridge called **Vaer** which is shared with all the friends and family. Since, all the food during the wedding days is home cooked, a **Waaza** or traditional Kashmiri cook is hired along with his team. This is the day he usually sets up the **Wur- a wood fired multi-top clay oven- in the backyard of the house**. All the feast thereafter are cooked on this wur.

**MAENZRATH**-The **Krool Kharun** ritual is performed on this day where in the entrance of the home is decorated with the auspicious motifs(a design repeated which then creates a beautiful pattern) and colourful frescoes(a painting made on wall or ceiling with wet paint) by the poff. The whole house wears a truly festive look.



**Maenz** is **Mehndi** and **Raath** is **Night**- the night of Mehndi, song and dance-is a couple of days before wedding. The *mother's and father's sisters- both are a key in this ceremony*. The *Maas-Mother's sister washes hands and feet of bride/groom, applies henna to the hands and feet in beautiful design*. The Poff thereafter goes around the room, dropping dollops of henna in everybody's palms who in return offer money to her as **shagun**(customary offering). The Poff makes Vaer on this day too. It's the night of song and dance. Everyone sits down in a large group with several traditional Musical instruments and sing Kashmiri songs. **Tumbakhnaer** is the most

auspicious of them all. A beat on this Kicks-off the musical night and makes it more lively. Tumbakhnaer is a goblet drum made of baked clay and sheepskin. Many people wanting a grand ceremony, organize **Gindun Gor-a** traditional Kashmiri folk singer who along with his troupe of musicians and dancers entertains everyone until the wee hours of morning.

**DEVGOAN**-This ritual is usually held a day before the wedding day. It marks the bride and the groom's transitions from Bhramacharya Ashram to Grahasthya Ashram.

The bride and the groom, at their respective places, are given **Kanyi Shraan-a** bathing ritual. The **maamayin(maternal aunt)** *cleans the a particular palce and the bride/groom is made to sit at the center. Water mixed with milk is poured over her/him through a muslin cloth with is then held by the four young girls(kanya), one at each end.* Following the bath, all the old clothes or accessories on the bride/groom are given away and they change into new clothes which are gifted by the mother's side of the family.

The poff makes the hair of the bride, by parting it right in the center with **Tull'e Moor**(Twigs from the mulberry tree) and loosely ties it with a red sacred thread) into two separate parts. Thereafter The bride/groom sit at the **Havan** and prayers are offered to **Parvati** and **Shiva** as per Vedic rituals performed by the priest. The bride and the groom observe a fast before the puja. The bride's gold ornaments and utensils given to her by her family are placed in front of the **Yagna** and are purified during the ceremony.

The **Atth** and **Dejhor** play an Important role here. You have seen Kashmiri Pandit women wearing a gold chain with an attached Pendulum in both the ears. In fact, that's one way of identifying them as married Kashmiri Pandits. This ornament has a deep spiritual meaning. Made up of gold, **Dejhor** is a shatkon or hexagon-shaped pendulum and **Atth** is the gold chain that holds the **Dejhor**. It's worn in both ears. The shatkon shape represents the union of Shiva & Shakti. During the Devgoan, the parents of the bride give her the Dejhor that is worn in the ears using the red Narivan. Later, on the wedding day, after the bride goes to her in-laws' place, they replace the red thread of the Dejhor with the gold Atth thus signifying the union of two individuals and the respective families.



## **LAEGAN-THE WEDDING DAY**

Back in Kashmir, probably due to the harsh weather conditions, the *Laegan* (the main wedding ritual) would take place during the day, at the chosen Saath. Weddings used to be less showy and less noisy.

The groom departs from his place towards the bride's home, accompanied by his family members and friends. Only his mother stays back home. The groom dresses up in a traditional outfit like a sherwani, or in a western suit. What is worth a mention, is his headgear — a *Dastaar (turban)* which is *tied in a particular manner by the elderly menfolk*. Usually, a beautiful silk saree is used for this, to give a rich, embellished look to the groom. *A black headed needle is compulsorily used in the Dastaar to ward off the evil eye!* Strings of silver coated almonds, cloves and Mahraz Posh (Globe Amaranth flowers) are used to garland the groom to complete the look.

The Kashmiri bride looks absolutely beautiful in a red saree and a stunning Headgear called **Targa**, Which give her a very distinct bridal charm. The first comes the **Taech**-*which is a snug fitting, gold embroidered Zari cap*. Then comes the **Zooej**-*a delicate netted fabric with embroidered patterns that is draped over the Taech*. Over the Zooej, a few layers of **Moharlath**-*Starched and glazed white band of fabric, are wrapped around*. The final layer is that of *Baendye* — *golden Gota fabric*. All this is secured with the help of several gold-headed needles. Two black-headed needles are also used, one on either side. Finally, the *Pallav* of the *saree covers the head*. The jewellery usually worn by the bride is all gold.

The loose hair is finally tied into *Khanji Lathur* — *two braids with each braid split into six parts and then knotted*. Each braid is covered with golden Gota fabric and then woven into a *Till'e Vaenkh (golden threaded paranda)*. Once the *Baraat reaches the bride's place*, the *women of the girl's family welcome them with Vanvun*. The groom and his family are garlanded with marigold flowers and a conch is blown to ward off any evil. Unlike other Indian weddings, Pandit weddings are without the customary music band and dance.

As the groom steps into the courtyard of the house, both he and the bride are made to stand on the *Vyoog* — *a rangoli*. The eldest lady of the bride's family does a traditional welcome of *Aalath (like an Aarti)* and *feeds them Nabad sugar crystals*. This is followed by *Dwar Poozah* at the main entrance of the house, a small puja performed by the priest. The bride wears a *Pulhor (straw sandals)* for this ceremony. The bride, groom, grandparents, poff and all from their *gotra* (family) fast until the *Laegan* is over.

The nuptial knot is tied through a long puja as per the Vedic rituals at the *Mandap* where the yagna is lit. The puja rituals are very elaborate and extend over several hours. The father or the eldest in the family of the bride does the *Kanyadaan* — giving away the hand of the bride into the groom's hands. It's only during the puja that the couple see each other for the first time (yes, in the olden times) in the *reflection of a mirror shown to them by the priest*. Through the ceremony, the groom and bride hold hands covered with a special cloth. This is called *Athwas*. A golden thread with embellishment –**Mananmal**- is tied to their foreheads.

The bride and the groom take *Pheras* (rounds) around the sacred fire, holding hands. The bride and the groom undertake the *Saptapadi* or the seven promises that the groom has to make to the bride. With each step that the bride takes “towards her new home”, the priest calls out a condition for the groom to accept. Only when these seven promises are made is the marriage solemnised. The *priest places walnuts in the hands of the bride which she hands over to her father-in-law symbolizing the continuity of progeny*.

**POSH'E POOZAH**-The Laegan culminates with a very significant and beautiful custom. The *bride and the groom, representing Shiva and Parvati sit side-by-side and a red dupatta or saree is placed over their heads. Friends and family gather around the couple and shower Posh or flowers on them while mantras are chanted by the priest. This is a flower worship of Shiv-Parvati, as one entity, hence the name Posh'e Poozah or worshipping with flowers.*

After this, the bride and the groom break the fast and have the *Day'e Batt'e* (feed each other from the same thali). When it's time for the Baraat to return, the *Maam* (maternal uncle) of the bride carries her out from there as after the kanyadaan she must leave from there the *Mahraz* (groom) and *Mahrin* (bride), the newlyweds stand on the **Vyoog** and are offered Nabad and kissed on the forehead by the eldest lady of the home. Wanvun is on.

### **SATRAATH**

After reaching her new home, the bride is welcomed by friends and family of her husband. The *Targa is undone and she is helped into a new saree by her mother-in-law. The bride at that time offers a gift to her month-in-law. She also carries gifts, like sarees, for all the women in the family.* Later, that evening, the bride and groom

pay a visit to the bride's family for dinner. The bride changes into yet another saree gifted by her mother this time, and returns to her home with gifts and blessings.

### **PHIRLATH**

This is the second time in the next few days after the wedding, when the couple visits the bride's parents, where they join a feast and are given gifts to mark the occasion.

**ROTH KHABAR**-On a suitable Tuesday or Saturday, the parents of the bride send a traditional sweet bread known as Roth to their daughter's home. That day, the bride goes to her parents place for a few days with the same person who had come with the Roth.

### **PANN- THE KASHMIRI VERSION OF GANESH CHATURTHI**

Vinayak Chaturthi also known as Ganesh chaturthi is special in many ways. First, it signifies the festive season in India. *Ganesh chaturthi is celebrated on the fourth day of the Hindu month of Bhadrapada.* According to Hindu mythology, the day celebrates the arrival of Ganesh from Kailash Parvat. Although the day is celebrated with much fanfare in almost all Indian states, the excitement and flavor in Maharashtra is on a different level altogether. Kashmiri Pandits however, dedicated Vinayak Chaturthi to a different Deity. The origin of Pann pooja, as Kashmiri calls it, stems from agriculture. The day is associated with the spinning of newly produced cotton (pann). *A long cotton thread (denoting the pann) is tied to the neck of an earthen pot and a handful of runner grass and rice grains(vishkih) is also kept on a plate.* **Beeb Garabh Maej** The word 'maej' in Kashmiri translates to 'mother'. Beeb Garab Maej comes from the name of two goddesses — Vibha and Garbha. It is said that these two local Goddess transformed into one and that's how Beeb garabh Maej was formed. In Kashmiri Pandits, **Beeb Garabh Maej** is the goddess of prosperity and happiness. *Who so ever prays to her with love and true devotion that house will never have the shortage of Money.* The day begins with cleaning the kitchen and the area where the pooja is performed. In our family I usually decorate the area with flowers and rice grains. All of us wear new clothes on Pann, all the married women wear an Athoor as it is an auspicious day. Once everyone is dressed up, the family members greet each other by saying, 'Pann Posth' or 'Pann Mubarak'. The main prasad offered to Beeb Garab Maej is roth. It's a sweet, hard flatbread made from a mixture of wheat flour, ghee (clarified butter), sugar and cardamom. While some roth is made specially for the deity, the remaining roth is distributed as prasad among family and friends. *Every family has a set measure of how much flour to use in the dough to make roths for the deity, the same measure being used generations after generations in the family.* However, the measure of the flour to

make roths for distribution can differ. My mother would knead the dough, roll it and fry it in a wokful of pure desi ghee, and I would take it out and sprinkle poppy seeds on it, all the while listening to Kashmiri bhajans on the phone. Pann Katha After the prasad is prepared and everyone is ready, the puja begins. The roth, and flowers are all neatly arranged, and everyone takes a seat. The highlight of pann pooza, besides the roth, is a legendary story about the deity narrated by the head woman of the house. **“Ryethav manz ryetha, Bhadra pyetha Vināyak tchoram t (aath)var.”**The story talks about a family where the Queen was a devotee of Beeb Garabh Meaj. She followed this tradition of worshipping the Mother Goddess that had been handed down by her ancestors. The manyata(traditions and belief) is that if you perform the pooja with pure heart, all your wishes will be granted. There is just one condition though; the sacred palce where the pooja is performed gets spoiled or disrespected in any way, the devotee and their family will suffer the wrath of the goddess. The king of the family did broke the condition due to his arrogance and stupidity he walked into the sacred place with his shoes on, thus spoiling it, and took the Roth that was kept there as an offering to the mother goddess. The Queen despaired but what could she do! It was done. Now the King and his family had to suffer for his mistake. The King was imprisoned by the neighboring Kingdom. Chaos ensued in the kingdom and with enemies approaching, the Queen was forced to flee the capital with her young daughter. Many years passed. The Mother and daughter lived a life of hardship. On the Autumn Day, as the cold had started to set in the air, the mother asked her daughter to get some coal for their Kangri(A portable heat, device in Kashmir, made with clay and covered in cane), so that they could stay warm. The lady asked her to wait, as she was about to perform the pooja. She couldn't take anything from the kitchen, until the ritual was complete and the Prasad in the form of Roth, offered to the Mother Goddess. The girl decided to wait and joined in the pooja until it was complete. She came back home with the kindling and some Roth. She asked her mother about the significance of the ritual and why was it that they didn't perform it.

