

4. LIVED EXPERIENCES OF KASHMIRI PANDIT WOMEN: FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND THE LIFE BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

Migration, whether forced or voluntary, has been an intrinsic part of the broader processes of social change across the world. However, there is a marked difference in the way different forms of migration are conceptualised and the resultant implication that it has. For instance, the difference between refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and the expected role of the state in dealing with them. Officially termed 'migrants', the Kashmiri Pandit community – originally belonging to the now Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India, is a quintessential example of a community that was forcibly displaced and forced into a life of exile in their own country over three decades ago. The exilic conditions that characterised their lives have left an indelible print on their minds and have shaped their life discourses polemically, in the forms of ruptured social fabric, disoriented identity, barriers to education, healthcare and restricted labour market opportunities. Although displacement affected the entire community at large, the impact of displacement was experienced differentially. This difference stemmed from gender, the social capital they possessed, educational qualifications that they had, their place of residence (rural or urban) and the quality of social networks they had access to. The most explicit difference can be seen between those who were set up in tents that were sunk in filth and were a breeding ground for disease and ill-health versus those who were displaced but never had to live in 'migrant camps'. But even within these two groups, there are apparent differences in the lives of men and women. The challenges of everyday life are felt more acutely by women who have had to navigate the murky waters of patriarchy in addition to physical displacement.

And yet, available literature on the subject is androcentric and homogenising in nature. The paper attempts to shed light on the manner and the source for the differential impact of displacement as seen through the impact of displacement on health, education and employment, which are more pronounced for women than men.

Keywords: Kashmiri Pandits, forced displacement, lived experiences, social capital, women.

INTRODUCTION

Migration, whether forced or voluntary, has been an intrinsic part of the broader processes of social change across the world. It has been theoretically defined in a myriad of ways, most commonly based on the simplistic assumptions of push-pull models with a singular aim of income (utility) maximisation. The more refined frameworks, such as that by Amartya Sen, perceive it to be the capability (freedom) to choose where to live, to move, when and why to move as against a passive 'cause-and-effect' response to various push-pull factors⁶.

Therefore, simplistically speaking, anybody who moves from one place to another, regardless of their motivation, would be undertaking the process of migration. However, there is a stark difference in the way the whole movement is initiated, understood and the resultant implications that it carries given the broader contexts in which it was undertaken. For instance, while both refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs) undertake the process of migration i.e. they move from one place to another, they are two distinct terms. Although, the causes for displacement could be similar for both categories of people, including but not limited to political unrest, religious persecution, armed conflict, internal disturbance, and so on, the

6 Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*. Vol 9(8)Springer.

implications can be drastically different. The basic difference between both categories is that in order to be classified as a refugee, a person has to necessarily cross an internationally recognised border, whereas IDPs stay within the territorial boundaries of the country that they are citizens of. However, it is not just a matter of nomenclature. These terms are extremely loaded and as such become the primary identities by which such individuals are recognised. For instance, for those categorised as refugees, there is a definite plea for humanitarian help and assistance from countries they may not have anything in common with. For those who are categorised as IDPs, there is a sense of responsibility that their own government has to necessarily shoulder in order to rehabilitate and resettle them thus forth.

The Kashmiri Pandit community, originally belonging to the now Union Territory⁷ of Jammu and Kashmir, India, is one such community. Forced into a life of exile in their own country over three decades ago, the displacement of the Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir in 1989-90 is a devastating tale of people being run out of their own homes for the safety of their lives while the state absolved itself of the responsibility to protect their lives and livelihood.⁸

There are multiple narratives of what led to their exodus, all carrying a strong political undertone. From the perspective of the Kashmiri Pandits garnered through personal interviews as well as memoirs in vernacular magazines such as *AIKS*, it is clear that the reason they were forced to leave was the blatant threat to their life and security. Kashmir was considered to be a relatively peaceful valley where the Kashmiri Hindu and Kashmiri Muslim communities lived in harmony with each other. The conditions of 1988-89, targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits and a general sense of fear forced them to leave. On the other hand, the government stands by the fact

7 Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019, re-constituted the former state into the union territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh w.e.f 31st October 2019.

8 Shekhawat, S. (2009). Conflict Induced Displacement: The Pandits of Kashmir. *Conflict Trends*, Issue 4, ACCORD.

that by the 1990s the pro-azadi movement had gained considerable ground and that in the early 1990s, there were slogans reverberating from mosques ordering people who did not support the Kashmir movement to leave the valley. While the government has maintained that the Pandits wanted to leave voluntarily and their movement was facilitated by government vehicles that may have created the image of the government facilitating their move, the Pandits have a different story to tell wherein they received no help from the government at all. Those who travelled in the dead of night recall making their own arrangements to travel outside Kashmir. Most of them recall their neighbours and friends helping them with making arrangements to leave the Valley.

