

THE LOST HOME: PERCEPTION OF HOMELAND IN KASHMIRI MUSLIMS' AND KASHMIRI HINDU PANDITS' NARRATIVES

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Abstract:

Kashmir is one of the most dangerous places in the world. It stands directly in accordance with authoritarian suppression, curfews, protests, terrorism and multiple exoduses. However, the history of Kashmir presents the valley as a beautiful homeland of independence, neutrality, asylum and abundant intellectual scholarships. The following paper tries to analyse the historical changes of the Kashmir valley, beginning from the political rule of Sultan Rinchen and how it permeated down to the common communal living space of the people. These historical changes, characterized by dynamic political changes, religious persecutions, exoduses and growing mistrust, formed an impenetrable identity which brought the strong divide between the two religions. This strong divide grew from the individual's immediate reaction to the family and environment to their actions on their own as well as towards the other community. The paper presents a chronological shift of the perception of the homeland for both the communities, with an attempt to highlight the complexity of the situation, deeply embedded in the historical past of the Kashmir valley.

Keywords: Lost Home: Perception, Homeland, Kashmiri Muslims' ,Kashmiri Hindu Pandits' Narratives.

Attachments area Over the centuries, Kashmir has evolved under a prejudiced description of two identities. Either it is an alluring heavenly sight, a tourists' paradise, or it is one of the heavily militarized zones of the world, on account for its terrorism, insurgency, counter-insurgency and local unrest of the people. It has failed to achieve the status of being one of the most jewelled states of India, on account for its literature, architecture, arts, sciences and various other scholarships.

The binary of Kashmir only as a beautiful place or a turbulent zone has heavily affected the idea of 'home' for everyone. Development of political discord between the two sects of people, over time, has resulted in a fragmented and a very divided idea of home. In over seven centuries of Kashmiri history, violence and bloodshed were largely present

entities, which seeped into the cultural, physical, mental, emotional, spatial, religious, communal, temporal as well as geographical dimensions of the people. This paper attempts to discuss this bifurcated idea of 'home' in Kashmiri identity, how it developed and took its present roots in the Indian Subcontinent and whether or not there are any long term solutions for this 7,000-year old problem

Home And Identity

The valley of Kashmir has a very strategic position in our Indian subcontinent. Safely blanketed with the Himalayan mountains on all its sides, with an ample network of springs, ponds, rivers and lakes, Kashmir valley has been one of the most impervious kingdoms of our India history. The mountains created a landlocked geography, which enlisted an endless supply of water and food, thus making the valley an independent region of the North. This placement was especially fruitful during an invasion, as the cold, bitter conditions of the Himalayas made it impossible for rulers like Afghan empire, the

Central Asian empire, as well as the lesser Northern Indian empires to attack the region. This became the reason why the Kashmiri empire had a peaceful reign of Hindu dynasties till the 13th century.

Moreover, Kashmir has been recorded in historiographies, tarikhs, and tazkeerahs as a "diplomatic playground" between the rulers of Indian subcontinent (Bharat Desh) and the rest of Central Asia as well as China. Due to this representation, Kashmir also became a country where people who were persecuted from their land or sought shelter from any kind of persecution took refuge. The refugees started living with the natives of the land, which were the highly educated Kashmiri Pandits. Through the confluence of the two communities, the native culture was sustained and it mingled with the culture, language and their communal narratives. One of the greatest examples of this mingling is the publication of the tareekh and historiography, Waqiai-i-Kashmir, which is accredited as the text continuing the historical narrative of Rajatarangini, the historiography detailing the history of Kashmir till the 13th century. (Zutshi 90)

In the year 1320, Sultan Rinchen was the first king to introduce the Islamic religion in the valley. He came to the valley as a Buddhist refugee, along with Shah Mir and Bulbul Shah, all of them fleeing from the kingdoms of Ladakh and Turkmenistan. (Bhan 12-13) After Sultan Rinchen took up the throne and introduced Islam as a religion to subcontinent, the slow divide between the communities Hindu and Muslim started forming. This divide was deepened during the reign of Sultan Sikander, who was also known as 'But Shikhan' (the idol breaker). His rampage of destroying temples, conversion of Kashmiri Hindu Pandits into Muslims, breaking of idols and burning up of holy Hindu texts and scriptures

presented an ideology where Kashmir was taken from a sangam of two religions to a place created solely from Muslims and their inheritors.

