
The Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits

The gathering of the storm

September 14, 1989 was a sunny day when Pandit Tika Lal Taploo, President of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Kashmir Chapter and a lawyer by profession, came out of his home in Bhan Mohalla locality of Srinagar and headed to the High Court where he practised law. As he stepped out, he saw a small girl crying. On recognizing that the child was of his Muslim neighbour, he lifted her in his arms, turned round and went straight to his neighbour to ask why the child was crying. The mother of the child said that her daughter needed some items of writing material but she had no money to buy these. Tika Lal took out a five rupee note from his pocket and handed it over to the woman. To the child he said, “My child, school is the place for you”.

Tika Lal left them and turned to go to his work place. He had hardly walked 70 steps when three persons with faces wrapped in dark cloth appeared at the blind turn of the lane. Two of them kept standing while the third moved a few steps forward and came in line with Tika Lal. He took out a weapon, aimed at Tika Lal and said, “You are the BJP leader! Come then”. He pulled the trigger and bullets pierced the chest of Tika Lal, who fell down dead in a pool of blood. The Bar fraternity, mostly Muslims, organized a condolence meeting in the premises of the High Court and at Tika Lal’s residence, the one who cried and sobbed the loudest among a large number of mourners, was the mother of the child, Tika Lal had lifted in his arms just moments ago.

Barely three weeks after this murder in Srinagar, unknown gunmen shot and killed another Kashmiri Pandit (Kashmiri Hindu), retired Judge Nilakanth Ganjoo in broad day light in Maharaj Bazaar, Amira Kadal. He had flown in from New Delhi and was headed homewards. Obviously, someone was keeping track of him while in close contact with the gunmen. Justice Ganjoo, Sessions Judge in Srinagar had given a death sentence to Maqbool Bhat, the leader of Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Front, whom he had found involved in the murder of Amar Chand, a CID Police Sub-Inspector of Jammu and Kashmir Police, resident of Nadihal village of Baramulla district. These two killings of Tika Lal and Nilakanth Ganjoo sent a shock wave down the spine of the Pandit minority community of the Kashmir Valley.

Gunning down of two outstanding members of their community in the autumn of 1989 within a span of only three weeks was ominous for the Pandits. It made them skeptic towards the law and order situation in the State and they started to feel deeply concerned about security of life. What baffled them more was that two Muslim witnesses on whose deposition Judge Ganjoo had based the judgement roamed as freemen. That evening, Radio Kashmir announced the incident in just one sentence; “Unknown assailants gunned

down a former Sessions Judge in Maharaj Bazaar, Srinagar”. Fear-stricken Pandits, with anguish written large on their face, huddled up in their homes to think over the seriousness of the threats to which they were exposed. Was death looming large over their heads? Their apprehensions were not unfounded.

Elections and Muslim United Front (MUF)

Two months before the killing of BJP leader Tika Lal Taploo, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah had ordered the release of a number of Kashmiri Muslim youth from Srinagar jails, who were alleged to have crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and received training in terrorist camps in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir. They were the early activists of Muslim United Front (MUF), a newly formed political group that contested 1987 elections to the Legislative Assembly of Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir and were charged with sedition against the State. MUF had strongly protested against alleged rigging of elections by National Conference-Congress combine, which later on formed the coalition government with Farooq Abdullah in the driver’s seat. MUF claimed that National Conference musclemen had let loose reins of terror during the elections. Their polling agents were assaulted, manhandled, abused and humiliated. Bringing National Conference’s oppressive measures and acts of intimidation to the notice of the Election Commission evoked no reaction from the latter. It convinced MUF that the entire election machinery was functioning in a partisan manner. Although they had their reasons to lose trust in the fairness of the Election Commission, the Kashmiri Pandits had no role in these political rivalries. A community with barely 3 per cent population had no say in anything, yet the community was to be made a scapegoat in this political tug of war.

MUF, the frontline activists of Kashmir’s Jamaat-e-Islami, projected the rigging episode as a step towards suppression of Muslim predominance in the State. Armed resistance was the option and there were takers of the option in the Valley of Kashmir as well as in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir. The idea of Islamic resistance movement highly suited late Zia-ul Haq’s (Military Dictator of Pakistan) ‘*Operation Topac*’ plan for Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan’s super intelligence organization, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) came into action.

Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)

ISI planned roping in of political activists in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir and their UK-based strong diaspora. The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), altogether with its twin centers in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir and UK, initiated armed insurgency in the Kashmir Valley in the mid-1980s with outright support of ISI. It opened its account of killing Hindus with the kidnapping and subsequent murder of Indian Assistant Commissioner Ravindra Mhatre in Birmingham in 1984. Amanullah Khan, originally from Astore in Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir) but settled in Luton, UK, faithfully carried out ISI’s instructions to his gangsters and coordinated an armed insurgency in the Kashmir Valley. JKLF secretly raised its cadres in the Valley and claimed the killings of Pandits beginning with the murder of Tika Lal Taploo.

Acting under the instructions of ISI, JKLF adopted a two-pronged strategy for activism in the Kashmir Valley. These were (i) Kalashnikov and (ii) a massive disinformation campaign. JKLF commanders drew power from Kalashnikovs that flowed to them from Pakistani arsenals through their handlers in training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir. The Pakistani intelligence agencies laid much emphasis on launching a massive disinformation campaign across the world saying that there was an indigenous freedom movement in the Kashmir Valley against 'Indian occupation' and that Pakistan was only extending moral and diplomatic support to it. Using JKLF as its hand tool, ISI made deep inroads into the large diaspora of Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir in UK and in the Kashmir Valley. Many youth in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir and the Valley were enrolled as activists and contributors to the political formation of JKLF. ISI opened numerous terrorist training camps close to the Line of Control (LoC) where retired Pakistan army officers were employed as trainers for the youth from the Kashmir Valley. They received short and long term training in fighting tactics, after completion of which they were given arms and ammunition and asked to return/infiltrate into the Indian administered part of Jammu and Kashmir for undertaking terrorist and subversive activities.

Realizing that the diaspora of Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir could play a crucial role in fomenting armed insurgency in the valley, Pakistani intelligence agencies also adopted a two pronged strategy. First the people in Pakistan and Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir had to be indoctrinated with the concept of Islamic Jihad in which the Hindu as *kafir* (infidel) becomes the target. Hating Hindus became the refrain of this massive propaganda. The people were told that Muslims were suppressed and oppressed by the Hindus in Kashmir. The second part of the strategy was to whet the lust of the activists in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir for domination over the entire State of Jammu and Kashmir, if the Valley was cleansed of its Hindu population, no matter howsoever tiny and insignificant. They were told that once the Kashmir Valley was cleared of impure Indian and Hindu presence, they would be the masters of that part and enjoy the prosperity to their heart's content as Kashmiris would be nothing more than the hewers of wood and drawers of water for them.

ISI's Plan

A number of Kashmiri youth whose release order from the jail was issued by the then Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah were among the first batch of Kashmiri youth who had crossed over and landed in the terrorist training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir. While returning to Kashmir they had been arrested by the Border Security Forces and handed over to the local Police which registered cases against them. The top four among them, namely Hamid Sheikh, Ashfaq Wani, Javed Mir and Yasin Malik were the pioneers of the armed insurgency in the Valley, with the assignment to begin with decimation of the Pandit community. The killings of the two prominent leaders referred to at the opening of this Study-paper, has to be seen in this background.

Killings of more Kashmiri Pandits followed soon after. Panun Kashmir, the frontline organization of internally displaced Pandits in Jammu, submitted to the Indian National Human Rights Commission a detailed list of 1341 Pandit killings in the Valley or other parts of the State like Kishtwar and Reasi by armed insurgents belonging to JKLF and other Jihadi groups who were rivaling with each other in perpetrating atrocities on Pandits. This number includes those who disappeared or were fished out from rivers and were never recorded in police records.