The most popular narrative is that it was the turmoil caused by the alleged rigging of the legislative assembly elections of J&K of 1987 that sparked tensions in the state. The political developments in Kashmir in the years preceding the exodus laid the groundwork for mass displacement of the Kashmiri Pandit community in late 1989 and early 1990. It all culminated in a trail of blasts and targeted killings in which the Central Telegraph office and the Srinagar Club had been chosen as the first targets of the militants in 1988. The year 1989 started with a wave of targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits. For instance, the retired judge who had sentenced Maqbool Bhat to death for the murder of Neel Kanth Ganjoo, was shot dead outside the J&K High Court⁹. There were many such Kashmiri Pandits who had been shot dead.¹⁰ Women and young girls were 'allegedly raped' gripping the community with fear for their womenfolk. One of the most horrifying incidences is of the rape and murder of Girja Kumari Tikoo who was sawn in half by a carpenter's saw. The post-mortem report of Sarla Bhat, a nurse, confirmed that she was gang-raped before her body was riddled with bullets.¹¹ Although

9 The incident has been widely reported in Indian press and also finds a mention in the book by Prakash, V. (n.d.). *Terrorism in India*. India: Kalpaz Publication. Pg. 516

10 Koul, M.L, (1999). *Kashmir – Wail of a Valley*. Part 1. University of Michigan.

11 Koul, M.L, (1999). *Kashmir – Wail of a Valley*. Part 2. University of Michigan.

the details of very few such incidences are available in public domain, personal interviews with the displaced Kashmiri Pandits reveal many such other incidences that were never openly discussed.

A full-page statement had been delivered in the offices of vernacular dailies that explicitly stated for Kashmiri Pandits to immediately leave Kashmir¹². By this time, those who had not fled earlier had panicked enough to leave in the dead of night by any means possible. As reminisced by many Kashmiri Pandits, there was no help provided to them by the government in the form of security or transportation out of Kashmir. The state government was jolted into action only when thousands of Kashmiri Pandit families reached Jammu. The state government registered these families and referred to them as 'migrants' post which they were temporarily set up in relief camps around Jammu.

“As a fall-out of the fundamentalist and terrorist activities, sizeable number of families belonging to the minority communities have been forced to leave their homes in Kashmir Valley and settle temporarily in Jammu, Delhi and other parts of the country. Government is providing all essential relief to the uprooted families. It is hoped that the Jammu and Kashmir migrants will go back to their homes in the Valley in the near future”¹³

They were set up temporarily in tents that were sunk in filth with no arrangements for water supply and heaps of garbage that were not cleared and which turned into potential health hazards.¹⁴

12 On January 4th, 1990, *Aftab*, a local Urdu newspaper, published a press release allegedly issued by Hizb-ul-Mujahideen asking all Hindus to pack up and leave. This was also followed by *Al Safa*, another local paper and *Srinagar Times* on 16th January 1990.

13 Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs (1990-91)

14 Koul, M.L. (1999). *Kashmir – Wail of a Valley*. Part 2, Chapter 12. University of Michigan.

A meagre amount of relief and some dry ration that had been initiated as doles. The relief amount has been increased from time to time, and current is capped at 13,000 INR per family at the rate of Rs. 3250 per person. It had started off at the rate of 250 INR per person (for a maximum of 4 members of a family)¹⁵. However, the assistance received from the government over the years has not satisfied the Kashmiri Pandit community.

While there are various grievances about how the ration as well as relief money was inadequate, the gravest injustice meted out to them was referring to them as 'migrants', a term that continues to be used for them. Their main reservation with the term 'migrant' is how that term conveys a sense of agency (however insignificant) that a migrant is typically assumed to have. But the displaced Kashmiri Pandits did not leave Kashmir because they wanted to, they left because that was the only viable alternative for them.¹⁶ Even if that meant leaving their lives behind and being forced into a life of confusion, uncertainty, and complete disorientation. And yet, the entire question surrounding the exodus and the Kashmiri Pandits has become a political debacle reserved for international forums, trivializing how their lives were completely turned around in a matter of days.

There is also lack of any succinct data on the displaced Kashmiri Pandits to study whether their mortality and morbidity indicators worsened considerably and rapidly post displacement and resettlement. An independent study conducted by the Times of India¹⁷ showed that among 350 families having 1200 inmates, only 5 births took place since resettlement in the camps while 200 people had died. Some of the reasons for this could be premature menopause in women, delayed reproduction or infertility, malnutrition, sunstrokes, weakness and stress. Another study conducted by

15 <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1705569>

16 Bhan, N and Bindra, S. (2019). Effects of Migration on the Health of Kashmiri Pandits. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research and Development*. Vol 10, No. 12. Pp. 89-93.

17 Times of India, 5th July 1995 Times of India.

Panun Kashmir in 1995, based on a sample survey of families present in the migrant camps between 1990-1995 showed that in 300 families having 1365 inmates, only 16 births had taken place¹⁸. The study shows how differences in the living conditions were prevalent not only between camp and non-camp displaced populations but also between people living in different camps. However, studies such as these, have not been attempted in the last ten years even on a small-scale, thus the lack of concrete data about the conditions of the displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

The exilic conditions that characterised their lives not only left an indelible print on their minds but shaped their life discourses polemically, in the forms of ruptured social fabric, disoriented identity, barriers to education, healthcare and restricted labour market opportunities. Yet, the exilic narratives deep-rooted in the feeling of helplessness have eclipsed the heroism showcased in rebuilding and re-establishing their home and identity, thus reducing Kashmiri Pandits to exemplary victims and anonymous bodies alone.

