



## The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile: a study with special reference to short story Divine Justice

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### Abstract

Around three decades before Kashmiri Pandits ran away from murder to suicide for the seventh Exodus out of Kashmir. A community whose ancestors lived in the valley for thousands of years was once again uprooted, from its ancestral land. They suffered physically, emotionally, psychologically, and economically in exile. Loved ones were killed, Businesses destroyed, homes turned up into ashes in the hand of terrorism. Living in refugee camps in scorching heat intensified their suffering and triggered their nostalgic remembrances of the valley.

**Key Words:** Kashmiri Pandits, Exodus, Exile, Accommodation, education, Trauma, insomnia, nightmares.

**Objectives of Study:** The objectives of this research paper are to study the pain and trauma that Kashmiri Pandits suffered in exile. The effects of exile on the social-economical and emotional life of Kashmiri Pandits is studied with reference to Kishni K Pandita's Short Story 'Divine Justice' from her collection of short stories titled "The last Exodus" Published in the year 2018.

**Literature review:** A long Dream Home: SIDDHARTHA GIGOO AND VARAD SHARMA, Rooms in our hearts and other stories: K.L. CHOWDHRY, Why don't you convert: K.L. CHOWDHRY, Faith and Frenzy: K.L. CHOWDHRY, are the collections of short stories on life in exile of Kashmiri Pandits in exile, Some of the stories like "The Nadimarg Survivor" from "Room in our heart and other stories" is based on a real-life incident took place in the year 2003 when 24 Kashmiri Pandits were shot dead by terrorists in Nadimarg village of Pulwama district of Kashmir valley.

A bit of everything: SANDEEP RAINA, The Divine and the Destiny: MEENAKSHI RAINA, these two are novels based on the life in exile of Kashmiri Pandits these two novels deals with the deep psychological impact of exile on the individuals, as in "a bit of everything" the protagonist Rahul suffers from nightmares and flashbacks of the memories of Kashmir Valley.

### Introduction:

Since the beginning of human civilization, migration is one of the important phenomena in human history. Migration is of two types first one is in search of better living conditions, job opportunities, and other material factors, this kind of migration is immigration. Another type of migration that occurs is in the form of mass exodus because of the socio-political situations like civil war, communal conflicts as in the case Darfur Conflict in South Sudan. "The mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits was one such mass exodus that forced around 140,000 Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley of Kashmir in the late 1980s and early 1990s." <sup>1</sup>

The advent of terrorism and killing of prominent Hindus like "Tikal al Taploo on 14 September 1989, later on, 4 November 1989 Justice Neelkanth Ganjoo was shot dead"<sup>2</sup>, who gave "death sentence to Maqbool Bhatt"<sup>3</sup> a terrorist of JKLF (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front) and a Journalist Lawyer Premnath Bhat was also shot dead on December 27, 1989. These killings, constant death threats, and forced extortion of money created a sense of fear among the minority Hindus and the sudden deterioration in law and order intensified their fears. "Some newspapers published from Srinagar such as *Aftab*"<sup>4</sup> of January 4, 1990, carried warnings from militant outfits virtually ordering the Pandits to leave the valley, similar warnings were reprinted in another the Urdu *Alsafa*"<sup>5</sup> of 14 April 1990." It was the time when friends turned foe, colleagues does not respond, neighbors turned their eyes off and those who were willing to help were stayed away because of fear of terrorists. The final blow to the Pandit insecurities came the night of 19 January 1990 when massive crowds assembled in mosques and anti-India and anti-Pandit sloganeering was chanted, such as "*Ralive, Tsaliv ya Galive*"<sup>6</sup> Which means either convert to Islam leave the land or die. another slogan *Kashir banawon Pakistan, Bataw varaie, Batneiw saan*"<sup>7</sup> which means (We will turn Kashmir into Pakistan along with Kashmiri Pandit women but without their menfolk) The loudspeakers were demanding the people to come out of their homes draw the infidels out of Kashmir. Along with this sloganeering Pandit Homes were attacked. All these created a panic in the Pandit community forced the Kashmiri Pandits to move out of the valley.

The Short story "Divine Justice" is one such story from the book "The Last Exodus"<sup>8</sup> by Kishni Kumari Pandita. The story is a miniature depiction of the socio-political conditions which compelled the Hindu community to move out of the Kashmir valley. The author provides the description of how Rakeshe's family suffered in exile which was the story of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits living in exile. Migration comes with its pain even though it brings a sense of security at the same time it brings in other types of insecurities and challenges. The only thing is that people escape from murder to suicide in the case of Kashmiri Pandits it was escaping a death valley to a living hell.