It was widely rumored that clandestine crossing of the Line of Control by Kashmiri youth for receiving training and arms in training camps in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir was facilitated by bribing the Indian Border Security Forces. The slogan “*to Sopore, Kupwara (Cities close to the LoC) and the other side*” was on the lips of adventurous Kashmiri youth at that time. The disinformation strategy had two components; Feeding international as well as vulnerable sections of the Indian press, both print and electronic, with false and fabricated stories, lies and canard of Indian army’s ‘oppression and suppression of Kashmir’s nationalist uprising’. The second was the indoctrination of Kashmiri Muslim youth lured to the terrorist training camps in different places in Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir with hate-Hindu and hate-India propaganda. The second part of this strategy spelt disaster for the Kashmiri Pandit community when these indoctrinated and trained gunmen returned to the Kashmir Valley adequately equipped with arms and indoctrinated with rabid fundamentalist ideology.

Perhaps, it is just possible that in the training camps, these JKLF gunmen were not strictly told to unleash terror against the Kashmiri Pandit community as a whole. But a young Muslim indoctrinated with fundamentalist ideology and with a deadly automatic weapon called in his hands wanted a target - Maligned Kashmiri Pandit was the sitting duck. Amanullah Khan, the chief of JKLF had confessed the same to a Pandit rights activist in a seminar in the European Parliament in Brussels in 1992. When the rights activist told him that his so-called freedom fighters had let loose brutal killing, rape, kidnapping, intimidating, issuing warnings through loudspeakers to run away from the Kashmir Valley to the Pandits, how could that be called a ‘freedom movement’. Amanullah Khan replied that was not the agenda but *‘the boys back to Kashmir with weapons became uncontrollable. They attacked Pandits because the Pandits did not join the armed struggle’*.

After the National Conference-Congress coalition government resigned under the pressure of the militants, armed youth almost ruled the lawless Valley of Kashmir. Farooq Abdullah went to London to play golf and his dismissed colleagues in the Council of Ministers hid their heads in Jammu where they illegally occupied government bungalows and some of them entered into secret liaisons with the Kashmiri insurgency leadership.

Change of plans

Alarmed at the success of JKLF cadres in dislodging the elected government in Srinagar (Summer Capital of Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir), and noticing the rising crescendo of anti-India sentiment among the Kashmiri people in the Kashmir Valley, ISI changed the goal post and came out in its true colors. ISI found it unavoidable to send a

message of *'thus far and no further'* to the JKLF. ISI sponsored a parallel terrorist group, named Hizbul-Mujahideen (HM). Rivalry between the two ideologically divergent groups resulted in the killing of many JKLF leaders and activists in the Valley. Nevertheless, Hizbul Mujahideen carried forward the policy of Pandit massacres initiated by the JKLF. In response, Amanullah Khan gave a call for a 'Great March' into Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir by mass violation of the ceasefire line at the border town of Uri. Panicked by the consequences of violating the Line of Control by the JKLF leadership, and totally opposed to JKLF's proclaimed ideology of an United Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistani troops opened fire on the obstinate marchers killing at least 17 of them and wounding many more. This was 1992, the second year of insurgency in Kashmir.

Thereafter ISI's strategy of Kashmir insurgency changed. It sidelined JKLF charging its proclaimed ideology of an Independent, United Jammu and Kashmir as diametrically opposite to Pakistan's claims to the entire State. ISI raised new armed groups in the Kashmir Valley, dozens of them under different names to play the central role. Most of them were affiliated to numerous fundamentalist-terrorist organizations based in Pakistan receiving all round support like arms, ammunition, money, logistics, equipment and direction from ISI's Kashmir chapter. In due course of time, all these armed groups were sucked up by Pakistan's two major terrorist organizations like *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and *Jaish-e-Muhammad*.

Days after the killing of Tikalal Taploo on September 14, 1989, a Kashmiri Pandit published a letter in *Kashmir Times* asking insurgency leadership to publicly spell out their policy towards Kashmiri Pandits in the light of the murder of a Pandit political leader. The response in next day's issue said, that the Pandits should join the armed movement for the liberation of Kashmir from the 'occupation of India' failing which they should be prepared for any fate.

