

Experiences of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women: The Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The present paper is about Kashmir which witnessed mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits during 1988-1990 due to the unrest and political turmoil in the state. The rise of militant activity hampered all social, cultural and political institutions of the valley. It affected the Kashmiri community in general and Kashmiri Pandit community in particular. In the view of securing their lives almost 250,000 to 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits left the valley to other parts of India. Most of them settled in Jammu and few other states of India as well. However there are few hundred Families of Kashmiri Pandits who did not migrate despite all the militant activities and political instability. The various studies have explored many problems for those who migrated but there are only few studies which have been explored for Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit. Because of the migration of large number of Kashmiri Pandits, the state witnessed many imbalances in its heterogeneous society. Those Kashmiri Pandits who choose to stay back face many problems and Kashmiri Pandit women has been the worst sufferers. This study explores how the Kashmiri Pandit women construct their lived experiences as being non-migrant Kashmiri Pandit women. This paper used narrative inquiry as a qualitative method to explore their lived experiences.

Key words: Armed Conflict, Kashmiri Pandits, Millitancy, Migration

1. Introduction :

Kashmir witnessed much political instability over period of two decades because of the armed conflict that is present there since the partition of India and Pakistan. The dispute between the two countries has led to many wars which destroyed not only the men and material but also destroyed the social fabric of the Kashmir valley. This wave of violence created dislocation of people from one place to other. In this dislocation Kashmiri Pandits migrated themselves from Kashmir valley to other safer places. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits became a huge crisis for general community as migration of this type leads to many social and psychological issues. The large scale migration of Kashmiri Pandits began in 1988-1990 and continued to next few years. Almost 250,000 of the 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits fled the valley (Puri, 1993:20)¹. Many scholars argued about the migration of Kashmiri Pandits and cited many reasons for their migration and its process. During 1988-1990 there were slogans like Ae Kafiroo Ae Zalimoo, Kashmir Hamara chhod do (you infidels you tyrants, leave our Kashmir) and Asi Gache Pakistan, Batavrosti batnev san (We want Pakistan, inclusive of Pundit women and exclusive of pundit men) from loudspeakers disturbed and compelled Kashmiri Pandits to leave the place (Hassan, 2010, p. 06)². Besides that, there were also warning of death from the militant outfit, which was carried in the local newspapers like Alsafa and Srinagar times (Akbar, 1991)³. There was migration of nearly 95% Kashmiri Pandit Community during the 1998-1990. However it is also a fact that there are Kashmiri Pandits who never migrated from their place of birth to any other place. 27 years later the total population of Kashmiri Pandits who permanently reside in Kashmir are 6,500 individuals. These Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandits remained in Kashmir because of varied reasons. It may be due to the economic constraints or love for their own land. . The Non-Migrant Pandit association under the banner of Kashmir Pandit Sangharish Samiti (KPSS) narrates that there were threats given to Kashmiri Pandits by posting posters on their gates and threatening them to leave the valley in the given course of time. The Samiti also narrates that the common Kashmiri Muslim was not threatening any Kashmir Pandits. They mention that there were extremist elements that used to treat them differently. The discourse of migration is a long academic debate but the fact is it divides people, creates communication gaps and gives rise to

many problems to the non-migrants as well as migrants. Studies reveal that the major impact of migration was on the Health status of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandits (H.Manzoor and R.Rafia 2018)⁴. The separation of families, friends, near and dear ones has given rise to depression, hypertension, stress etc. The trauma of migration has increased gaps between the Migrants and Non-Migrants. Above all, the general impact on the Pandits has been studied through various empirical and quantitative studies. In this case, it gives the essence of weight- age of the problem but some aspects might be explored qualitatively. This paper addresses the lived experiences of Non Kashmiri Pandit women through narrative inquiry.