The first and the foremost thing that forced migration brings is the disruptions of the pace, goals, and plans of an individual and families. 'Rakesh's sister was about to marry when his father was shot dead on the acquisition of being a government informer, which compelled them to leave the valley out of security concerns. Bilal's backstabbing and snatching away all their valuables made things worse and delayed Rakeshe's sister's marriage to a whole for five years since they have, to start from scratch for everything.'<sup>9</sup>

One of the first challenges that come with mass migration is from the environmental conditions that changes following the change in geographical conditions in case of Kashmiri Pandits first it was the time of winter season in the month of January, the time in which they were forced to move out of the valley, Another 'natural force that struck Kashmiri Pandits was the scorching heat'<sup>10</sup> in regions of Jammu and Delhi where the majority of Kashmiri Pandits lived in exile. The people who were used to pleasant summers and enjoying their winters in their homes were now living in tents.

Education is gravely disrupted in a mass exodus. After the forced migration Kashmiri Pandit children faced a similar fate they were unable to continue their education. *'There was reluctance on the part of government and Kashmiri Pandit children had to study in camp colleges and schools.'*<sup>11</sup>

The following lines depict the difficulty faced by the Pandit community for getting into higher education institutes in Kashmir as there was no reservation in education in education institutions given to them as a state minority. *"You know how hard our children had to fight for the seats in professional colleges in Srinagar. Now even those seats were not there... It must be the only minority community for which there was no reservation. In Kashmir we were in minority no one listened to us."*<sup>12</sup>

There was a lack of political support for the cause of education of Kashmiri Pandit children 'Only a few political parties and state governments looked into the problems of Kashmiri Pandits. The Maharashtra government of the Shiv Sena party started a quota system for Kashmiri Pandits in Professional education institutions.'<sup>13</sup> The following lines indirectly refer to the role of 'Balasheb Thakrey' in the education of dislocated Kashmiri Pandits. *We are eternally indebted to some eminent people from Maharashtra who insisted on keeping some seats reserved for our community. Only after that some more states Followed.*<sup>14</sup>

Another challenge that mass exodus brings in is accommodation. In the case of the 1990's exodus of Kashmiri Pandits the areas of Jammu where the majority of Pandits migrated, was not ready for such a large influx of people within months. As a result, rents shoot up everything that can accommodate people was converted into a room-like structure and were up for rent. In the story "Divine Justice" Rakesh and his family faced a similar problem they rented a cowshed, the following lines from the story show us the conditions of accommodation in the Jammu region.

*"Things were bad in Jammu as far as accommodation was concerned. Cowsheds, garages, stable everything. Somebody showed us a room which must have been a cowshed. It still stank of cow dung there was nothing but four walls and a tin roof."*<sup>15</sup>

The starting of life all over again was another important concern for the people in the exodus, especially the economic activity. The Protagonist of the story "Divine Justice" too faced the same problem he was an engineer and his father was a government official who was killed by militants on the accusation of being an informer. The family of Rakesh started from making paper bags, later they moved to the business of bookbinding which they later with their hard work developed into a cottage industry of woollens, cotton, and Silk. The Following lines referred to the story that shows the economic hardships that a person in exile faces. *"We will start making paper bags."*<sup>16</sup> It was Rakeshe's mother who came up with this idea. His mother encouraged him to start life all over again. 'Humiliating attitude of bureaucracy added to the suffering of Kashmiri Pandits in exile. Because government relief and rehabilitation process was in the hands of same bureaucracy which was biased against Kashmiri Pandits.'<sup>17</sup> 'Rakesh's uncle while standing in a queue for the relief distributed by Government, was humiliated by one of the clerks, who might have earned less than what his uncle used to pay his salesman.'<sup>18</sup>

One of the important themes discussed in the story "Divine Justice" is the Karma Philosophy of Hinduism. It is the Karma of Rakesh and his family that they started their life all over again, from scratch by making paper bags to owning a cottage industry with several people employed under them. While in the case of Bilal, who treacherously backstabbed Rakesh and snatched all their valuables. He lost his mother and daughter in a fire incident. His home caught fire from a neighbouring Pandit house torched by unsavoury elements. Bilal's home burnt to ashes, and some of his belongings were taken by people as he did to Rakesh. Mentally strong people become strong winds that help others in sailing through difficult waters in this story; Rakesh's mother is that strong wind. When Bilal treacherously looted everything valuable out of them. She was the one who consoled and encouraged the whole family. The following lines from "Divine Justice" depict how mentally strong Rakesh's mother was in difficult times.