*Her mother said as they were too poor to afford the sugar, the ghee and the flour for Roth, there was no way she could do the pooja in a manner that she was used to.*

*The girl went away but kept thinking about the ritual. She used to clean horse-stables to earn a few pennies to help her mother out. While doing her job, an idea struck her. She asked the groomsman if she could collect the horse dung from the stables. They had no use for it and let her take as much as she could, in exchange for a clean floor.*

*She collected the horse dung in a wicker basket and took it to the river where she washed it. The horses were fed grain along with hay and there was undigested grain in the dung. She took the grain and washed it again, ground it and turned it into*

*some flour. Even after all that, even after her hands were sore and red from the cold, there wasn't enough flour. She took it back to her mother excitedly. The mother was overwhelmed at her daughter's innocence and determination, so she decided to use some clay to supplement the small amount of flour and made three pieces of Roth for the first time since misfortune had befallen their family. They had cleaned their tiny hut, and offered this Roth to the Mother Goddess along with a few flowers and some cotton wool that was floating around; it was all they could find.*

*As is custom, Roth is distributed amongst friends and family after the pooja flowers have been taken for a visarjan (immersion, usually in a water body) in the evening. The mother covered up her Roth and went to the temple where other women were distributing Roth amongst themselves. She was embarrassed at what she had, how could she share Roth prepared from grains picked out of horse dung and clay! As it seemed strange that she wasn't willing to share, another woman who noticed her covered thali, removed the cloth curiously.*

*They both stared at what lay beneath! Three pieces of gold Roth lay sparkling on her thali. The Mother Goddess had finally smiled on the former queen and forgiven her. The news of this miracle spread far and wide until it reached the King. The mother and daughter duo were summoned to the court and asked to explain. The former queen was forced to reveal her identity and told the King of her misfortune. She explained how she had the gold and how she was certain that she had been blessed by the Mother Goddess again.*

*The king couldn't argue with this, after all, he had the proof right in front of his eyes. He knew that there was indeed something unexplainable. In that moment he realised that if he imprisoned the queen who clearly had been blessed by the Divine Mother, he may also suffer from the same fate as her husband! He decreed that the former king be released from prison. He also asked the mother to give her daughters' hand in marriage to him to which the mother agreed. The King, who was now her son-in-law gave their kingdom back to them.*

This practice is similar to the compulsory katha narrated during Satyanarayan puja. The puja ends with prayers and aarti as family members seek the blessings of Beeb Garab Maej for a healthy and prosperous year ahead. After the puja, the roth is usually served with kehwa (Kashmiri tea).

**HERATH(Shivratri)**-the most sacred festival of Kashmiri Pandits. This festival is observed by the Kashmiri Pandits to seek blessings of the cosmic vision of Shiva and Parvati. There is a famous saying in Kashmir about the Afghan governor, Jabbar Khan, who forbade Kashmiri Pandits from celebrating Herath(Shivaratri) in winter. As it always snows on Shivaratri, he decreed that the festival be celebrated in

the summer. It snowed that summer resulting in crop failure. The saying goes, **‘Wychton yi Jabbar Jande, Harras ti korun Vande’** (Look at this Jabbar the fool, he turned summer into winter).

Since the majority of the Kashmiri Pandits are followers of Shiva, so Maha Shivratri festival is observed for 15 days, beginning with the parva of Hurya Okdoh or Krishna Paksh duadashi or tryodash(changes every year) Much before the festival does actually occure, houses are cleaned, new-utensils are brought and other household things are put in the order, for the glorious arrival of the Vatak-Raaza. One new dress for the main puja is set aside, and through preparation are made and a collection of eatables are made with love and devotion. Each day has a special name and religious function to be observed, which includes the social get-up, and interaction with friends, neighbours and relatives.



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*Regular cleaning starts from Huriokdoh and continues to Ashtmi, also revered as the Huri shtami. Huri Navmi is also a prelude to the function. Dashmi is called Diyaar-Dhaham.*

One this day usually married daughters come to their parental houses to participate in this social ‘At Home; for enjoying the special feast. But essentially they are given fresh-clothes, a salt packet, kangri, zang/aath-gath which starts from a minimum one rupee coin.

**Shivratri poja** is known and revered as **vatuk pooza**. On the **eleventh day**, known as the **Daad Kah**, *mostly, the pandit families cook the fish. The place which is fully cleaned for the vatuk pooza is fully decorated with garlands, photos and pictures of Shiv Parivar.*

On the **12<sup>th</sup> day** the day of **Ganesh Puja**, in association with the **Wagur Baah** is invoked according to the family tradition.

On this day the pots are cleaned and are kept at a clean place.

The **Tryodashi** or **13<sup>th</sup> day** is the actual day of **Maha Shivratri**. This **13<sup>th</sup> day** or **Tithi** is know by the name of Herath. This festival is celebrated with up most joy by the Kashmiri Pandit community. They generally believe that the marriage of Shive and Parvati is being celebrated on this day of Herath/Mahashivratri. **Vatak Raaz** is decorated with flowers filled with walnuts, soaked in water representing Shiv and Shakti. Then a definite number of small pots filled with walnuts in water as such are kept according to what is shown in the Janthri, symbolizing other Deities/Bharaatis. at a tap in the compound of the house. Then it is taken back into the house where the eldest lady of the house bolts the entrance-door from inside. The members carrying the watukh knock at the door and the following exchange of words takes place :

कुस छुव? [Who is there ?]

राम ब्रोer [Ram the cat]

क्या हथ? [what have you brought with you?]

अन्न, दन, गुर्य गुपन, ओर जुव [With food, money, cattle, good health]

Vatuk Raaza is the presiding-deity. There is a set form of Puja/worship each or in a group of our Homes. Mostly, the heads of the family observe fast on Shivratri. After the worship/puja as well as fast, Prasada is taken at midnight which is Kashmiri delicacies such as Dum aloo, Paneer, Palak,nadru. Which was offered to deity. It takes around 3-4 hours to perform the whole Puja in a celebrated manner. *After all the rituals are done the family members sit together and Sings songs, play cards cuz it is said that it's the night of celebration.*

One the **14<sup>th</sup> Day** i.e. Second day of Vatuk, usually called “**Salam**” the daughters and Son-in-laws are invited by the parents. It is a day of grand feast and family.

Money called **Herath-Kharch** and other presents are given to all younger ones. People greet each other and send **Naiveed(prashad)** to each other.



Some of the Kashmiri Pandits make Non-veg on salam for the agori who came with bharatis this tradition has been passed down from generation to generation but it is also said that at that time due to the cold climate in Kashmir, meat was often a staple food source, contributing to the non-vegetarian diet of many Kashmiri Pandits.

The **15<sup>th</sup> Day** heralds the end of this auspicious festival. All the pots are collected. Flowers and Garlands and other decorations offered to the Vatak Raaza, are put off from them, which are usually immersed in the nearest lake or river.

The end come in the form of **Vatuk-Parmuzun**. Prasada in the form of Watak Duni(walnut) and Tomul Tost(Roti made of Rice) is distributed among all the neighbours and relations. *Thus comes this grand religious function to an end if the Kashmiri Pandits Version of Heart/Mahashivratri.*

After days after Doonya Mavas, on the day called Teel Aatham, on lights an adobe lamp outside the house on the stoop, welcoming the spring time.

### **Kaw Punim (Purnmashi dedicated to Crow)**

**Kaw Potul** is ready. Dishes are all set to be served to the Crow. *Another unique culture of Kashmiri Pandits who worship the Nature in every form. Magh Purnima a very Sacred day for all Sanatanis.* In Kashmiri Pandit tradition this day is celebrated as “**Kaw Punim**” which translates to “**Puranmashi dedicated to Crow**”. Crow as per as Hindu Tradition is taken as the representative of Our Ancestors or transporter of Food given away in their name of our Ancestors to them in their abode in the Pitru-loka. Crow is also considered as the vehicle (Vahan) of the Shani(Saturn) and it also represents the Yama and Dharmaraj. When this festival was being celebrated in *Kashmir it used to be the Harsh winter during this time the crow was taken as a source of hope symbolizing our tradition of remembering our Ancestors and giving thanks to them.*

**Kaw Punim** is followed by “**Hurie Okdoh**” *the first day of start of cleaning the our houses towards making preparations for Herath(Mahashivratri)* a very great and important festival for Kashmiri Pandits Which falls on *Phalgun Krishn Paksh Dwadashi*. On the day of Kaw Punim cooked rice or yellow rice(Taher in Kashmiri) or Kichdi is prepared and a portion of it is placed on the large ladle made by putting two unequal stick lengths in shape of a cross, tying those in the center and weaving a grass mat at its anterior end, giving it a spoon shape . This is called “Kaw potul” in Kashmiri and it is used to be kept on the porch of the house. While putting the cooked rice for feeding crows on it following would be recited:-

**“Kaw Batt Kawo,  
Khechrey Kawo,  
Gang Bal Shrana Karith..**



***Gurute Meche Tyoka Karith...  
Walba Saneye Nawe Larey Kanna Darey Beh...  
Dal Batta Kheney..."***

(Oh Crow the True Batta, the lover of Khichdi, you have taken your holy dip at the sacred Gangbal and adorned yourself with Red Clay Teeka. Now come and roost on the porch of our new house and take this cooked rice and Lentil).

This festival signifies the love and care about other creatures that our culture emphasizes.

**Khichdi Amavas(Khechmavas)**-another festival celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits on **Paush Krishn Paksha Amavasya** according to the **Lunar Calender**, the Occasion honours a *peace treaty between Yakshas and the residents of Kashmiri Valley*. On this Day, *Kashmiris make dry Khichdi with Rice, turmeric, green moong dal and salt*. This is either served outside in a Thali or on a base of Dry grass shaped like ring, commonly known as Arie. *The Khichdi is often served with Monj(Kadam) Achaar(pickle) and a glass of water*. Some peoples also place a stone on the side and anointed with vermillion, treating it as Lord Kubera. A diya is lit to welcome the Yaksha and once everything is set, we are not allowed to turn back and see it. The belief is, "Yech likes to eat in private". Often described as Kashmiri Yetis, Yech Lived in the mountainous regions of Kashmir. *According to Kashmiri Lore, every winter, they would come down to the plains in serach of the food, creating havoc in the process. So, to prevent further loss of life, vally dwellers made a pact with the Yech. Once a year, they would offer Khichdi to the tribe members in case of protection.*

### **Don't look back!!**

*It was said that never look back at Yaksha's meal laid out on a thali or dry grass in the balcony or garden. Legends has it that Yech would wear a cap and who so ever gets it becomes the wealthy person and would never die. It is also said that Yech only barks for 2<sup>1/2</sup> times to give a sign About its presence.*

Each and every Kashmiri is said to have a Ghar-Devta (presiding deity). Have heard a lot of stories from my grandmother about it. She use to say that Ghar Devta have abnormal height and wear a long piece of White cloth with a diya on their Head and have a stick which has Gungroo tied to it and when so ever they come downstairs they use to create a lot of sound so that others peoples could know about their presence. They are believed to protect the family from hardships and Negative energies. Hence, every year, families organize a feast in the honour as a token of Gratitude, with the ritual of Gaad Batt.

While most of the people would stick to a vegetarian fare on this day, some add meat to the Khechar and keep a piece of raw fish on the top like Gaad batt. It all boils down to a family Reeth(custom). *Be it fare, faith or food- Khechmavas is a Khichdi of customs that everyone enjoys, regardless of their belief in the existence of Yech.*

While some of the aspects have been changed over time and with circumstances, most of the rituals still have been retained because Kashmiri Pandits no longer live in Kashmir. The changes that took places were;-

1. In Gandun the sister-in-law or the sister use to go at brides place to apply her tyok and tie her narivan but now everyone wants a lavish Engagement ceremony.
2. Before everything was managed on your own but now it's totally different as the bride requires a lot of things now a days.
3. The Krool Kharun ritual was performed by the Poff but now peoples call the local artist to make beautiful designs.
4. It was mandatory for the Kashmiri Bride to wear Taraga on the forehead but now a lot of Kashmiri Brides don't like wearing it also the pulhor is not worn anymore.
5. On Kaw Punim children of the family use to make Kaw potul but now the new generation don't know how to make it a lot of them don't even know what to recite while offering the food to crow.

