

Kashmir Pandits: Migration, Homelessness and Resettlement

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Abstract

It was in January 1990, that the Kashmir Pandits were forced to leave the valley. Militancy in Kashmir had acquired a visceral form, and the valley was completely under its grip. The sickening frenzy over exclusivity and the doctrine of isolationism took the valley in the direction of a complete collapse. There were many stakeholders who acted as cohorts to intensify the wave of militancy. The militants directed their untamed energy against the Pandits, who belonged to a contrary socio-cultural axis, to establish a cultural monolith, characterized by exclusivity and oneness. The ethos of Kashmiriyat regressed into an empty signifier. The Kashmir Pandits became homeless in their home country and were subjected to unspeakable pain, trauma, and dislocation. This displacement embodied serious consequences which dislodged their right to live a normal life with security, rootedness and dignity. This paper, therefore, discusses the forced migration of Kashmir Pandits and their identity as refugees, their homelessness and the scope of return to their home in Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmir Pandits; Militancy; Migration; Homelessness; Resettlement

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, Kashmir Pandits have been living in India as a fragmented and dislocated community. They are living as refugees in their own country, which is secular, democratic and multicultural. Even after thirty years, they are still uncertain of their return to their actual home, where their ancestry and cultural root is located. Since Article 370 and 35A of the Constitution, antique from the Nehruvian period and legal documents that granted exclusivity status to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), have been abrogated by the BJP government, there seems some hope of resettlement giving the Pandits immunity of optimism for the return to their home. It was towards the fag end of 1989 and in the very early part of 1990, the Kashmir Pandits came under the grip of militants in the

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valley (Jagmohan, 2019). Kashmir has nevertheless been one of the most contentious regions in South Asia. India and Pakistan have been at loggerheads over Kashmir since the Partition in 1947.

History at a Glance

Going back into history, Kashmir started moving in the direction of becoming a Muslim majority state as Shah Mir (1339-42) ascended the throne of Kashmir through cunning and conspiracy after the death of the last Hindu King Udyanadeva in 1338 (Jagmohan, 2019; Khan, 1953). After Shah Mir, the Mughals, the Afghans, etc., occupied the throne of Kashmir and made Kashmir a significant centre for propagating Islam and conversion (Madan, 2008). The Hindu and Buddhist legacy that existed for centuries was bottlenecked (Jagmohan, 2019). The iconic Kashmir narrative of inclusivity was replaced by a narrative of exclusivity and oneness. This socio-cultural tendency restructured the existing ethos of collectivism and a shared future. To ensure a complete Islamic takeover of the valley, forceful conversion was adopted as a methodology for achieving the goal of cultural unilateralism (Jagmohan, 2019). The unchallenged consistency of such practices led to the decrease in the demography of the Pandits in the valley. The exodus began. The Sultans (1339-1555), Chaks (1555-1586), the Moguls (1586-1752) and the Afghans (1752-1819) ruled Kashmir before the Sikh rule started there, and could change the cultural topography of Kashmir (Razdan, 2016). Barring a few exceptions, the likes of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470), though very few in number, the Islamic rulers largely contemplated proselytising the valley.

The Islamic missionary drives, under the auspices of the reigning Sultans and the imperatives of cultural exclusivity, suffocated the non-Muslims. The Pandits of the valley who were the custodians of the *Sanatana* tradition were categorically targeted as they strived for erecting cultural embankment against the perfidy and promotion of proselytization. Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) was particularly instrumental in the early years of Islamic rule to institute systematic iconoclasm. He pioneered the policy of Islamic superiority and one identity. Subsequently, other sultans began to follow in his footsteps to impose monotheism upon a people who cultivated pluralism from the time unknown. Looking at the gravity of

atrocities unleashed upon the Pandits by Aurangzeb's governor for Kashmir affairs Iftikar Khan (1671-75), the Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur was requested to extend his help to the Kashmir Pandits. Guru Teg Bahadur's challenge to Aurangzeb and his death in the latter's hand owing to his obstinate defiance against Aurangzeb's determinacy to convert led Ranjit Singh to occupy Kashmir (Jagmohan, 2019; Kohli, 1992; Singh, 1967, Fenech, 1997). The Sikh rule lasted only 27 years (1819-46) in Kashmir and it was followed by the Hindu Dogras (Mangrio, 2012).