However during the reign of Sultan Zain ul-Abidin (his successor) and even during the rule of the Mughal emperor, Akbar, the valley experienced a revived flow of Hindu Pandit cultures and scholarships. This did not, while it did create an atmosphere of security, failed to revive sangam between the communities. The divide increased, as the dynasties changed from Chaks to Mughal, Afghans, British, Dogras and finally, in the present context, the tensions have escalated on a large scale, inviting global attention from almost all the countries. This communal divide led to the following outcome: the present day political divide which has triggered and cemented a sharp split, resulting into two major religious factions. Even more so, this divide took a volatile turn when Kashmiri Hindu Pandit community had to bear seven exoduses, the last being as recently as 1989, thus, a mainstream inclusive identity was turned into a single community specific approach.

This turbulent and fractured succession empire disrupted the lifestyle of people upto great deals. Our idea of home is directly linked to our identities. When Kashmir was undergoing such violent power changes, it had a direct impact on the identity of people as well. Each ruler brought its own set of beliefs, religious structures and identity when he came to the throne. These beliefs and structures were imposed on his subjects as well, which led to a sharp distinction between the two major communities of the valley- Hindu Pandits and Muslims. This divide was made worse by rulers such as Sultan Sikander, who was known as the But-shikan (the idol breaker), a name earned when he destroyed Hindu temples, burned Hindu scriptures and persecuted thousands of Pandits, making them flee the valley. This divide gave rise to the communal idea of identity, termed as Kashmiriyat, thus to define the very essence of the valley.

Kashmiriyat is directly related to the idea of Kashmir. Hangloo describes this identity, in general terms as follows: "Kashmiriyat does not only mean simply a harmonious relationship cutting across religious and sectarian divisions or pluralistic tradition, but it is a far wider concept that has grown over centuries of historical process that the region of Kashmir has embraced, both in peace and in turmoil. Kashmiriyat is not a mere concept but an institution with societal, political, economic and cultural currents and undercurrents."(37-68) Taking this explanation further, Hangloo further breaks down the idea into two parts- having the key elements of homeland (kashir) and commons spoken speech (kosher), besides the constituents of similar costumes and cultural practices such as distribution of cooked and uncooked food as a token of goodwill, visit to the shrines and reverences to the relics, similar culinary and sartorial styles, folklores, and folk music, etc. (Hangloo 38)

However, in the present scenario, the idea behind Kashmiriyat is nowhere near the utopic description as given above by the critic, Rattan Lal Hangloo. Since the time of our Independence, the identity of being of being a Kashmiri is seen through their demand of azaadi from the country of India. One of the chief reasons behind this demand is that since time, Kashmir, while being a part of Indian subcontinent, has always enjoyed an area of minimal interference due to its strategic positioning. Moreover, the post- independence demand by Sheikh Abdullah for a secession gained momentum, until 1989, when it took a serious turn and led to the seventh exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. These political changes gave way to a brutal cycle of curfews and army lock- downs, which changed the definition of home forever for the Kashmiri people. For those living in the valley, the home became synonymous with the phrase “azaadi from Hindustan”, while for those who forcefully fled the valley, it became synonymous with homecoming, which was never possible. Thus, to trace this change, the paper has divided the idea of home in three levels.

The first is the innermost, personal level of an individual, I.e., where they live. Their house, their family members, nature and environment around them, even their native religious places such as greh-devta (house-deity) and greh-mandir (house-temple), all comes under the first intimate idea of home, through which an individual has their first contact as well as how they understand and view the world. The second is the communal level. How an individual interacts with their community, after they have developed a basic understanding from their first level. How they implement their thoughts, ideas, emotions, behaviors and their understanding of right and wrong, when they start interacting within the community. This part can be subdivided into two more distinctions. The first distinction is the intra-communal level, I.E., how they interact with people within the community. The second distinction is inter-communal level, I.E., how they interact with people who do not belong to their community or are from a different community. This communal difference could be religious, political, social, ideological as well as spatial. The third level is the whole area, in this case, the valley of Kashmir in itself. This level deals with how that same individual interacts with the people of the land, at large. In this view, this point of view would be used to describe how one individual perceives the idea of Kashmir as his/her homeland very differently from another individual. This difference could either give rise to a violent situation or could also result in peaceful but a long term solution, depending upon how that person has been influenced in the first two levels.