In private and in public, in homes and in mosques, Kashmir Valley's Muslim society was in revolt. In their mass congregations, India was painted as the occupier and the Kashmiri Pandits were dubbed as the spies of India. The tag that Pandits are the spies of India in Kashmir never left them. After the 4th of November, 1989, the day Judge Ganjoo was gunned down, the scenario envisaged by Zia's *'Operation Topac'* began to unfold layer after layer. Firing here and a blast there foretold of coming events. Muslim clergy intensified their hate Hindu tirade in public and private assemblies and in Friday congregations, they poured venom in their sermons and projected Kashmiri Brahmans - this bare 3 per cent religious minority - a source of threat to the 97 per cent Muslim majority in the perceived Islamic theocratic State. Outright denigration of India, Indian democracy, Indian army and establishment were meant to unnerve the Pandits.

The Exodus

It was 19th of January, 1990 and days were cold and nights bitter, though there was no snow on the ground. Around 9 PM, loud and thunderous Islamic and pro-Pakistan slogans raised collectively by a multitude of humanity and relayed through powerful loudspeakers almost pierced ear drums. These slogans were not new to Pandits in the Valley of Kashmir

as they were familiar to such outbursts, however the very odd hour, the tumultuous bang and the intriguing spontaneity besides the pressing loudspeakers into service, all spoke threateningly that a storm was brewing in the Kashmir Valley.

Suddenly, telephone bells began ringing loudly in the houses of most of the Pandits in Srinagar. Mobile phones had not been introduced then. Each caller on the other end of the line asked his relative, friend or acquaintance whether they were safe. This question carried more meaning underneath its simple words. The callers told their respondents to come out of their houses in that dark and dreary night and see for themselves what a strange scenario was unfolding on the streets and squares of the city of Srinagar. Scenes on the streets, squares and open spaces in the city were to be seen to be believed. Masses of Muslim population, young, old, children, and women came out of their homes, crowded the streets, gesticulating vigorously and yelling slogans in favor of Islam, Pakistan and the insurgency. Crowds of people carried rugs, carpets, mats and furnishing and spread it out on the streets and squares. They brought wood and lit bonfires to keep their bodies warm. People sat, squatted, danced, shook fists made violent gestures as loud speakers were fixed and microphones blurred a mix of Quranic verses, revolutionary songs, anti-India vitriolic and the supremacy of Islamic faith, all by turn making rounds from one to another speaker, each speaker more rabid fire brand than his predecessor. Islamic slogans, profuse admiration for Pakistan, stories of the heroes of early Islamic conquests, the paradise created by Allah for the *Momin* (pure) and hell fire for the *kuffar* (unbelievers) etc. were the major themes of their outpouring. Speakers praised Islam as the best religion God had sent through the Prophet. The crux of these surcharged utterances was that all symptoms of *kufr* (heresy), *butparast* (idolatry) and dualism as with the Hindus had to be cleaned from *darul salam* (the place of peace). Spirited stories of the heroes of early Islam like Omar and great commanders like Sa'd bin Waqqas and Tariq and others were recounted conveying that Islam had not lost the strength of destroying non-believers. This rant continued till wee hours. The message went to the Pandits that they were in the line of fire.

Like frightened pigeons, the Pandits huddled up in their nests and kept vigil all night. Not a single soul came out of his house to go to the temple for prayers or to Hari Parbat heights to pay usual obeisance to the deity. The night-long tirade against non-Muslims on the one hand and lionizing of Islamic war lords on the other, snatched whatever remnant of peace of mind they were left with. The question that caused them grave distress was how they could live in the Valley of Kashmir without the goodwill of the majority community with which they have had centuries of good and brotherly relations. To Kashmiri Pandits his Muslim neighbor was neither an enemy nor a rival just because of their very insignificant rather negligible numbers. For the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir this open and unabashed tirade was let loose against them on such a massive scale. The administration collapsed and law and order were thrown to winds. The police deserted their posts and the Pandits were left to themselves with their survival hanging in balance.

