

## Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude: A Saga of Forced Migration and Its Impact on the Identity of Kashmiri Pandits*

**Simran Koul**, Research Scholar, SSHSS, Sharda University

**Dr. Pallavi Thakur**, Assistant Professor, SSHSS, Sharda University

### Abstract

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another, either voluntary or involuntary aiming to settle in new location. Forced migrants in exile are significantly more vulnerable to identity change than any other social group (Bhugra, 2004, p.130). Migrant's often experience continuous adaptive demands leading to identity-crisis due to socio-cultural difference. The paper investigates how forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir in 1990s due to militancy have resulted in forming and reforming their identity as depicted in Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*. It examines the three stages of identity crisis experienced by the Kashmiri Pandits: 1. Hiding their identities during the volatile situation in 1990s Kashmir 2. Shedding of the home, culture, distinctive practise and their identity while severing their ties with the native land. 3. Facing the dilemma of cultural adaptation and identity maintenance in the host land post-migration. Identity-crisis positions them as a subaltern with no socio-economic agency and reflects their inability to generate discourse from that subaltern position. The paper explores Kashmiri Pandits trauma, as portrayed in *The Garden of Solitude*, whose search for their identities augments the desire to resettle in their homeland.

**Keywords:** migration, Kashmiri Pandits, identity crisis, genocide, exile, trauma

### Introduction

Due to the selective killings of the Pandit community, the Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave their homeland. Tragically, the majority of the work on Kashmir which has been published even after 1980-1900 fails to inform both the national and international groups about the miseries and hardships faced by the Pandit community in their own hometown, their fragmented identity, the tribulations faced by them in alien land after the exodus and their situations in migrant camps. The upsurge in militancy and administrative breakdown exacerbated conditions culminating into the mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. But before discussing the forced migration and identity crisis experienced by Kashmiri Pandits, it becomes significant to understand migration and its effects on identity.

Migration is a form of social change where a person, either alone or with others, moves from one place to another geographic region for a prolonged stay. Any such process entails not only leaving behind well-established social networks, but also a feeling of sense of loss of identity,

dislocation, isolation and alienation (Hugh Dingle, V. Alistair Drake, 2007, p. 115). These feelings lead to acculturation processes. A series of factors in the new environment along with levels of stress produces a sense of isolation and alienation.

Migration can be voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary migration is “when someone chooses to leave their home” which could be in search of employment, education, housing or other opportunities. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration has defined the forced migration as involuntary migration “when people are forced to leave their homes either due to war, famine or by the government” (Finn Stepputat, Ninna Nynerg Sorensen, 2014, p. 87). War has consistently been a major factor in forced migration throughout history. Such acts lead to the movement of people to the neighbouring states/nations as refugees. These individuals are not normally accepted by the host communities and are hence compelled to live a vagabond existence without having stability with regard to housing, social life and economic pursuit (Cees Boekstijn, 1988, p. 84). In several cases, the host considers them a burden adding to their distress. The predicament of migrants gets amplified if they belong to different communities, verbalise different dialects, exercise various traditions and follow various customs. They abandon their social circle of companions and forge new bonds with the community belonging to the area.

The effects of conflict and 'voluntary migration' have been studied in literature (Ruiz, Silva, 2014, p.775) but the effect of war, conflict and 'involuntary migration' has not been explicitly studied. Many of the conclusions that come from studying "voluntary" migration do not apply to forced migration because the latter situations have unique characteristics that set this phenomenon apart from the "voluntary" migration process. It becomes essential to also focus on forced migration as the impact of forced migration is broad and generally not explored in particular (Datta, 2016, p.165). The forced migrants could experience life-altering situations both during and after the migration. In order to escape the violence they often leave their homes, valuable assets and end up in the refugee camps where the living conditions are worse than their pre-migration situation. Dunn and Creek (2015) uses data from Northern Uganda and discovers that over time, a "culture of idleness" develops in camps. According to Lehrer (2015), the emergence of a "culture of idleness" requires time because it often entails the presence of an alcohol market, drinking establishments, and other practices to pass the time.

