

The Impact of Historical Trauma on ‘Internally Displaced’

Kashmiri Pandits

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to investigate the psychosocial impact of trauma due to violence and forced displacement during the insurgency in 1990 on the Kashmiri Pandit community of India. Data is collected through semi structured personal interviews of the Kashmiri Pandits (n=20), 6 women and 14 men, who were displaced during the insurgency of 1990. The internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits report various encounters and adversities that they experienced due to the exodus. Three major themes and twelve subthemes pertaining to the psychosocial aspects of the life of the survivors is identified by conducting a thematic analysis of the content. The study reveals that the victims of the forced migration experienced tremendous psychosocial stress due to the pre migration violence and acculturative stress post migration and are still emotionally scarred by the event that occurred 32 years back. While the community has moved forward demonstrating incredible resilience and works to create their bequest through strength, dignity and meaning, the yearning for the homeland remains with them. The study suggests that while most survivors continue to carry residual emotions of fear, anger, and humiliation they continue to stride forward to reconstruct their culture and community.

Keywords: *Trauma, Discrimination, Acculturation, Violence, Forced Displacement, Psychosocial*

The inhabitants of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, located in the extreme north of India are called Kashmiris. The Kashmiri Pandits are a part of the Saraswat Brahmin Community who lived in the Kashmir valley for more than 5000 years. Kashmir, often referred to as the ‘Crown of India’ was known for its breath-taking views, peaceful reflexion, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural richness, and religious diversity. However, this diversity made it the centre of warfare rather than cultural progression. The once ‘paradisical’ valley of Kashmir has been the centre point of conflict since centuries and its inhabitant the Kashmiri Pandits have been subjected to atrocities due to the genocide that has been structured by seven defined exoduses since last 32 years. In 1989, insurgency struck Kashmir with the assassination of eminent Kashmiri Pandit personalities. The ethnic cleansing of the valley continued over epochs but the exodus of 1990, recognized as the second largest exodus after the partition of India left a stain on the tranquil culture of India. The pandits understood they were not safe in the valley and executed anytime. This led to the mass migration of a majority

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of the Pandit community. Many Kashmiri Pandits strode out of the valley for the first time due to the exile leaving behind their eternal home. Several were left behind in dilemma and succumbed to their fate. It is estimated that about 95% of the community left Kashmir during the insurgency. Most of them left for the refugee camps in Jammu which were largely in a dilapidated condition. The pre migration turmoil and the post migration struggle indeed left an eonian wound in the soul of Kashmiri Pandits. A damage that transcends across generations and keeps the struggle alive. The struggle to overcome the trauma, to find a sense of purpose, to adapt to the new life and to keep the culture thriving and identity intact.

Historical Trauma refers to a cumulative emotional and psychological ordeal experienced by a group of people who share ethnicity, identity, or circumstances across the life span often transgenerational (Brave Heart, 2003). The trauma may be caused due to discrimination, racism, or oppression. The term Indigenous Historical Trauma was coined by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart to describe the psychosocial implication of European colonization on North American Indigenous communities. The term was often used to delineate the experience of the Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children. Fairmon (2004) explained historical trauma in context of the American Indians as “indescribable terror and the legacy of terror that remains after 140 years, as evidenced by repression, dissociation, denial, alcoholism, depression, doubt, helplessness and devaluation of self and culture.” She further expounded the transgenerational nature of the trauma that leads to the indignity, remorse and distrust that is shared across generations. The past two decades has seen numerous literature that entail the impact of historical trauma on various communities across the globe that share the account of persecution, ethnic cleansing, and discrimination like the African Americans, Swedish immigrants, Israelis, Mexicans, Armenian refugees and many other cultural groups and communities (Campbell et. al., 2011; Daud et. al., 2005; Karenian et al., 2011; Wexler et. al., 2009). The basic premise of the historical trauma theory is that there is a higher incidence of disease in population imperiled to mass trauma for a prolonged period even across generations (Brave Heart et. al.,1998). The underlying assumptions of the historical trauma theory are:

- The predominant suppressing population methodically and purposefully perpetrates mass trauma upon the target population.
- The trauma is not restricted to a particular cataclysmic event but is inflicted unceasingly over a prolonged period.
- The traumatic experience resonates across the population.
- The natural course of life is disrupted by the enormity of trauma and influences the remnant of physical, psychological, social, and economic inequalities that perseveres across generations (Sotero, 2006)

There are three theoretical perspectives of historical trauma in the discipline of social epidemiology that the theory integrates. The psychosocial perspective asserts that the vulnerability to the disease increases due to the psychosocial stressors that act on the biological system of the body like an infective mechanism. The ecological perspective emphasizes upon the role of dynamic interrelated life course factor in the aetiology of the disease. The third framework is the political theory that focusses upon the economic and political contributing factors of diseases (Krieger, 2001). Sotero et. al. (2006) proposed a conceptual model of historical trauma (Figure 1) that outlines physical, psychological, and social aspects and draws an association between these aspects and health risk and vulnerability. It also highlights the vicarious traumatization experienced by the subsequent generations.