The Dogra rule in Kashmir was primarily an Anglo-Dogra collaboration (Rai, 2012). The British sold Kashmir to the Dogra king Gulab Singh in 1846 through the treaty of Amritsar with the payment of Rs. 75 lakhs (Bose S. , 2003). The Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra rule under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah (National Conference) on May 10, 1946, complicated the matter when India was struggling harder to obtain its freedom from British rule. Anand (Anand, 2001) writes: "The Quit India Movement in British India had its echo in Kashmir where the National Conference had launched 'Quit India Movement' with renewed vigour from 28.6.1938 demanding that Maharaja Hari Singh should quit the State bag and baggage and leave the people of the State to decide their own future by having a responsible government. It gained more momentum in 1944".

Therefore, the Quit Kashmir programme was not just a 1946 political decision. It developed in consonance with the emergence of the National Conference as a political organisation in 1932. Abdullah's Quit Kashmir experiment was not merely his reaction against Dogra's administrative incompetency, it was in sync with the Muslim League's demand for the Partition as Kashmir was a predominantly Muslim majority state. On the question of Dogra misrule, the Dogras had toothless sovereignty in Kashmir. They acted according to the British tutelage. They just occupied the decorated office of being the king like the kings in colonial India. To accuse the Dogras singularly as despots were presumably to peddle the manufactured narrative of Sheikh Abdullah. The Dogra rule in Kashmir came to an end with Raja Hari Singh signing the Instrument of Accession to join the Union of India in October 1947.

Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir immediately after the Partition in 1947 made the situation extremely dire by engaging the tribesmen comprising Afridis, Mahsuds and the Pakistan regulars to go on a rampage in Kashmir (Chandrashekhar, 2018; Jagmohan, 2019; Anand, 2001). Hari Singh's indecision made Kashmir bleed in the savage unleashing of violence, barbarity, and loot. His procrastination made Pakistan acquire half of Kashmir which is now called Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Even after the Instrument of Accession was signed by Hari Singh, the matter was taken to the United Nations (UN) by Jawaharlal Nehru on January 01, 1948. Contrary to his expectation, Nehru had nothing to gain by taking the case to the UN. Of this act of misadventure, India had to lose much of its autonomy in Kashmir.

The new Kashmir was born on 26 October 1947 although a part of it remained under Pakistan even after the Instrument of Accession was signed by Hari Singh to merge into the union of India under the intervention of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). Towards its self-determination and autonomy, legal arrangements and special provisions were made. But the dignity and human rights of the Kashmir Pandits never secured a place in the Kashmir discourse. Pakistan through the Kashmiri leaders and by playing the card of religion and Islamic brotherhood constantly kept the atmosphere tense in the valley. The Abdullahs, Muftis, Geelanis, Hurriyat, etc., under the tutelage of Pakistan, complicated the matter. Militancy, terrorism and separatism, therefore, got intensified in Kashmir. The resurgence of cultural homogeneity under the impact of a consortium combining Pakistan, militants and local leadership made life miserable for the Pandits in Kashmir.

Migration

The tragic episode of the Pandit migration from the valley occurred in 1990. The atmosphere in Kashmir was very tense. Messages from the mosque came blaring to vacate the valley at once. The selective killing of the Pandits was introductory to a big happening if the warning of vacating the valley was not adhered to. The valley came completely under the grip of the militants who received training in Pakistan. The local leadership went absolutely mum and offered enough indication of

possible collusion. Benazir Bhutto did the necessary messaging through her televised speech to keep the temperature high in the valley (Jagmohan, 2019).

The kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the prominent Kashmiri leader and the then Indian Union Minister of Home Affairs in the V P Singh government Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, by the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) on 8 December 1989 and the subsequent release of five jailed militants in India emboldened the militant grit in the valley to cause further instability (Ganguly, 1998). Those released militants were Abdul Hamid Sheikh, Sher Khan (a Pakistani), Javed Ahmed Jargar, Altaf Ahmed and Moor Mohammad Kalwal (Bhattacharjee, 2019). In addition to that, Farooq Abdullah released 70 militants from J&K jail between July and December 1989 (The List of terrorists released by Farooq Abdullah govt, 1990). This gave the militants and the separatists the necessary impetus to wreak havoc in the valley. Pakistan did the rest with rhetoric, ideology and hard and soft resources for intensifying the tension. Moreover, the unrest around Mandal Commission and Shah Banu case in 1986, effete central leadership and the poor economy in 1988 put India in a shaky condition. Pakistan utilised these hard times in India to push its infiltrators and unleashed violence in the valley. The success of getting its operatives released by kidnapping Rubaiya Sayeed increased Pakistan's appetite to intensify terrorism.

The former Union Minister in V P Singh's cabinet, Arif Mohammad Khan, shares his experience with *The Sunday Guardian* on August 31, 2019, that 'the manner in which the Rubaiya Sayeed matter was handled, gave a fillip to terrorism' (Basu & Kumar, 2019). The central government under V P Singh could do nothing remarkable to stop the exodus of the Pandits but to send Jagmohan as governor to restore normalcy in the valley. On his arrival in Srinagar, he found shockingly that the situation had gone completely out of control. The Pandits were in panic and paranoia seeing the violence unleashed by the militants. The state machinery and the chief minister Farooq Abdullah had retired metaphorically to a coma against the neurotic frenzy of militants hellbent

on flushing the Pandits out of Kashmir. The timing of such action was well-chosen. It was not just an accident in history. There was no suddenness involved in it. It was an occurrence indicating collusion, conspiracy and calculation. Leaving home was painful for the Pandits. Leaving home was to give up one's ancestry, property, job, investment and cultural roots. The militants spread the shockwaves of terror not just by messaging but also by killing. The Pandits had a difficult journey to make. It was a journey to uncertainty. They migrated to Jammu with the idea that things would settle down and they would come back. The remains of their houses in the valley are now reduced to mere skeletons and left to the elements for final disintegration. But it's been three decades now and with the BJP government in power at the centre and directly coordinating the J&K affairs, there seems some space for hope to readdress the much-awaited Pandit plight. It seems that definitive attention has been extended to bring the valley to normalcy and to develop a socio-cultural scope for the return of the Pandits.

Homelessness

The Pandit's journey to Jammu was not easy. Jammu was not welcoming enough towards them. The pain of leaving home was coupled with the indifference of the Jammuites (Pandita, 2013). They were sheltered in tents as refugees for quite a long time. The camps built to accommodate the displaced Pandits in and around Jammu and in the towns of Kathua and Udhampur were named Jhiri, Gajan Sumud, GSI Transport Nagar, Railway Camp, Labour Sarai, Muthi, Purkhu, Misriwala, Nagrota Camps etc (Datta, 2017). The heat and humidity, lack of hygiene and severe irregularities in water and electricity supply, epidemics, etc., intensified their agony. Gradually, the government of India made arrangements in terms of providing One Room Tenements (ORTs) (one of brick and cement type and other of fabricated materials with tin roofs), financial support (Rs. 1200 per soul and with a cap of Rs. 5000 per family, only for the 'Relief Category' not for all, in 2010) and benefits in govt service sectors, etc., to make their life a little better (Datta, 2017). Ironically, the materials used for constructing ORTs could hardly resist the boiling summer in Jammu:

“They were also built with a ‘shelf life’ expected to last only for ten years until 2004, and yet they are still inhabited. While the camps are provided electricity and water by the state, the supply is erratic, which exacerbates conditions in the summer. One informant complained bitterly about having to raise children, live, sleep and entertain visitors like me in a single room, which he regarded as ‘slow poisoning’. The camps are thus regarded by its residents themselves as a place which does not allow for a life of dignity and respect” (Datta, 2017). This is what is bragged about as the lucrative gifts of the government. The pathetic condition of these ORTs explains the lack of administrative seriousness towards the plight of the Kashmir Pandits. However, no quantum of compensation can substitute the Pandit right over a home in Kashmir.