Identity refers to the results of the two key processes: social categorization and self-representation. When these two processes come together, one experiences a sense of difference from others, acknowledges their own differences, feels a sense of belonging, and as a result, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are developed, maintained, and reinforced (Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 2000, p. 18). Identity is considered as the birth right of every individual. So it becomes imperative to identify one's identity and provide them with the right to protect their discrete, cultural and racial identity. When individuals feel that they are not recognized, appreciated, accepted or deprived of something to which they are entitled to, identity crisis emerges out. Every ethnic group has a unique culture, traditional institutes and language (Jitendar, 2022, p.119). Belonging to a specific group gives rise to feelings and sentiments. Minorities struggle for a common cause in maintaining their identity out of a combination of fear of assimilation with the dominant culture.

While migrating from one place to another the people "carry their knowledge and expressions of distress with them". Their identity shift as they themselves integrate into the new culture, which demands a certain amount of adaptation. They often try to settle down by assimilation. Their identities were stripped and they were tagged as refugees. They still reside in their own nation as "internally displaced migrants" today (Abdul Majeed Dar, 2019, p.271). Although the majority of Kashmiri Pandits have now established themselves in various regions of India, hundreds of them are still languishing in Jagti migrant camps located in Jammu.

Preparation before migration and the social support enhances the coping mechanism of refugees. The genesis of stress and how the individual manages it will also be influenced by acceptance and welcome by the host. Migrants in the host land "find themselves without a history and without an image" (MariaCaterina La Barbera, 2015, 2017, p. 3). Facing an unknown universe migrants feel alone, lost and without any reference point. Though they strive to merge but still migrants remain strangers and face distrust and hostility. Bozzoli and Brück (2010) investigate the effect of camp residency on morbidity using data from Northern Uganda. They discover that living in an IDP camp nearly doubles the morbidity rate. They contend that this outcome may be explained by the overcrowding and poor facilities found in IDP camps. These camps do not have access to safe drinking water for the migrants and the other basic necessities.

The process which begins when migrants leave their homes never ends. It generates an incomplete condition of neither belonging "here" nor "there". The desire for stability becomes challenging. The feeling of empowerment and the search for recognition is crucial for the reconstruction of identity. Identity formation is a relative process of recognition. It is a factor which often emerges in opposition to another person or group. The cultural fixations of those who have lived in the same place their entire lives have also been confused by the blurring of "here" and "there" (Shemana Cassim et. al, 2019, p.5).

It is not easy to determine whether one belongs to a certain social group or not. Self-representation does, in fact, mobilise several kinds of belonging that don't simply reflect a binary distinction between "them" and "us." Being a part of a group depends on how social borders are appropriated and (re)interpreted, and whether or not the majority group on the other side of the boundary would accept or reject the minority group. Although they are employed as situational shifting references in connection to people who desire to define themselves within the greater interactional context, the Other and the Self are not clearly defined as constant categories (Dieu HackPolay et.al, 2021, p. 3).

According to the narrative identity theory, people create their identities by fusing together their various and conflicting life experiences into an ongoing narrative that gives them a sense of unity with their vital trajectory (Somers 1994; McAdams 2001). The negotiation of identities is a way for migrants to give meaning to their conflicting experiences. It is a social activity that may be described as a blend of performances, discourses, and (dis-)identification practices built on a variety of cultural contexts and frames of reference. Migrants are able to assert their agency in the context of migration through this technique.

IDPs(Internally displaced persons) are people who have been constrained or obliged to leave their residence of habitual residence, precisely in order to avoid the impacts of armed clashes, circumstances of generalized violence, infringement of human rights or normal or man-made

catastrophes, and who have not crossed an internationally acknowledged state border( Kalin, 2000). Such people possess the right to find safety in other parts of the country, the right to bequeath their nation as well as look for protection against any forcible returns or resettlement in any region where their safety, life, health and liberty could be at risk. India lacks a national policy for IDPs so the government refers IDPs as ‘migrants’ ((Migration and society by Ravender Kumar Kaul, 2006, p.12). The migration and identity crisis cycles lead to the emergence of new fragmented identities. This is explored in the case of Kashmiri Pandits, who are living in exile in different parts of the India. The paper discusses how the forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir into alien land lead to their identity crises in exile at refugee camps.

The conflicts have compelled several people worldwide to abandon their homes, either as internally displaced individuals (IDPs) or international refugees. In 2010, 11 million refugees and 27 million internally displaced migrants were estimated worldwide (Isabel Ruiz, Carlos Vargas-Silva, 2012, p. 772). The literature suggests that forced migration has serious consequences on those who are compelled to migrate. Determining the effects of forced migration is crucial in order to find solutions that can minimize the negative effects of forced migration. There are several factors which can lead to the migration of people from their homes.