*"I slumped on the road and cried shamelessly. My father was gone and all our valuables were gone, and we were left literally and metaphorically on the road ....Suddenly my mother stood up in front of me. Her eyes were blazing. I was surprised to see her like that. She was totally transformed." "Get up she said. Don't behave like a sissy. Be a man that you are." Thank god that we are alive. Thank your friend that he spared our lives and nobody would have known about it..."*<sup>19</sup>

Rakesh's mother was the one who came up with the idea of making paper bags and asserted Rakesh to bite the bullet and sell them while handing over the paper bags to Rakesh, she said. *I don't know about your engineering skills, but that is not what we require now. Right now I want to see how good a salesman you are.*<sup>20</sup>

The incident of losing his mother and his four-year-old daughter, and the valuable belongings that he looted from Rakesh, in a fire that his house caught from a neighbouring Pandit home torched by miscreant element. This incident created a sense of guilt in Bilal for what he has

done to the family of his friend Rakesh. His friend Rakesh's father was killed by militants in front of him at the gate of his home when similar elements were responsible for the death of his daughter and he lost everything he had, and then he was able to understand the pain that Rakesh has gone through. This incident and his guilt resulted in traumatizing Bilal which resulted in nightmares. Another important theme that is depicted in this story is the trauma that an individual goes through after experiencing a deeply disturbing or distressing situation. Cambridge online dictionary defines trauma as:

*'severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience, or a case of such shock happening.'*<sup>21</sup> Also, Merriam Webster online dictionary define trauma as: *'a disordered psychic or behavioural state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.'*<sup>22</sup>

Trauma in some of the cases leads to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). 'PTSD is a physical and emotional response to the reminders of traumatic events. PTSD symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, and extreme physical and emotional reactions when reminded of the events. Emotional reactions like fear of harm, guilt, numbness.'<sup>23</sup>

Bilal was suffering from insomnia after losing his daughter and mother in the fire incident. This loss also reminded him of what has happened to Rakesh's father and the treachery he has done to him at the time of distress. This created a sense of guilt in him then, he thought of reliving his pain by apologizing to Rakesh for the treachery he had done. He tells his tragic story to Rakesh which gives him a bit of relief from the pain he was suffering. When Rakesh forgave him thought his expression of pain would help him release his pain he said. *'Today I feel lighter and most probably will sleep better after a long time.'*<sup>24</sup>

Bilal's traumatizing situation continued even after Rakesh forgave him. His insomnia gave no relief to him. He went to Delhi to meet Rakesh. His traumatic situation was so grave that he was not able to sleep for a week. He was having nightmares. According to the Oxford, online dictionary nightmares are frightening or unpleasant dreams. *My mother and my daughter are haunting me Every time I close my eyes, they are there. Their half burnt bodies are shrouded in white sheets. I haven't been able to sleep for about a week*<sup>25</sup>

In Bilal's nightmares, his mother and daughter were, calling him a thief for the treachery he has done to Rakesh. *"What surprises me is that my mother never knew what I had done. I had told her that you had given your expensive things to me for safe keeping. My daughter was not even born when that incident took place. How in God's name do they know what I had done?"*<sup>26</sup> The preceding lines indicate that the nightmares that Bilal was experiencing were because of his guilt for what he has done to Rakesh. These lines indicate that Bilal was suffering from trauma after losing his daughter and mother which, resulted in his mid-mixing up the facts and resulted in nightmares that he was experiencing.

The final part of the story deals with another traumatic nightmare of Bilal. 'In this nightmare, Bilal met personified Vitasta (Jhelum river) covered in a white sheet, was crying on its bank for her children (Kashmiri Pandits) her entire body was full of scars, here scar is a symbol of the atrocities inflicted upon Kashmiri Pandits. Vitasta said that she was in great pain and bleeding, each time when a wound was about to heal some more were inflicted on; symbolizing the continuous atrocities inflicted on the Pandit community.

Jhelum asks Bilal to do something about the pain that the Pandit community was facing in exile, she said *"They are suffering and so am I. Bring them back. Why don't you do something about it?"*<sup>27</sup> The following lines depict the outburst of Jhelum because of her pain and alludes to the 'flooding of Jhelum River in the year 2014.'<sup>28</sup> *"There will come a time when I will not be able to take it anymore. I will break my banks in go berserk. The tears of my children will become a deluge. The entire land will be submerged that character will cause many disasters perhaps you will wake up then."* The displacement not only puts the geographical, social, and cultural existence of the individual or the community at stake but also disturbs the psychological balance of an individual. The story points to the conclusion that human by nature is not violent, he also possesses compassion, kindness, tolerance, brotherhood, but influenced by narrow selfish motives and radical elements, he turns selfish, violent, and becomes chaotic and tyrannical but these circumstances cannot keep him satisfied for long like Bilal.

## Conclusion:

The mass exodus of Kashmiri pandits is the result of the rising hood of terrorism, violence, and failure of state machinery in maintaining the law and order situations. The constant killing of prominent Kashmiri Pandits creates a sense of fear among the Kashmiri Pandits. The final blow to all insecurities of Kashmiri Pandits came with the involvement of the local population in anti-India and anti-Pandit sloganeering. All these factors resulted in the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits living in exile in the areas of Jammu and the rest of India. A sudden loss of everything also resulted in the traumatization of Kashmiri Pandits. They suffered from PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder). In some of the cases, the perpetrators too suffered from PTSD, the character of Bilal and the intense sense of guilt he was suffering from is an example of one such case. The outburst of personified Jhelum is a metaphorical depiction of the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir floods Rakesh is mother is the manifestation of goddess Durga that has family out of difficulties in Exile.

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