Nothing can assuage the pain of being homeless. Only home can. A home away from home is not a home. Any semblance of home in the ORTs is a synthetic home. It is a stopover arrangement. Their real home is in Kashmir. They are waiting to return to their home. Jammu is a kind of waiting room (Datta, 2017). The Pandits' demand for returning to their home is the most legitimate demand and nothing can refute this demand because they exercise the autochthonous right over the land in Kashmir being the oldest inhabitants.

Resettlement

Though three decades have already passed since their forced migration from the Kashmir valley, the issue of resettlement is still a burning question. The issue remains valid as long as the Pandits have not been asked to reclaim their ancestral land. But the Kashmir question is quite complex: ‘The Kashmir dispute has become increasingly layered and fragmented with territorial, legal, and political dimensions’ (Markey, Wahid, Jha, & Mian, 2010). The geopolitics embedded with it is equally complicated. There has been a religiously and ideologically determined perception that has been built that the Pandits belong to a different religious and cultural axis and therefore should not be given the required

accommodative environment to them to stay alongside as neighbours. This social attitude was fed to the people, and militants and other religious and political organisations operating in the valley ensured its sedimentation in the collective psyche of the people. Therefore, every lukewarm attempt made to settle the Pandits after the 1990 episode did not succeed. On the contrary, the intensity of targeted attacks on the residual Pandit community by the terrorists was further deepened.

The Pandit residue that still clung to their land in some remote parts of the valley even after that tragic episode in 1990 exercising their grit and exceptional strength to combat violence and negationism fell prey to the subsequent massacres post-1990 (Timeline of Terror, 2022). Seven Pandits were killed by the militants in Sangrampora village, Budgam district, J&K on 21 March 1997 (Baweja, 1997). The extremely thin Pandit minority was selectively targeted and lined up and shot dead. In 1998 on 25 January, the Wandhama Ganderbal massacre took place and in which 23 Kashmiri Pandits were gunned down (Singh, 2021). The deceased also included four children and nine women. On 17 April 1998, the Prankote massacre occurred and in which 29 Hindus including women and children were beheaded by the militants in the villages of Prankote and Dakikote, Udhampur district, J&K (Gupta, 2021). It was the most brutal and barbaric act which forced 1000 Hindus to migrate. The story of Hindu migration was not just one of or isolated incident in Kashmir. It was chronic and consistent. The Chapnari massacre on 19 June 1998 witnessed the killing of 25 Hindus by the militants at Chapnari, Doda District, J&K (Pillai, 2022). The Kishtwar massacre on 03 August 2001 by the militants at Kishtwar, Doda District, J&K claimed 17 Hindu lives (Kak, 2001). Kashmiri militants killed 32 Hindus at Qasim Nagar in J&K on 13 July 2002 (LeT Ultras involved in Planning, 2002). In the Nadimarg massacre, 24 Kashmir Pandits were killed at Nadimarg village, Pulwama district on 23 March 2003 (24 Hindus are shot dead in, 2003). In the 2006 Doda massacre (April 30), 22 Hindus were murdered in Doda, J&K (Sharma, 2006).