Human rights are universal, their protection cannot be restricted to any authority or state. It involves all the political and social organizations and all international associations. Human rights groups both in India and abroad are accused by several reports of “completely and conventionally glossing over the fact of Pakistan’s involvement in training, funding guiding and coercing terrorists in Kashmir. It does not mention the killings of minorities and brutalities against them by terrorists” (Kashmir: From Autonomy to Azadi, 1996, p. 341). Associations such as Asia Watch while raising wails about the challenges of Kashmiri Muslims, makes no more merely than a passing reference to the ruthless brutalities by Islamic terrorists who forced the Kashmiri Pandits to flee from their homes due to gruesome killings of men and rape of women (Kashmir: From Autonomy to Azadi, p. 406). According to Dixit, Kashmiri Pandits have been denied elementary human rights approach (2014, p.175).

### **Siddhartha Gigoo’s *TheGarden of Solitude*: A Saga of Fragmented Identity of Kashmiri Pandits**

Islam set its roots strongly in Kashmir in the fourteenth century A.D. largely through the endeavors of 'soofis' and different preachers from middle Asia. The fusion of both Hindu and Muslim religions in Kashmir gave birth to the incredible culture of the 'Sufi-Rishi' tradition giving rise to a ‘composite culture’. The people from both religions shared a collective identity comprising of a common faith in customs, languages, food and other common manners, dialects and practices. Kashmir had always been a boiling point since its accession to India. In 1947 Pakistan’s attempt to annex Kashmir head-on was unsuccessful after which it has considered the accession of Kashmir as the ‘unfinished mission’ and since then has been exercising terror as a medium. It has been constantly pursuing a strategy of creating proxy war leading to destabilization and disruption in J&K by promoting religious doctrines following ex-filtration, instructing the use of arms, monetary allurements and strategic/doctrinal guidance (Jha, 2020, p.30). This was accomplished by conducting training camps on its own soil and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) wherein the Indian Kashmiri Muslim youth were ensnared. They were redi-

rected to Kashmiri with sophisticated firearms and ammunition after getting training in warfare. During the nineteenth century, Kashmir went through its darkest period with discord and political upheaval. The Kashmiri Pandit community went into exile in large numbers throughout the 1990s.

Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* reflects upon a Kashmiri family's struggle after being displaced from their homeland due to insurgency. The main character of the novel is a young boy named Sridar, whose father is Lasa and Mahanandju and Gowri are his grandparents. Gigoo in his novel, through various incidents, depicts how the situation from normalcy turned very soon into insurgency forcing the Pandits to leave. Gigoo briefs the readers about Kashmiri Pandits lives that was shattered by the cataclysm of insurgency. The paper attempts to examine the identity-crisis experienced by the Kashmiri Pandits in 1990s Kashmir. It makes an attempt to analyse three stages of Kashmiri Pandits' loss of identity that resulted in a perpetual alienation and interminable trauma.

### 1. Kashmiri Pandits's Identity in 1990s Kashmir: A Death Vortex

Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* at the very outset depicts Kashmiri Pandits living a settled life for generations in Kashmir. With no social or political upheavals, the Kashmiri Pandits, like any other native of Kashmir, are engrossed in their routine life. Lasa is no exception to it. He renovates his home, and also turns a part of the courtyard into a kitchen garden. He had hay mats installed as decorations on the ceilings of every room. Both the corridor and the living room's floors were decorated with lovely terracotta tiles. "A water heater was installed for heating the water during the winter" (pp.22-24). Lasa, as a father, dreams of a safe and secure future for his son. He sends his son, Sridar, to Professor Wakhlu to study Mathematics who was known for making even the duffers pass the school exams in Mathematics (p.30). The serenity of the valley was gradually disrupted by the militant's of the Kashmir Liberation Front and their associates. Sridar recalls the day when he and other children were at Professor Wakhlu's house and there was a visitor. One of the children recognized the visitor. He informed his friends,

Billa Puj is a goon of this area. He owns a butcher's shop at Gaw Kadal. Don't you know that his brother Majid is a militant and works for the Kashmir Liberation Front? Hilal says that he is back from the training camp in Azad Kashmir, and now roams with a Chhakir and Rof under his pheran. (*The Garden of Solitude*, 2010, p.31).

Children had developed code words for the arms and ammunition carried by the militants. "Chhakir and Rof were code names invented by Sridar's classmate Hilal for Kalashnikov and AK47" (p.32). Children too became sensitive to the change in the social state of affairs. Billa's presence made everybody aware of an impending danger.