WOMEN AND DISPLACEMENT

For women, the conflict and violence of 1989-90 impacted both their survival as well as their dignity. There were derogatory slogans underlined with sexual threats directed at the Pandit women such as 'let the Pandit men leave Kashmir, but let them leave their women behind' and 'Assi Gachhi Kasheer Batau Rous Batnew Sann (We want Kashmir along with women folk of the Kashmiri Pandits but not their males)'.¹⁹ The question of sexual victimisation of Kashmiri Pandit women has been addressed in some texts,

18 Kashmir Documentation – Pandits in Exile (2010). Panun Kashmir Movement, Jammu India Pg. 64.

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=fbc50eb3c4e5682bfa3b84b5cff97d3fb740d4a0>

19 Kashmir Documentation – Pandits in Exile (2010). Panun Kashmir, Jammu, India.

but broadly speaking, the ordeal of women who either were sexually abused or were threatened with it, has largely been absent from scholarship.

The process of displacement itself, the subsequent resettlement and the task of 'place-making' posed additional challenges for Kashmiri Pandit women who were the lesser educated, and the financially-dependent sex as compared to men. While there exist narratives of the harrowing experiences of displacement in some vernacular magazines (such as AIKS, Shehjar, Naad etc), there has been a consistent lack of scholarship on the embodied experiences of women either on account of androcentric narratives or due to the lack of a sufficiently sympathetic and interested audience. As a result, women and their experiences have been marginalised within the community as well as in the broader narrative around this 'territory of desire'²⁰. Therefore, it is important to problematize and explain this critical social phenomenon of conflict-induced displacement from the perspective of women in order to develop a feminist method of inquiry (Harding, 1987) to fully comprehend the differential impact of displacement for women as against for men. Harding emphasises the importance of formulating gender as a theoretical category in research²¹. A feminist theory is therefore critical to reconstitute the meaning of the experiences of women as they have lived them. It helps in consciousness raising as it enables readers to view the context critically in a new light.

Feminist theorisations of displacement offer a lens to analyse displacement from a political perspective, allowing the reframing of displacement as a multiscalar, micropolitical and differentiated process for women as against men. Such an approach accounts for the previous literature that has typically overlooked practices, bodies, as well as the degrees to which displacement occurs.

20 Kabir, A. J. (2009). *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (NED-New edition). University of Minnesota Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttj7p>

21 Harding, Sandra. (1987). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issue*, *Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press*. 1-14; 76-94

Therefore, as per Malesi (1987), the feminist method would include description, contextualisation, multiple approaches to gather data, subjectivity and consideration of gender itself as a variable. Therefore, the primary advantage of using a feminist perspective in studies on conflict-induced displacement, would be that the impact of the displacement on women in particular can be viewed from a gendered perspective, thereby showcasing how displacement had a differential impact on women and men as well as between different groups of women based on varying factors.

The archival pieces of news for instance “*Kashmiri Pandits – Aliens at Home*’ dated December 9th, 1990²² or “*Kashmiri Pandits Narrate Woes*”²³ dated February 19th, 1990, published in *The Times of India* shed light on how Kashmiri Pandits had been run out of the Valley and did not feel accepted in Jammu, thereby making them nothing better than guests in their own country. Leading newspapers show snippets of interviews with Kashmiri Pandit men reserving for themselves the overarching responsibility to speak for the community. Their responses however have a strong political undertone and often take the shape of a blame-game. What is interesting is that not even a single interviewee is a woman. The only time that women are considered to be an active part of the community is on the 19th of January every year since 1990 when a silent demonstration is taken out to remind the government of the fateful time that the community had been left to its own perils.

Pictures showing women participating in silent protests in recent times are often circulated with much pomp and show, and yet, there is almost no written record of the different ways in which women showed resistance and

22 Hussain, A. (1990, Dec 09). Kashmiri pandits aliens at home. *The Times of India (1861-2010)* Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/kashmiri-pandits-aliens-at-home/docview/613618633/se-2>

23 Kashmiri pandits narrate woes. (1994, Feb 19). *The Times of India (1861-2010)* Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/kashmiri-pandits-narrate-woes/docview/516377297/se-2>

resilience immediately post displacement, especially in relief camps. Their role in the task of rebuilding their homes while ensuring emotional availability for their children, the sick and the elderly of the family as well as the community is often ignored, as is their effort in supplementing family income by taking on double-burden of work in the form of paid employment outside home and unpaid work at home.

The lack of literature on the specific experiences of Kashmiri Pandit women makes it very difficult to bring out the atrocities perpetrated against them or the ways in which they dealt with the changed circumstances. Interviews²⁴ with a select few women presently living in Jagati township²⁵ in Jammu revealed how the main challenges they faced ranged from lack of privacy, recurrent urinary tract infections, skin related diseases and other non-communicable diseases.

In-depth interviews with women from Jagati also reveal how displacement has had a differential impact on women as against men. For example, the roles and responsibilities of men mostly continued to be the same after displacement—to be the primary breadwinner and provide for the family in material terms. Failing which, alcoholism and substance abuse was an accepted reaction to the challenging times. For women, the unpaid work increased as did the emotional labour. They were reeling from the trauma of their changed circumstances while providing the same level of care and comfort to the children, elderly and the sick. Jagati is replete with examples of women being the actual breadwinners and shouldering the entire responsibility of the household expenses while being subjected to domestic violence at the same time and yet their ordeal is rarely ever captured in academic writing or otherwise.

24 Primary data collected in 2022 by the author by way of in-depth personal interviews of women presently living in Jagati township.