The paper would now move forward and discuss this idea through the four narratives of Kashmir, which describe this predicament on a more unique level . These texts are from two genres: from Fiction- The Garden Of Solitude by Siddhartha Gigoo and Scattered Souls by Shahnaz Bashir and Non-Fiction- Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A memoir of Lost Home in Kashmir (Our Moon has Blood Clots from now on) by Rahul Pandita and Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer.

Narratives of a Lost Home

The four novels chosen to represent the plight of present-day Kashmir are from the genres of non-fiction and fiction, which present the narratives of both Kashmir Hindus and Muslims respectively. This is because the juxtaposition of fact with fiction will not only highlight the seriousness of the problem, but also presents the problem from the point of a common man. In the next paragraph, fictional novels would be discussed, followed by the non-fictional novels.

The Garden of Solitude by Siddhartha Gigoo, although fictional, has a penchant for narrating the story about Kashmiri Hindu Pandits exile of 1989-90, without making it look biased or presenting any community in a stereotypical light. It weaves both fact and fiction, highlighting the situation in the most realistic possible way. It presents a world which traces the conversion of Hindus and Muslims into enemies as well as repercussions of this conversion.

Scattered Souls by Shahnaz Bashir is a collection of fictional thirteen short stories. Although this collection does not begin with an epigraph, its most impressive element is before the beginning of every short story, the author has presented two or three quotations which aptly describes the situation being narrated in the stories. Another important element of this collection is the continuous narrative of three short stories in a sequence- Ex-Militant, Psychosis, Theft- conveying the idea of how the idea of 'home' has changed for local people. From fighting for their right to live freely in their homeland to an adverse situation where the rich milk out profits while the disadvantaged live with trauma, poverty, violence and hopelessness.

The non-fiction novels taken up in this paper present an accurate description for each community. In other words, it can be said that both novels are halves of each other, like two sides of the same coin.

Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer is the first half of the complete narrative which presents harrowing experiences of the author alongside the real-life political, communal as well as religious changes of Kashmiri Muslims in the valley. One of the striking factor of this novel is that Peer, at one point in his novel, had drawn its parallel from the Intifadas of Israel and Palestine. This is a very important discourse, when it comes to Kashmiri literature because it shows a clear picture of the pain, the loss, the torment, anguish and torture people have to go through, as a part of daily life. It criticizes the normalizing of the violence by the army and critiques the privileged position of those who are in power. It criticizes the armed rebellion and acquaints the readers with the idea of intellect struggle, confluence and prosperity of Kashmir.

Our Moon Has Blood Clots by Rahul Pandita presents us with the second half of the narrative: the Kashmiri Hindu Pandits and their seventh mass exodus. The book introduces the author's personal experience of exodus juxtaposed against many other Pandits who went through the same. The novel is replete with political and communal instances that make the trauma of fleeing their homes in order to save their life and dignity become appalling and realistic to the readers. One of the incidents written by Pandita is the Girja assault and rape case. Girja was a school laboratory assistant and was brutally assaulted, raped and killed by 5 Muslim men, one of whom was her neighbour himself. She was a Kashmiri Pandit, who had to return to Kashmir valley because of no employment opportunities and abject poverty. (117-118) Representing this utter chaos and forced exodus from their homeland, Pandita has employed a writing technique which revives the Kashmiri identity, which stands threatened in the present turn of events, happening purely for political aims.

Literary Representations

I.) Personal Level

The development of how the idea of the home began diverging in the Kashmir valley started at the personal stages in the community. As mentioned above in this paper, the personal stage of an individual includes the interaction with their home, family members and their natural environment. They are the first elements which begin the cognitive and mental processes of an individual in relation to their outer environment and community. Therefore, when we analyse the circumstances, it has been found that the impact of this division was only felt when both the communities went loggerheads with each other at a very personal level.