# The Prelude to Exodus: Events Leading to the Migration

The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits represents one of the most significant and tragic events in the history of Jammu and Kashmir, characterized by the mass migration of this Hindu community from the Kashmir Valley during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This migration was primarily driven by escalating violence, a rise in insurgency, and targeted attacks against the Pandit community. On January 19, 1990, a series of events culminated in a climate of fear that compelled approximately 155,000 to 170,000 Kashmiri Pandits to flee their ancestral homes. The exodus is often cited as one of the largest forced migrations in modern Indian history, second only to the Partition of India in 1947.

## Causes of Migration

1. **Insurgency and Violence:** The onset of armed conflict in Kashmir in 1989 marked a critical turning point for the region. Insurgent groups, particularly the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), began targeting Kashmiri Pandits as part of a broader agenda for independence or autonomy from India. This violence included assassinations of prominent Pandit figures, creating an atmosphere of terror within the community (Thakar & Mishra, 2020; Maqbool, 2020).
2. **Targeted Killings:** The assassination of high-profile individuals within the Pandit community served as a catalyst for mass panic. Reports indicate that between January and March 1990 alone, numerous targeted killings occurred, significantly heightening fears among the Pandits (Maqbool, 2020; Puri & Escobar, 2023).
3. **Public Calls for Expulsion:** On January 19, 1990, inflammatory slogans were broadcast from mosques urging Kashmiri Pandits to leave or face dire consequences. This public call for violence further exacerbated an already tense situation and led many families to believe that their safety was no longer guaranteed (Robinson, 2013; Wikipedia, 2015).
4. **Lack of State Protection:** The failure of both state and central governments to provide adequate protection or assurances to the Pandit community contributed to their sense of abandonment. Many felt that they had no recourse for safety as violence escalated without intervention (Gigoo, 2024;

Maqbool, 2020).

5. **Social and Political Dynamics:** The broader socio-political context included rising communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. While many Muslims did not support violence against minorities, the perception among Pandits was that they were collectively targeted by militant factions supported by Pakistan (EFSAS, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2015).

## **Political Aspects**

The political landscape surrounding the exodus is characterized by several key factors:

1. **Role of Insurgent Groups:** The JKLF's initial secular motives shifted towards radicalism over time, alienating non-Muslim communities such as Kashmiri Pandits. This shift created a hostile environment where targeted violence became prevalent (Thakar & Mishra, 2020; Puri & Escobar, 2023).
2. **Government Response:** The response from both state and national governments has been criticized for its inadequacy during this crisis. Scholars argue that the lack of timely intervention allowed violence to escalate unchecked (Maqbool, 2020; Gigoo, 2024).
3. **Long-term Implications:** The migration has lasting effects on both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims in the Valley. While many Pandits seek to return to their homeland, discussions are often mired in historical grievances and accusations from both sides regarding injustices faced during this tumultuous period (EFSAS, n.d.; Maqbool, 2020).

## CONVERTING KASHMIRI COMMUNITY

(Times Now News Jan 19, 2020) “Thirty years ago, over five lakh Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Valley after terrorists with full backing of Islamic fundamentalists in the Valley unleashed a genocidal campaign.

To mark the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir, the Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD) planned a series of events in India, the US, the UK, Canada and several other countries.

The genocide of the Kashmiri Pandit community is perhaps the only case of violence in the country, on which no inquiry commission or committee has ever been formed to investigate.

The community was the first victim of terrorism in the Valley by Pakistan-backed terror outfits in the late 1980s with tacit support from the locals. Kashmiri Pandits were targeted and many community leaders, professionals, government servants, traders and teachers, men, women and even children were killed.

It all started on January 4, 1990, when a local Urdu newspaper published a press release issued by Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, asking all Kashmiri Pandits to leave the Valley immediately. Over the coming days, this warning was repeated by almost all the local newspapers.

Masked Kalashnikov wielding Jihadis carried out military-style march openly

In his book *Kashmir: Its Aborigines and their Exodus* Colonel, Tej K. Tikko writes that the Kashmiri Pandits were given three options by the Islamic extremists and terrorists: *Ralive, Tsalive ya Galive* (either convert to Islam, leave the land, or die).

The local mosques in the Valley gave highly provocative, communal and threatening slogans with radical Islam casting a dark shadow on ‘Kashmiriyat’.

Colonel (retd) Tikko writes that some of the slogans raised by the Jihadis were: “*Kashmir mein agar rehna hai, Allah-ho-Akbar kahna hoga*”, “*Islam hamara maqsad hai, Quran hamara dastur hai, jehad hamara Rasta hai*”, “*Pakistan se kya Rishta? La Ilah-e- Illalah*” and “*Dil mein rakho Allah ka khauf; Hath mein rakho Kalashnikov*” to name a few.

The community claims that over 700 members were killed while many women were raped and killed.

The genocide and subsequent migration of Kashmiri Pandits from their own land not

only altered the demography of the J&K but also changed it forever. Kashmiri Pandits were the soul of J&K and with their forced removal, the newly formed Union Territory remains hollow.

Time has come for Kashmiri Pandits to return to their homeland and reclaim what rightfully belongs to them.”

## **WHAT HAPPENED IN THE 1987 J&K ASSEMBLY POLLS**

(Sushim Mukul, Apr 19, 2024, India Today)“It wasn't just Amira Kadal, the seat from which Syed Salahuddin was contesting, where the mandate was allegedly manipulated.

An Amira Kadal-like situation was reported from several seats in the Kashmir Valley as well as in Jammu.

News reports were full of eyewitnesses speaking of a pattern of "rigging and strong-arm tactics all over the Valley," of "massive booth-capturing by gangs", of "entire ballot-boxes pre-stamped in favour of the NC", of numerous people "simply not being allowed to vote", and of government supervisors "stopping the counting as soon as they saw opposition candidates taking a lead", noted Sumantra Bose in his book, Kashmir, Roots of Conflict, Path to Peace.

The vote counting was postponed in several MUF strongholds at the last minute. As the counting started in Handwara, the MUF candidate and his counting agents found themselves thrown out of the counting station by the police, according to an India Today magazine report of 1987.

People's Conference (PC) candidate Abdul Ghani Lone complained to the Election Commissioner that ballot-boxes from a counting station in Handwara were removed overnight and 100 of his counting agents were arrested.

"This simply deepens people's feelings against the Government of India. If people are not allowed to cast their votes, where will their venom go except into expressions of anti-national feelings?," asked a disconsolate Abdul Ghani Lone, father of Sajad Lone.

Reports of electoral rigging poured into several offices of District Commissioners from various parts of the Valley.

Reports of electoral manipulation and coercive methods continued to inundate

party headquarters and district commissioners' offices in various parts of the Valley.

In Pattan, entire ballot books pre-stamped for the National Conference (bearing serial numbers 024864-024898) were recovered with counterfoils intact from polling booths, according to an India Today magazine report by Inderjit Bhadwar.

Similar pre-stamped books were found by MUF agents from polling officers at Idgah, Handwara and Cahdura, according to the report.

MUF candidates also alleged booth-capturing at Khan Sahib and Hazratbal where gangs of National Conference (NC) workers drove to polling stations in Matador vans and entered the booths while the police looked helplessly on, reported the India Today in March 1987.

In several counting stations, the counting process was stopped when MUF candidates took the lead over Congress-NC candidates.

In many instances, polling officers refused to seal ballot-boxes.

However, the government machinery turned a blind eye to the allegations and complaints, and, instead, started its crackdown on opposition leaders.”

## **RESULT OF J&K 1987 ASSEMBLY POLLS**

(Sushim Mukul, Apr 19, 2024, India Today) “As a result, the polls were swept by the alliance of Farooq Abdullah's Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and Congress, led by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

While the Congress won all 26 seats it contested, the NC was declared winner in 40 of the 46 seats it contested.

The Congress-JKNC combine winning 66 seats in the 76-member Assembly could have been a big deal. But it was not, for obvious reasons.

However, the true scale of "rigging" is not known till date.

A 2022 report submitted to the US Congress says "...the belief that Rajiv Gandhi's government had left the Kashmiri Muslim population in 1987 electorally disenfranchised" was one of the factors behind the conflict in Kashmir.

The blatant poll manipulations of 1987 were among the several factors, including those fanned by Pakistan and its spy agency ISI, that led to widespread anger in Jammu and Kashmir and resulted in the rise of militancy and terrorism in the Valley by 1989.”

### **Voice of terror: A conspiracy to remove Kashmiri Pandits**

(Vishakha Raghuvanshi, Legal Services India)“Tracing back to 1975, Sheikh Abdullah agreed to decisions made by the federal government in Jammu and Kashmir to merge the state into India under the 1975 Indira–Sheikh Accord. Jamaat-e-Islami Kashmir, the People's League in Indian Jammu and Kashmir, and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) rooted in Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir were among those who denounced the accords.

In such an era, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) intended to spread Wahhabism in place of Sufism in order to foster religious unity in the country. In the 1980s, Sheikh Abdullah's government began Islamizing Kashmir by changing the names of around 2,500 villages from their native names to new Islamic ones. Sheikh also began giving communal lectures at mosques, which were evocative of his aggressive pro-independence speeches from the 1930s. He also referred the Kashmiri Hindus as mukhbir or Indian military informants. In Kashmir, the formation of the Muslim United Front, the forefront of activists Jamaat-e-Islami, aroused fear in Kashmiri Pandits. During the state assembly election, they promoted their notion by mentioning the Islamic resistance movement and Pakistan's ISI's active involvement in it. The Pakistani ISI funds a terrorist organisation known as Hizbul-e-Mujahideen (HM).

JKLF was a supporter of ISI, and they used to spread a lot of misinformation among the Kashmiri Muslim people in order to get support from them and aid in the exodus of Pandits from the valley. They used to foster anti-Hindu attitudes in their training camps by persuading the masses to cleanse the valley of these Hindus, no matter how minuscule their numbers were. In the valley, there should be no Hindus. This was the beginning of displacing Kashmiri Pandits, and then came the night of exodus.”



## **19th January, 1990: The night of the exodus**

(Vishakha Raghuvanshi, Legal Services India)“The date was January 19, 1990, and the days were chilly and the nights were unpleasant. Around 9 p.m., eardrums were almost pierced by loud and thunderous Islamic and pro-Pakistan slogans raised collectively by a multitude of humans and relayed through powerful loudspeakers. These slogans were not unfamiliar to Kashmiri Pandits. The sights on the city's streets, squares, and open areas had to be seen to be believed. Thousands of Muslims, young and old, children and women, descended into the streets, gesticulating vehemently and chanting slogans in support of Islam, Pakistan, and the insurgency. The Pandits found that overnight their neighbours had changed color. Pandit and Muslim neighbours known to one another for generations began to behave like strangers.

Suspensions loomed largely and in a few days the entire atmosphere changed and the Pandit came to be called 'the other'. The government was knocked out by a single night of defiance and revolt and the next morning not a single policeman was visible anywhere in the city. They had withdrawn to their barracks or hid in their homes as the administrative machinery had collapsed and law and order crumbled. From the next morning viz. 20th of January, 1990 it was the rule of the mosque, the priest and the Islamists. Loudspeakers fixed to mosque tops, blurred uninterruptedly cautioning the Pandits to leave the Valley.

Pandits had no choice but to flee their old homelands, including their homes, hearths, properties, jobs, businesses, farms, orchards, temples, shrines, cremation grounds, Gods, deities, and ancestors' ashes. They enlisted whatever mode of transportation they could, packed a bag full of clothes, and left the Valley for unknown and uncharted territory. They left in small groups for fear of being apprehended and slaughtered.

Jagmohan replied that if the Pandits decide to leave the valley, then they will stay in the refugee camps that were set up by the Indian government in Jammu because the political will of the Indian government was not in favour of intervening in the incident. "However, if they decide to stay back, then he would not be able to guarantee the safety of the Pandits in the valley", which clearly illustrates that there is no one in the valley who can wipe Kashmiri Pandits' tears.”

## **Human rights violation of Kashmiri Pandits**

(Vishakha Raghuvanshi, Legal Services India)“Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life.