25 Jagati township has been established around 23 kms away from the city of Jammu on NH44. It was set up to be a satellite town that was to accommodate all the displaced Kashmiri Pandits living in the 9 relief camps spread around Jammu after the displaced Kashmiri Pandits who fled from Kashmir came to Jammu.

THE CHALLENGE OF 'PLACE-MAKING'

The theorisation of place is done by understanding it as a meaningful segment and not just in a cartographic sense. It does not have a fixed pattern or established human meaning but is defined by the specific meaning that an individual attaches to it. As against a 'space', a 'place' is humanised space, one that is a centre of established values and meanings (Tuan, 1977: 54). Likewise, a 'place' gathers things in its midst both animate and inanimate entities that bring together experiences and histories, languages and thoughts. Therefore, the power that a place possesses, is because of the power of gathering that it has; gathering of people, thoughts, experiences and histories (Casey, 1996: 24). For Kashmiri Pandits, therefore, 'place' was where they lived their everyday lives and sustained their livelihoods, making memories, networking and following their rituals and cultural practices. It was a safe zone where they felt protected. It was an instrumental tool that tied their reality and identity together. Since most women were not into paid employment while they were in Kashmir, and rendered unpaid care work at home, their 'home' was a very important aspect of their lives.

Post-displacement, not only did the Kashmiri Pandits lose their homes, they lost an important part of their identity. Women felt this loss more dearly because their sense of 'place' was heavily dependent upon the confines of their home. As a result, displacement led to a disoriented sense of identity for them, where they no longer had a 'place' that they could call home.

Despite the fact that displacement affected everyone, the impact was not felt by every individual in the same manner. One of the most important factors that differentiated the experience of one person from another can be traced and understood in the differing social capitals that they had access to and the degree to which they could avail this access.

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is an important conceptual apparatus that can be employed to explain how social networks, cultural capital as well as the socioeconomic

positions of people in Kashmir became crucial factors in deciding where they resettled post displacement and the consequent impact this had on the generations to come.

Various social, economic, and political mechanisms all work together in varying capacities to give rise to the **socioeconomic position** of an individual, whereby populations get stratified by their gender, income, education, occupation, class, caste, religion and other factors. The socioeconomic position shapes the specific determinants of health status that are reflective of people's places within the social hierarchies of the society. Based on their respective social statuses, individuals experience differences in the exposure as well as the vulnerability to health-endangering conditions. Even illness can feed back into altering the social position of an individual by way of impacting their employment opportunities and thereby reducing income.

At the *individual level*, social capital refers to the individual networks and levels of personal involvement in a society in which case it becomes a component of human capital alongside the skills and knowledge (education) which would favour productivity, careers as well as social inclusion. In this case, individual social capital then becomes a counterbalance for other forms of capital, such as lack of education. Therefore, a less-educated person would have to rely more on social support and networks to meet everyday challenges. It is also possible that social capital may act as a complementary force to higher education. For instance, better-educated people possess more robust networks and social participation. This is reflected in the way that individuals living in urban areas in Kashmir who were better educated were able to secure jobs much earlier than their rural counterparts because of the better social networks.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is essentially viewed as a community characteristic. It is a network of individuals who are linked together by social ties and

interactions. Therefore, community social capital is not just the additive product of individual social capitals but of the community as a whole. The remainder of this paper is interested in exploring the relationship between social capital and health, which becomes all the more important because conceptually they can have reciprocal effects on each other. This is reflected in the way of many Kashmiri Pandits who were not very well educated themselves but were able to improve their material conditions quicker because of the better-placed network that they could draw resources from.

The importance of social capital can be gauged in a direct form when a careful analysis is done about how and why some Kashmiri Pandits were forced to stay in tents in inhumane conditions²⁶ for instance, at the Mishriwala camp situated at the outskirts of the city of Jammu, there was not even a single toilet for the 1200 families living in makeshift tents, while there are other members of the community who have never had to experience any such situations. In-depth interviewing with people who presently live in Jagati township and those who are either living in Jammu or in Delhi, would reveal how displacement was experienced differentially. It typically took the following form.²⁷ Those people who were residing in the city of Srinagar and who were the professional salaried classes and, educated people, were able to mobilise their networks and make arrangements either to live in Jammu on rent, or with relatives/acquaintances at the time they reached Jammu after fleeing from Kashmir. People from rural areas, non-salaried and had a lower level of education, were the ones who were forced to live in tented accommodations that had been erected by clearing jungles in and around. Those who were better placed in terms of their socio-economic positions, had the luxury to

26 Hussain, A. (1990, Dec 09). Kashmiri Pandits— aliens at home. *The Times of India (1861-2010)* Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/kashmiri-pandits-aliens-at-home/docview/613618633/se-2>

27 Sourced from personal interviews conducted by the author with persons living in Jagati township in Jammu.

weigh the pros and cons of staying back in Kashmir when the situation started deteriorating in 1988-89. These people packed their bags and left Kashmir in a slightly more planned fashion. Those who were running businesses or were directly working in the fields in rural Kashmir had no such option and were forced to live in Kashmir for as long as they could. Given that their biggest asset was land, an immovable factor of production, they faced huge losses. The sudden nature of forced displacement did not allow them the luxury of time to sell their land and liquidate their assets. As a result, the political turmoil left them penniless and in a more pitiable state.