2. Method :

The present study adopted a Qualitative method to gain the understanding of the lived experiences of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women. Under the Qualitative Paradigm, the Narrative analysis was found to be the feasible method. The purpose of the Narrative Inquiry is to reveal the meanings of individual's experience. It is listening to the story of the participants. Narrative inquiry methodology provides the opportunity to go beyond the search for the one 'grand narrative' (Grbich 1999: 57)⁵ and to examine the transformative process of storytelling in this field. Narrative inquiry approach has been used to understand many aspects of culture, experiences, and identity of the participants (Lieblich et. Al 1998)⁶. In fact the first identity narrative . The theoretical underpinning of narrative inquiry is the belief that 'telling a story about oneself involves telling a story about choice and action, which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions' (Rice and Ezzy 1999: 126)⁷. In order to get the proper insight about the lived experiences of the Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women, the above theoretical framework was kept in consideration. The present study adopted purposive sampling and the total number of participants interviewed for the study was (n=5). The interviews took place at their respective homes and the names of the participants has been hidden. The participants did not wished to

reveal their names because of the anonymity. So the principle of confidentiality was taken into consideration for the present study. The present study entitled, “ The Narrative Inquiry: Lived Experiences of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women” recruited participants through a local agency. The participants were informed by the researchers through telephonic communication and a copy of informed consent was also sent to them. In the informed consent the process and aim of the research was discussed.

3. Research Question :

- 1. In what ways does Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women experience about being a ‘Non-Migrant’?**

4. Data collection:

The present study was conducted in the respective homes of the Participants. The data was collected through interviews using a single Research Question followed by dialogic process and researcher’s observation. The final analysis methodology was based on Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal’s (2004)⁷ analysis of narrative data. These authors draw a distinction between actual events and narratives, arguing that narratives must be based on some form of perception or observation of real events (Rosenthal and Fisher-Rosenthal 2004)⁸. They have a six stage process of analysis, which includes an analysis of biographical data, thematic analysis, re-construction of the case history or life as it was lived, an analysis of individual texts, a process of comparison between a narrative and life as lived, and the formation of different types of narratives. After following the above procedure the data was read and re-read and summarizing each participant’s story into 2 or 3 pages. Particular themes and sub-themes were identified manually after transcripts were read and re-read again. Adhering to the above method, following themes and sub-themes were identified.

Theme	Sub-themes	
1. The transition from Kashmiri Pandit Women to Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women		
2. Migration of Kashmiri Pandits	2.1 Social Dislocation 2.2 Separation of Families	
3. From Minority to Extreme Minority	3.1 Threat to religious Identity. 3.2 Declining Population of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women.	

5. Result :

The thematic analysis resulted in 3 main themes and 4 sub-themes. The first theme deals with transition of being just Kashmiri Pandit Women to Non-Migrant Kashmiri Women. The other two themes discuss the Migration Discourse and its impact.

Theme 1: The transition from Kashmiri Pandit women to Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women.

Armed conflict has affected the general community in kashmir and Kashmiri Pandit women has been worst sufferres. It is seen in the participant narrartives that the migration of their own community has affected them socially as well as psychology. It is matter of concern for them how and why there was such an immediate transition from being just kashmiri pandit women to Non-Migrant Kashmiri pandit women. Here are the actual excerpts the participants are talking about their sudden transition:

Participant 1:

“ kashmiri pandits were just kashmiri’s like other kashmir’s. it is question to understand how we are being called as non-migrant kashmiri’s... this question always haunts me in a way that it should not have happened... you also need to think about this change... it all happened because of the migration of kashmiri pandits that divided us between migrants and non-migrants..... this division is not just about these words ...ummm..... but this is the division between our hearts...”

Participant 2:

“ being a kashmiri pandit women is not a difficult for me...I am a kashmiri pandit women and I am proud of it ...but why I should be called as non-migrant when I never thought of leaving kashmir... hhhh!... I am right now junior engineer in the PWD department...I have seen people there talking about non-migrant kashmiri pandits... I always intervene in this case.. I always tell them not to use “non-migrant” with us...we are just kashmiri’s like any other kashmiri... “

Participant 3:

“ you know how it is be like a non-migrant kashmiri pandit !.. it is like I do not belong to kashmir...it is government that divided us between migrants and non-migrants...yes, it is true that those migrated are called as migrant kashmiri pandits....but what about me or those who never migrated or never thought of migration...why people call us non-migrants..... when some one says you are a non-migrant....i just refuse to accept these things...I am just a kashmiri pandit women...”

Participant 4:

“ kashmiri pandits were almost 3,00,000 before migration happened... the migration happened because of the political instability... but what remains the question is that why I should be called as non-migrant... it is a direct attack on our identity...I am a pandit women and being pandit is my identity...being non-migrant is not my identity...it seems that as if we are a different kashmiri people within the main stream kashmiri population..”

