



## **MIGRATION OF KASHMIRI PANDITS AND THE QUESTION OF BELONGINGNESS**

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### **Abstract:**

The proposed research paper is a study of Kashmiri Pandits' statelessness in the world's largest democracy. From the very beginning of its great civilization, India assimilates people from different walks of life in itself. Today the modern world is facing many problems, the problem of ethnicity-based migration is becoming a compelling phenomenon around the world. The problem of forced migration is very compelling and challenging for both the developing and developed nations. During the 1990s India witnessed a secessionist fury of communalism in the Kashmir valley when more than half million a Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the valley by Islamist fundamentalists. It's estimated that four to six lakhs of Kashmiri Pandits left the valley during the insurgence of communal frenzy in the valley. Their houses were looted women were raped and hundreds of them were murdered in broad daylight. This paper is an insight to understand the mental and physical agonies that Kashmiri Pandits suffered in their homeland as well as in their opted land in different parts of the world.

**Keywords:** Statelessness, assimilate, secessionist, Islamist, fundamentalist.

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## **Introduction:**

Forceful migration of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland created a stateless situation for these people who are living as refugees in hundreds of refugee camps established in Jammu and other regions of India with abject humanitarian conditions. Their forceful migration from the valley is a modern-day tragedy in a secular country like India. In this research, an attempt to locate them in postcolonial literary discourse and the question of their belongingness is discussed. All the aspects of their life and life stories are explored. Humanitarians and researchers are extensively working around the forced exodus of the people. But the other facet of the situation of study is to analyze the issue from the perspective of migrants themselves who have undergone the ordeals of forced migration. In the words of Eliot:

Every country is home to one man and exile to another.

(Eliot, "To the Indians who Died in Africa")

The exile from the homeland, anticipated or unanticipated, definitely posits many questions before these people: survival, safety, security, nationality, opportunity, identity, and belongingness. At a time when the situation was very difficult in the valley and a secular state is only concerned about the majoritarian community in the valley, it's very important to know and explore the suffering that a minority within a state is suffering from. Being a part of a diverse country like India where the identity of an individual is shaped by his or her culture, which in itself is a total of our beliefs, traditions, values, laws, and preferences, it's just to make it adequate for every individual from majority to the minority to get itself manifested in every discourse of life whether it is academic, political and societal. This manifestation of a marginal community in the valley is tried to explore with the help of the texts written by Kashmiri Pandits. This research paper offers to analyze the life stories of suffering, identity crisis, and endangered existence. It also offers a viewpoint toward those whose status is precarious, liminal, marginal, and seemingly, non-existent. In this vein, the present study offers to analyze the plight of Kashmiri Pandits in different parts of India, who were forced to leave their homeland, and now are living in a state of uncertainty.

After thirty-two years of exile, Kashmiri Pandits couldn't return to their homeland. The stories of their persecution, psychological traumas, and struggle remain untold for decades. The plight and unheard stories of Kashmiri Pandits in India, who after internal displacement, suffer identity crises in their own country, and the texts by Kashmiri Pandits are pregnant with painful shared histories: *Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* by Siddhartha Giggo, *22 Years: A Kashmir Story* by Bill K Koul, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul *The Odyssey of Kashmiri Pandits* by M. L. Bhatt and *The Lost Shangri La* by Somnath Sapru. There is an inherent pain, in the literary creations of these Kashmiri writers, of the unimaginable angst that these people are suffering in their adopted lands. The inherent loss of identity and culture is visualized by these writers in their works. For a better understanding of the migration crises, its multiple levels, and the implications of the mass exodus of a particular community, it's important to study the life experiences of Kashmiris penned down by the Kashmiri writers. The numerous exile-inspired dimensions are discussed and explored in the works of these Kashmiri Pandits. To delve deep into

the meaning of homecoming and self-fulfillment, by overcoming the odds and difficulties, the hope for the lost dreamland, invest a serious engagement in the chosen texts.

If we analyze the theoretical perspective of migration and exile narratives then the works of postcolonial literary critic Edward Said becomes a key runner in examining the pain and sufferings of exiled communities. The theme of exile is central in Said's critical and scholarly works. Exile is a political condition that is painful and unjust in the case of the Palestinian people who, according to Said, lived in a terrible state as exiles in their native land. Said's memoir, *Out of Place* (1999), talks about the autobiographical roots of his interest in exile both as a political condition and a critical concept. He explored the literary representations of exiled people in his works due to which a cosmopolitan discourse aroused around the conditions of displaced and migrated Palestinian people in whole over the world. Such consciousness is required by analyzing the literary creations of Kashmiri Pandits. All such themes are the central concept of the present paper.