Table 01: Violence against the leftover Pandits post 1990 in Kashmir

Year	Date	Place	Casualties
1997	21 March	Sangrampora village, Budgam district, J&K	7 Pandits
1998	25 January	Wandhama Ganderbal	23 Pandits
1998	17 April	Villages of Prankote and Dakikote, Udhampur district, J&K	29 Hindus (1000 Hindus migrated from the place)
1998	19 June	Chapnari, Doda District, J&K	25 Hindus
2001	03 August	Kishtwar, Doda District, J&K	17 Hindus
2002	13 July	Qasim Nagar in J&K	32 Hindus
2003	23 March	Nadimarg village, Pulwama district	24 Pandits
2006	30 April	Doda, J&K	22 Hindus

Violence inflicted upon the Pandits in Kashmir was too consistent and concentrated that it generated too much fear and paranoia among them. The first thing that is urgently required is to address that fear that has taken its seat in the Pandit mind. Removal of the temporary provisions in the Indian Constitution such as Articles 370 and 35A on 5 August 2019 by the BJP government at the centre ensured the suspension of special status given to J&K. The removal of this legal barrier is a significant achievement. There is no contestation about it whatsoever because the preceding governments did not consider it urgent and never understood its anachronism. Article 370 has always been a political tool to achieve certain electoral and ideological dividends. Against all the pressures both internal and external that the central government could repeal this oppressive legal construct is in itself a remarkable accomplishment. It is expected that the removal of the legal barrier would facilitate the integration process. It was followed by Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act on 09 August 2019 which carved two union territories out of one J&K. The amendment undertaken in October 2020 revised the existing law concerning land and ownership and a host of other things (Sinha, 2020). Such phenomena, however, offer some positive indication that something exceptionally different is yet to take place. Settling Pandits along with a host of other people in Kashmir will

occasion a demographic balance. As a result, the Pandits will feel safe in a space that is plural, not culturally claustrophobic. The sense of cultural alienation will not motivate a community to settle and thrive. A diversity of cultures and people and ideas makes a place truly eclectic and forges an environment of harmony. This initiative would restore true *kashmiriyat*, which the valley was quintessentially known for. It would perhaps defeat the game plan of the militants and some stakeholders who intend to fossilize Kashmir into a medieval monolith.

This optimism stands in complete disagreement with the ongoing ground reality in Kashmir. There is no doubt that in recent years the number of killings by militants has gone significantly down because of the strict policies taken up by the central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. The culture of development, business, tourism, infrastructure, employment and communication has been effectively promoted in Kashmir. The security concerns have been most expertly addressed. Intelligence mechanisms have tightened up their grips to restrict terrorist activities. These developments that include economy, security, employment and infrastructure present the impression of a different Kashmir. The positive derivations that emanate from these impressions indicate the development of a scope of inter-community co-existence. The issue of Pandit resettlement seems an achievable goal. This explains how much focus the current government in coordination with the security apparatus has given to building a different Kashmir.

Given this developing background, the reality of targeted killings happening intermittently, on the contrary, inflicts fear. In 2022 alone between 1 May and 2 June, nine Hindus have been killed in Kashmir causing serious anger among the religious minorities in the Muslim-majority valley (Aswani, 2022). These and a host of other killings have generated a sense of fear leading to a possible evacuation of the remaining Hindus from the valley. The Kashmir Pandits and the non-Kashmiri Hindus living in Kashmir feel unnerved about these tragic developments (Chowdhary, 2022) Ensuring the prevention of this form of terrorism, which seems more intelligent than obvious, has been difficult as the terror module emerges from within. They are more embedded and obscure than distinctly identifiable. In such a scenario, the

idea of a return of the Pandits to the valley to restore the eclecticism of Kashmir sounds unrealistic. This new variant of terrorism requires modification of methods to handle the perpetrators effectively. The conventional techniques will not act appropriately to stop them. Therefore, it may take some time to respond to the hybrid terrorism. This does not in any sense explain the incompetence or failure of the security and intelligence apparatuses to check these challenges.