Participant 5:

“ when almost all pandit families decided to migrate from kashmir my family decided not to migrate ...is this the sin that we have not migrated and we have been marginalized by calling us non-migrants ?... it is like ‘ othering’ your own people but this question is necessary to discuss...why people call us non-migrants ...its answer lies in the long standing dispute of kashmir..polticians politicized kashmiri pandit population and millitants took its benefit by killing some influential kashmiri pandits...”

Theme 2: Migration of Kashmiri Pandits:

This theme was derived from the narratives of the participants which showed how and why kashmiri pandits migrated from the kashmir valley. Under this theme two sub-themes were identified which manifested social dislocation and seperation of families. The these two sub-themes discuss the migration of pandits and its impact on them.

Theme 2.1 : Social Dislocation:

Armed conflict in kashmir has resulted into the mass destruction of the resources and displacement of the people. People have been dislocated from one place to other. The mass migration of kashmiri pandits from kashmir to other places of india has resulted in various socio-economic problems which has thus affected the psychological health of the non-migrant kashmiri pandits. From the excerpts of the narratives of participants it is cleary manifested that the non-

migrant kashmiri pandit community has been affected because of the dislocation of kashmiri pandits who are now called as 'migrant kashmiri pandits'.

Participant 1:

“ people in kashmir would have never thought of such destruction before the rigged elections of 1998... that was the main reason behind the rise of militancy... people demanded separate homeland ..a separate country and azaadi(freedom) movement started.. in between some ill elements of the society killed many pandits...many muslims were also killed either by militants or indian army...but we were already in minority so it was easy for militants to attack us because they perceived this wave of freedom struggle meant for muslims only... I have witnessed and heard about many pandits being killed ...umm ..because of that pandits migrated... my family did not migrate and as a result we face many problems...the dislocation of pandit community has created many problems for those who did not migrate...all my relatives now live in jammu and delhi..we do not have frequent communication with them.... Their dislocation has alienated us socially... but what can we do now...hfff! It was our fate...”

Participant 2:

“ all of a sudden kashmir witnessed migration of kashmiri pandits and this migration was because of the fear and threat of getting killed.... But to be honest more muslims were killed than kashmiri pandits...why government does not accept their failure in protecting the rights of kashmiri people... it costed us our lives..our economy..our relations... now the question is why it has affected more to kashmiri pandits?... the answer is simply that 95% of kashmiri pandits migrated to other places for their safety...just 5% remained here... these 5% face lots of issues because of the migration of kashmiri pandits... their dislocation caused many problems... we face issues in marriages particularly...migrants now marry there...non-migrants do not get proper matches and among the population of 5% it is difficult to find a proper match...”

Participant 3:

“ migration came with a lot of challenges for non-migrants...although they settled themselves in the immigrant places...ummm..... but it has affected us more than migrant kashmiri pandits.... This type of dislocation created social gaps.. this type of displacement creates communication gaps... this gap would remain forever if something is not done at policy level..”

Participant 4:

“ armed conflict is the reason for the migration of kashmiri pandits...we never used to have such things before that we see today... before the militancy took place people lived peacefully and had strong relation with each other... there was no concept of migrant and non-migrant... when in 1988 , militancy shook the entire kashmir...people were killed irrespective of the religion they belongkashmiri pandits were also killed...and because of that almost all pandits migrated from kashmir to other parts of india...but it came with a consequence of social problems... there are only few hundred families of kashmiri pandits living in kashmir ...almost around 700 families... you can imagine how much social and communication gap must be between the migrant and non-migrant kashmiri pandit community !...”

Participant 5:

“ militancy caused people to displace from one place to other places... it causes many problems...like...the question remains what about those who stay back... if only some people displace it concerns to their families but when there is a dislocation of almost entire population what could be its impact on them as well as on those who stay back... here in kashmir there are only few families left..., dislocation came with the displacements of our hearts as well...we cannot survive like this...”

Theme 2.2: Separation of Families:

Migration due to armed conflict doesnot only cause social dislocation it comes with the seperation of families as well. From the excerpts of the participant narratives it is manifested that seperation of families was the big negative consequence because of the migration of kashmiri pandits.