By the evening a rumour floated in the area. It didn't take more than a day for the students to unravel the mystery. Very early in the morning the professor and his wife had left. They never returned (Gigoo, 2010, p.33).

The novel also discusses the Kashmiri Muslim youth handpicked by the 'Liberation Front' to train them across border. The Pandit community was stunned at how the Muslims hailed militants as a hero that would return and fight for Kashmir's liberation.

“During a cricket match in a temple compound, near the banks of Jhelum, Mukhtiar told the Pandit boys that his brother Basharat had quietly disappeared from his home...“But Mukhtiar told Sridar that Basharat had gone across the border to undergo training in handling weapons. He had been chosen and handpicked by the area commander of the Liberation Front himself (Gigoo, 2010, p.39).

Kashmiri Pandits could see the land transforming into a place of insecurity and threat. The militants placed a strong focus on purging the area of “kafirs”. Kashmiri Pandits were identified as their foes and a barrier to the "Kashmir freedom struggle." The insurgents declared that the Kashmiri Pandits should abandon their women for Muslim males and leave Kashmir. According to European Foundation for South Asian Studies (2017) “Traditional Kashmir Muslim Society has always been respectful of Kashmiri Pandit womenfolk and this shameful and shocking slogan showed that only a fringe section of Kashmir Muslim society indoctrinated in hate mania was out to disrupt communal harmony” (p.7) The towns and roads were renamed. Gigoo portrays that all the stores and business signboards chose green as their new colour. To correspond with Pakistani standard time, all clocks and watches had their time adjusted backwards by thirty minutes.

The names of town and streets were changed to reinforce a new cultural identity. Green was decreed to be the colour for all signboards of the shops and commercial establishments. The time in all the watches and clocks was turned backwards by half an hour (Gigoo, 2010, p. 23).

Pandits felt isolated in their own village because they had no one with whom they could share their troubles. The Pandit community was unable to continue holding their festivities. Their hearts were filled with fear. More deaths occurred on every new day which aggravated the fear in Kashmiri Pandits and they began hiding their identities. To protect themselves from terrorists who sought to eradicate the Pandit minority, they started to imitate the Muslim community.

The Pandit women stopped putting tilaks on their foreheads to mask their identity. The men grew beards. They did not speak to one another on the streets. They abandoned their traditional greetings ‘Namaskar’ (Gigoo, 2010, p. 59).

Lassa’s friend Nilkantha admonishes him about the Kashmiri Pandits “loosing their respect in the eyes of their Muslim friends” (ibid, p.41). He beseeches Lasa, ““Our women and children should not stay here with us. Send your mother, wife and son away from Kashmir. Do not wait any longer. Downtown is no longer safe for us”. Pandits did not venture out on roads”(ibid, p.42). The growing insecurity disrupted the lives of Kashmiri Pandits. According to Devinder Singh in *Reinventing Agency, Sacred Geography and Community Formation: The Case of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits in India* the Kashmiri Pandits kept their doors and windows closed all the time due to the fear of firing. They did not switch on lights after the advent of evening in order to hide from militants. The Pandit households began to run out on basic necessities including rice, vegetables, dairy, sugar, and other essentials. Things turned awry (Singh, 2014, p. 399). It was advised that people avoid watching All India Radio or any other Indian form of news. People were told to only watch Pakistan TV, exclusively listen to Pakistan radio, and to avoid watching Doordarshan. Retailers and business organizations were told to avoid working on Fridays and to conduct business on Sundays (Pandita,

2013, p). All forms of entertainment were prohibited, women were told to adhere to a dress code, and signboards along Kashmir's streets now changed to Urdu from English with a green background (Sarkaria, 2009, p. 199). Kashmir witnessed a social unrest both in the Pandit and Muslim community. Gigoo in his novel mentions that there were songs of freedom echoing all over the valley. The valley was draped in the colour of 'azadi' that was enforced by the militant groups:

There was only one slogan on people's lips. 'Freedom from India! Free Kashmir!' The new song everyone sang was, 'We want freedom, we want freedom!' The songs of freedom were broadcast from the loudspeakers to remind people of their duty to fight for the cause and join the freedom struggle (Gigoo, 2010, p.97).