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Alexander (2011) proposed the theory of cultural trauma. A community is said to have experienced a cultural trauma arises when a dreadful event that strains their conscience and blemishes the memory leading to disruption and irreversible changes in their individuality. The cultural trauma can be explained through three perspectives specifically lay trauma theory, enlightenment theory, and the psychoanalytical theory. According to the lay theory trauma occurs because of disruption of the basic need of love, security, order, and connection by a traumatizing event that leads to instant and unreflexively response. The enlightenment perspective suggests that individual or collective trauma is a pragmatic reaction to an unexpected change based on the perception of the person or community. The response is to overcome the situation that caused trauma. The psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the role of unconscious emotions, cognitive distortion, and the defence mechanism in the traumatic event. The individual experiences pain not only due to the traumatic event but due to the effort to keep the pain subdued. Instead of fostering an ameliorating response and ascribing the responsibility of the event the individual internalizes the trauma through repression.

It is often referred to as collective trauma due to the psychological impact it has on the collective memory not restricted to the event but the rekindling of trauma to make meaning out of the event. The collective trauma embedded in the collective memory concludes in the structuring of meaning that reinvents the identity of the group. The collective trauma motivates a pursuit for meaning, assuages the existential peril and entrenches the individual in the community that shares the 'wound' that transcends human existence thus promoting group affinity and solidarity (Hirschberger, 2018). Viktor Frankl (1969) who himself was a Holocaust Survivor posited the concept of 'Will to meaning', he postulated meaning provides a reason to live that motivates an individual to survive even in the direst circumstances and with great suffering. The sufferers construct the social meaning by conserving the identity of the group they share the legacy of their traditions and cultural understanding of the threat. They symbolically carry the trauma that augments their existential fears. The trauma fosters solidarity across generations that extenuates the existential fears and endorses a sense of meaning that disseminates the memory and the trauma becomes the social identity of the group (Hirschberg, 2018).

Migration refers to the movement of individual, family, or group from one region to another. It may be voluntary or forced. The term used for an individual who migrates forcefully due to a threat to life, property or dignity is referred to as a refugee. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Since the Kashmiri Pandits never crossed the border of the country of origin, they are not recognized as refugees. A more appropriate term for the Kashmiri Pandits is 'Internally Displaced People'. According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, internally displaced persons (also known as "IDPs") are "person or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border." The IDP are at a greater risk of attack, sexual assault, abduction and are dispossessed of adequate shelter, food, and health services equivalent to a refugee. However, the international law does not grant a special status to internally displaced persons with rights specific to their situation. The term "internally displaced person" is largely descriptive. The UNHCR data for 2020 revealed that there are

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82.4 million forcible displaced people worldwide that includes 4.8 million internally displaced people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, 2020).

Kunz (1973) stated that refugees are 'pushed' out of their homeland due to oppression and life threat and if granted a choice, they would not have left a fully functional society in which they were well integrated. The anticipatory refugees are the ones who anticipate danger and make a safe departure before the crisis worsens. The acute refugees are the ones who await and hence escape homeland immediately due to exacerbated crisis without any resources. Since Jammu and Kashmir was a centre of conflicts since decades and had experienced seven organized exoduses over the years, there were anticipatory as well as acute refugees.

The study of migration and its impact on immigrants has predominantly been an area of interest for discipline like anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science. Relatively limited studies have been conducted in the discipline of psychology. However, Berry (1990) argued that psychology plays well defined role mainly in the two broad areas of acculturation, a focus of cross-cultural psychology and intergroup relations, a subject of social psychology. Acculturation refers to the process of cultural and psychological change because of contact between two groups. It is a process of mutual change, nevertheless the impact is higher on the non-dominant. Most studies across all the discipline focus upon the acculturation attitudes, explicit behaviours and individuation and identity. This indicates towards two major determinants in the process of acculturation extent of contact and participation level of each group and the effort for cultural preservation demonstrated by each group (Berry, 2001). Berry (1992) theorized a model of acculturation that delineated the process across two dimensions, the preservation or rejection of the native culture and the acceptance or dismissal of the host culture. The acculturation strategies are:

- Assimilation occurs when an individual prefers to adopt the culture of the host population over the indigenous culture.
- Separation refers to the strategy when the immigrants value their own culture and wish to preserve it and hence refuse any alliance with the host culture.
- Integration refers to the process of striking balance between the native and host culture. The immigrants maintain cultural integrity while being a part of the larger society.
- Marginalization occurs when an individual rejects both the native and host culture.