Participant 1:

“ you tell me one thing? Where is your entire family...in kashmir ? is it!but my extended family like uncle, aunt, cousins are not anymore here..... they have migrated when millitancy shook the entire kashmir...it seperated our families...I am living here and my relatives live at jammu and delhi... we lost close knit relations... seperation of families came with the cost of less communication between ‘us’ and ‘them’

Participant 2:

“ millitancy destroyed families...it forced people to flee...and the irony is that when you do not know that your relatives have migrated in the dark nights ...and in the morning when you come to know about this...hhhh!.... it is frustrating.....it affected my health...it affected me socially as well as mentally.....migration came with the disruption of families particularly kashmiri pandit families....”

Participant 3:

“I can tell you this way...when some one in your families migrates just because of the work but you know the person will come back but you still miss him... but imagine a situation when your family relatives migrate because of the conflict...you are not sure whether they will come back or not... this uncertainty of not coming back creates a series of problems... millitancy seperated our families...our blood relations.....what else shall I tell you..”

Participant 4:

“ God knows very well who destroyed our families...who forced our families to migrate...no one wants to leave the place of birth.... What we have witnessed I wish no one else witness that..every day I feel I am missing something...and I know that ‘something’ are my relatives who have migrated...”

Participant 5:

“ migration caused our families to move away..to flee from the place of your origin to the place you do not know about.... Some stay back because they could not afford to migrate...and the love for the home land....but...you know this type of migration always destroy families and same happened with us...earlier we used to live together ..now we are far far away from each other..”

Theme 3: From Minority to extreme Minority

Kashmiri pandit population in Kashmir was already in minority. Different sources have given different figures of Kashmiri pandit population before and after the migration. However the question remains that how the migration has reduced the overall figure of non-migrant Kashmiri pandits. From the narratives of the participants it is further divided into two sub-themes.

Theme 3.1 : Threat to religious identity

Participant 1:

“ when militancy engulfed the entire Kashmir we knew that it would impact on our religious identity... the impact came because of the migration of Kashmiri pandits...all our religious scholars also migrated from Kashmir...we do not have any Hindu preacher here who would teach our children...”

Participant 2:

“no body in kashmir has interferred in our religious practices... why should I blame them...you know truth is truth...unlike others why should I talk of temples being destroyed...yes...it is true that some temples were destroyed but I do not blame muslims...who did this every one knows and those who did this do not follow any religion.....but one thing is there that I must tell you...I really feel there is a threat on our religious identity and that is not because of the above reasons ...that is because of the mass migration of kashmiri pandits...with migration all reliogious teachings went away with them...our children does not know about our religious practices...whatever we know pass on to our children.... But this is not enough....we need guru’s for this practice...”

Participant 3:

“ you know we face so many difficulties while some one marries or on someone’s death... for both the practices we need guru They are not here....we have to hire them form jammu and they demand hefty amount of money.... Muslims do participate in our marriage or during the funeral of some one who dies but they cannot perform last rites because of their obligations...we have our own problem...”

Participant 4:

“it is a reality that our religious identity is at stake... no guru is avalaible here who could perfrom or teach religious practices to our children..”

Participant 5:

“ we are just few hundred families living in kashmir..almost all kashmiri pandits left the valley and with them the source of knowledge also went away... in that way there is threat to our religious identity...”

Theme 3.2 : Declining population of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women:

Participant 1:

“ as you know and I already told you that majority of the population migrated from kashmir to other places of India.... When almost 95% population of kashmiri pandits migrated leaving behind only few hundred families in kashmir...it worsened our situation ...it gave rise to many social problems ...like ...the marriage of our community (non-migrants)...umm.....some one told me that we have only 600 non-migrant pandit families in kashmir... it becomes a huge concern when we have to marry our children.. mostly we do not get our proper matches here particularly for girls...so even we do not wish to...but what can we do other than to marry them with migrant kashmiri pandits...so in a way our population gets reduced day by day...”

Participant 2:

“ armed conflict induced migration not only created problems for those who migrated but I think more problems are faced by those who stay back like my family did.... It has affected our population... non-migrant population is reducing and I owe this problem to the marriage factor...every parent wants his/her children to get proper and well settled matches...in kashmir we do not have that opportunity for our children...so most of the marriages take place with migrants...”

Participant 3:

“ the worst impact on us due to the migration of kashmiri pandits is that we do not get proper matches here among non-migrants...most of the non-migrant have crossed the marriageable age because of these problems...no what we do is to marry with migrants...it not only costs the reducing numbers of non-migrants but it is loss to our indigenous culture and tradition..”