Taking the example of Kashmiri Pandits. They have been existing peacefully with the with the Muslim community, sharing their rituals, festivals, land and neighbourhood with them. The basic plot of the novel, *The Garden of Solitude*, is the friendship between a Hindu and Muslim neighbour, Lasa and Ali. This utopic relationship is disturbed by a series of events, which were strategically carried out, in order to make Pandits feel like an encroacher in their native lands, thus forcing them to flee. Even the neighbors turned on each other, forcing them into vacating their houses and supporting the militants and giving them away the addresses of Hindu Pandits living in the area. The neighbors would either increase the volume of music in their houses, or would increase the sound of namaaz coming from the loudspeaker of the mosque, in order to drown the sounds of the bullets and screams of the people. (Pandita 231) In more gruesome acts, the case of Girja can brought into light, where she was raped, assaulted and butchered by Muslim men, who were formerly her neighbors. (Pandita 117-118)

However, the Muslim community did not see it as violent or threatening act towards another community. In their eyes, the forceful fleeing of the Pandits was looked more as a metaphor for India governance losing their authority on them. Peer describes an episode of his school life, where the students protested against the singing of Indian national anthem, and teachers were powerless to punish them for disobedience. He clearly writes, “they knew the world had changed and so had the rules governing it.” (23)

What was this change that happened so suddenly? The change sprouted from the internal need of the people to differentiate themselves from one another. Both Peer and Pandita have talked about owning a great deal of literature on Kashmiri history, poetry and politics as well as world history and literature. Their respective fathers owned their personal library, which was frequently visited and read by the two authors. The other houses, even if they didn't possess a large number of books, their households had their religious texts and they were informed about the basic history, especially since the time the Dogra dynasty came into power. This basic and adulterated version of history caused a personal up-roar in the houses of Muslims, and felt it is their right to demand azaadi from Indian government. They came to see this as an only way of restoring Kashmir to its historical glory, and felt their duty to do so.

To achieve this, their first set of targets were their neighbor, Kashmiri Pandits. Being a highly educated community, Pandits were usually employed in the higher jobs of the society, especially in the legal, media and the political fields. Muslims targeted them, because of them, especially youths felt that Pandits were getting favors from Indian government and would always side with the Indian government. Therefore, their removal from the valley is only the first step in a long way to achieve azaadi. This personal outrage and mistrust was carried forward in the communal level of the society, which would be discussed in the next section.

II.) Communal Level

The outrage and mistrust was manifested at the communal level indirectly, through the anonymous warnings written on the blank walls, threatening the Pandits to leave the valley, if they do not want to meet their fate. And later, the valley saw a direct manifestation of mistrust through numerous accusations at already-in exodus Pandits and assault against those Pandits who returned back to the valley looking for means to earn their living and support their family in exodus. This development and formation of mistrust developed in two types of stages at communal level.

a.) Intra-communal stage

The first type of stage is the interaction with one's own community, after he/she has surpassed their personal level. For Kashmiri Pandits, This stage was definitely seen after

their exodus. They developed a sense of communal identity, where they experienced a collective loss of home and identity, and yearned for a homecoming, which they knew was never possible. As Pandita says, "We also counted the number of times we have shifted since the day we have left home. It roughly came around to be twenty. It may have even been twenty-two times, the same as the number rooms in our house that Ma continuously talked about." (139) This communal interaction was hugely based on acquiring means of sustenance after being reduced to the state of homelessness and poverty-stricken. Gigoo writes in novel how the simple practice of going to school and learning had become meaningless and the only semblance of meaning was left in acquiring as many possible ration cards in black, so that the families can have more food to eat and buy their daily necessities. (Gigoo 85-92) For Kashmiri Muslims, this sense of intra-communal identity came from their goal of gaining independence. The community was in a collective agreement and raised their children in a fervour towards gaining independence from Indian state. As Peer wrote in his novel, while many families were against the militancy and the violent life it had created in the valley, the community had a tradition to honour the youth who were 'martyred' by the Indian army. They were titled as 'Shaheeds', or the one who gave their life to the cause of freedom. The martyred youth is taken to the burial ground in procession, in order to celebrate the sacrifice of the youth and his parents. This celebration inspires many other youths of the community to join the cause. Peer writes in his book how youth risked their lives to cross the border and learn armed training in fight against India. He describes it, "Kupwara (town closest to LOC) teemed with men and boys from every part of Kashmir waiting to cross the border. Tariq and his friends were introduced to a man who was taking them across the mountains.

Men like him were referred to as 'guides'. They were often natives of the neighbouring villages who knew the terrain well. It was still dark when they crawled beneath the last Indian check-post on the other side. The next day, Tariq was in Pakistan controlled Kashmir, Muzaffarabad. He was taken to an arms training camp run by the military. For six months he trained in using small arms, landmines, rockets, and propelled grenades."(35-36)

b.) Inter-communal stage

After developing certain intra-communal notions, the communities became disjointed with each other. Peer and Pandita from their respective novels described a brief idea of peace, where their fathers had studied together with students of both the communities, played together in fields, plucked apples from the trees and bathed from the same streams.

