



Migration, Development and Cultural Influences: A Study of Kashmiri Migrants in Local Diaspora

Prof. Jasbir Singh

Department of Economics

University of Jammu

Abstract

Historically the people move from one place to another in search of livelihood or a better living. But forced en-mass migration of a community still hounds their past and their belongingness to their roots. More than three decades ago, the Kashmiri Pandits were forced out of Kashmir Valley. It was a mass exodus leaving everything –material or non-material, back in Kashmir with no hope to come back. The majority of them first came to Jammu and then left to Delhi and other parts of India. Some of them also migrated outside the country. The efforts of the present government to rehabilitate them in Kashmir Valley look a difficult proposal. After three decades of exodus from their native place, the Kashmiri Hindus have settled to their new places embodying new culture and adjusting in new society while trying to preserve the old one. They are contributing to the new diaspora economies which are no easy as diaspora economies operate across many different scales and in many contexts. They could not contribute to the diverse culture and ethnicities in new settlements as they were forced to migrate under adverse conditions. They may call themselves as refugees in their own country but they were recognized as migrants.

Key Words: Kashmiri Pandits. Migrants, Diaspora, Development.

Introduction:

Indians have a long history of migration to different parts of the world. During the mid-sixteenth century people from Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, South, Bengal, Allahabad and Bombay migrated to Central Asia, Europe and Russia (Levy, 2002, 2005: 1-31). During the British rule in India many Indians undertook short trips to England and European countries. When India got Independence, Indians migrated to European countries mostly either for higher education or learning skills. Many of them did not stay their permanently. Those who stayed always kept regular contacts with their families in India. In Europe they were not considered as “guest-labour” immigrants as the case was with the South European and North African countries. After World War II the European countries developed into a multi-lingual, multi cultural and multi-religious society. Indians in diaspora also became a part of the European set up.

Migration is not an easy phenomenon to comprehend. Usually migration covers decision on migration in search of a job. *Oxford Advance Dictionary* defines migration as the “movement of large numbers of people from one place to another”, (2015:981) or one region to other. There are various types of migration streams. Mostly migration from rural to urban areas is migration in search of employment.

Poor rural people are generally forced to migrate due to economic, socio-cultural and environmental determinants. Economic explanations centre on the search for better opportunities of employment and income, socio-cultural explanations centre on the desire of migrants to break away from traditional constraints and inequalities. Environmental explanations centre on the attraction to migrate induced by disaster, displacement and demographic pressures or imbalances. This in turn, creates both benefits and problems for the areas people migrate from and migrate to. On the other hand it is economic implication that stimulates rural urban migration. The decision to migrate depends upon expected higher wages (real wage differential) and probability of successfully obtaining an urban job (Harris J.R and MP Todaro 1970). Hence migration of rural labourers towards urban areas is socially beneficial because as against the rural agricultural sector which is characterized by unemployment/under-employment, modern urban sector is characterized by better employment opportunities and wages are maintained at level much higher than the agricultural rural sector. In urban areas marginal product is not only positive, but also grows rapidly as a result of capital accumulation and technological progress (Lewis W Arthur 1954 and Fei, John CH and Gustav Ranis 1964).

Consequences can be observed in economic, social, cultural and demographic terms. Shift of labour from the regions where it is in disguised unemployment usually provides increase in the average and marginal productivity of labour as well as per capita consumption. Besides, some migrants overcome the barriers of communality and adopt positive attitude towards various social issues like inter caste marriage, increase in the marriage age of boys and girls. And also due to migration birth rates and fertility rates have reduced.

In Social Sciences, "in communities which are encapsulated in larger and social units, migration has always been one possible mechanism for coping with internal and external problems" (Kasdan, 1970:1). This becomes a reason for the people to move out from their place of residence to other places. The driving force for migration is "expulsion" and "attraction", expulsion resulting always from shortage of food and other socio-economic factors. (Haddan: 1912). Whereas attraction refers to better life opportunities at “other” places. The instinct to migrate can have various reasons. "Migration of people has been transmuted into mobility of individuals" (Park, 1950:349). The individual as the carrier of cultural baggage himself transports it into new cultural surroundings where he sorts out his experience and adapts himself in a new environment.