IMPACT OF DISPLACEMENT

In order to assess the affectivities of the kind of forced displacement that the Kashmiri Pandit community faced, it is pertinent to consider displacement itself to be a context rather than a process wherein the historic-structural complexities as manifested at the micro level have a multifaceted impact on the lives of individuals. Rather than only seeking a physical trajectory of where the Kashmiri Pandits thus resettled, a focused effort on how they lived through the immediate period after the exodus and the challenges they faced in rebuilding their lives needs to be studied in greater detail. There are various facets of their lives that should be given due attention, health, education and employment being some of the more important aspects.

As Ankur Dutta (2016) writes,

'What complicates the scene is the fact that more than two decades have passed since their displacement. Many Kashmiri Pandits have rebuilt their lives with varying degrees of success. Yet the sense of loss with displacement persists across generations. There is an inability to make a secure place and home in spite of settlement in physical sense. The multiple issues associated with the forced displacement of Pandit community such as homelessness, dislocation, the camp life as a refugee, the haunting traumatic memory of physical and mental violence, the

*cultural and ritualistic social memory of the past etc. have an indispensable gender dimension which has to be addressed since the female experience of these aspects of exile differs significantly from that of men. Unlike Kashmiri Pandit men, the women have faced more disadvantages due to their basically lower social and human capital status which makes them more vulnerable in such historical contexts of victimisation. Either they were direct victims of mental and physical abuse or were living in constant fear of different forms of threats and violence as part of growing social and communal tension in the Kashmir valley*²⁸

There was no aspect of life that remained unaffected by displacement, but the most significant impact was felt on the health of the people, their ability to attain or continue their education and their livelihoods and thus, have been dealt with in more detail.

IMPACT ON HEALTH

The health of any individual is a product of their social, economic, ecological, geographical, political, environmental factors. Post-displacement circumstances had a direct and an indirect impact on the health of the displaced persons, along with short-term as well as long-term impact on health. Choices about health and healthcare are determined by forces that go much beyond health, such as gender, conflict, livelihood opportunities, social relations and so on. Therefore, any strategy to improve the health of displaced persons would be incomplete without adequate attention paid to these other factors as well.

28 Datta, A. (2016). Dealing with dislocation: Migration, place and home among displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Vol. 50(1). Pp. 52-79. SAGE Publications.

Displaced populations may not have poor health per se but the process itself can have negative impacts on their health due to exposure to diseases, lifestyle changes, cultural barriers, stigma, lack of healthy practices, barriers to healthcare and many other factors. For those who are exposed to poverty, inequality and threat to physical integrity, health becomes an even bigger cause of concern²⁹.

Healthcare solutions for a displaced population can take one of two forms, either short-term or long-term interventions. Band-Aid solutions would only address immediate concerns, but for the Kashmiri Pandits who were displaced from their own homes, efforts needed to be more consistent. If the primary accounts of those who lived in tents in Jammu are to be believed, for an entire year (1990-1991), no efforts were undertaken by the government to provide any kind of healthcare services, not even primary healthcare services or any emergency services. As a result, the interviewees believed that about 1000 people were lost to dehydration and snake bites alone although official data on the same is unavailable.

Quantification of healthcare needs of any displaced group is a requisite to ensure that the already-scarce resources do not get appropriated by the better-off natives, leaving relatively little for the displaced. It is rather unfortunate that the government missed an opportunity to provide targeted healthcare services to the displaced people, which could have been done in a preliminary manner because of the advantages of their encampment. The government could have reached out to a higher number of displaced people because they were spatially concentrated in a few camps. Yet, this was not done.

As far as health indicators are concerned, it becomes difficult to ascertain them for displaced Kashmiri Pandits for two reasons. One, their health

29 Carol, A. (2018). Statelessness, exodus and health: Forced internal displacement and health services. *Refugee Populations and Health*, CSP Reports in Public Health.

conditions become mere numbers in the overall calculation of the health indicators of the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Even for district-wise data, there is no one statistic for the Kashmiri Pandits living in the relief camps as they are spread in and around Jammu. Two, the health indicators by religion subsume them under the broader category of Hindu and therefore their conditions become a part of a larger picture, smoothing over details specifically about them. For instance, there is district-wise data available on key health indicators in the NFHS 5 where a total of 20 districts including Jammu, Leh, Kupwara, and Ladakh have detailed data on various indicators like the use of contraceptives, the rate of anaemia in women, the percentage of married women in different age groups and so on. But there is no separate data collected on the health conditions of those displaced Kashmiri Pandits who presently live in Jagati township³⁰. For example, the NFHS 4 and 5 data upon comparison show that the overall percentage of women aged 15-49 years who are anaemic has reduced from 65.9 percent to 48.9 percent, however, this is reflective of the overall situation in the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir and in no way reflects whether displaced Kashmiri Pandit women are faring better in terms of the percentage of women who are anaemic³¹. Likewise, assessment of the situation of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) can be done at the aggregate level of the UT (16.3) only with no way of analysing the situation for the displaced Kashmiri Pandit women and if the IMR has decreased for the displaced Kashmiri Pandits owing to improved maternal health and nutritional status or level of institutional births.

In the case of Kashmir, it is believed that post-exodus, the very first year was an acute phase where almost everyone who was displaced suffered from one or more health problems. Depression among the adults was considered a

30 Health Dossier 2021: Reflections on Key Health Indicators – Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. And NFHS 5, GOI.