The strategies vary according to the attitudinal position of the immigrant and the receiving society. The immigrants can choose the strategy only if they have the liberty and the receiving society does not impose conditions that restraint the autonomy of the immigrants (Berry, 1974). Studies propose a more beneficial outcome of the integration approach in term of psychological wellbeing (David et.al., 2009). While marginalization is the least beneficial (Berry et. al., 2006). Certain communities have a psychological prerequisite that facilitates the embracement of integration strategy. Such societies are relatively open in their cultural orientation and exhibit culturally diverse ideology, positive ethnocultural attitude, minimal level of intolerance and discrimination and a sense of belonging and respect of the larger society (Berry et. al., 1995). Strategies may also vary across domains in life (Arends-Tóth et. al., 2004). Individual may adopt integration strategy in the public life but privately may reject the host culture and traditions. The assimilation theories primarily focus on assimilation of subsequent generations of immigrants. The classical assimilation theory also called the straight-line assimilation was formulated by the scholars of The Chicago School. Park and Burgess (2014) explained assimilation as the "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons

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and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” According to this theory the immigrants adopt the norms, values traits and beliefs of the host culture over time across generation to an extent that they may not be distinguishable from an individual of host culture (Park, 2005). However, the new assimilation theory emerged as an alternative proposing segmented assimilation presenting three alternatives straight-line assimilation, downward assimilation into other cultural diversity of the oppositional culture, and selective acculturation which is a combination of social flexibility and preserving the core values of the native culture (Portes and Zhou 1993). With every generation the migrants move 50% closer to the norms and beliefs of the host culture with some distinction across characteristics and communities (Mesoudi, 2018).

Migration has existed since eons and its derivation has evolved over the years. However, factors affecting the mental health of the immigrants have persisted over the years. Evidence suggests migration can impact the social, psychological, and the cultural spheres of life of the immigrants (Bhugra and Becker, 2005). The impact is relatively detrimental for immigrants who have experienced forced displacement rather than willingly leaving their motherland due to war, conflict, or civil unrest (Hermansson et. al., 1996). Longitudinal studies suggest that traumas and life changes due to forced migration have an impact on the long-term health effects, psychological as well as physiological thus impacting the overall mortality of the population (Hauka et. al., 2017; Cantor et. al., 2013; Morgan et. al., 2010). The internally displaced people remain within the boundaries of their homeland hence they are not conferred with the human right protections and amenities accorded to the refugees. Studies reveal they are more susceptible to mental health issues than the refugees (Porter et. al., 2005).

Each stage of migration i.e., pre- migration, migration and post migration has an impact on the mental wellbeing of the migrant. The challenges vary across the stages. The pre-migration phase entails decision and planning to relocate, the migration phase involves physical relocation across regions and the final stage involves becoming accustomed to the new social and cultural norms (Bhugra et. al., 2001). There are various determinants of the psychosocial impact of migration on the immigrants such as the duration of relocation, acceptance by the host and native culture, social support, semblance between the host and native culture and other factors such as language, education, employment opportunities etc. (Bhugra et. al., 2001). The psychological impact may vary across the stages of migration. The prevalence of mental disorder is relatively higher in the later phase of the trajectory of expulsion than the initial phase due to acculturation stress and incongruence in accomplishments (Bhugra, 2004). The predisposing factors that lead to mental illness vary at each stage and act in conjugation with the personal and relational factors. In the pre migration phase it is determined by the temperament and the personality, while in the migration phase it is ascertained by loss and grief. At the post migration phase the migrant experience enculturation, integration and deculturation that leads to cultural shock (Bhugra & Jones, n.d.). A cross sectional study suggested that elevated level of perceived discrimination in post migration scenario due to pre migration trauma is the source of higher level of psychological distress (Li & Anderson, 2016).

Forced migration is a traumatic experience that leads to various psychological difficulties for the migrants. A systematic review conducted on 7000 refugees settled in western countries reported the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to be 9% and major depressive disorder to be 5 % with high degree of comorbidity (Fazel et. al., 2005). Another study conducted on the Kurdish women who were internally displaced and migrated to foreign land due to political conflict reported the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

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as high as 46.4% (Gulsen et. al., 2010). Studies conducted on the refugees over the three decades of war in Afghanistan suggest high level of pervasive mental health problems with comorbidities. Residing at the refugee camp during the transition further worsens the psychological wellbeing due to continuous traumatic stress caused by institutional abuse (lack of security, poor sanitation and living condition etc.), and inadequate mental health services (Eleftherakos et al., 2018). Qualitative synthesis indicates psychological distress as an outcome of culture shock due to being uprooted besides stressors such as loss of identity, language conflicts, unemployment, loss of personal traditional roles and social status (Alemi et al., 2014). The psychological sequelae of the migrants are influenced by interaction of experience of potentially traumatic events and broader ecological social factors (Steel et al., 2009).