Migration in Developing Economies:

Traditionally, migration of labour in India is such that the change in residence can take place either on permanent or semi-permanent or on temporary basis (Premi, M.K. 1990). The development process of the city

provides people with new economic opportunities and other social benefits which lead to migration of workforce to urban areas. In an attempt to mitigate deprivation and make an adequate living for themselves, the people from poor households in rural areas keep moving and shifting their places of living to urban areas. Therefore, migration is due to pull factors like better employment, higher wages, better living conditions at destination etc., and push factors at home such as lack of employment, low wages, agricultural failure, debt, drought and other natural calamities, (de Haan; A, 1999) and sometimes forced migration.

Internal migration has become a common feature of the developing economies of the world. The mobility of people within national boundaries is very difficult to measure. Internal migration may be less visible but still it has a positive impact on development and poverty reduction. Internal migration can be a crucial livelihood strategy for many poor people and an important contributor of economic growth.

Relationship Between Diaspora and Economics:

The relationship between diasporas and economies is complex, diverse and as diaspora economies operate across many different scales and in many contexts. Diaspora economies, although they may often operate ‘under the radar’ of conventional economic flows of goods or capital, are both integral to, and parallel to, normative accounts of transnational global economies for instance while the ‘millionaire migrants’ from Hong Kong and Taiwan to Vancouver are obvious examples, street traders from Niger on the streets of Harlem (Coombe and Stoller 1994) or from Bangladesh and Senegal in Barcelona (Kothari 2008) are also examples of ‘migrant cosmopolitanisms’.

Conventionally it is believed that diaspora has been a source of larger remittance flows that increases the income of families /Households and becomes the source of development in the country of origin. The experts also feel that Diasporic transformations also become the source of skills and knowledge, and investment and business relations back in homeland. The later part of this presentation however refutes such established conventions. This may be in context of diaspora which fails to establish link.

Diaspora, a Greek word means ‘to scatter, spread, disperse, be separate’ was more widely used in the fifth century BC among classical philosophers, who on many occasions had used it with a negative connotation. Some of such philosophers used diaspora as a process of dispersion and decomposition, a dissolution into various parts without any further relation to each other. 1960 onwards the word diaspora started to be used to denote a national, cultural or religious groups living in foreign countries. This has been facilitated by the increasing transnational and universal migration. Diaspora formation can occur by accretion, as a result of gradual, routine migration, which may be a matter of choice or strategy on the part of households and communities. Alternatively, dispersal may be brought about by crisis and may involve violence, “catastrophe, expulsion or other forcible movement resulting from conflict or persecution...of compulsion and choice, so that diasporas may emerge as a result of both cumulative processes and crises (Van Hear 1998).

Diaspora is the experience of an individual, who is wrenched away from where she/he has belonged for years like a leaf separating from the tree. To understand the concept one has to go through the writings of various Diasporic writers who have been feeling nostalgic about the place of their belonging or origin or homeland. In *Imaginary Homelands* Salman Rushdie writes:

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we look back, we must also do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that ... we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands...of the mind. (13)

Diasporic communities are trapped in their identification with the homeland and host countries. Gabriel Sheffer in his work *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* reveals diasporic dilemma “for all those many millions of people worldwide who maintain special connections with their homelands while striving to feel at home abroad” (xiii). He also reveals how the diasporans retain memory of their homelands and culture along with related problems of such a kind of awareness and nostalgia. Diasporans struggle to assimilate and try to maintain balance between taking up a new culture and preserving their own culture.

During the second half of the twentieth century, many people have, being forced to leave their home countries owing to political pressures and persecution. Among countless examples, the Tibetans, Cubans and Armenians all have appeared prominently in the media (Lang 1989; Tweed 1997; Korom 1999). Indeed, Tibetans speak of their central Tibetan administration as a ‘government-in-exile’, while Edward Said underscores that: ‘Modern western culture [...] in large part [is] the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees. In the United States, academic, intellectual and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents’ (Said 2001: 173).