31 NFHS 4 (2015-2015) and NFHS 5 (2019-2021), Government of India.

given. Heart diseases and skin-related diseases become very common. Reportedly³² about 2000 people died from heat stroke in the first year alone. Post that, as people began to come to terms with the change in their circumstances, and coping mechanisms started to come into play, stress-related problems began to take over. Diabetes, allergies, hypertension became more prevalent. Lack of security, clean water, food, shelter, basic sanitation became their most pressing challenges. It is also argued³³ that present-day concerns are related to heart diseases, cancers, hypertension along with psychological disorders like depression, PTSD and phobias. As time passed, and help from the state was received, these problems become non-life threatening and this is possibly the reason why the urgency to address these began to be relegated to the background.

The aspect of the health of the displaced that gets highlighted the most is their mental health. Any traumatic experience will impact each aspect of health—physical, mental, psychological—in varying capacities. Depending on the demographic profile, the overall status of health, socio-economic conditions, and cultural beliefs, the response to health outcomes differ. With specific reference to the Kashmiri Pandits who lived in the various relief camps in Jammu, studies have been conducted on the health of the pandits primarily ranging from ascertaining the prevalence of dementia among the displaced Kashmiri Pandits³⁴ and the psychiatric morbidity in adult Kashmiri Pandits living in a 'migrant camp' at Jammu³⁵. Most of the studies that have been conducted make use of standardised psychometric tests and are quantitative in nature. While the tests themselves provide information on the different kinds of mental health problems that are most

32 Bhan, N; Bindra, S. (2019). Effects of Migration on the Health of Kashmiri Pandits. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research and Development*. Vol. 10, No. 12. Pp. 89-93

33 Sourced from personal interviews conducted with the Pandits living in Jagati township presently.

34 Raina S, Razdan S, Pandita KK, Raina S. (2008). Prevalence of Dementia among Kashmiri migrants. *Annals of Indian Academy of Neurology*. Volume 11, Issue 2. Pp. 106-108.

35 Banal, R. et al. (2010). Psychiatric Morbidity in adult Kashmiri migrants living in a migrant camp at Jammu. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*. 52(2) pp.154-158.

commonly associated with the displaced populations, these studies fail to establish the probable causal relationships of how the prevalence of dementia could be related to literacy levels or why men have a higher prevalence of dementia in the given sample size.

Psychometric tests offer a ready insight into some mental, emotional, behavioural issues, but as they rely solely on self-reporting measures, they have obvious methodological limitations. This is because the test scores are analysed using a set standard of parameters and a diagnosis is made, however, such quantitative analyses are beset with a respondent bias and they may not adequately capture the nuances of social life and its processes. This can be overcome by using qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews, focused-group discussions and cross-referencing. These measures have not been adopted to study the displaced Kashmiri Pandits, therefore providing only limited information about their status of health as well as their overall well-being.

Coping strategies have been defined as 'the response to diminish physical, emotional, psychological burden linked to stressful life events and daily hassles'³⁶. It is an adaptational activity including constantly-changing behavioural and emotional efforts. There are two approaches that have been identified approach (problem-focused to resolve the stress) and avoidance strategies (emotion to avoid thinking about it). The study conducted in Muthi Camp in Jammu uses Trauma Symptom Checklist-40, Perceived Stress Scale, and Coping Response Inventory. The study³⁷ concluded that the null hypothesis was accepted for significant differences were found in terms of the anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances and sexual trauma index but no significant difference was found in terms of the disassociation

36 Charak, R.; Bhat, A. (2011). Gender Differences in trauma symptoms, perceived stress and coping strategies in Kashmiri migrants. *Indian Journal of Health and Well-Being*. Vol. 2(1). Pp 24-26.

37 Ibid.

and sexual problems. It concluded that men and women did not differ significantly in terms of perceived stress but women showed more coping strategies than men. It makes reference to another study³⁸ by Arnetz et al. in 2010, to suggest that demographic factors such as age, gender, and race lead to lesser variance in stress as compared to lifestyle factors like social support, sleep, self-care etc. Therefore, buffering factors such as social support, socioeconomic status and self-care might affect the perceptions of stress.

While the study uses psychometric tests to make analysis, it uses the term sex and gender interchangeably as is done in many medical and health journals unintentionally. However, as a social scientist, it is important to make the qualification between sex and gender absolutely clear. To suggest that coping strategies are found to a higher degree in females than in males would imply there is an underlying biological composition or physiology of the individual sexes that explains it. However, if gender is used as a metric, it would entail all the processes of socialisation that teach a woman to bear the stresses of life and to endure them.

Another aspect that has not received adequate attention of scholars is the long-term impact of displacement on the Kashmiri Pandits, especially those who continue to live in resettlement areas. Any community that has been forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence, would report Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and other emotional responses and problems. However, displacement tends to cause long-term impact on health which may not be of a psychological nature alone.

38 Maghout, J.S., Janisse, J., Schwartz, K., & Arnetz, B.B. (2010). Demographic and Lifestyle Factors Associated with Perceived Stress in the Primary Care Setting: A Metro Net Study. *Family Practice – Oxford Academic*, 28 (9), Abstract at PMID: 21068192.

For those who were displaced, displacement was accompanied by severe economic constraints forcing people to alter their food habits, their healthcare-seeking habits and any other essential expenses. More often than not, it was women whose health took a backseat in the case of an economic adversity. As some camp dwellers recalled, for the first year after the encampment, no healthcare services made available to those living in the camps. As a result, thousands of lives were lost to easily preventable diseases and conditions. Dehydration and snake bites became very common causes of death (Bhan & Bindra, 2019).