Human rights are being violated at every moment in the Indian administered portion of Kashmir. Whether it is murder, abductions, torture, rape, or sexual abuse, it is repression and intimidation throughout their day to day lives, they suffer the oppression of freedom of speech. Militant action undertaken by the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front has resulted in the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Kashmiri Hindu Pandits, who make up around 3% of the valley's population.

Human rights activists have accused security forces in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir of employing rape and molestation as a punishment and intimidating technique against civilians suspected of sympathising with militants by armed personnel representing India's central government. Armed soldiers, including the Army, the Central Reserve Police Force, and the Border Security Force, are believed to number between 3 and 5 lakh. According to Liaquat Ali Khan, an academic writer, these abuses in Kashmir are not sanctioned by the government but are easier to carry out because to the law's authority to isolate and search villages and regions.

Terrorist organisations such as the JKLF and the Hizbul Mujahideen, as well as about a hundred other groups, have raped and murdered Hindu people. Over three lakh Hindus have been compelled to flee the Kashmir valley, resulting in internal displacement to refugee camps in Jammu and New Delhi. Muslim citizens who are perceived to be political opponents of terrorists or who are suspected of being informers have also been raped or killed. Pandits in Kashmir were offered three options: escape, convert, or death. No human rights activists questioned the biggest ethnic cleansing of Hindus in independent India's history. Nobody objected when it was made clear that they wanted Hindu women but not Hindu men.

Now the question arises, where were the human rights? Do Kashmiri Pandits don't deserve that too being a citizen of a country? Nobody came to the rescue, and no one offered assistance. Where were the human rights advocates when men had no choice but to slaughter their wives and daughters in order to shield

them from the evil? Terrorism is the worst foe of human rights, and the evacuation of Kashmiri Pandits was nothing more than an act of terrorism. Human rights cannot and should not take precedence over human life.”

## **Echoes of the Past (Case Study 1)**

Through this interview, We have talked to a young uncle who was saying that the situation there had started worsening in 1986, then they did mass migration in 1990 and after coming here, they got quarters in jagti to live in. He said that he was only 6-7 years old when he migrated from there. He said that the people who were staying in the quarters there, after going there, 50,000 Kashmiri Pandits had died due to scorpions and snakebites. They also said that they who are their next generation, their children, do not have any knowledge about their culture. After coming here, it got mixed with the dogras and their culture also got mixed with some of the dogras and kashmiri . So, their children also have no more knowledge of their culture at all. So, during the conversation it was also revealed that he had a lot of land in Kashmir which has now been captured and he does not want to go to Kashmir because he says that Hindu religion is not safe there and in kashmir it is still written on the board: *“Go Back to Indian Dogs”*. He says that people here sitting at home say that there is heaven in Kashmir but for the Kashmiri Pandits, it is still written there that Go Back to Indian Dogs and they are not safe there. He also said that *“Eth banouvu Pakistan bato bagaer batniyo saan”* meaning, we will make Pakistan along with Kashmiri Pandit women but without Kashmiri Pandit men. He also said that Kashmiri Pandits were those who did not know how to pick up a gun. And he also said that if today's generation knows how to pick up gun and they have so much courage then they can go to Kashmir and take their rights and fight for their rights. Then something may be right but no one has that much courage. He also says that the government had implemented an act for the land of Kashmiri Pandits, but nothing like this happened, it was only limited to newspapers or social media. Kashmiri Pandits did not get anything and he saw a lot of struggles and the thing he faced ,he his words Can't tell, what he has seen practically. The conversation also touches on the sensitive issue of land ownership and the government's unfulfilled promises. The young uncle expresses his unwillingness to return to Kashmir, citing concerns for his safety and the prevalence of kashmiri pandits. His words underscore the importance of acknowledging the historical injustices faced by Kashmiri Pandits and the need for meaningful initiatives to support their rehabilitation and cultural preservation.

## Echoes of Displacement, Struggle and Survival (Case Study 2)

In this case study, we went to meet a migrant family in the Jagti Quarters to know more about their past situations and about the location and house conditions in which they are currently living. There were four females and one male when we went there. They told us many things about what the situations at that time were, how the intercommunity relations were, and much more.

They started telling us that there were variations in ways of living (Udhna Baithna), eating (Khan Pan), and languages (Bol Chal) in different parts of Kashmir, especially in the city area and village area. Adding to this, they told us that the way they celebrate their culture in Jammu is the same as the way they celebrated in Kashmir, but the variation comes in the way city people and village people celebrate.

Then they told us that before migration there were not many government jobs there. People used to their own work (business) and the people who were in the government sector were at very high posts, and when they migrated to Jammu, they got retired in those 30-35 years after migration. Only a few are there who are still working before and after migration. Adding to this, they said that the government gave the package in which they told they'll give one government job per family, but there were 2 to 3 persons per family doing government jobs, and those who were in the private sector were in the private sector only to which they said, "Jo Gareeb hai, Gareeb ka Gareeb." They are living on the relief that the government has provided. They said if the Govt really wanted to do for the migrants, they should provide one Govt job per family, not give 2 to 3 persons Govt jobs in a single family. They said that people who were on relief or doing private jobs sold their property (if they had any) so that they could send their children outside for studies and jobs in which the government had no role; it was all the hard work of the parents.

Then they started talking about the pre-migration situations. They migrated in 1990 during mass migration. In 1989, things were getting wrong, but still, they didn't have any idea that migration would happen. During mass migration, no one knew that they were going to settle in Jammu permanently; they thought after 2 to 3 months everything would get sorted and they would go back to Kashmir, but reality was totally different. Everything was happening inside. The lady there told us that in her village, 30 to 40 people in white dresses go to Masjid, do meetings in the home, but they didn't know what they were planning in their meetings. They saw everything

happening in front of their eyes, but they never thought that they could do such things. After some time, they raised their voices, and all those things happened.

Talking about the intercommunity relations, they said that their relations were very good; they studied together, played together, and their teachers were Muslim, to which the lady said, “Betiyon ki tarah padhate the, raksha karte the humari.” but suddenly what happened they don’t know. One of the ladies said that they were good, but something internally they were already planning.

One of the ladies said that her father was not ready to leave Kashmir, but when her uncle was killed by the militants, then they decided to migrate. During migration they carried few essential things with them as they thought they were going for some time only, but later it got very difficult for them. They said that the government provided them relief, gave them rice, pulses, and other ‘Rashan,’ but they said it was just support but not enough. They also added that they used to live in a single tent with the whole family for almost 1.5 years, which was difficult for them to survive.

Then they talked about their land. They had so much land in Kashmir, but it was grabbed, and landowners were given threats saying, “Lekar Dekho.” The lady said, “Hum kaise jate phir bache pasand hain ya zameen pasand hain, bharosa kya hai inka, chod kara aye hain sab kuch.” They also went back to Kashmir not as residents but as tourists for the yatra at ‘Kheer Bhawani.’ Then they talked about the act regarding the land, to which he said it was just an advertisement; the ground reality was nothing.

Then they said that the government provides relief to a person of around 3,200, which is not enough to survive on the current date. The maximum limit is 4 persons; the government provides around 13,000 for 4 persons. If there are more than 4 persons in the family, the amount of relief is the same, i.e., not exceedingly more than 13,000. Uncle said that he is doing a private job so they can manage the expenses; otherwise, depending on the government, they will eat for 5 days only in a month, especially those who are in the private sector. Adding to this, he said a person doing a private job is getting 30,000 for working from 10 to 5, and on the other hand, a person doing a government job for the same time duration is getting 80,000. Then how will the person survive doing a private job? After this the lady said that she had applied for the relief for her daughter-in-law, but it is almost a year later, and the relief office has not provided it yet. Adding to this, the lady said, “Relief holder ke liye kya kiya, humein mehngai baaki kuch nahi kiya.” She also

said that there is some water-related issue in their building, their room stinks. For the last 4 years, she has been giving applications to them, but no action is taken yet.

In the ending of our discussion, they also told us that the intercommunity friend of one boy took him to the jungle and killed him; some were shot dead. It was very difficult for ladies to step out of their homes. They said that when the 'Jaluoos' came at that time, they used to get hide; they brainwashed people there, and the situation was so worse to even explain. In the end they said, "Muslims ache the par achanak kya hua pata nahi".

## **REVIEW OF FIELD VISIT**

So, when we went on a field visit, we interviewed many people. They also told us that when they migrated, they had no idea something like this is going to happen. Their conditions were absolutely normal, whatever happened. Whatever condition they faced suddenly happened and this is what he had thought that he will migrate but he will return in a month or two. And they remained here for all their life, conditions became very worse, their house and land, which they left back in Kashmir were seized, and they will never return. And still say the same, be it, because they don't want to recall their past.

## **After the Exodus: Life and Struggles of Kashmiri Pandits in Displacement**

The migration of Kashmiri Pandits in the early 1990s marked a significant turning point in the community's history, leading to profound social, economic, and cultural impacts. Following their exodus from the Kashmir Valley due to rising violence and insurgency, many Pandits relocated to Jammu and other parts of Northern India, resulting in a fragmented community grappling with loss and displacement.

### **Social Disruption and Community Fragmentation**

The mass migration led to the disintegration of close-knit communities that had thrived in the Valley for centuries. Families were separated, and traditional social structures were disrupted. As of 2024, approximately 47,129 Kashmiri migrant families remain registered with relief organizations in Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by those displaced (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). The loss of cultural spaces, such as temples and community centers, further exacerbated the sense of dislocation, making it difficult for families to maintain their cultural identity and pass on traditions to younger generations.

### **Economic Hardships**

Economically, the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community has faced significant challenges. Many individuals struggled to find stable employment in their new environments, leading to increased reliance on government assistance. Data indicates that inter-state migrants from Jammu and Kashmir often engage in self-employment or regular salaried positions at their destinations (Dabla, 2014). However, despite these efforts, many families continue to experience economic instability due to limited job opportunities and the need for re-establishment in unfamiliar urban settings.

### **Remittances and Economic Contributions**

Despite these hardships, many members of the Kashmiri diaspora have found opportunities abroad, contributing economically through remittances. International migration has become a crucial lifeline for many families back home. According to NSSO data, a significant portion of international migrants are economically active and send remittances that positively impact household

economies (Dabla, 2014). This financial support has played a vital role in improving living standards for some families in Kashmir.

### **Policy Responses and Rehabilitation Efforts**

In response to the ongoing challenges faced by Kashmiri Pandits, various government initiatives have been implemented. The Government of India has approved rehabilitation packages aimed at providing jobs and housing for displaced families. As of July 2024, out of 6,000 government jobs promised to Kashmiri migrants, 2,724 jobs have been provided along with the construction of transit accommodations (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). These measures are intended to assist in the reintegration process and provide stability for those who have been displaced.

### **Conclusion**

The situation of Kashmiri Pandits after migration reflects a complex interplay of social disruption, economic challenges, and resilience. While many have successfully adapted to new environments and contributed economically through remittances, significant hurdles remain. Ongoing support from government initiatives and community organizations is crucial to ensuring that this historically rich community can preserve its identity while rebuilding its future.

## **RELIEF AND REHABILITATION TO KASHMIRI MIGRANTS**

The relief and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants, particularly the Pandit community, have been a significant focus of government efforts since their mass exodus from the Kashmir Valley in the early 1990s. The Government of India has implemented various schemes aimed at providing financial assistance, housing, employment opportunities, and social integration for the displaced community.

### **Overview of Relief Measures**

#### **1. Cash Assistance:**

Under the Security Related Expenditure (Relief and Rehabilitation) Scheme, Kashmiri migrants are entitled to cash relief. As of 2024, registered families receive ₹3,250 per person per month, with a maximum ceiling of ₹13,000 per family per month (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). This assistance is crucial for meeting basic living expenses in their new locations.



## **2. Housing Support:**

The government has initiated the construction of transit accommodations for Kashmiri migrants. A total of 6,000 transit accommodations have been approved under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) 2015, with 2,724 already constructed as of July 2024 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). Additionally, financial support is provided for housing reconstruction and repairs for those returning to the Valley.

## **3. Employment Opportunities:**

The PMDP includes provisions for creating 6,000 jobs specifically for Kashmiri migrant youth. As part of this initiative, approximately 3,000 jobs have been filled to date (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). These employment opportunities are critical for helping migrants achieve economic stability and reintegrate into society.