The impact of these killings, may it be Makhan Lal Bindroo, the prominent Kashmir Pandit pharmacist (Ashiq, 2021), Arvind Kumar Sah, a street vendor from Bihar, (Masood, 2021), Rajni Bala, a Hindu teacher from Jammu posted in Kulgam (Ashiq, 2022), Supinder Kour, a Sikh woman teacher, and her colleague Deepak Chand (Ellis-Petersen & Hassan, 2021), Rahul Bhat, a revenue employee in 2022 (Sabarwal, 2022), Vijay Kumar, Bank Manager, Ellaquai Dehati Bank, Kulgam district (Hindu man killed, 2022), and a host of other people including some of the Muslims complicate the atmosphere in the valley appearing antithetical to the possible return of the Pandits (Chowdhary, 2022). Therefore, around 4000 Kashmir Pandit employees, who were placed in Kashmir under the Prime Minister Rehabilitation and Return Scheme over a period of a decade, and the Dalit employees numbering 3000 'employed under the 8% reservation of Scheduled Caste quota in each district of Kashmir' (Chowdhary, 2022), feel insecure in the event of these gruesome killings taking place intermittently, and demand for the relocation and safety. Fearing threats to their life, they contemplate on mass migration complicating the central government's efforts to secure peace, friendship and reciprocity. The growing impatience among the religious minorities including Hindus and Sikhs in the valley where Muslims are a majority obscures the optimism of return.

Hybrid terrorism is reported to have got backing from cross-border actors interested in vitiating peace in Kashmir. The recent spike in targeted killings is seen as the handiwork of the hybrid terrorists. These modules that operate so precisely on their targets are surprisingly not figured on any terror list but are sufficiently radicalised to deliver the given task (Sandhu, 2022). They emerge from the crowd and mingle quietly in the crowd making it all the more difficult to trace them. This level of

sophistication has gone into the making of terror in the valley. The anonymity factor attached to it spreads fear among the residual Pandit, Hindu, Dalit and Sikh communities forcing them to run out of Kashmir. This is a part of the sleek strategy adopted by the terrorists and other stakeholders of separatism, exclusivity and cultural homogeneity to unsettle the Indian government's determination to introduce peace in the region. This may frustrate the imagination of Pandit homecoming and the aspired logic of reciprocity and productive cultural dialogue. The groundswell of terror has increased security concerns among civilians, minorities and security forces. These worrisome developments, which were apparently nil in 2020 generating hope of difference, have disturbed the proposed course of events to normalise the security imaginations of the valley. The sub-currents of radicalisation, plotting, weapon delivery and target determination and final execution, co-option of radicalised locals, and Pakistan's alleged role in remote-controlling these events along with the local cohorts are some of the developments which disturb the valley. But the resolve of the current central government to exercise zero tolerance for terrorism explains the preparedness to quick-fix the problem in a short while. The manifestation of this preparedness comes in the form of India's successful organisation of the three-day G20 Submit in Kashmir from 22 to 24 May 2023. This sends a very definitive signal to the world about India's commitment to restoring peace in the valley. This also develops the optimism of Pandit's resettlement in the valley.

Moreover, Kashmir has gone through a very difficult time owing to restrictions and curfews imposed after the abrogation of Article 370 to avoid tensions in the valley. The fact of militant and terrorist grip over the valley and the Gupkar elite and their vehement opposition to the removal of the said article has forced the central govt to resort to such restrictive measures. But, to add to its difficulties, the Covid 19 extended the period of shutdown. Therefore, the valley had to go through a slightly longer period of stasis. It may contribute to slowing down the processes of negotiation for an amicable settlement in an atmosphere of friendship and harmony as the Gupkar confederacy may apply all methods in their ideological arsenal to postpone the processes of the Pandit settlement. Pakistan is always there to add and profit from the tension that captures

the valley. Despite the existing and probable bottlenecks, there should not be any hesitation on the matter of resettlement of the Pandits. The postponement method would further complicate the matter. But now the situation seems much better. The BJP government has done enough to restore peace through development and minimisation of militancy. Tourism, business, economy, development, employment and communication have substantively improved in the valley. The grievances over poverty and lack of facilities are no more the itineraries in their protest list. Therefore, the time now seems more conducive to bringing the Pandit communities back to their home and settling the historical injustice inflicted on them.