Migration of Kashmiri Pandits:

Kashmir has been, for the last more than thirty four years, under the clouds of armed violence (Though it has gone down at the present). The rise of militancy and selective killings of Kashmiri Pandits in late 1989, followed by a terror campaign launched through letters, posters, pamphlets and newspapers, and issuing death threats and warnings to Kashmiri Pandits to leave the Kashmir valley in a short and specified time, had given rise to feelings of fear and insecurity. Its immediate and major fallout has been the unprecedented en masse migration of nearly 4,50,000 Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir to Jammu and other parts of India and to different parts of the world. These enforced migrants were put up in temporary camps in three districts of Jammu division and also a camp was set up in New Delhi. Kashmiri Pandit migration has been the largest displacement of people in the history of independent India. {Though some agencies claimed that the number of exodus was less ranging from 30,000 to 1,00,000 but it is sure that very few Kashmiri Pandit families were left back in Kashmir }. The exodus resulted in the displacement of the people in search of new existence.

A socio-cultural set up, in which these communities had lived, for centuries, was dislocated by this conflict. This exodus was not so easy for Kashmiri Pandits who left behind moveable and immovable property. The new place, social life and economic opportunities drastically changed their life and surviving efforts. Nothing is the same anymore. Children have lost their innocence, women their freedom and men their security. There was a time when people of Kashmir, irrespective of their diverse faith lived in harmony for centuries nurturing *Kashmiriyat*, the composite culture of Kashmir. But the migration has come as a death blow to *Kashmiriyat* making it insignificant and meaningless.

Kashmiri Pandits have suffered immensely due to militancy. Considered to be the original inhabitants of Kashmir, they have been the worst sufferers and lost everything in a flicker of a moment-their roots, identity, homes, hearth, possessions, memories, childhood, cherished dreams, hopes for a better tomorrow and their sense of belonging. They have become refugees in their own land, forced to flee from violence, they are the worst sufferers today.

The pattern of migration depicts that 90 per cent migrants families moved from Kashmir valley from January 1990 to May 1990 with escalated rates during the month of March and April 1990, when bomb blasts , killings , looting of the property of minority community was at its peak (Report of Jammu and Kashmir , Centre for minority Studies,2006).

The migration took place from all parts of Kashmir valley covering both rural and urban areas. All types of occupational groups including agriculturists, farmers, traders, self-employed and government servants moved out. A significant proportion from rural areas, having agriculture as main source of income, migrated in the first phase during February –March, 1990. The migration was spontaneous without any pre-planning primarily due to insecurity bred by terror catching even the government unaware. Insecurity was the primary reason for migration.

The impact of conflict in Kashmir has devastated the socio-economic fiber of the state. Kashmiri Pandits since time immemorial had been seen as integral part of the Kashmiri society. In the past attempts were made by the vested interests to disturb this community and force them to leave the valley with onslaughts made on them from time to time on different fronts namely, economic, educational, business, social, employment, religious, cultural and even historical- directly or indirectly. But assimilation of this Kashmiri Pandit community was such that they have always remained an important part of *Kashmiriyat* ideology and contributed in the growth and development of the state of Jammu and Kashmir

In exile, under pressure of survival many Kashmiri migrants resorted to inter-caste and inter-community marriages. This further eroded the cultural ethos of the community. The Kashmiri community had always been known as a well knit and cohesive family structure which could not be maintained any more in exile. This led to discontinuity in preservation of their cultural identities. Though elders in the families overwhelming were not in favour of inter- caste or inter-religious marriages but many from the younger generation opted for it due to various

reasons. Still elders preferred to marry their daughters in non-Muslim castes. The breakdown of joint families or cohesive community group due to displacement has resulted in difficulties in match making arrangements in view of giving acceptability to sons and daughters-in-law from diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. The younger migrant generation still to some extent speaks Kashmiri at home or in their migrant groups but where one parent is from a different community or the households where grandparents are no longer alive Kashmiri language is hardly spoken. With regard to writing in case of second generation it is on the verge of extinction as it is not taught in schools outside the valley.