The women of both communities honored and respected each other's rituals and festivities and it was common for a Hindu to be seen at a Muslim shrine or vice versa. However, with the political development of the demand of azaadi, both communities

became accusatory of each other and the idea of 'us vs them' was permeated into the psyche of each individual.

Kashmiri Pandits knew that the reason behind their loss of homeland, as well as death and assault of numerous fellow Pandits was because of their Muslim neighbors who intentionally supported the idea of putting their life in danger, so that they can later occupy the lavish residencies of Pandits, after they leave. This idea can also be proven through testimonies of various Pandits, who were only allowed to leave with their lives, not any belongings. In order to save their homes and fulfil their 'homecoming', the Pandits started an organisation of 'Panun Kashmir' (own Kashmir), which focused on two elements: asserting their right to come home and plea to government for curbing the secessionist demand, so that valley becomes safe for their return. (Panun Kashmir) They are wary of what treatment they might face if they go back in the present conditions.

Furthermore, the Pandits who did go back, like some Pandit women took up jobs under the government scheme in inauguration of Akhnoor bridge in order to provide for their family, etc. faced severe harassment and degeneration from Muslim who leered at them and passed comments. This unsafe environment became a cause of several health problems like heart disease, severe stress and anxiety, high blood pressure, depression and sleep deprivation. (Pandita 246-251) Most of the people chose to fend for themselves in abject poverty, instead of returning back to the valley.

Kashmiri Muslims, on the other hand, already harbored a deep suspicion against the Pandit population for getting 'favors' from the Indian Government. Therefore, when the army was deployed in the valley, with a view to curb the rising militancy and violent attacks on the local people, the Muslims saw this as a conspiracy of India. Pandita writes about a theory that the then-governor of Kashmir, Governor Jagmohan, had deliberately removed the Kashmiri Pandits community, so that they were not caught in between the cross-fire of military and the militants and the secessionist movement would have been discredited. Pandita answers to his accusation in the following words, "... the problem is the apathy of the media and majority of India's intellectual class who refuse to even acknowledge the suffering of the Pandits. No campaigns ever run for us; no fellowship or grants given for research on our exodus. For the media, the Kashmir issue has remained largely black and white- here are a people who were victims of brutalization at the hands of the Indian state. But the media has failed to see, and has largely ignored the fact that the same people also victimized other people." (Pandita 220)

Therefore, at the both intra-communal and inter-communal level, the divide has been so strengthened that it is next to impossible for it to be filled and revived. This idea severely

affected the identity and notion of home, at both the national and regional, which would be discussed in the next topic.

III.) Territorial Level

At the territorial level, the vast divide between the two communities had seeped in and formed a major division, which changed the meaning of homeland, with respect to Kashmir.

The first change that happened at the territorial level was the differentiation between the two communities was the change in the vocabulary used to refer to both the communities. For Hindu community, the term 'biraadari' was used. Biraadari refers to the society of Kashmiri Hindus, who lived together and practiced the varna system. It works on the system of lineage of zaat, where the society is divided into five Jatis, based upon the work of an individual. The five jatis are: Brahmins, Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishayas (traders and merchants), Sudras (commoners, peasants and servants) and Untouchables (street sweepers, latrine cleaners). Similarly, the community of Muslims is known as 'quom'. This idea of Quom generally defines a universal Muslim community all over the world, which separate from any nation-state of society. It is a nation without any physical boundaries. Quoting Rizwan Ullah, " imbibes an universality bridging all political and geographical divide." (2000)

This distinction has been further exemplified in the context of desh and mulk.

When the term 'desh' is used, a secular homeland is pictured which has a place for everybody and everyone. It is associated with the peaceful living for every community in the area, whether it is based on their religion or language or customs, traditions and castes. In the present context, the valley of Kashmir is not associated with 'Bharat desh', rather it is associated with the idea of 'mulk'. The idea of a separate nation- or mulk - is an independent state of Kashmir where Muslims could express themselves freely. This idea was based on two notions- first, from Islamic scholars who viewed this definitive scholarship as an idea of faith and conviction, and the second, from the viewpoint of the USSR annexation of Islamic territories which politicized this idea.