Muslim kids were taught to sing the songs of freedom. Carpet weavers, labourers, and bus drivers were all asked to sing the national anthems while at work (ibid, p.44). According to Pandita, during the long, cold night of January, when everyone was asleep, several mosques broadcast "Azadi" battle cries, urging the populace to leave their homes and march to Srinagar in order to seize control of the valley (Pandita, 2013, pp. 21-22). They placed a strong focus on purging the area of "kafirs". While waiting helplessly for everything to return to normal, the Pandits listened to these songs in fear.

One night in January, the Pandits heard the slogans broadcast through loudspeakers from the mosques.

'O informers, agents and kafirs, leave this land. Leave Kashmir, leave Kashmir.'

With each passing hour in the night, the slogans grew louder and louder (Gigoo, 2010, p.67).

The names of the Pandits who were to be killed were written openly on hit-lists that were placed on the walls across the valley (ibid, p.30). Lasa grew restless as the days passed. His sleep escaped. He stayed up all night, doing nothing except watching the clock hands go from one hour to the next. He was unable to meet Ali and his other friends due to curfew. He dreaded spending the entire day at home and was afraid to enter the street.

Tathia mentioned that he had heard of a hit list prepared by a militant outfit, known as Hizbul-Mujahedeen (HM). The hit list contained the name of Pandits to be killed (Gigoo, 2010, p.30).

A Muslim friend of Lasa told him about the circulation of the hit list containing the name of Pandits to be killed next was circulated all over Kashmir so they must prepare to leave soon as they were not safe any longer in their homes (ibid, p.30). This conversation underscores the identity of Kashmiri Pandits becoming the reason for their massacre. Kashmiri Pandit men were hanged on tree tops. Their limbs were chopped and thrown on roads. The genocide of the Kashmiri Pandits took place in the name of 'Freedom of Kashmir' 'Azadi...azadi the protesters sang' (ibid, p. 55). According to News18 report methods used to torture the Pandit community includes strangulation by steel wires, hanging, marking with hot irons, lynching, gouging of eyes before death, burning alive, dismemberment of body, slaughter, dragging to death. Numerous Kashmiri Pandits such Lassa Koul, TikaLalTaploo, GirijaTickoo, Satish Tikoo, Sarla Bhat, Neelkanth Ganjoo, SarwanandKoulPremi were openly brutally killed in Kashmir (News18, Timeline of Terror: Chronology of the Ethnic-Cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits, 2022). European Foundation for South Asian Studies (2017) exemplifies "the hate campaign carried forward through barbaric and inhuman means of violence, struck fear among the entire Kashmir population to the extent that nobody was prepared to show even the slightest goodwill to the Pandits" (p.7).

The fear engulfed the life of Kashmiri Pandits. They became skeptic to the existing law and order system prevailing around them. Threat, anguish and fear enveloped their life. Death was hanging heavily over them due to their identity. The only way to escape the 'death vortex' was to leave their homeland.

## **2. Shedding of the Home, Culture, Distinctive Practice and Their Identity While Severing Their Ties with the Native Land:**

The events did not stir the state or central government to come out in its inertia. The Pandit families were gripped with a feeling of terror. No one was sure what to do. They were going through the peak of religious agitation, a horrific display of widespread hysteria (Gigoo, *The Garden of Solitude*, 2010, p. 42). As the observers to the summit of rigid mania of a vivid display of general terror, the Pandits realized that their genocide was unavoidable. Pandits were compelled to leave even if their souls resisted. Pandit families started leaving their houses with quivering lips and teary eyes. Women, children, and men ran from their homes. Pandits were homeless, uprooted, itinerant and jobless.

Next morning the other Pandit families in Mattan started evacuating their home. The decree clearly stated that the Pandits leave. The posters on the walls of Pandits house read: "All non-believers and informers are given thirty-six hours to leave this place. Those who fail to obey will be sawed" (Gigoo, 2010, p.50).

The days were filled with doubt. It was difficult to anticipate when the curfew will be implemented or removed. Gowri realized the Pandits would eventually have to go. There was nothing else to do but leave. Lasa did not want to jeopardize the safety of his family any further in these conditions so he told his family that they would be leaving soon.

Lasa felt miserable. There was no one to talk to. Pandits feared for their lives and saw to it that nobody came to know about their silent exit. Mahanandju could not sleep that night. He put his personal belongings in a trunk. Lasa's wife kept the essential belongings in some trunks and readied for leaving. Gowri cried the whole night in the living room (Gigoo, 2010,p.72).