The Pandit community have, however, reorganised themselves over the last three decades after their forceful eviction from the valley as they found no reason to stagnate expecting the central government's intervention to resettle them going against the arithmetic of electoral dividend by appeasing certain communities. The collective amnesia around the suffering of the Pandits and their right to land, from which they have been driven out, disappointed the Pandit community and engendered in them the courage to recover. They could overcome their suffering by exercising their unique existential grit, the 'courage to be'. But, they did not leave the valley voluntarily. It was not an act of choice. It was a deliberate attempt to cleanse them from the valley if the call to vacate was not adhered to. This thin minority may not feel encouraged to come to the valley unless a secure environment is developed. A secure environment cannot just be developed by increasing troop deployment, but by promoting inter-community interaction and cooperation. This is inarguably a tough proposition knowing the communal temperature of the valley. But, that seems to be the only way out to bind people having contrary cultural affiliations and ideological moorings. The current government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done exceptionally good work in terms of instilling development in the valley. There is a noticeable difference in the valley in terms of tourism, development and security and a significant reduction in terrorist activities. This gives the impression that the long-pending issue of the resettlement of Pandits in the valley is going to be addressed soon. All that has been done in this connection is to earn *sab ka vishvaas*

(everyone's trust) to make Kashmir a multicultural space where difference is its strength. The efforts that have been given in this direction, if find resonance with the existing community in the valley at large, will make the resettlement process effortless and effective.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the forced migration of Kashmir Pandits from the valley owing to the resurgence of militancy demanding exclusivity and disconnect. The Pandit displacement led to their homelessness and terrible difficulties in the face of complete uncertainty. Even after 30 years, they are still refugees and unsure of their safe return. The removal of Articles 370 and 35A has been a necessary way forward towards settling the Pandits in the valley. The will of the nation seems to be at the right place on the matter of giving the pandits the homecoming, but there seems delay at the level of execution and procedural nitty-gritty. More importantly, the mood of the valley needs to be gauged prior to the resettlement of the Pandits. The central government is extending the best of its efforts to build an environment of cooperation and intercultural dialogue. Development has been the methodology through which cooperation-building exercise is believed to yield desired results. The political and ideological mess that Kashmir was reduced to since Independence and even prior to that needs uncoiling to set things right. The efforts taken in the last few years by the current government are significant enough to make some attitudinal changes in the people of the region. There is high optimism for a change in the sociocultural mood of the place given the developmental motif that has gone into Kashmir. Such expected behavioural and perceptual changes against the status quo of a very specific religious and ideological attitude, if becomes visible on the ground, can make a difference. If the aspirations translate to actuality, it will facilitate the ease of the Pandit resettlement.

The return of the Pandits to the valley is their right. It should not be conflated with choice because it is their place, 'The Kashmir Pandits trace their ancestry to the story of Kashyap Rishi. It explains the geographical and cultural rootedness of the Pandits in Kashmir. The depth and the strength of their root determine their claim upon the land' (Panda, 2022). The sooner they return is better for Indian democracy and

its democratic institutions. Justice would be served to the Pandits who were not only humiliatingly driven out from their ancestral land in a democratic country but also had to wait for 30 years to go back to the land rightfully theirs. However, the option of dialogue with the communities in the valley must be adhered to. This would initiate an ecosystem of peace and cooperation, and would make the resettlement of the Pandits in the valley more lasting and rooted:

“Knowing the complexity of the Kashmir issue, it requires the govt at the centre and the leadership in the state and the people of Kashmir and the Pandits to come together in order to express cooperation. All stakeholders need to discuss and amicably resolve the issues through proper dialogue. Efforts need to be made from both sides. Willingness needs to be extended from both ends. Such acts of a unique display of human character will defeat the cause of militancy and ease out gradually the intense military presence in the valley. It will inaugurate a new ecosystem of intercultural communication and cohesion (Panda, 2022)”.

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