Siddhartha Gigoo a migrant Kashmiri Pandit writer explores the pain of dislocation in his *A Fistful of Earth and other Stories* addressing the pain and feeling of belongingness to his homeland. Set in a land ravaged by political upheaval and war, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* depicts a surreal world where people find themselves trapped in circumstances over which they have no control. In a series of bizarre incidents, a researcher is baffled by the secrets he unearths about a dying clan; a monk encounters an enigmatic stranger at a railway station; a municipal commissioner suddenly goes mad for no discernible reason; a medical intern discovers a shocking secret after a patient's death; two chess-loving inmates are unable to escape from prison long after it has ceased to be one, and a refugee undertakes an odyssey through time and memory in search of his lost friend. Written in elegant and lyrical prose, and traversing a range of themes, these stories will transport you to a world of conflict and persecution, of banishment and exile, of loneliness and despair, but where still glimmers a hope for redemption.

Another work by Sudha Koul addresses the issue of migration and nostalgia of Kashmiri People that they suffered during and after the exodus of their community from the valley of Kashmir. *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* published in 2002 is an elegiac memoir shows that how the beautiful vale of Kashmir was once the Heaven on earth. Her book is the first memoir of a woman and her traumatic experiences in the valley of Kashmir. She skillfully explored the world of four generations of women and their lives through her memoir. The pain of the religious and political inferno which caused so much trouble in the valley was beautifully addressed by her in this book.

Somnath Sapru a journalist and Historian by profession has written a beautiful book *The Lost Sangri La glimpses of Ancient Kashmir* (2001) about the enchanting beauty, history, and cultural past of Kashmir. Sapru in his book discusses the lost glorious past of Kashmir which once was the center of Sanskrit learning. Its achievements as a land of literature, language, dance, drama, and philosophy are highlighted by the author of the book. The author adheres to the land which belongs to Kalhana, Abhinavgupta, Lalitaditya, Pingala, and Adi Shankracharya. The lost history and identity of the Kashmiri people and the quest for his belongingness are explored by the author in the book.

*22 Years: A Kashmir Story* by Bill. K. Kaul is a life writing of a Kashmiri Pandit who suffered displacement from the Kashmir in the 1990s. In the book, the writer tries to knit down his lost childhood memories of his lost home in Kashmir. The book is full of memories with the return of all his fears that made him flee Srinagar in 1989. The author not only breaks his vow of returning to Kashmir but also falls in love with his homeland of Kashmir. There is a detailed description of beautiful locations of Kashmir where once he and his family spent precious time of their life.

*The Odyssey of Kashmiri Pandits: Destination-Homeland-Panun Kashmir* by M. L Bhatt is another work of a Kashmiri Pandit who faced exile and persecution from his motherland because of turmoil that erupted in 1990 in the Kashmir valley. The book presents the pathetic life of Kashmiri Pandits and their quest for identity in their adopted lands. The book explores the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the situation after that. In his work the author penned down traumas of the original inhabitants of the Kashmir valley the Kashmiri Pandits who are scattered all over the world, are now haunted by the nostalgia of Paradise.

The current analysis also offers to compare the academic and cultural characteristics of the ways through which forced migration and exiles are represented by scholars throughout their works as well as the impact of migration upon their psyche and their identity is also explored. Through this study, the status of those minority communities across Kashmir, who were once displaced forcibly from their homes, shattered, uprooted, and isolated is analyzed. All of These people are now living in a hope of resettlement and long for having a state of normalcy in the valley, through which normalcy can take place in their disturbed lives. After a quarter of a century of living in exile, Kashmiri Pandits can't return to their homeland. The stories of their persecution, psychological traumas, and struggle remain untold for decades. Focus is also required to put some glimpses on the plight and unheard stories of Kashmiri Pandits in India, who after being internally displaced, are suffering from an identity crisis in their own country. Literature on migration and refugees can be analyzed through different literary approaches. In contemporary literary discourse, cultural theorists are also exploring in their studies the role of culture and identities in shaping the consciousness of migrated people on worldwide platforms. Their consciousness and traumas were represented in the writings of Thomas Mann, Salman Rushdie, Benedict Anderson, Stuart Hall, Spivak, Matthew Arnold, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Taslima Nasrin, and who provides an alternative approach to understanding the features of migration.