The Kashmiri Pandits' ongoing health and social needs stem from the dislocation they face and the loss of support, economic position, education, and health care. The impacts of these conditions have been felt inter-generationally. The most commonly-cited example³⁹ is that of low income-low nutrition: underweight, malnourished children with lower educational and labour market prospects.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

While no systematic study has been conducted to ascertain the impact of displacement on access to education by the displaced Kashmiri Pandits, personal accounts of the displaced reveal difficulties in sustaining the expenses of education to be their biggest hurdle. This is despite the relief in the form of reservation of seats for the Kashmiri migrants at lower cut-offs in different colleges. Of late, prominent universities (such as Delhi University) in the country have altered admission procedures for the 'Kashmiri migrants'. For instance, in the case of University of Delhi, those wards of Kashmiri Pandit 'migrants' who wished to apply for seats reserved for Kashmiri migrants were required to register themselves with the

39 Siddiqui F, Salam RA, Lassi ZS, Das JK.(2020).The Intertwined Relationship Between Malnutrition and Poverty. *Front Public Health* doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2020.00453.

University specifying their percentage along with their course and college preference. Subsequently seats would be allotted to the student who had scored the highest percentage for a given college and course. Presently, every college under University of Delhi, releases a separate cut-off for the Kashmiri migrants reflecting the increased competition amongst them, wherein the wards of those who are non-camp but displaced Pandits have a better chance of securing those seats. Likewise, some Universities require an aspiring student to submit residence proof of certain areas belonging to specific quartiles in Kashmir to be eligible to apply for a seat reserved for the Kashmiri 'migrants'. This leaves many displaced Kashmiri Pandits at a disadvantage since they no longer have any documented proof of their homes back in Kashmir. Nevertheless, the basic requirement to apply for a seat continues to be a 'migrant certificate'⁴⁰. The wards of Kashmiri 'migrants' have to upload a registration certificate as a 'Kashmiri migrant' issued by Divisional Commissioner/Relief Commissioner⁴¹ who is the competent authority to do so.

However, wards of non-displaced Kashmiri Pandits could also receive a migrant certificate if they are able to submit some kind of documentation of their parents or grandparents as proof of having lived in Kashmir. The process becomes quicker for those students who apply for a certificate simply for educational purposes and surrender any claim over relief money. As a result, competition for a handful of seats that should have ideally been filled by wards of displaced Kashmiri Pandits, has increased tremendously. This is important because the experience of the exodus and its implications

40 Relief and Rehabilitation Organisation was created vide Government Order No. 52/CR/REV/ER dated 23.03.1990. It had a stated mandate to provide ration, shelter and cash assistance to 'migrated' families from Kashmir Valley for sustaining life, wherein one of the services to be delivered to the 'registered migrants' by the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation was the "*Issuance of migration certificates for educational purposes*".
<https://www.jkmigrantrelief.nic.in/orders/CitizenCharter.pdf>

41 [https://www.dr.du.ac.in/reservation-of-kashmiri-migrants.php#:~:text=1\)%20Various%20undergraduate%20programs%20of,the%20wards%20of%20Kashmiri%20Migrants.](https://www.dr.du.ac.in/reservation-of-kashmiri-migrants.php#:~:text=1)%20Various%20undergraduate%20programs%20of,the%20wards%20of%20Kashmiri%20Migrants.)

were not the same for everyone. Those who continue to live in Jagati township grow-up with severe economic restraints and as such would benefit greatly from the seats reserved for the Kashmiri Pandit 'migrants' in government institutions of higher education since they are offered at subsidised costs. However, if a quick assessment was to be done of the admission requirements in leading universities, it would be clear that of late, there is a separate cut-off for the Kashmiri Pandit migrants thereby increasing competition amongst the community greatly. The level of education that one can achieve is equally a product of the aptitude of the student as well as how conducive an environment is provided to the child. As there is a wide difference in the way that wards and children of Kashmiri Pandits parents who were resettled immediately in makeshift tents and have only been shifted to Jagati township in 2011, and those who never had to live in those camps, there is no doubt that the Jagati inhabitants are placed at a disadvantage, stemming from the lack of additional resources and tutoring. As a result, they are either forced to take admissions in private institutes that typically necessitates education loans for years at a stretch or are forced to give up their dream of education altogether.

Although there is no official document that suggests that the seats are reserved for kids from migrant camps, there is an expectation that these seats should be given to them as against those kids who have grown up in much better circumstances. This is because the reservation for them was made on account of the difficulties they faced post displacement and the disruption in their education. 32 years after the exodus, it is often the second or third generation children who are seeking the advantage of the reservation, but the economic impact of displacement is intergenerational and as such doesn't take away from the importance that it can have in helping children significantly improve the conditions of their families.

However, this recent trend has not undermined the importance that the community places on education as the panacea for their woes. One of the reasons for the unwavering faith in education could also be the manner in

which educated pandits were able to bounce back on their feet much quicker than the rest of the relatively uneducated community. Hence, there is a great deal of significance and relevance attributed to education because of which, parents undertake loans to finance the education of their children, burdening them further, often pushing them deeper into indebtedness.