## **4. Educational Support:**

The government offers scholarships and financial aid to children from displaced families to ensure access to education. This includes vocational training scholarships aimed at fostering skill development among young migrants.

## **5. Health Care Initiatives:**

Kashmiri migrants have access to health care benefits through schemes such as Ayushman Bharat. The government provides health cards that facilitate access to medical services and reimbursements for expenses beyond the coverage limit (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024).

## **Challenges in Implementation**

Despite these measures, several challenges hinder effective rehabilitation:

- **Inadequate Financial Support:** Many migrants contend that the monthly cash assistance does not sufficiently cover living expenses in urban areas where they have relocated (Deccan Herald, 2024). The rising cost of living exacerbates these challenges.
- **Limited Resettlement Data:** There is a lack of comprehensive data on the number of migrants who have successfully resettled back in Kashmir or who have benefited from rehabilitation schemes. This gap complicates efforts to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives (ISPP, 2024).

- **Security Concerns:** Ongoing security issues in Kashmir deter many migrants from considering a return to their ancestral homes. Fear for personal safety remains a significant barrier to repatriation (Deccan Herald, 2024).
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Accessing relief and rehabilitation benefits can be complicated by bureaucratic inefficiencies. Streamlining processes and decentralizing decision-making could enhance responsiveness to the needs of Kashmiri migrants (ISPP, 2024).

(06 AUG 2024, PIB Delhi) “Out of 6,000 government jobs, sanctioned under Prime Minister’s Development Package-2015 and Prime Minister’s Reconstruction Plan- 2008, 5724 Kashmiri migrants have been appointed. Unemployed youth are also being facilitated to get financial assistance under self-employment schemes.

The steps taken for the security of Kashmiri migrants include robust security and intelligence grid, group security in form of static guards, round-the-clock nakas at the strategic points, night patrolling and area domination, identification of vulnerable spots, security arrangement through appropriate deployment and intensified cordon and search operations.

Government has taken several steps for providing facilities to Kashmiri migrants. Details are as under:

- i. Cash assistance @ Rs. **3,250/-** per person to eligible Kashmiri migrants subject to a maximum limit of Rs.**13,000/-** per family per month.
- ii. Eligible Kashmiri migrants are provided **9** kg rice per person, **2** kg atta per person and **1** kg sugar per family per month as basic dry ration.
- iii. To facilitate the return of Kashmiri migrants to Kashmir valley, 6000 transit accommodations are being constructed for employees recruited under Prime Minister’s Package.
- iv. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has launched an online portal in August, 2021, wherein Kashmiri migrants can lodge online grievances with regards to encroachment, change of title, mutation and distress sale.
- v. Kashmiri migrants have been provided with Ayushman Golden Health

Cards. Primary Health Centres/Dispensaries have been made available in camps for appropriate healthcare.

- vi. Five government schools (4 higher secondary level and one secondary level) have been set up in camps to provide education to displaced children. Migration Certificate is issued to eligible migrant students through online portal [www.jkmigrantrelief.nic.in](http://www.jkmigrantrelief.nic.in).
- vii. For the convenience of Kashmiri migrants, Domicile Certificate, Resident of Backward Area Certificate, Migrant Certificate, Income Certificate, Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) Certificates and Registration Certificate are issued online.”

## **Conclusion**

The relief and rehabilitation efforts for Kashmiri migrants represent a critical aspect of addressing the long-term impacts of displacement. While various measures have been implemented to support this community financially and socially, significant gaps remain that need to be addressed. Enhancing financial support, improving data collection on resettlement outcomes, ensuring safety in Kashmir, and streamlining bureaucratic processes are essential steps toward effective rehabilitation.

## **A HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT**

(Miller, B. (Ed.). (2020). *Dealing with dislocation: Migration, place, and home among displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir*. In *Sociocultural Anthropology: Critical and Primary Sources* (Vol. 4, pp. 249-267). London: Bloomsbury) “Purkhu camp, our primary field site, was located on the outskirts of Jammu. It was one of the largest colonies since its establishment in 1990 till its closure in 2011, housing approximately 1,000 families. The camp had been established first as a collection of tents and then transformed into a colony of one-room tenements (ORTs), the basic housing unit of the camp, arranged in phases or organised lanes. The camp was provided with a health centre and a school, and was connected to the city by regular public transport to the extent of forming one of the terminal points for the local mini bus services. The camp also neighboured local settlements inhabited by Dogra communities. Therefore, while it was regarded as a “Pandit” area, several shop spaces in the camps were run by Dogras from the neighbouring areas. The history of Purkhu camp provides a sense of how Pandits

settled into the Jammu cityscape and how they related to a new place. Our first encounter with the history of the camp came through Ratan Lal who had fled with his family to Jammu in early 1990 and had been a resident of Purkhu camp since its establishment. Ratan Lal revealed to me that the land was originally the site of a Muslim village until the time of India's Independence. The earliest residents of the area were attacked during the communal rioting in the wake of the Indian Partition and those who survived had crossed over from Pakistan as refugees. The land on which the camp was established was, therefore, state property and had been open to development only with the establishment of the camp in 1990. Ratan Lal later directed me to Prem Nath, one of the first settlers in the area who also came from northern Kashmir. Prem Nath, a friendly and jovial man, lived in the camp where he ran a small shop selling garments. He explained that the camp was first established with rows of tents in 1990. As he shared his account, a number of qualities began to emerge:

Then in 1994, the sarkar (the government) built "pigeon holes" (i.e. the ORTs), a kabutarkhana in which you cannot even keep buffaloes. The government set up tents in a place where men would be afraid to go alone. When they erected tents here, we saw nothing but snakes and scorpions. We would have to do this every night (he swung his hands and slapped the desk he sat behind to demonstrate). Snakes would come out of the ground in their thousands. The comfort of the night would be ruined. It was a jungle, all the way to where we are sitting now. When we would go out to urinate, we would take a large stick and lantern. . . . This would be around the time of 1990, 91, 94 and 96. The locals would say that a churel (witch) lived here. The locals would come here to graze their buffaloes but after sunset, no one would dare to come since the churel will be prowling.

The image of Purkhu camp as a former wilderness that was gradually transformed into a place of habitation was accentuated in other accounts and conversations with residents. One of the most commonly encountered stories is of the difficulties of living in tents during aandhis (dust storms), which are common during summer. My informants would recall that families would hold on to the support beams of the tents to prevent them from collapsing due to the storm winds.

However, by the time we started fieldwork, Purkhu camp gave a sense of settlement. Most residents had customised their ORTs by taking over space in front of their allotted quarters, building compounds and extra rooms and facilities to the extent possible that included kitchens, store rooms and, where possible, bathrooms and toilets. Consequently, the lanes of ORTs provided more intimate spaces of neighbourly contact and interaction. Many built shop spaces as attachments to their quarters as a means of generating income. These shops dealt in groceries, electrical repairs and hardware, stationery, pharmaceutical goods and clothes, among a range of products and services, giving rise to a market like atmosphere. The shops also provided, in some cases, the equivalent of “street corners” for residents to meet and socialise. The population of the camp was fluid with newer residents entering through births or marriages. Often new families entered the camp by moving into ORTs vacated by migrants who chose to leave the camp. As one migrant shop owner remarked that: Yeh camp ek town jaisa hai (this camp is like a town).

Stories of an earlier wilderness that gradually became civilised are also essential to understanding the way many Pandits speak of the city of Jammu. Jammu for migrants, and especially those who had never left Kashmir before, seemed to be different and alien in every respect from Kashmir, including the landscape, the weather and the people. A Kashmiri Pandit organisation saw the camps in Jammu as having “terrible consequences” for the community, especially since the Kashmiris were unused to the environment of Jammu that they described as “entirely different and hostile” (Panun Kashmir Movement 2004: 60–63). Snake stories, harsh weather and discussions on the quality of housing offer a way to look at both dispossession and how gradually a relationship with place was forged over the years. Yet, memories of homes and homesteads, the physical environment and social relationships can also interfere in the making of place into home in Jammu. While stories of settlement help us understand the Kashmiri Pandit experience, what also emerges, and which I shall discuss in the next section, is a constant movement that takes place between past and present.”

## **Families Migrated**

(April 26, 2022, The Dispatch) “Pakistan-sponsored terrorism forced 64,827 Kashmiri Pandit families to leave the Kashmir valley in the early 1990s and settle in Jammu, Delhi, and some other parts of the country, government has said.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for 2020-21, as many as 14,091 civilians and 5,356 security force personnel lost their lives to militancy in Jammu and Kashmir between the 1990s, when militancy first reared its head in the valley, and 2020.

“Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir is intricately linked with infiltration of terrorists from across the border,” the report said.

Besides Kashmiri Pandits, militancy forced some Sikh and Muslim families too to migrate from Kashmir Valley to Jammu, Delhi, and other parts of the country, it said.

Nearly 1,054 families from the hilly areas of Jammu migrated to Jammu plains, it said.

As per the records of registration available with the Relief and Migrant Commissioner, J&K, at present 43,618 registered Kashmiri migrant families are settled in Jammu, 19,338 families are settled in Delhi and NCR, and 1,995 families in a few other states and the UTs in the country, the report said.

With a view to resettle Kashmiri migrants in the valley, the MHA has approved 3,000 jobs in the J&K government under Prime Minister’s Reconstruction Package – 2008, and an additional 3,000 jobs under the Prime Minister’s Development Package – 2015 (PMDP-2015).

To house these 6,000 Kashmiri migrant employees in the valley, construction of 6,000 transit accommodations at an outlay of Rs 920 crore has also been approved by the MHA.

Under the scheme, 1,025 flats have been completed or “substantially completed” and 1,488 are under construction.

The report said that a total of 2,546 terror incidents sponsored by Pakistan took place in Jammu and Kashmir from 2014 to 2020, in which 481 security personnel, 215 civilians, and 1,216 terrorists were killed.

There were 1,776 infiltration attempts from across the border to Jammu and Kashmir between 2014 and 2020, of which 685 were successful.

The annual report said under the PMDP-2015, financial assistance of Rs 5.50 lakh is also being disbursed to the 36,384 families which were displaced from Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), Chhamb, and Niabat and had settled in Jammu and Kashmir.

The central government has approved a similar financial assistance for inclusion of those Displaced Persons (DP) families. Out of the 5,300 DP families of PoJK, 1,947 initially had opted to move outside the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, but later returned and settled there.

A total of Rs 1,371.13 crore has been disbursed to 31,670 beneficiaries till December 31, 2020.

Financial assistance of Rs 5.5 lakh per family has also been approved by the government of India with an outlay of Rs 317.02 crore for 5,764 families of West Pakistan Refugees (WPRs), who had migrated from several areas of West Pakistan in the aftermath of the partition of 1947 and settled in different parts of the Jammu region, the report said.”

## **Problems Faced by Kashmiri Migrants After Migration**

The migration of Kashmiri Pandits in the early 1990s has resulted in a multitude of challenges that continue to affect their lives today. The following sections outline the key problems faced by this community after their displacement:

### **1. Housing and Living Conditions**

Many Kashmiri migrants initially found shelter in temporary accommodations, such as tents or makeshift quarters, which often lacked basic amenities. In Purkhoo and other migrant colonies, families frequently lived in overcrowded conditions, with multiple members sharing small spaces. Reports indicate that many families had to endure living in tents for years, facing harsh weather conditions without sufficient protection (Impact Journals, n.d.) . The lack of proper sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, and adequate shelter has led to significant health issues within the community (FM Review, 2025) .

### **2. Health Care Access**

Access to healthcare has been a persistent issue for Kashmiri migrants. Although some camps have established dispensaries, these facilities are often poorly equipped and lack essential medicines and medical supplies. As a result, migrants frequently face difficulties in obtaining timely medical care, leading to increased morbidity and psychological distress (Impact Journals, n.d.) . The absence of reliable ambulance services further exacerbates health challenges for those living in remote camp areas (ISPP, 2024) .

### **3. Economic Hardships**

The economic situation for many Kashmiri migrant families remains dire. Monthly relief support from the government is often inadequate; currently set at ₹13,000 per month for each family, this amount struggles to meet basic living expenses due to rising costs of essential goods (ISPP, 2024) . Many migrants have been forced to sell their properties in Kashmir to fund their children's education or daily needs, while others rely solely on government assistance (Impact Journals, n.d.) . Employment opportunities are limited, with many migrants finding themselves in low-paying jobs or entirely unemployed.