There are various literary creations of Kashmiri Pandits in the form of fiction and non-fictional in which they have penned down the miseries of exile that they have suffered at the hands of their people. These texts written by Kashmiri Pandits and all their characters and protagonists are pregnant with painful shared histories which are violent and communal. Few of the texts written by them in exile like *Garden of Solitude* by Siddhartha Giggo, *A Long Dream of Home* edited by Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma, *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* by Siddhartha Gigoo, *22 Years A Kashmir Story* by Bill K Koul and *The Odyssey of Kashmiri Pandits* by Dr. M. L. Bhatt are full of all those memories in which they manifest their internal and external uprootedness and nostalgia of their lost homes and identity of Kashmir valley. The proposed research paper also attempts to analyze the inherent correlations between the stories provided by Kashmiri writers

through their literary creations, an attempt has been made to analyze the unimaginable sorrow that these people are suffering in their adopted lands. That inherent loss of their identity and culture has been visualized by these writers in their works. To a greater understanding of the refugee crisis and its multi-levels in the Indian state and the implications that are there to solve this mass level of an exodus of a particular community, it's important to study the life experiences of Kashmiri writers who are personally suffering these identity crises due to their culture and identity. Different culturally inspired dimensions are discussed and explored in the above-mentioned texts, these books are chosen that narrate the tales of people living as refugees or migrated communities in different Indian states. And to know more about the meaning of a sense of homecoming and hope of self-fulfillment, by overcoming all types of odds and difficulties by hoping for a dreamland and achieving it, these texts are chosen.

The Indian concept of humanism believes in mutual respect for every human being without discriminating against them in the name of caste, creed, and religion. Indian philosophy is known for its assimilation of thoughts and ideas, and the same philosophy become the ideal way of life for every citizen of India through the development of modern civilization. People from unknown places came here and adopted this land as their motherland and become a part of this great cultural heritage. The ideas of cosmopolitanism, universalism, and humanitarianism are becoming new era benchmarks for every country in the world. But if we see the modern-day migration problem of different states around the world then all these approaches seem vague in providing a better lifestyle for the people who got persecuted because of their ethnicity and cultural identity. The harsh reality of the modern world is that migrated people got discriminated against and disgraced in their adopted lands. Their exclusion from the mainstream of society needs to be explored.

Contemporary literature in India and the world is shaped by the issues of migration and refugee crisis. It's worth considering that modern cultural, political and social discourse in India is largely dominated by the issue of Kashmiri Pandits and their exclusion from the valley. Transnational migration and displacement also provided a platform for this issue to be discussed on world forums. Discussion and discourse in this regard are ultimately providing a space for Indian literature to get noticed and Indian writers are getting acclaim for their true representation of these marginalized masses. Indian novelists like Naipaul and Rushdie have discussed these agonies of persecution and displacement in their works. *India a Wounded Civilization* by Naipaul and *Imaginary Homelands* by Rushdie provide thoroughly explored literary insights into the lives of migrated people. Thematically and scholarly analysis of migration and its historical roots is also discussed in *Kashmir Behind the Vale* by M. J Akbar. Pain and suffering by Kashmiri Pandits are elaborated in *Our Moon Had Blood Clots* by Rahul Pandita. It's worth considering that migration and displacement have profoundly shaped world literature, both thematically and practically. It investigates the texts produced in exile, the issues of alienation, and the notion of cultural and conceptual alienation in literature. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi K. Bhabha talks about inherent authoritative cultural values that give authoritative power to one group over the other. Imaginative homelands, race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and texts that piercingly and poignantly

dramatize the varied experiences of homelands and quest for identity in literature of migration are the front runner in Indian academic investigations in Indian educational institutions.

From last more than two decades, authors, poets, and researchers examine in literary texts, the agony of displacement of Kashmiri Pandits, what it means to be uprooted, willingly or by force, from one's homeland as well as the problems of settlement and resettlement in an entirely new environment. This tradition has an influential social and cultural bearing. M. J. Akbar in his book *Kashmir Behind the Vale* mentions the agony and vacuum that migration creates in the Kashmir valley:

"The almighty tends to have a sardonic sense of humor. He creates Paradise, and then let's slip a snake in the apple orchard. The curse of every earthly Paradise is pain" (Akbar 6).