The Pandits found that overnight their neighbors had changed color. Their idiom changed as if they had thrown off the mask they wore for such a long time. Pandit and Muslim neighbors known to one another for generations began to behave as strangers. Suspicions loomed large and in a few days the entire atmosphere changed and the Pandit came to be called '*the other*'. The government was knocked out by a single night of defiance and revolt and the next morning not a single policeman was visible anywhere in the city. They had withdrawn to their barracks or hid in their homes as the administrative machinery had collapsed and law and order crumbled. From the next morning viz. 20th of January, 1990 it was the rule of the mosque, the priest and the Islamists. Loud speakers fixed to mosque tops, blurred uninterruptedly cautioning the Pandits to leave the Valley. The refrain of their slogans was that they wanted their Kashmir without Pandit males but with their women folk. 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.

However, the hate campaign, carried forward through barbaric and inhuman means of violence, struck fear among the entire Kashmiri population to the extent that nobody was prepared to show even the slightest goodwill to the Pandits. *Al Safa*, a popular Urdu daily of Srinagar minced no words in telling the Pandits to leave the Valley within hours if they wanted to save their lives and honor. Loud speakers fixed on mosque tops blurred a profusion of warnings of similar type. More and more anti-India demonstrations were to be seen on the streets in which demonstrators were mad with anger, hate and revenge. Fear stricken Pandits did not find any source that could assure them at least the safety of life. In its evening news bulletin, Radio Kashmir took the name of the Kashmiri Pandits gunned down by terrorists. The gruesome stories of murder of hapless Pandits unnerved the community members. There was no sense of approaching majority community for protection and help because the neighbors, too, were in the grip of fear heightened by the collapse of law and order. The dynamics of secret and selective militancy so rigidly drilled into the heads of the actors, had reached a level that the son who returned after training never disclosed to his parents and family members where he had been and on what mission. Indoctrination was of the level that even parents began to fear their sons. This is best explained in the television interview which Bitta Karate gave to the security officials after he was arrested and interrogated by security agencies.

Bitta Karate was one of the top JKLF gun wielders who had crossed over to Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, and received training and indoctrination in the camps there. In the interview, the journalist asks him on whose behest did he carry out the killing of the Pandits. He replied that he obeyed the orders of his senior Ashfaq Wani and Amanullah Khan. When asked if his senior told him to kill his parents would he do that as well, he emphatically said, "Yes". This speaks of the type of barbarianism that was sucking the Valley into its vortex. Asked how many Kashmiri Pandits he had gunned down, Bitta replied, "*I lost the count after killing 22 of them*". When asked who was the first victim of his bullets he took the name of one Satish Kumar Tikku, who was a friend (and perhaps

also a class fellow) of Bitta Karate, and occasionally visited him in his Srinagar home. Bitta Karate had returned after undergoing training in terrorist camps and Satish, not knowing where his friend Bitta had disappeared for a while, went to see him in his home. He found Bitta cleaning a gun (AK 47). Surprised on seeing the weapon Satish asked him what it was. Bitta avoided the question and said that it was a toy he played with. Naïve as Satish was, he took it lightly and soon forgot the incident and left his friend. But Bitta was greatly disturbed and went to see the 'commander', related to him the story and asked for directions. The commander told him to finish Satish lest he discloses it to police. Bitta went to Satish's house and called him to come out of his home. No sooner did Satish step out on the street, Bitta, in a flash of a moment, aimed his China made pistol at him and fired shots that pierced through Satish's heart. He fell down dead in a pool of blood. Brandishing his pistol in the air in broad day light, Bitta scared the pedestrians and walked away in complete confidence. Today the killer of 22+ Pandits is roaming a freeman in Srinagar city.

Yasin Malik, a terror comrade of Bitta was arrested in connection with the gunning down of six uniformed Indian Air Force personnel at Barzulla, Srinagar waiting at a bus stand. Yasin Malik riding the pillion of his friend's bike opened fire at the standing airmen with an automatic weapon, killing all of them and the bike riders sped away. Yasin Malik, later on became the chief of JKLF in Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir after the party split.