#### **4. Cultural Displacement**

The migration has led to a significant cultural dislocation for many Kashmiri Pandits. As families adapt to their new environments in Jammu and beyond, younger generations often lose touch with their cultural roots and traditions. The blending of Dogra and Kashmiri cultures has resulted in a dilution of the unique cultural identity that the Pandits once maintained (ISPP, 2024) . This cultural erosion poses a threat to the community's heritage and collective memory.

#### **5. Psychological Trauma**

The psychological impact of forced migration has been profound. Many migrants experience trauma related to their experiences during the exodus and subsequent hardships faced in exile. Studies have shown higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among displaced Kashmiri Pandits compared to the general population (PMC, 2004) . The ongoing uncertainty about their future and the loss of their homeland contribute significantly to mental health issues within the community.

#### **6. Social Isolation and Insecurity**

Kashmiri migrants often face social isolation in their new environments. The transition from a close-knit community in Kashmir to unfamiliar urban settings has disrupted social networks and support systems (FM Review, 2025) . Additionally, incidents of violence against minorities in Kashmir have heightened feelings of insecurity among migrant families, leading many to fear for their safety if they were to return (ISPP, 2024) .

#### **Conclusion**

The problems faced by Kashmiri migrants after their forced migration are complex and multifaceted. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy interventions that consider the unique needs of this community while promoting their cultural preservation and ensuring access to essential services.

## **LIVING CONDITIONS**

### **Conditions of Migrant camps for Kashmiri Pandits reviewed**

(National Human Rights Commission, India) “The Chairperson of the Commission, Dr. Justice A.S. Anand reviewed the relief and assistance provided to Kashmiri Pandits with senior officials of the Jammu and Kashmir Government in Jammu on 17 May 2003. Prior to that, he had directed the Commission’s Special Rapporteur, Shri Chaman Lal, to visit the camps on 16 May 2003 to make an on-the-spot assessment of the living conditions of the residents. Accordingly, Shri Chaman Lal visited nine of the eleven camps; inspected the camp infrastructure and interacted with the residents. His findings were later taken up by the Chairperson with senior officials of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Chairperson explained the obligation of the State Government to provide living conditions of good and reasonable quality to the migrant families in the context of their fundamental right to a life with dignity. The fact that these families were forced to leave their homes in the Kashmir Valley under unfortunate circumstances, causing them enormous pain, cast a special duty on the State administration not only to meet their basic physical needs but also to ensure that their self-respect and self-confidence are restored and their sense of belonging is revived.

The Special Rapporteur noted a marked improvement in the infrastructure such as the approach roads, internal lanes, drains, water supply and sanitation since his last visit in February 2000. However, he pointed out a number of problem areas, based on his observations during his recent visit. After a detailed discussion, the action points were identified for improving the living conditions in the camps.

#### **These included**

- Improving the water supply systems at Nagrota, Muthi-II and Purkhoo-I camps
- Improvement in sanitation
- The medical facilities provided at the camps will be improved by raising their status to primary health centers, at least at Nagrota-I, Purkhoo-I, Muthi I & II and Mishriwala camps.

- Patients requiring specialist treatment for diseases like diabetes, heart-ailments, chronic-asthma, psychiatric disorders should be identified and proper arrangements made for their health care.
- Improvement in the camp schools.
- Periodical visits by senior officers of the State Government to the camps.
- Widening the coverage of Anganwadi centers at Nagrota-I and Purkhoo-III. The centers already sanctioned at Muthi-I and Muthi-II to be made operational.

In his concluding remarks, the Chairperson reminded the senior officers that it was not merely to ensure the efficient running of the relief camps but to make the migrants feel that their human dignity is respected. He suggested that the Administration should try to arrange at least a weekly visit of a psychiatrist for the counseling of the inmates reported to be suffering from mental depression and other psychiatric disorders. He emphasized the need for greater involvement of the NGO sector and civil society in this endeavour of restoring the lost sense of belonging to the migrants. The Administration has to make an effort to counter the feeling of the migrants that they are abandoned and convince them by its performance and conduct that it cares for them.

The Chairperson later met delegates of (i) Jammu & Kashmir Sharnarhi Action Committee, Jammu (ii) Nadimarg Massacre Morcha and (iii) the State Kashmiri Pandits Conference and heard their grievances.”

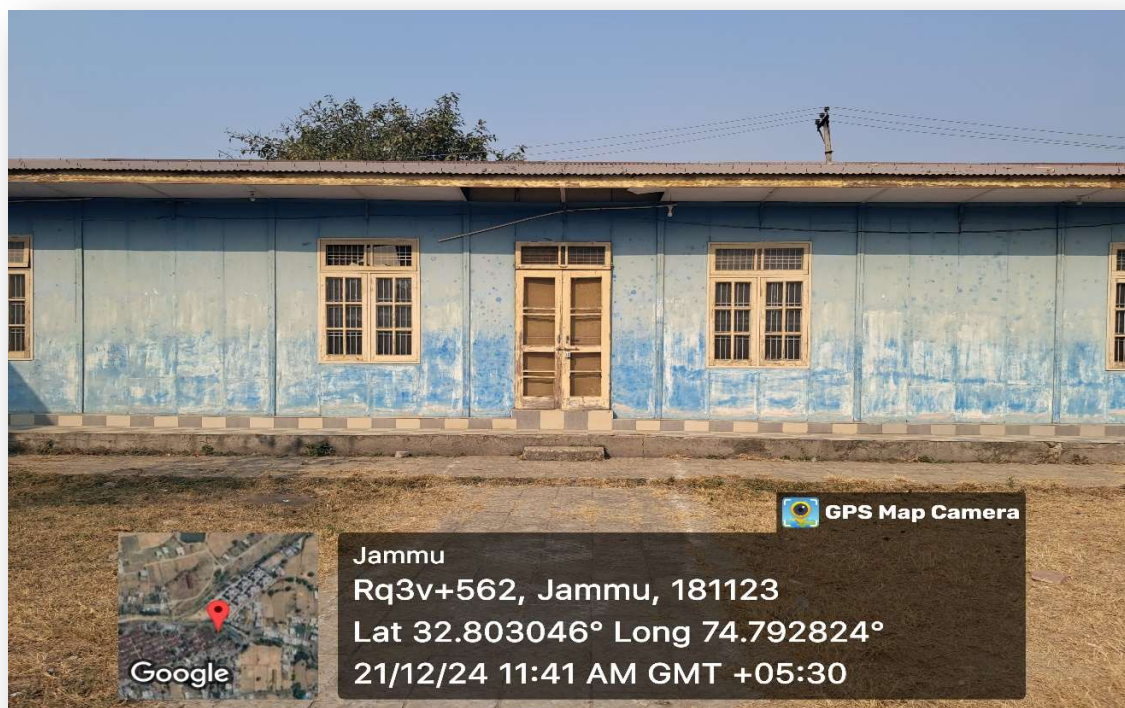
## LIVING CONDITIONS (OBSERVENCE)

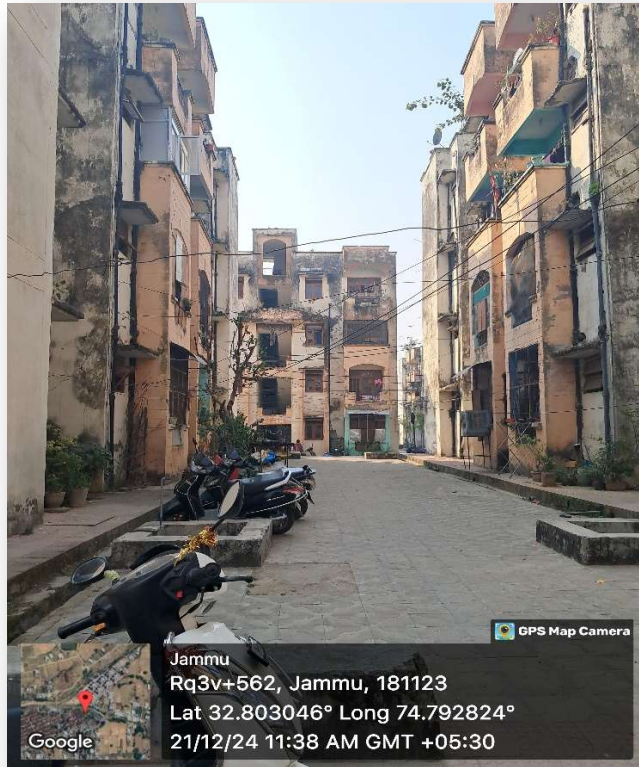
### Purkhoo, Jammu

During the field visit in Purkhoo Camp, Jammu, the first thing that we observed was the living conditions of the camp, how people were living there, how the infrastructure was, and what facilities were provided in the camp. These are some of the observances of the camp during the field visit time:

- ❖ The buildings of the camp were not properly maintained from the outside, which made a bad impression on us as visitors. This indicates that the government is not paying attention to the maintenance of the buildings.
- ❖ We saw people filling water in plastic containers from a tap outside, which shows that home-to-home water facilities were lacking there.
- ❖ The garden area in the camp was not properly maintained. It was looking like a barren land.
- ❖ Also, there was no hospital near the camp area. It was some kilometres away from the area.
- ❖ There was a temple inside the camp only where people could perform their daily rituals.
- ❖ The community hall was also there for any kind of gatherings or events.

Here are pictures of the camp that were clicked during the field visit:









## From Home to Refuge (Case Study 3)

The story of this Kashmiri family's migration and struggles is heart wrenching. Forced to flee their home in Baramulla district in 1990, they faced immense challenges in finding stable housing and income.

We had a field visit in purkhoo, where we talked to an aunty who said that they had not got quarters in the building but in a teen house where they had been given a place to stay and they were from the border side in Kashmir who had migrated. But they had a lot of difficulty in getting quarters. Aunty told us that there were a lot of applications and hence they got the quarters here. Earlier, they used to live on rent houses but they did not have enough money to pay, so they got the quarters through the application. They were from Baramulla district. They said that when they came there, there was no cleanliness etc., they cleaned it themselves. There were unwanted plants etc., they had to face a lot of problems. The family we met, There was an uncle who had met with an accident and could not even walk properly, so how would he work and run his household and when they migrated from there his son had died in an accident while coming and so his family is facing a lot of problems in running the house, they are only dependent on the relief they are getting from the government. This family migrated from there in 1990. And this family said that they would get only relief from the government and no help from the government, they did not get it from the government when they migrated and are not getting it now.

The aunt's journey highlights the difficulties they encountered in securing quarters, relying on government relief as their primary source of support. The family's resilience in the face of adversity is inspiring, from cleaning and transforming their allocated space into a livable home to coping with personal tragedies. The uncle's accident and the loss of their son during the migration have further worsened their struggles. Despite these challenges, the family continues to persevere, relying on government relief as their primary means of survival. Their story underscores the need for ongoing support and rehabilitation initiatives for migrant families, as well as the importance of acknowledging the long-lasting impact of displacement on individuals and communities.



## **A Temporary Dwelling (Case Study 4)**

We conducted a field survey in the Kashmiri Migrant Colony at Purkhoo in the Jammu district of JK (UT). There, we met a lady and conducted an interview with her. She was in class 8 when she migrated with her family. Being a teenager, she didn't know what was happening around her. As children, they were not aware of the militancy attacks. We asked her about the problems she faced with her family after they migrated. She said that no one had a house to live in; half of the population slept beside the road. There was no space, and no one had their belongings. Some people had nothing to take, while others ran without their things. They had no money and no livelihood. There were seven members in her family. We asked them if they wanted to go back to Kashmir. They said they visited sometimes, and when we asked if they owned land, they replied that they did, but it was no longer theirs. Then we asked her, being a female, what problems she faced. She said they faced many difficulties; they didn't have enough space to live in the migrant camps. With limited food, they lived in a tent where ten to twelve people stayed in one tent with very little space to sleep. When the wind blew at night, the tent would blow away. During the rain, they had to hold the tent up and sit through it while their belongings floated out in the rain—food items such as oil, rice, masala, cooking utensils, and many more. After the rain, they had to start over again and again. Over time, they saw many problems. She said she didn't want to remember those memories. We didn't force her to recall them, and she became emotional.