The study of migration and forced migration has produced an extensive body of scholarly literature in the last few decades. Regular journals are publishing articles and research papers related to forced migration. It is important to know that the factors that triggered forced migration were more severe, intense, and compelling than those of voluntary or involuntary migrants who chose to migrate in a way for betterment. They have experienced escapades on the verge of losing their life as well as that of the whole community or race. Forced migration in the valley changed the whole minority discourse in India. Human rights violations and its definitions of humanitarianism got changed after the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. All these inquiries are needed to be checked and analyzed to find answers to all these questions which cause a great tragedy in modern India after the independence.

In this research paper, an attempt has been made to explore the experiences through scholarly, literary, and artistic expressions of Kashmiri Pandits living in exile in different parts of India and the world. It also tries to explore the individual stories of victims and their efforts to fight for their survival. This uprooting of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland to unknown places is fully analyzed and expressed by the Kashmiri writers. Forced migration is a highly multidisciplinary field of study. Numerous fields of study influence the whole analogy of forced migration. Sociology, Economics, Science, History, International Relations, Law, and Politics as well as other wide variety of research including minority studies, conflict studies, ethnic relations, and development studies, etc. Studying the forced migrants from any perspective requires analyzing the above-mentioned fields also which owns the effect of research to be at the risk of producing a scattered effect. Much of the literature on displaced Kashmiri Pandits is available but that is full of diverse perspectives. Historical perspectives, political analysis, and social orientation dominated this whole study of migrant literature. Much of the literature available on Kashmiri Pandits is based on the assumptions of politics, law, and international policies to deal with the situation. A one-sided picture of the whole exodus is produced by many writers from Kashmir and other parts of the world also. So the point of view of Kashmiri Pandits remains an area of study. Analysis of this aspect can provide an alternative narrative, and a true agony of homelessness can be shared with the people of the world among whom these people are struggling to get assimilated by maintaining their cultural identity untacked. There are approaches and theories of Migration in the fields of Social Science

only to study the issue on empirical grounds which also doesn't provide a base for the present research. In English literature and literary theory, Migration theory is considered an evolving branch of Postcolonial theory but Forced migration may show even greater implications. There is a lack of availability of comparative and comprehensive research in the field of forced migrants through the point of view of Kashmiri Pandits as writers and exponents of their real miseries.

Due to mixed approaches and methodologies used by the different researchers from different fields and also with different purposes and perspectives in their analysis, the whole migration literature of Kashmiri Pandits has become highly complex. And still, there has not evolved a framework or theoretical expression that gained a commonly accepted consensus in the academia. The chosen texts try to show a link among the victims of Forced migrants and a comparative analysis of their plight, issues, and challenges. It attempts to show their hopes and expectations, their fears and predicaments, and yearning for home and belongingness to highlight the issue of identity and cultural crisis. This is to signify that their problems are not temporary and these should be viewed from human grounds and solutions should be found on an urgent basis. It also hopes to propagate more research to find answers and solutions to the questions that this issue raises just to help the migrants in finding their rightful place and belongingness. The proposed paper is an attempt to provide a space for the Kashmiri Pandits in contemporary discourse, it's not just to present the individual memoirs with a tale of unending agony and nerve-wracking traumas but to have a greater understanding of Kashmiri Pandits' endurance in pain, resilience, an instinct of survival, behavioral patterns, the process of getting heard, fears, uncertainties of life and quest for fulfillment through getting their appropriate place in world's largest democracy.

### **Conclusion:**

After three decades of forceful migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley, the basic questions are still there as to who was responsible for the secessionist violence in the valley during the period of 1990s, who were the victims, and who were displaced from their motherland. Successive governments came into power throughout this period but none paid heed to the reconciliation. The complicated situation within the valley and agenda politics by the regional political parties within the Kashmir valley has led to the subjugation and marginalization of Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley and outside the valley. Now It's time to provide a healing touch to all the Kashmiri Pandits and accept their homelessness as a fundamental reason for the Kashmir crisis. Distance between both communities is not going to help anyone. Kashmiriyat and mixed historical-cultural bonds between both communities need a new shape and revival for the cohesive existence of both communities. The question of Kashmiri Pandits' identity and belongingness needs to be addressed and discussed on different platforms.

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