Participant 4:

“ it is as simple as that... dislocation means losing your own people... and when you lose your own people you face many problems...same happened with us...kashmiri pandits migrated and we faced many problems because of their migration... we face many problems on daily basis like the education of our children... more importantly our marriage system has failed... not getting proper matches within non-migrant community... so we have to marry our children with migrants...this affects our population as well...”

Participant 5:

“ mass migration has wrecked a havoc on non-migrant kashmiri pandits...their migration has caused us to face many challenges...one of the challenges we are concerned about is the marriage... we are getting reduced every day.....most of our young boys and girls are unmarried...because they do not get proper match...and at last we have to marry them with migrants that itself is another challenge....this process has reduced our population..”

6. Analysis and Discussion:

The main purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women. To gain more understanding about their experiences qualitative method was suitable for the present study. The population in the present study belongs to a homogeneous group, so narrative inquiry method was employed for the analysis of the data. Based on the Research Question the participants cited many experiences of living in Kashmir as Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women through their narratives. The researcher allowed the participants to narrate their stories. Interviews were audio-taped and field notes were also employed in the study.

The present study revealed that Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women have different narratives regarding the armed conflict in the Kashmir valley which has resulted in the impoverishment of the Kashmiri society through the channels of reduction of the capital, income and employment, physical destruction of agricultural resources, reduced investment and mass displacement of human resources⁹. The Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women shared their experiences which

has been discussed in the particular themes. First theme deals with “Transition of Kashmiri Pandit Women to Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women”. The participants shared a negative experience of being called as “Non-Migrant”. In the present study the participants manifested how their names have been channelised from one notion of being Kashmiri Women to other notion of being “Non-Migrant”. All the participants mentioned that this happened all because of the migration of Kashmiri Pandits and that migration happened due to the onset of militancy. The second theme “Migration of Kashmiri Pandits” resulted into two sub themes “Social Dislocation” and “Separation of Families”. The participants in the present study mentioned how migration has led to social dislocation and how this challenged the entire family relationships which resulted into the separation of families. The study conducted by Husaain (2017)¹⁰, suggested that there has been a change in the culture and traditions of the Kashmiri Pandits. In his study he said that before migration Kashmiri Pandits used to stick to their customs and traditions but now, culture and tradition is losing its rigidity to a large extent and the use of Tilak on forehead is rare. In the present study the participants also revealed that there has been change in their customs, traditions and religious practices which resulted into the third theme “Minority to Extreme Minority”. This theme is further divided into two sub-themes, “Threat to Religious Identity” and “Declining population of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women”. The participants in the present study revealed that there has been many obstacles they are facing in their daily lives which gives rise to many Psychosocial problems. Among the many social problems, marriage as a social institution has been badly hit. The reasons cited by participants is the reduced population of Non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits. The participants in the present study revealed that Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandits, more importantly women have to marry outside Kashmir with migrants because they could not find proper matches for their marriages. Marrying outside Kashmir with Migrant Kashmiri Pandits has reduced the overall population of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandits.

7. Study's limitation and weakness:

The present study provided indepth data about the experience of Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women. The participants discussed about their daily lives regarding how is is to be like a Non-migrat Kashmiri Pandit Women. The present study is the Narrative Inquiry of the expierences of Non-Migrant kashmiri Pandit women. The sample size in the present study is small. The study is not extented for generalizations as the aim of narrative narrative inquiry is to give voice to the people that are under study.

8. Conclusion :

The present study suggested that the process of migration has divided Kashmiri Pandits into Migrant Kashmiri Pandits and Non- Migrant Kashmiri Pandits. However Non-Migrants feel “othering” when they are being tagged with the word “Non-Migrant”. The study aimed to explore the experiences of the Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit women. The participants expressed negative experience of armed conflict which started in 1988 and resulted into the mass migration of kashmiri pandits. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits has long lasting impact on the daily lives of Non-Migrant kashmiri Pandits women. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits resulted into various Psychosocial problems which was manifested while participants narrarted their stories. It has adversely affected their families and religious practices. Through their lens of their experiences Non-Migrant Kashmiri Pandit Women feel isolated from their own community. Participants sought vaious rehabilitative measures for ther return of Migrant Kashmiri Pandits so as to save their culture and tradition, religion and marriage as a broader means of Social Institutions.

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