Ms. Girija Tickoo, a Kashmiri Pandit teacher in a government school in Kupwara district was coming out of the school building after collecting her salary when she was accosted by gunmen who kidnapped her to some unknown place where she was gang raped. The assailants, fearing she might disclose their identity, forcibly put her under a machine saw and cut her body into pieces. Avtar Krishan Koul, Deputy Director Food Supplies was gunned down by masked terrorists in his office. He had enquired into the disappearance of some truckloads of food grain supplies reportedly taken away by JKLF activists at gun point. Lassa Kaul, Director Doordarshan (Television) Srinagar was gunned down outside his house in Bhan Mohalla. He was accused of relaying anti-militancy news. Pandit Premnath Bhat of Anantnag was a lawyer by profession and a very popular social figure much liked by people of all communities. Masked Jihadis barged into his house, dragged him out and emptied on him their magazines of their guns. Professor Nilakanth Raina (Lala) of Jammu and Kashmir Government Higher Education Department, an eminent historian and researcher was called by masked and armed gunmen at about dusk at his home in Fateh Kadal locality in Srinagar and gunned down at point blank range. Professor Nilakanth was conducting researches into the Buddhist antiquity of Jam'a Masjid mosque in Nowhatta, Srinagar. In November 1989, Sheela Tikoo was gunned down near Habba Kadal. On 4th of March, 1990, Mrs. M.N Paul, the wife of an Inspector of BSF was kidnapped, raped and then murdered because she happened to be the wife of a government official. Also in March 1990, B.K. Ganjoo, an engineer in Telecommunication Department was brutally gunned down while he tried to hide himself in an empty drum used for storing rice. The assailants climbed the third floor of his house to catch hold of him. His wife begged the murderers to kill her too but only to receive the sadist remark, "*there should be someone left to cry over his dead body*". In April 1990, a nurse named Sarla Bhat was kidnapped and

continuously raped for several days before her dead body was thrown on the roadside. In May 1990, Mrs. Prana Ganjoo and her husband Prof. K.L. Ganjoo were kidnapped in Sopore where the woman was raped and then both of them were murdered. In June 1990, Mrs. J.L. Ganjoo, her husband and her sister-in-law (husband's sister) were killed in their home in Ban Mohalla, Srinagar. In July 1990, a working woman, namely Teja Dhar was shot dead on the roadside in Ali Kadal, Srinagar. In July 1990, a Pandit lady named Nanaji was gunned down on the roadside in Batamaloo, Srinagar. In July 1990, Dr. Shani was locked up in her house in Karan Nagar and then the house was set on fire. Flames consumed her alive. In August 1990, Babli Raina was raped in front of her family members in her house and then shot dead. One particular case which literally butchered the tradition of tolerance and communal harmony as well as the tradition of humanism in the Valley of Kashmir happened on 30th of April 1990, when four armed persons forced entry into the house of Sarwanand Koul Premi in Anantnag district. They dragged him out of his house along with Virender Koul, his 27-year old son for 'enquiry' and in the nearby jungle, the father and son both were gunned down. Sarwanand Koul, a poet and scholar, was 64 years of age and had translated the Bhagwat Gita into Kashmiri. A copy of the Quran was preserved in his house which he used to read occasionally.

It is not possible to give details of all Pandit killings in this Study paper. Panun Kashmir, a political organization of the displaced Pandits, has published a complete list of about 1341 Kashmiri Pandits who were killed by Jihadi armed men in the course of armed insurgency in the Valley of Kashmir in 1990 and after. This includes the disappeared and fished out Pandits, whose identity was not established and the police kept no record of them. Interestingly the J&K State government reduced the number of Pandits killed by militants below 200. According to critics, this distortion of numbers has been done deliberately to escape the censure by the UN, which according to Tokyo Convention has recognized killings beyond 200 as genocide. It must be noted that the National Commission for Human Rights of India while considering the appeal of the Kashmiri Pandits, said that they were subjected to killings 'akin to genocide'.

Apart from individual killings, Kashmiri Pandits were also subjected to horrific massacres as Jihadi insurgency fanned all over the Kashmir Valley and its adjoining areas. Here is appended, a chart that gives some information about mass killings of the Kashmiri Pandits and (other) Hindus in post-exodus days.