Then we asked her how much time she spent in the tent with her family. She said it was ten to fifteen years before they were given single rooms, where she lived with her family. There was no space to put their belongings; one side was for sleeping, eating, and studying, while the other side was for their things. She said they were grateful for what their children were doing in their lives now because, in a family where eleven to twelve people lived together, it was difficult for children to study in that environment. We then asked about her education since she was in class 8 when they migrated. She said she completed her education in the migrant camp, studying up to 12th grade in a tent school. Afterward, she also enrolled in college. After some time, a school building was constructed, along with other facilities. The temperature in Jammu was extremely hot, making it difficult for them to stay in a room without a cooler or even a fan.

After that, we asked about her wedding. She said she got married to one of the migrants in the camp. At that time, people didn't have enough money, so they set up a wedding tent beside the roadside and faced many challenges. Then we asked her about the quarters she is currently living in. She said she got these quarters in 2008. Earlier, they lived in single-room quarters where she faced many difficulties. Some people actually live there without paying rent and don't have jobs. They stay there without any rent. Also, she doesn't pay electricity bills, and they fetch water from a tap. The government provides medical facilities to them. There is also a community hall for weddings, and the medical facility is located behind the community hall. We also saw a Chinar tree there where people offer water and flowers. The lady explained that devotees pour the water used for worship there.

After that, we asked about their culture and whether their children follow it. She said their children are now a mix of Dogra and Kashmiri culture, and many of them have gone out to study and don't know much about their original culture.

We then asked them if they wanted to return to Kashmir. She said she didn't want to go back after everything they had been through. Considering the situation, they had seen their homes and lands being destroyed, and they were unwilling to return. Now, they depend on the government. We then asked her about their migration and how they managed to leave the area. She said some people escaped at midnight, some during the day. Some took their belongings, while others left empty-handed. Some escaped in vehicles, while others had to go on foot. She shared one incident where her mother's sister's son was shot dead by militants, and their elder sister's brother-in-law also lost his life due to gunshot wounds in a similarly tense situation. After that, the remaining family members managed to escape, and their neighbors also fled due to fear.

The lady told us that her family still owns land in Kashmir, but it has been left uncultivated with no crops growing. Local people are using that land, and they cannot do anything about it. However, she said that once her children are married, they plan to utilize that land. Her house in Kashmir was a two-story building with beautiful furniture, windows, and doors at that time, but people stole them during the migration. She lived in the Kazigund area of Kashmir, near the Bandhan tunnel. After migration, they visit Kashmir every 5-6 years. Now, the situation is calm. They specifically go to the Khir Bhawani Temple in Astami, attend festivals, and stay in a Sarai or apartment. Government buses are available to help with transportation.

So, this interview ended. They cooperated with us very well and shared all their experiences and problems, which they said us that they had never discussed before.

## **A Tale of Two Generations (Case Study 5)**

### **Older Generation**

The older generation of Kashmiri Pandits considers the 1990 migration as a heart-wrenching chapter of loss and displacement. It was not merely leaving their homes but being uprooted from their ancestral identity and culture. They remember the days of peace in Kashmir before the violence of the late 1980s shattered their sense of security and forced them to flee. This displacement has entailed immense personal suffering, from tragic deaths to accidents during escape, and marks deep scars in the psyche of these people. Most feel forsaken by their government, since rehabilitation, rights to land, and meaningful support have often failed to materialize, leaving them dependent on the woefully insufficient relief. Another anxiety is for the erosion of their cultural heritage younger generations, raised outside Kashmir, become estranged from their culture. Most elders will not go back home, mainly because they feel that there is no safety or that hostility remains. Their frustrations are then enhanced by a perception that their struggle has been reduced to political speech, further adding to their feeling of injustice. For them, the migration was a deep wound that never healed, with an ongoing sense of yearning for justice, recognition, and a real effort at protecting their dignity and culture.

### **Younger Generation**

There are varying levels of interest in culture and history from the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits. The children are at one end interested in their roots, making conscious efforts to know their traditions, language, and past experiences of their community, while the others feel they are not associated with it. For some, the pain and trauma associated with the exodus make it difficult to connect with their heritage, while others simply focus on building their lives in the present without delving into the complexities of their history. On the other hand, there are some who have an identity to which they give utmost importance, hence seeking ways and means to explore their ancestral tales with a deep sense of responsibility, so as not to forget the identity one had and would like to pass on to the generations. This separation reflects how Kashmiri Pandits view their connections with their past in different ways.

## Field Visit Interviews

### Interview with Respondent 1

In this field visit I, Bhaviya Koul and Ishu Bharati Pandti went to my uncle's house to take his interview and the things I got to know made me had chills. I then realized how much toughs were the things for them. They left Kashmir on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1990 during Migration. They had never imagined that they would leave their houses like that, during that time Farooq Abdullah was the president of NC but to them he was also a terrorist because during Militancy he flew to England. Due to the zero support from the Government they had no option but to leave their native place. They studied with their friends had fun with them completed their high school from MPML and then did their graduation from SP Collage, they use to go to college while talking and walking 4 to 5 Km, to them it was a lovely atmosphere, even if the parents had food for one time still they use to send their Kids to school that's why most of the community was literate and were able to get the jobs for survival even after migration. What they said, "Voh bachpan kabi nahi milega, voh time khatam ho chuka hai" [We won't get that time back nor our childhood.] Physically they were still here but mentally they were still in their village their land, gardens, cows everything was snatched away from them. Although they had a lot of friends but their Best Friend who was nice and secular type of person and was close to their heart. He was much interested in politics and got a ticket of BJP from Ananthnag. But he was no more with them because one day while going for a speech and due to the Landmine blast he died. It was so much tragic for them that they weren't able to eat food for 8-10 days.

The intercommunity relationships were good but it had a lot of bad elements. Whenever Pakistan Lost the match against India the glass windows of their house use to be the target and at one point they stopped repairing their windows. More than 2000 Kashmir Pandits got brutally killed, women were raped, it was a tragic time for them. Imagine getting slapped for not setting the Pakistani Standard Time this is what happened with Uncle and what he said, "uss din ke baad aaj tak, mai aab sattar saal ka ho gaya hu maine aaj tak gadhi nahi pehni." [From that day till now, I am seventy years old now but I have stopped wearing a watch.] For them Radicalization was there from the start, the peoples who supported Pakistan were getting provoked and weapons were Handed over to them but even with that they had One Aim, "Aak din ham Kashmir alag karenge India se, Hindu logo ko yaha se bagakar rehenge." [One day we will separate Kashmir from India and will make these Hindus leave from here.] At that time they left with a thought of coming back after 5 or 6 Months, after the situation would calm down, that's why they came empty handed, just a briefcase with all the educational certificates and some pair of clothes.

After Migration when they came here in a bus and at Gandhi Nager, Near Apsara Theater they parked it and spent 2 nights with their wife, 2 small Kids, 2 unmarried sisters, their brothers family and their parents. They had their gas with them so they were able to cook the food and on the third day they came to Sani colony, there was a Sikh family and 2 Rajput families. The Sikh family arranged a small house for them which belonged to an Army and was abandoned for years. The house they had in Kashmir had 4 to 5 stories and during their main festival Shivratri all the family use to come together and celebrate it with joy and happiness but after migration celebrating Shivratri and doing pooja in a single room became hectic for them. They spent 2 to 3 years in that house and then got another house and lived there for 7 to 8 years by the time when they got their own house but the charm the rhythm the taste was no more. But they got the best cooperation from Dogra Community of Jammu, they helped them a lot. Right now they have a business of Army supplies in Transport nager, Jammu. When they didn't even had a shop here, a person from dogra community helped them. He gave his own shop to them and didn't even took rent for 3 to 4 years. The line on the buses, "Khand Meethe Dogre" reflects the true nature of Dogra Community, to them the people from Dogra Community are Fighters and really helpful. They salute them with the up most respect.

After Migration Jagh Mohan did started a Major relief of Rupees 900 for all the Kashmiri Pandits but they didn't got it because their wife was a Government employee. The land in Kashmir, they sold it in small amount. At that time it costed 1 Lakh but they sold it in 10-20K. To them whatever they had left in Kashmir others will also take it. They visited their native place but didn't had the guts to go inside and also the fear that someone might be hiding inside. They just want to go back to their native place, but to them even if everything is given back they still need protection and security too. Will they be able to handle it, maintain it and earn anything, it's hard to say, it seems dark. To them even if there is 100% support from the government they still won't be able to stop the terrorism. To them the Government employee who work there, they are in compulsion because they need to survive, don't even know the person going out to work will be able to come back home safely. They are doing their but are always at risk.

They are concerned for upcoming generation, They want the elders of Kashmiri community to teach their upcoming generation good habits, teach them about their culture. The upcoming generation to Live and let live, work hard, work like a qully and behave like a prince, never look back, fetch central jobs but don't go back to Kashmir, its dark. The current generation is following their traditions, culture, rituals perfectly . Their son who lives in US still celebrates Shivratri, When they went to US they celebrated Shivratri they was they celebrated it in Kashmir.

## **Interview with Respondent 2**

### **How did migration happen?**

It started with selective killing of well-respected and influential Kashmiri Pandit leaders and ordinary people alike. It was an organized way of frightening the Kashmiri Pandit populace that had been residing in Kashmir since thousands of years.

The local Kashmir Muslim that were being radicalized since some time poured onto the streets threatening the Kashmiri Pandit community. Selected slogans were raised like: “*Eth banouvu Pakistan bato bagaer batniyo saan*” meaning, we will make Pakistan along with Kashmiri Pandit women but without Kashmiri Pandit men.

An environment of hatred & violence was carefully constructed in Kashmir, which forced the Kashmiri Pandits to leave their homes. It was not a Migration per se but rather a forced displacement and the distinction is very important. This is a story of how a miniscule minority was forced to leave their beloved homeland behind.

### **Intercommunity Relations?**

Kashmir was made up of the majority Kashmiri Muslims and minorities like Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs and some Dogras’ as well. The Intercommunity relations were good as it was largely a rural area and people trusted each other and visited each other quite often but the relations were not that great as some events happened which created distrust among the communities like in 1975 temples were burned which strained the relations.

### **When and how did you leave Kashmir?**

The mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits started in 1989-90. Interviewing one of the prominent figures in the Kashmiri Pandit community Ramesh Hangloo who made the now famous community radio “Radio Sharda” said that he and his family left Kashmir in December of 1989 when one of the well respected and prominent social activist of the Kashmiri Pandit community Premnath Bhat was killed by terrorists.

Kashmiri Pandits knew that their time had come to finally leave their beloved homeland which they had cherished for thousands of years. They couldn’t communicate with each other to plan when they should leave and they had to leave

alone only with some essential belongings. They knew that if they left together, they would become a crowd which could easily be targeted so everyone was left for themselves to plan how and when they should leave. Some left in Local Trucks, some in cabs & some in buses.

The one aspect the Kashmiri Pandit community completely overlooked was that the community as a whole thought that this was a temporary shift and they would come back in some months when the Central Government would resolve the situation but unfortunately that moment never happened and Kashmiri Pandits have been in exile for 35 years and counting.

The displacement of the Kashmiri Pandit populace and other minorities was not a coincidence, the people who had perpetrated this tragedy upon them were organized and were working according to a well-built plan. This was not a migration but a planned Genocide of the Kashmiri Pandits. They didn't want the minorities to return after some months, they wanted them gone forever from the Valley. So, they made sure to destroy everything the Kashmiri Pandits would come back for. They burned their homes & age-old temples. They encroached their land which were passed down from generations upon generation. They built such an environment to make sure that Kashmiri Pandit's wouldn't even think of coming back here.

### **Efforts of the Central and State Government**

The State and Central government were completely ineffective in resolving the situation at hand. The situation deteriorated so much that minorities couldn't even trust the Local Police in Kashmir as they could be with the perpetrators too. There was a complete administration collapse in Kashmir and it took 5 – 8 years for the government to rebuild Kashmir with the help of the Indian Army. The condition was damaged to such extent that there was no State government as there was central government rule to stabilize the situation, after years of rebuilding Kashmir, finally in 1996 State elections were conducted again.