Within this, the level of priority accorded to young girls and their education needs to be further explored. Examining whether the desire to educate Kashmiri Pandit children equally regardless of their sex against the backdrop of the all-India trend of sacrificing a daughter's education in favour of the son would prove to be extremely insightful.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

The sudden displacement of the Pandits left them with no sense of stability in life and rendered them devoid of possessions. They were left with little to no income, no job and no certainty about the coming future. The period immediately post the exodus was particularly terrible for them as a large proportion of the population was facing poverty-like conditions for the first time. Displaced urban dwellers were typically the educated, salaried professional class while those in the rural areas were land-owners and businessmen. The exodus had levelled the playing field for everyone in many respects.

Post-resettlement, the community found livelihood in odd jobs and small businesses. The professional class were on the lookout for better-paying jobs but an influx of educated professional people never bodes well for the native population. The recently-displaced were suddenly competing for jobs with the natives of Jammu and as the simple laws of demand and supply dictate, surplus labour reduced the bargaining power of the natives and even more so for the displaced Pandits, who were more vulnerable.

The women however, saw the exodus to be a blessing in disguise providing them with an opportunity to seek paid employment outside their homes⁴². A highly patriarchal community, the Kashmiri Pandit mores barred women from entering the labour market altogether irrespective of their level of education. A very small proportion of women were working in a paid, professional capacity mostly as teachers or as clerical staff in government offices in Kashmir in the pre-displacement period.

Economic compulsions borne out of displacement forced the women of the pandit community to seek employment outside the household. Those who had shifted to Delhi and Noida especially felt that they could explore the labour market and find a job that suited their qualification. Employment was important not only to support their families but also because it would lead to financial independence for them.

However, terms such as 'financial independence' or 'financial emancipation' have to be read with extreme caution and care with respect to women. A patriarchal structure not only puts limitations on what women can and cannot do, but also imposes rules and regulations on every imaginable aspect of their lives. For working women, this often manifests as control over the money that they earn. Therefore, true financial emancipation would mean that women have the agency to decide how the money that *they* earn is going to be spent. Seldom is the choice theirs. Most women, especially of the older generation, would hand over their entire salary to their husbands or fathers or fathers-in-law and have zero say in deciding how that money is to be spent.

42 Sawhney, C; Mehrotra, N. (2013). Displacement from Kashmir: Gendered Responses. *Sociological Bulletin*. Pp. 83-99.

The response of the government in order to help the unemployed youth of the Kashmiri Pandit community has been the much-discussed PM package. The Government devised policies for the Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants under the PM Package in 2008 and 2015 with various components such as enhancement in the relief amount which presently is capped at 13000 INR per family at 3250 INR per person (therefore for a maximum of 4 people). A significant component was the 6000 posts that were announced as a way of providing direct government employment in various departments in places like Bandipore, Anantnag, and Kulgam.

However, the problems of the PM package are far and wide. One, the jobs generated are typically in Kashmir, which forces many people to not avail these job opportunities as concerns of safety and security have not been adequately addressed. The other reasons that have come to light in recent times is the staggered increase in the wages of those working under the PM package, denial of leaves or transfers on compassionate grounds. The recent targeted killings of Hindus⁴³ have sparked a fresh wave of fear amongst the pandits about whether they would like to continue working in Kashmir or not. The death of Rahul Bhat, a Kashmiri Pandit working as a clerk under the PM Special Employment Package for migrants in 2011-12, has further triggered immense fear in the community. He was shot dead in his office on 12th May, 2022⁴⁴. Likewise, the targeted killing of the Hindu teacher Rajini Bala from Samba district, Jammu posted in Kulgam on 31st May, 2022 was another incident sparking fear and insecurity amongst the community about taking up the jobs offered under the PM package.

There are constant requests and applications⁴⁵ submitted to the concerned authorities requesting transfers out of Kashmir, especially by women.

43 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/terrorist-who-killed-rahul-bhat-tv-artist-amreen-among-3-gunned-down-in-jk-101660146686792.html>

44 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/kashmiri-pandit-employees-demanding-transfer-from-kashmir-detained-in-jammu-3784253>

45 <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/kashmiri-pandits-hit-streets-again-after-teacher-s-targeted-killing-in-j-k-s-kulgam-news-199512>

Protests were staged in Jammu by men and women alike after Rajini Bala was shot dead, wherein explicit demands were made to transfer the Kashmiri Pandits to government departments in Jammu with priority given to women who were forced to take up jobs in remote areas in Kashmir to support their families.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

As the younger generation toils to make their lives qualitatively different from that of their parents and grandparents, specifically for those who were resettled in camps, it becomes important to understand that the challenges for every generation are different and any one-size-fits-all solution would not be able to make a difference to their lives. Solutions and remedies will have to be tailor-made keeping in mind the requirements of every generation. For example, with respect to the elderly who continue to live in the camps, integration of health and social care is extremely important. This integration is even more important given that the younger generation is moving out of resettlement areas to metropolitan cities in search of jobs. As a result, the resettlement camps are slowly transitioning into 'old-age' homes where the older generations cannot rely on the younger generations to cater to their needs. Likewise, the younger generation requires the assistance of the state, especially in pursuit of education and employment opportunities to make sure that they get a fair chance at improving their life in qualitative as well as material terms.

46 <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/kashmiri-pandits-hit-streets-again-after-teacher-s-targeted-killing-in-j-k-s-kulgam-news-199512>

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