Event	Date	Death toll
1998 Wandhama massacre	25/01/1998	23 Hindus
1998 Prankote massacre	17/04/1998	26 Hindus
1998 Chapnari massacre	19/06/1998	25 Hindus
2000 Amarnath pilgrimage massacre	01/08/2000	30 Hindus
2001 Kishtwar massacre	03/08/2001	19 Hindus

As disorder and lawlessness gripped the Valley, the Pandits shivered with fear. This was the atmosphere of fear and lawlessness in which the Pandits became homeless. In these circumstances it was but natural that the entire Pandit community stood fear-stricken and then followed the impulse of running away from this cauldron. The entire community had lost the confidence in the majority community.

Members of a high ranking delegation of parliamentarians visiting Srinagar to assess the ground situation quarrelled among themselves on seating arrangements in the meeting room. They showed scant understanding and interest in the critical situation in the Valley and the sword of death dangling on the head of the vulnerable minority. The Pandits found that the Indian government, too, had written them off. Threatened and defenceless Pandits had no option but to leave their millennia old homeland, homes, hearths, properties, jobs, business, farms, orchards, temples, shrines, cremation grounds, Gods, deities, and the ashes of their forefathers. They engaged whatever means of transportation they could manage, took a bagful of clothing and headed out of the Valley to unknown and un-seen destinations. They left in trickles for fear of being captured en route and butchered in cold blood. The process continued for the first two-three months of 1990. Despite the fact that thousands of soldiers were garrisoned in Badami Bagh Cantonment, Srinagar, not one soldier escorted the fleeing fugitives. In spite of the silence of the Kashmiri Muslims on the atrocities committed against the Kashmiri Pandits, the general masses of Kashmiri Muslims did not obstruct the exit of the Kashmiri Pandits and facilitated their safe journey out of the Kashmir Valley.

The Pandits of Kashmir, who had braved numerous spells of forced conversions and destruction of their civilizational symbols during six centuries in the past, were extirpated from their five thousand year-old homeland at a time when India was governed by a Democratic and Secular dispensation. Seeing the current rise in Islamic fundamentalism and radicalization of the youth of the Valley of Kashmir, it can be concluded that the Kashmir Valley's ethnic cleansing is complete and everlasting. They have been banished from their birth place not for decades or centuries or millennia, but for all times to come.

Aftermath

After their departure the houses of the Kashmiri Pandits remained abandoned in the Kashmir Valley. Miscreants looted household goods, furniture, kitchenware, accessories, electronic gadgets, small libraries, papers, files and documents. Electricity and sanitary fittings were pulled out, taken away and sold. In most cases even the doors and windows of these houses were removed and stolen. The bare structures were set on fire if these did not happen to be in densely populated areas. Large number of houses and properties went on distress sale. Shops were grabbed by the locals, though a handful of them fetched the owner some money. In villages, the ruins of torched Pandit's houses were grabbed and showed as Muslim Endowment (Awqaf) property in revenue records. If any Pandit was able to sell his property somehow, he had to remain content with its throw-away price. Landed properties of Pandit shrines, temples and crematoriums stand largely vandalized and usurped. The ethnic cleansing of the Valley of Kashmir was completed.

Conclusion

The Kashmir Valley has become a theocratic Islamic place within the secular Indian Union. The people of the Kashmir Valley, with hundred per cent Muslim population (barring a few negligible minorities which account for less than 1%), are increasingly identifying themselves with the wider Sunni Muslim world. The Kashmir Valley does not have a viable economy and it depends on huge financial doles from New Delhi under one or the other pretext. However, the State Government is usually unwilling to render any account for these receipts which results in no accountability and leads to corruption. Many members of the political leadership of the Kashmir Valley, including the Kashmiri separatists are mostly ambivalent and their pro-Indian or pro-Pakistani credentials are subject to the quantum of funds provided.

The return of the Kashmiri Pandits to the Kashmir Valley depends on the goodwill of the majority community in the Valley. That is no more to be found nor is there wisdom enough within the leadership of the Kashmir Valley to understand how important it is to live in harmony with people of other faiths. The Kashmiri Pandits should understand that the fetters they wore for seven centuries are broken once and for all and their wings should take them over to new climes and lands.

Diasporas have, also, built great civilizations.



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