The novel presents the trauma experienced by Kashmiri Pandits while departing from their homeland. C. Sawhney states, "Terrorised in every conceivable manner, they were completely defenceless and forced to abandon their homes under cover of darkness for refuge elsewhere" (2015, p.87). Ganghar in *Decoding Violence in Kashmir* quotes JKLF leader Javed Mir that arms were picked by them to grab the attention of the world. He claims that despite the signing of numerous agreements and pacts between India and Pakistan, nothing has changed in Kashmir. "Violence became necessary, he recalls, because it is one thing that is noticed, has the power to genuinely transform the state of affairs and "a process towards freedom" in case of Kashmir" (2013, p.37). Gigoo portrays the dejected Pandits who were witnessing the closure of all democratic channels. Like several other Pandit families Gowri also prepared to leave. She knew that the leaving was inevitable. Her conversation with Lasa reflects the unbound pain she endured while leaving her home,

'Can't we take the tiles? Can't we take the new ceiling?' she said to her son, as she looked at the tiles and the ceiling. They had spent a lot of money on the renovation of the house (Gigoo, 2010, p.72).



While packing the things Lasa examined the objects to determine their utility. Each object appearing significant and pointless simultaneously depicting his disconsolate feeling about leaving his home like several other Pandits. Pandits were leaving their identity to reinscribe a new one in an alien land,

Everything useful appeared frivolous and trivial. He was not able to decide which things to pack and take with him, and which things to leave behind. The household items lay unattended to and scattered in the rooms. The ones which were his prized possessions disappeared behind the dark corners. Lasa looked at the items, touched them to know if they were indeed useful. One moment, each item seemed precious. The other moment, everything seemed useless. The familiar household items scattered on the floor seemed to have lost their utility, except an old quilt in which Lasa laced in winter. (Gigoo, 2010, p.66)

The whole night Lasa could not sleep as he kept getting flashes of his happy moments spent in the home. Next morning when Lasa boarded the bus his heart refused to leave but he knew that he could not stay any longer. He sat in the bus and saw his home fade away as he moved ahead in the bus.

Lasa thought about the house he left behind; the house in which he had made first love to his wife; the house in which his son was born. He saw his house fade away in a distance. He wondered if he had taken all the belongings. He wondered if he had left something behind. His soul refused to leave the house (Gigoo, 2010, p. 67).

While leaving Pandits felt forlorn and disheartened. Their hearts refused to leave their homes. They became homeless over a night. Some even ran barefoot without any belongings (G.L Pandit, 2006, p. 155). Their sensation of terror and current fear prevented them from contemplating the horror of what awaited them in the future and what would happen to them somewhere. Many Pandit families left their houses with quivering lips and teary eyes. Women, children, and men were escaping from their homes in caravans. Pandits were homeless, jobless, and migratory as a result of man-made catastrophes rather than natural disasters like floods or earthquakes. The Pandits discussed how despite everyone being innocent, many of them were killed because the militants thought they were Indian government informants (Malik, 2016, p. 19). There were extended queues of buses and trucks on roads. "Each truck carried a home, and hopelessness. Each truck trudged on inexorably, with terror-stricken faces looking pitifully all around" (Gigoo, 2010, p. 66).

Lasa was perplexed by how bizarre everything was. There were Pandit families, coming from various towns and villages of Kashmir moving in trucks. Some persons spoke softly, while others appeared to be speechless as they had lost their voices. Others spoke as if it were their first words after a prolonged period of silence. Lasa observed a feeling of abandonment among the Pandits (Gigoo, 2010, p. 77).

Ganghar concludes that due to the states indifference "the Pandits were neither Kashmiri in Kashmir nor Indians in Jammu as far as the national identity was concerned" (2013, p.31). Gigoo too underscores novel place, culture, climate and social and economic fabric severely impacting the identity of migrated Pandits.

**3. The Dilemma of Cultural Adaptation and Identity Maintenance in the Host Land Post-Migration:** Following the migration Kashmiri Pandits dispersed in various places such as Muthi, Nagrota, Mishriwala, Purkhoo, Durga Nagar, Janipur, Bohri, Gangyal, Bantalab in Jammu and Batalbalian in Udampur (Kaul, 2010, p.73). After arriving in alien cities the Pandits spoke after a prolonged silence. Some of them still communicated in hushed tones as they had been doing for a long time in Kashmir. The Pandits were now accompanied by a sense of loss. They faced acute shortage of accommodation, overcrowding in all public institutions and price escalation in host land. There were cultural differences between migrants and the natives. In camps, the Pandits faced great difficulties.