Kashmiri Pandits have fared rather well in education and employment outside Kashmir from where they were forcefully driven out. Many Kashmiri Pandits have over years become secure, established themselves quite successfully in other parts of the country and outside. However, they still interpret residing outside Kashmir as a miserable and unfavourable stay. Majority of them, first and second generation Kashmiri Pandits visit Kashmir as tourists or want to show their 'place of origin' to their children or grandchildren; and others want to return in a defined area earmarked by them as "Panun Kashmir". Still there are many who left valley in the nineties and to date have not looked back, somewhere the memory of the last days of mob shouting slogans asking them to vacate Kashmir has become fixed in memory and desists them.

Emotional Bonding with the Homeland:

Kashmiri Pandits perceptions and dreams of home and belonging are fuelled by memories of prior homes, (before exodus) by notions of where 'we' came from (Davidson 2008: 26; Leung 2008: 164). Memory, however, cannot be seen as direct, if partial, knowledge of past experiences. The act of remembering is always contextual, a continuous process of recalling, interpreting and reconstructing the past in terms of the present and in the light of an anticipated future and in this the early nineties when en masse exodus took place remains fixed in memory.

Their varied experiences encompass both relations to the 'homeland' and feelings of being home; both physical localities and metaphorical symbolizations of belonging (Ghorashi 2003; 189). Adding to the complexity are differences between first-generation migrants, who can relate their diasporic experiences to their own memories of a time before migration, and later generations for whom the 'new land' has never been new and whose memories of the 'homeland' are more fragmented or nil. Since later generations have not experienced migration and have no memories of the time before it (Brah 1996: 194). They are the heirs to diasporic memories that are told and retold, re-appropriated and reinterpreted in light of the here and now. In this context I quote an incident from Rahul Pandita's book of a migrant family residing in a metropolitan city. The parents of a young six year old girl were called to school where the teacher told them she was suffering from some psychological problem. When asked the teacher clarified she asked students to draw a picture of their house. The girl drew a picture of house on fire, when asked she told her my house is burnt. The parents realized no more talk of their burnt house in valley.

Among the Kashmiri migrants exists a dichotomy between ‘Kashmir’ as the object of longing [...] and hostland as the object of efforts to belong’ and adapt (Fortier 2000: 136). While this tension, which seemingly springs from the experience of ‘living here relating to a there’ (Bauman 2000; 324), can be viewed and is indeed often experienced as problematic, it is also part of what Clifford (1994;322) calls the ‘empowering paradox of diaspora’.

Development seen as economic growth has come to Kashmiri migrants over a period of time. Many skilled Kashmiri professionals, such as engineers, medical and IT graduates, have migrated to world over availing the opportunities provided by global labour markets.

Unlike immigrant diaspora or migration diaspora where migrants have a link with the home country or home state the Kashmiri diaspora is lacking such linkages. They consider themselves living in exile as they were forcefully thrown out of their own state where they had been a part and parcel of the culture and heritage and contributed in developing the Kashmiri ethos, society and kinship. When they moved out of the valley they tried to assimilate with the mainstream by coining a new “Kashmiri Hindu” identity.

As a result, in case of Kashmiri Pandits the outcomes of migration are integration and assimilation. Many of their customs and rituals got diluted and influenced by the rituals of local Hindus. The Kashmiri Pandits adapted to the mainstreams’ culture despite differences and difficulties. Most of the Kashmiri migrants over years have adopted the local culture of their areas by participating in the local fairs and festivals. Many Kashmiri migrant women these days keep “karva chauth” (a fast for the long life and well being of husband) fast which never existed in their own community rituals.

Conclusion:

To conclude migration, as studies indicate have and continue to contribute to the richness in diversity of cultures and ethnicities in new settlements. However, this has not happened in case of Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave their homeland under adverse circumstances and are addressed as “migrants” by the administration. On the other hand they call themselves “refugees.” Among these Kashmir Pandits who migrated, a majority of older generation due to displacement, non adjustment due to dress, language and food habits, nostalgia and heat of the plains died within a few years. The second generation who were young at the time of exodus experience multiple stresses including the loss of culture , religious rituals , and social support systems , adjustment to new climates, new cultures , new food habits , new language , new rituals and changes in identity and concept of self. What Salman Rushdie call “imaginary homelands” Kashmiri migrants recognize “They do not live in Kashmir , they carry Kashmir in their hearts.”

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