Thus, combining the above two notions, the demand for a separate state was born, which had a clear demarcation between the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, the consequences of this demarcation were extremely gruesome, and they led to the beginning of a series of events that no one had foreseen before.

Course of Repercussions

The clearly evident consequence of this division was how the identities of Hindus and Muslims all over the country became conflicted. After 1989, after the forced exodus of

Pandits came to light, the people from both communities took their respective stands with the Kashmir issue. This led to a deep mistrust, which had already developed in the region of Kashmir, to seep in both the communal consciousness at the national level. Already inflamed by the horrifying event of Partition, the exodus and demand for secession proved to be the fuel for the already burning fire of communal hatred, which has been smoldering since 1947.

With the growing communal hatred, the demand for secession became more pressing, and started involving the use of arms and fire-power more often. Many militant groups such as Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, etc., came in the picture. Even Pakistan began its interference, for getting back to India when it had helped Bangladesh gain independence in 1975. In the present scenario, China and Pakistan have strengthened their international relations and this has real-time potential to hamper any possible solutions of the Kashmir dispute. (Wagner 2)

Due to this potential, there is a constant cover of army, which has made the life of common people in Kashmir, a living hell. Forbes India has called Kashmir as one of the most militarized places on Earth. Therefore, this has led the politically influential people to make the most of the situation. Bashir's short story, Country-Capital, talks about this idea in a very clear manner. The story portrays how the school is divided between appeasing the three superpowers of his region- the militants, the army and the Government- that the education being imparted to the students is completely false. They are shown learning the capitals as "Capital of Kashmir- India", "Capital of Israel- America" etc. (73-78) This story shows how the political leaders, in order to appease more powerful people only tell a part of the story to common people. The common people are misled by the charismatic speeches and false promises, and combined with their own passion; they go down the path where the only benefit goes to the people in power. The sacrifice of common people is reduced to collateral damage. In Bashir's story, The Ex-Militant, we are shown an interview about the life of an ex-militant, Ghulam Mohiuddeen, who was captured and detained in the detention centre, PAPA-2, along with another militant, Fayaz. The story clearly shows how Fayaz, whose parents had a cashmere shop, was able to buy his freedom from the detention centre, while Ghulam was only let out on the mercy of the superintendent. Later, in the interview, it is also shown how he has trouble finding a job and married the woman he loves because the local people are wary of trusting a militant. When he goes to school for his daughter's payment of fees, he is surprised to find that Fayaz rose up in the ranks, and is now the trustee of the school. (21-34)

Caught up in the whirlwind to mint money and profit out of the situation, the government fails to provide and look after the people who are already distressed from the

continuous violence. In the second short story, Psychosis, Bashir shows how the bride of Ghulam, Sakeena has to do menial jobs to make ends meet, after her husband has once again been taken by the military, with no sign of returning. She was raped and violated by the army and there is no help either from the government or any leader of the militancy groups. She hates poverty so much, and wishes her children to be dead, so that she has fewer mouths to feed. Even at the end of story, her house is razed to the ground by the same government, who was supposed to look after her and her family, leaving her with nothing.(35-47)

Even in the case of Kashmiri Pandits, the government has forgotten their predicament entirely. There are no written journals on their sufferings and no media house is showing their plight. They are left to the mercy of bare minimum rationing and labeled as “internally displaced migrants.” Gigoo addresses the community being reduced to a vote bank, which sees nothing but false promises. He wrote a scene in his book, which describes how politicians had no words left, when the narrator asked when they would be able to return home. (85) Even Pandita writes in his book how the sustenance given to Pandits are being reduced because they are just seen as leaching-off the money. (242-243)

Since the people are caught up in the daily struggle to obtain their bare living necessities, and powerful are busy making profits, both the communities shared a collective loss in terms of loss of local monuments, architectures, shrines, sacred literature, culture, traditions, etc. The constant military presence has destroyed the natural environment through continuous bombings, while the monuments have been converted into garrisons for military and militant purposes. Peer writes, “there used to be a temple, a mosque, a pond, and a few apricot trees there. Now it is all military.” (131) Even

Pandita writes how the locals celebrated Shivaratri with veneration, processions, and feasting, fasting, prayers and decorated, mud idols. But now, in Delhi, the celebration of festivals is reduced to only a meagre meal, fasting and prayers, thus showing how displacement caused loss of their traditions.