The government failed to make proper arrangements for Pandits, hence the hygienic situation following relocation was extremely pathetic. They used school toilets near camps. No regular cleaning was done, forcing them to defecate in open. Due to the poor hygienic conditions, the camps became the breeding ground for mosquitos and several other diseases having a detrimental effect on the health of camp dwellers.

The men went reluctantly to the striking latrines to relives themselves. Some women covered their noses with the end of their sarees and took with them buckets full of soil to cover the faces. There were others who refuse to use the latrines. The faucets ran dry. The stray dogs were all around. It was a row of makeshift toilets. The walls were made of wooden planks. Thin sheets of tin with holes and another scarp from the junkyard formed the roof. There were no bathrooms. They all went either to the school or to the temple to bathe. Slowly inconvenience became a habit. (Gigoo, 2010, p. 119).

The Pandits were required to register themselves as "internally displaced persons' after their migration. The offices had lengthy lines. They struggled with disorientation and fatigue, Numerous Pandits died from heatstroke, indicating how terrible their living conditions were. Getting registered as a migrant, who has been internally displaced, was difficult.

Outside the registration centre, an old man and his wife waited for their turn to get registered as migrants. The queue was long, and every moment seemed long and deary. The registration process was fraught with perils. There were the queues, the documents, the papers and the forms. The woman talked aloud to herself. She mumbled some inanities; signs of fatigue and disorientation. Others in the queue made gestures at one another (Gigoo, 2010, p. 115).

A young woman lay half-asleep in a pool of vomit. Her shadow melted in the sun. A bystander tried to help her to water. Someone swooned. The rest of the migrants struggled to get ahead with the registration process. The local inhabitants watched the scene, aghast and appalled with horror (Gigoo, 2010 p. 116).

The relief distribution of few kilos of rice to some migrant families were clearly inadequate for their survival. Even the relief distribution management indulged in corrupt malpractices and cumulated a lot of money (Kaul, 2010, p.217). Inordinate favouritism by the officials of the relief commission towards their own relatives was claimed by helping them with fake registrations (Kaul, 2005, p.180). For a long time, the camp schools were operated in tents on open

grounds in intense heat thus each rainy day was a holiday. There were no appropriate arrangements provided in migrant schools. Students sat on filthy mats because there were no wooden desks. The schools were not cleaned. The surroundings were not at all sanitary. The students just filled their classroom hours by engaging in a variety of activities.

There was no bell in the school. No one dusted the benches. In many tents, students sat on rugs and listened inattentively to the lectures delivered by sleepy teachers. Some students in recess went to buy lottery tickets with the money their parents gave them (Gigoo, 2010, p.127).

The youth could not concentrate on studies in the limited shelter space. They remained marginalized by the government in the employment sphere too.

The stories of Kashmiri Pandits did not prevail anywhere. Most news coverage on Kashmir did not mention the migrants or their stories. No statics, no images of the decreased and the decaying Pandits in camps, nothing. There were no anecdotes about prior lives. The remembrances of a generation that had lived in Kashmir were non-existent.

He stopped listening to the news broadcast on the radio in the evenings. When his wife asked him why he has stopped listening to the news, he said. The news yesterday was the same as it is the day before yesterday. It will be the same today. They will say dozen of people died and got injured. Nobody knows the truth. Falsehood has become the truth and people like to listen to things which are not true. The Prime minister said this and that. Throw the radio out of the window. Banish it (Gigoo, 2010, p.123).

Initially after migration Pandits would listen to the news very keenly as they were hopeful that the government would address them and their conditions would improve but after years in exile at migrant camps they realized that government had turned a blind eye towards them (ibid, p.123). The Pandits felt secluded from others as on festivals and other important occasions, members of other communities could always visit their homes but the terrorised Pandit community didn't enjoy the privilege.

The Pandits had to adapt to new environments, cultures, languages, and lifestyles after leaving Kashmir, and when they moved to Jammu, their new neighbours mocked them for having a distinct accent. Due to the difficulties in exile many Pandits died due to sunstrokes, snakebites or other illness.