### **Indication about migration**

They were several indications which we got to know by a respondent told that the situation was deteriorating in Kashmir, the wise caught it early and left the Valley. In 1975, in district Anantnag some temples and houses were burned, this was a clear target to the Hindus residing in the valley but most didn't bat an eye. Then in 1988 the situation worsened and finally in 1989 the situation abruptly got worse which was closely followed by the mass migration of the Kashmiri Pandit's from the Valley.



## **How Kashmiri Pandit's rebuilt themselves**

Kashmiri Pandit's with no support from State or Central government or anyone for that matter, knew that they had to rebuild themselves alone. Even after such a tragedy, with strong focus on academics and business, KP's became Engineers, Doctors, Businessmen etc.

Talking to one such influential and well-respected person Ramesh Hangloo who started the famous "Radio Sharda" 90.4 FM said the main reason he started this community radio back in 2007 was because he wanted the world to know about his community's language, literature, scientists, mathematicians, historians etc., Describing the huge contribution of Kashmiri Pandits to India he said that 70% of knowledge and culture came from Kashmir and was distributed to the rest of India. He also felt that KP's had lost that sense of belonging after migration and he wanted the KP's to be proud of what they are and what they gave to India and the rest of the world. After the events that unfolded in 1989-90, the KP's were scared of even speaking their own language somewhere else. In his own words he said the journey was tough as it was not easy to start a community radio by 'yourself' as it was not the age of computers back then and even if you had to send a letter to Delhi you had to wait some days or had to go to Delhi yourself. Community radio was not known about those days but even after all these challenges he made the radio to persevere what was left. He said that he couldn't have done it alone as he faced significant challenges in running the radio due to lack of content like songs, literature etc. but it was the KP community which supported him and built Radio Sharda what it is today and why it is listened throughout India as well as 108 countries worldwide. The Artists came forward and contributed their Art, Poets and literary figures shared Poems and other literature, Engineers, well-respected leader and thinkers and Doctors like K.L Choudhary, K.K Pandita, Sushil Razdan and other renowned doctors gave their precious time and shared their knowledge. He said that it was not only the KP community that supported him but the Kashmiri Muslim community also supported him by listening to the radio.

He said that this venture was successful, as slowly but surely, the pride of being a Kashmiri is being restored in the KP community and they don't hesitate to call themselves Kashmiri now, he also said that through his radio, Kashmiri Muslim community in Kashmir is also feeling proud to be Kashmiri.

He launched a program called "*Pènd te puran*" in which they went to the homes of KP's and talked with 3-4 generations of that family and asked where they had their home, why did they leave, what are they doing now, what their children are doing now etc. In doing so he gained a record of over 1000 houses of KP's.

Even after such a horrific incident, the Kashmiri Pandits refuse to let go of their roots, traditions and culture no matter how dire the situation, the KP's have survived and will survive.

### **Support from Government**

Talking with Ramesh Hangloo the interviewee (Ishu Bharati Pandit) asked him if he received any support from the government to run the community radio and he said that he didn't and nor he expects any as according to him the biggest support government can give to him is recognizing his radio station and giving him the license to run the community radio. He says he doesn't expect any financial gain from this as this is a community radio not a commercial one and he only does it to instill a sense of belongingness in the community

### **Future of the Pandits**

The next generation of Kashmiri Pandits are very important as they will decide whether the Pandit culture will die out or persevere as it has for thousands of years. What do the Pandits who went through migration think? Well, Ramesh Hangloo thinks that it will survive. He said that he knows that many KP children don't know anything about Kashmir let alone visited it, they don't speak Kashmiri but he believes that there comes an age in a person's life where he tries to find out about his heritage and ancestry. He implores the young KP's to explore and learn about their traditions and culture.

He said that the entire world has become a global village due to Interconnectivity around the globe and that has impacted language as well, he says that around 70% of younger Kashmiri Populace residing in Kashmir don't even speak Kashmiri but he thinks that just because they don't speak Kashmiri just like the younger people here but he says that it doesn't mean they don't know who they are. He says that the younger generation is proud of what they are and aren't afraid to admit that they are Kashmiri. He thinks that the next generation will continue the tradition and culture because he has seen the younger populace going to Kashmir on events like "*Zeasth Asthami*" to know what was their culture and tradition.

## **What the Pandits expect of the Government now?**

The events that unfolded in the 1989-90 were truly unfortunate but what was more unfortunate was that the government magnificently failed to protect the KP's from genocide and turned a blind eye to them. Unfortunately, that was not the end of the governments inept governance as they also failed to provide humane accommodation to the KP's when they arrived in Jammu.

Ramesh Hangloo told us that government should tell the rest of India and the world about people like Pāṇini who gave significant contributions to Sanskrit Grammar, Khimander, Kalhan, Abhinavgupt, Pilhan, Mummat, Waqayat through putting it in the national syllabus and textbooks as it should be known not only to Kashmiri Kids but to the whole India and world so the people know what the Kashmiris have given to the world and why is Kashmir and its knowledge so important.

He wants the next generation of Indians to give something back in return to what Kashmir has given them by going to Kashmir, settling there and making it their favorite destination not for tourism but a religious, meditation and spirituality destination instead. He says that through this we will be paying homage to our ancestors and our ancestors will be happy from us.

## **Interview with a Group of Respondents**

### **Muthi Camp**

Kashmiri Pandit migration is a very complex issue and to get a grasp of what happened before, during and after the migration, we conducted field surveys with our team.

One such field survey took us straight to one such Kashmiri Pandit camp in Muthi, Jammu. Our team quickly noticed that people were not comfortable speaking about the migration on camera or on audio and we complied with their wishes of remaining anonymous.

As we were talking to some people, one person told us that he was friends with and played cricket with the infamous terrorist Bitta Karate who was responsible for hundreds of killings of Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990's. They played cricket in Bhairav Mandir, Chattabal when the person was 18 years old in 1980.

## **Places of meetup**

People in Kashmir usually used to meet in local temples for evening chit-chat, some other notable mentions of meetup places are Mughal Garden, Mata Kheer Bhawani, Shankaracharya temple etc.

## **Intercommunity Relations**

Kashmiri Pandit migration was largely an issue of political and religious unrest, making it important to understand the social fabric at the time. Our team interviewed people in the camp about intercommunity relations, and they indicated that these relations were not good.

Interestingly the one event we heard repeatedly was the India vs Pakistan cricket match, whenever there was a match between the two countries there was unrest in the local society there as the local Muslim population supported the Pakistani team and the outcome of the match didn't matter as they would pelt stones at the KP houses after the match.

## **Where they settled after migration?**

The government initially settled the KP migrants in the government quarters in Tapawan as per the local people which our team were talking to. In 1990 they shifted to Geeta Bhawan, after that accommodation was provided at the JDA Hotel, then at Gol Quarter, Muthi. At last the Jagti flats were constructed in 2008, 18 years after the events in the Valley happened.

## Conclusion from Interviews and Case Studies

The interviews conducted with Kashmiri migrants reveal profound insights into their experiences and the challenges they face after displacement. **It is important to note that the statements presented in these interviews and Case Studies are those of the respondents and not our own words.**

Respondents highlighted significant issues, including inadequate housing, with one stating, "We had to hold the tent up during the rain while our belongings floated out." Access to healthcare emerged as a critical concern, as expressed by an interviewee who noted, "The dispensaries are poorly equipped, and we often struggle to get timely medical care."

Economic hardships were prevalent, with many families relying on insufficient government relief. One respondent remarked, "We live on relief; if it weren't for that, we wouldn't survive."

Cultural displacement was also a recurring theme, with concerns about children losing touch with their heritage, as one individual stated, "Our children are a mix of Dogra and Kashmiri culture; they don't know much about their roots."

Additionally, the psychological impact of migration was evident, with many expressing trauma related to their experiences. One individual said, "I don't want to remember those memories," reflecting the lasting emotional scars.

In summary, the voices of Kashmiri migrants underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems addressing housing, healthcare, economic stability, cultural preservation, and mental health. Their stories highlight the human cost of displacement and the importance of acknowledging these ongoing challenges.

## **Future Possibilities**

The rich cultural heritage of the Kashmiri Pandit community has endured through generations, yet the preservation of their customs remains a formidable challenge since their displacement in the 1990s. Looking ahead, several areas of research could play a pivotal role in exploring and safeguarding their cultural identity.

### **Preservation of Cultural Practices in Diaspora**

Future studies may investigate how Kashmiri Pandit diaspora communities celebrate significant festivals such as Pann (a variation of Ganesh Chaturthi) and Herath (Shivratri). Research could explore adaptations in lifecycle ceremonies and wedding customs as they evolve in contemporary settings, as well as the role of cultural institutions in maintaining these traditions and fostering unity among displaced individuals. A recent survey revealed that 62% of Kashmiri Pandits remain optimistic about returning to their homeland, emphasizing the importance of preserving their cultural practices during this transitional period (New Indian, 2025).

### **Evolution of Language and Literature**

The foundation of Kashmiri Pandit identity lies in their language and literary traditions. Future research might focus on the preservation and revival of Kashmiri literature, including historical texts, folklore, and oral narratives. Alarming, a survey indicated that 37.9% of respondents rated their children's Kashmiri language skills as poor or very poor, signifying a generational loss of linguistic heritage (New Indian, 2025). Additionally, examining the evolution of the Kashmiri language within the diaspora and analyzing contemporary literary works that reflect the experiences and perspectives of recent migrants could provide valuable insights.

### **Cuisine as Cultural Identity**

The culinary traditions of Kashmiri Pandits are integral to their cultural identity. Opportunities for future research could include documenting traditional recipes such as Wazwan, kahwa, and festival-specific dishes, as well as studying adaptations in cooking methods and ingredients due to geographical displacement. Exploring food as a medium for preserving cultural memory and fostering communal bonds may also yield significant findings.

### **Art, Music, and Handicrafts**

Artistic traditions are central to Kashmiri Pandit identity. Future investigations could examine contributions to traditional crafts like Aari and Sozni embroidery, efforts to preserve musical traditions such as folk songs like Wanvun, and innovative approaches to sustain handicrafts as forms of cultural expression.

### **Festivals and Religious Practices**

Festivals encapsulate the spiritual ethos of Kashmiri Pandits. Research could explore the significance and evolution of major festivals like Herath and Pann, the intergenerational transfer of religious knowledge, and how rituals foster a sense of belonging within the diaspora.

### **Cultural Narratives and Oral Histories**

Personal narratives are vital for preserving community memory. Future research may focus on collecting oral histories from elder community members, utilizing digital platforms to document these stories globally, and studying storytelling traditions as means of cultural resilience.

### **Cultural Representation in Media**

Media significantly shapes perceptions of Kashmiri Pandit identity. Research could analyze portrayals in films, literature, and art while exploring community-driven initiatives that share their stories through modern media channels. Evaluating the impact of these representations on global awareness and cultural pride will also be essential.

### **Role of Youth in Cultural Preservation**

Engaging younger generations is crucial for sustaining cultural heritage. Future studies might examine how youth connect with their heritage through education and social media, the challenges they face in balancing modernity with tradition, and innovative approaches they adopt to promote cultural practices.

### **Intercultural Exchange and Influence**

Intercultural interactions can enrich Kashmiri Pandit traditions. Research may explore influences from other cultures on their practices, integration within broader communities, and collaborative efforts to globally showcase Kashmiri heritage.

### **Future of Cultural Heritage**

Sustaining cultural heritage amid globalization presents pressing challenges. Future research directions could include innovative methods like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) for cultural preservation, long-term initiatives for cultural revival in the Kashmir Valley, and evaluating global frameworks for safeguarding intangible heritage relevant to the Kashmiri Pandit context.

### **Conclusion**

The cultural dimensions of the Kashmiri Pandit community present a fertile ground for future research that addresses both historical legacies and contemporary challenges. By investigating the preservation, adaptation, and evolution of their traditions, scholars can contribute to broader discussions on resilience, identity, and the significance of cultural heritage in shaping human experiences. Continuous focus on these areas will ensure that Kashmiri Pandit culture remains vibrantly relevant for generations to come.



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