Therefore, for such a complex and deeply rooted problem, could there be any solutions?

Potential Responses

The conflict of Kashmir is a centuries old conflict. Therefore, the solution to such a complex problem is neither quick, nor easy to find. It requires implementation of a long-term plan, in several phases, if this problem ever needs to be panned out. In present time, the BJP government, led by PM Narendra Modi has revoked the constitutional benefits of Article 370 and 35A, thus bifurcating the state into Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh. This means that any Indian would now be legally able to buy property in Kashmir and settle there- one of its present day provisions. Many critics believe that this would rile up the riots even more and terrorist attacks will be increased. The settlement issue would rise the concern that the Muslim community would mistake this as a

sign for the government encouraging the Hindu to settle down and become a majority there, in order to have a India favoured plebiscite. (ET 2019) However, some critics have looked at this revocation in a positive light as well. One of the positive outcome of this revocation is that the Kashmiri Pandits have a hope of returning back to their homes, after few years, since Kashmir has been finally acceded as a part of India.

One of the creative solutions brought forward by two scholars, Priyanka Bayaka and Sumeet Bhatti is the idea of creating an independent economic zone, where India and Pakistan could trade with each other. (38) However, during the present times, especially after the revocation of Article 370 and the CoronaVirus pandemic, a simple trade negotiation would not do much benefit when it comes to improving the relations between the two countries. Even the involvement of the United Nations wouldn't be advantageous, as both the countries either have a strong backing, or are strong emerging economic and military powers in themselves. However, the active interest of the government in rural areas as well in making sure the local people of Kashmir (including those in exodus) have their financial sustenance processed in due time, can go a really long way as a solution for this problem. (41) Another thing the government can do is to provide multiple employment opportunities in the valley. This could be done by regularly opening vacancies in the public sector, or by giving incentives to private corporations to manufacture in Kashmir so that employment can be generated. Tourism industry can be exploited as a major industry to generate employment for thousands of people, so that the militancy and terrorism influence is brought down. Surveys have shown that most of the youth are attracted to militancy because they are poor and want to support their family.

At the school and university level, the students should be taught about the congregated history of Kashmir, in terms of its literature, culture, religion, communal sharing of space and its dependence on the natural environment. This detailed study about Kashmiri history will make sure that less youth are driven to 'charismatic' propaganda of powerful people, who want to stir up trouble in the valley to create profits. Moreover, the students should be given scholarships as an encouragement for their merit, so their family is able to send them to school.

Furthermore, every narrative about Kashmir has presented the people of Kashmir being disjointed from the rest of the country. The government of India needs to take this into factor, and through gradual process, they can make sure that the Kashmiri people are included into administrative machinery of India. This can be happen by elections, followed gradual lessening of troops from places where less terrorist activities are reported, holding periodic meetings and follow-ups between the state and central government. Even the common people can do their part by being open and inclusive to the Kashmiri people and understanding and aware of their glorious as well as traumatic past and refuting the media

coverage which shows only biased narratives of Kashmir. In this way, we can begin the to solve the complex problem of Kashmir, by starting at the molecular level.

Conclusion

Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's PM in 1990, had publicly acknowledged then Indian PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in a statement, quoted, "Kashmir ko hum le nhi skte hain, or aap de nhi skte ho." (we cannot take Kashmir, and you cannot give it to us.) This statement is a clear indication to the military prowess of India, due to which Pakistan is unable to take the land by force. Hence, in such a situation, India has the upper hand, and the only chance for India to solve this issue is to negotiate a solution that is beneficial to both the governments and leaders of the states (Kashmir and India). (Bayaka 45)

The India needs to understand the demand for secession of state comes from Muslim idea of having a nation for their own community. And if the idea of homeland needs to be resolved in any manner, then the leaders need to implement a longer resolution of possible solutions which will guarantee the long term effects.

Therefore, the paper would like to highlight that one of the most effective solutions which could be worth implementing would be the introduction of Kashmir's conclusive history in the education curriculum, so that facts are not hidden from any community, and at a personal as well as communal level, the people can come to a semblance of understanding about what shared living space existed in the valley, and how it benefited all people of the society. In this way, when people finally come face to face with their past, they are more likely to acknowledge and see the difference between past and present. And in this way, they can take a better decision for the future, one that is, hopefully, inclusive for all communities.

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