During the early years in exile, the Pandits huddled in tents and cattle sheds. There was nowhere to go, nowhere to hide our fear. The community struggled to come to terms with unfamiliar land. The migrants faced harsh conditions. The tents and shreds were so small and dark that people wandered aimlessly on road, as though in search of something. The old perished into void and nothingness! And some found themselves imprisoned in the shackle of dwindling hope and longing (Gigoo, 2010, p.191).

By yelling "Azadhi!" in class, Jammu kids would make fun of their Pandit classmates. For them, it was only a joke meant to make fun of Kashmiri Pandit students, but for those Pandit

students, the word "Azadhi" was associated with terrible memories that would come flashing every time they were teased (Allaie, 2017, p.173).

Pandits were aware of the fact that they can get a house in any region of the country, but not in their actual hometown, which makes them feel different and isolated. Even years after their migration, Pandits could still recall the bloodshed in Kashmir because it had such a profound effect on their memory. The exodus left a permanent imprint on the Pandits' memory. They would never forget the gunfire and the mosques' exhortations for the Pandits to leave. Their chests still feeling the weight of the roar. Many Kashmiri Pandits had developed the practice of telling the same tale about their homes in Kashmir. They felt it had become a part of their identity now. They would tell their new neighbours and the younger generation the same old tale.

A significant feature of migration is the trauma- physical, mental and psychological, diverging from their involuntary exodus from the valley. The terrible anxiety and the battle for survival in a non-native environment has prompted to the development of new disease entities in the community which were previously unknown or rare.

The old and infirm, but before they died, they all turned mad, one by one. Madness invaded and crushed them all. There was no mourning in the rented houses. Mourning was forbidden. A generation tuned into stones. A generation forget itself! (Gigoo, 2010, p. 191).

In fact, the health trauma has become a challenge in the survival of the exiled community (Hussain, 2018, p.709). The undercurrent of fear, which has enveloped the migrated Pandits, persists along with the feelings of deprivation and uprootedness. While readjusting and surviving in an alien land they are also coping with joblessness, trauma, stress of relocation, social instability, bleak future, poor housing, unhygienic living conditions, few medical facilities and malnutrition. According to Ganghar, "To be a Kashmiri today means a sense of defeat, a crisis of identity and bewildering uncertainty" (2013, p.35).

## **Conclusion**

The Pandit community is caught in a vicious cycle of pain and exile. They feel that they are betrayed by their fate and neighbours. Due to the loss of their homeland, they feel lost. The younger generation that is born and raised in the host country lacks a sense of longing for their native land. Young people identify more strongly with the host country, which creates inter-generational differences with the elders.

The community has been suffering many losses including the loss of homes, land, orchids, farms, property, shrines, temples, freedom, liberty and the right to live in their native motherland which not only the government has refused to recognize but also the human right activist (Evans, 2010, p.19). Both the moveable and immovable properties owned by the Pandit families in Kashmir such as commercial, residential, agricultural property, economic assets, transport vehicles, and cattle were also lost by them.

Over the past three decades, most of the properties of Kashmiri Pandits have either been illegally encroached, gutted or damaged reducing them to rubble while some other Pandits have been compelled to sell their assets such as orchids, lands, and farms in pennies to protect them from

the continuous threats from their Muslim neighbours informing them to either sell their properties or be ready to face the consequences even after migration. Some Pandit families had to sell their assets in order to ameliorate the expenditure in exile such as serious illness, meeting crises, renting some shelters, marrying off their daughters.

The law and order condition in Kashmir has not been amended to the degree which can encourage the migrated Kashmiri Pandits to return to their homeland. Migrants stand still where they were thirty-two years ago. The Pandit migrants have lost themselves in the sluggishness and lethargy and physical, moral, psychological and spiritual collapse has become the unavoidable corollary. Their human drive and the will to live respectably have died a premature death.

In the current scenario, Kashmiri Pandits are forgotten beings. An entire generation had turned into stones due to the years of misery. Kashmiri Pandits visit their homeland as merely tourists and pilgrims now. The sacrifices and tribulations of Kashmiri Pandit's exile have remained untold. The quickly old aged ones are fading away and taking the untold stories along with them—“stories of who they were, what they faced, what they lost, how they struggled and what remains now” (Abdul Majeed Dar, p. 271). People who were born and raised in exile struggle to comprehend their own identities and the history of their elders.

The Pandit Migrants are haunted by the question that to what extent can they redeem their forgotten identity, glory, property, traditions and culture? Some of them continue to live in migrant camps hoping to return home someday. They live on a meagre pittance which is doled out of them.

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