Purpose of the study

Limited literature explores the psychological impact of war trauma and forced migration beyond PTSD and depression. The psychological sequelae is diverse and further studies are required to delve into the emotional implications of the trauma. Studies suggest that assessment and interventions for forced migrants need to look beyond the PTSD model defined by DSM or ICD to provide a holistic solution to their psychological concerns (Tuomisto & Roche, 2018). Anger and related behaviours may be correlated with provocation or evasion (Charney & Keane, 2007). A relatively novel study revealed that emotional dysregulation arbitrates the association between trauma, psychopathology, and post migration stressors through differential patterns (Nickerson et al., 2015).

Post migration stressors such as trauma, adaptation challenges, cultural damage, loss of family and social loss are predictor of higher symptoms of PTSD while loss of culture and support leads to emotional distress (Carswell et al., 2011). Immigrants experience loss of social capital and are at a risk of social marginalization in the host country. The unfulfilled sense of belonging leads to meaninglessness, self-dysregulation, and depression (Stillman et. al., 2009; Baumeister et. al., 2005; Choenarom et. al., 2005). Migrants also experience a change in social status and regress socially and professionally, that leads to the feeling of estrangement and impedes the process of adaptation (Nabi, 2013) In the post migration scenario, linguistic integration and proficiency is an important predictor of acculturative stress, in fact bilingualism is considered a significant predictor of low acculturative stress (Lueck & Wilson, 2011). Study conducted on internally displaced persons of Colombia showed that during the long-term settlement phase some internally displaced persons attempt to return to homeland and expose themselves to risk of oppression, retaliations, and brutality but most who adapt to the host country do not wish to return as they refrain from experiencing re-displacement (Schultz et. al., 2014). The research question guiding this study is: "In what way the trauma caused by the 1990 insurgency (exodus) affected the psychosocial experiences of the first generation Kashmiri Pandit survivors?"

The key objectives are

- To understand the psychological distress experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community due to insurgency and subsequent forced migration.
- To evaluate the psychosocial challenges faced by Kashmiri Pandits in the process of acculturation.
- To assess the social capital retained and built by Kashmiri Pandits over the years post insurgency.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative analysis method, thematic content analysis was used for analysis and interpretation of data. The audio recording of the interviews was listened to multiple times to ensure completeness of data. All interviews were transcribed in verbatim into English and a copy of the transcript was shared with the participants for verification. Post correction the transcripts were anonymized and subsequently analysed. The transcripts were read repeatedly to extract manifest as well as latent content that vary in complexity and level of abstraction. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis by Green and Thorogood. A comparative analysis of the interviewees account was conducted to summarize the data by classifying it into recurrent themes. Thorough reflection of the data was performed to analyse the association between them to contextualize the subthemes. An open coding scheme was developed by identifying the pertinent themes that emerged from the responses.

Participants and sample characteristics

In accordance with the practices in qualitative research, participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling is ideal for exploratory research aimed at gathering valuable information from the rich experiences of the participants. Kashmiri Pandits were enlisted with the aim of understanding their experiences through the transition into the assimilation in the host culture. Patton (2002) recommended purposive sampling over probability sampling for is in depth evaluation of a subject as it focusses upon 'information rich cases. Prospective participants were screened based on the inclusion criteria. Efforts were made to ensure a diverse sample from distinct background and host culture residing across different cities of India and abroad. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are listed below:

Inclusion Criteria

- Age: 50-80 years
- Both men and women fulfilling the criteria for the study were selected.
- Participants who experienced and migrated during the insurgency of 1990 were included.
- Participants who have spent at least twenty years living in another city far away from their homes were included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals who left Kashmir voluntarily before 1990 for better opportunities were not included.
- Kashmiri Pandit who still reside in Kashmir were not included.
- Participant currently undergoing treatment for any psychological disorder were not included

Participants were majorly recruited through snowball sampling, wherein the preliminary participant recommended multiple individuals to be a part of the research.

Data collection

The screening questions were sent to the 30 prospective participants. Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria 20 participants were shortlisted. The participants were explained the aim and procedure of the study. They were informed about the terms of confidentiality and recording of the interview. Post obtaining their consent, interviews were conducted in person

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and on telephone as per feasibility. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The sample consisted of 20 participants, both men (n=14) and women (n=6) with a median age group of 57. 2 participants had resided in the refugee camp in the initial years post migration. Telephonic and personal interview were conducted with the shortlisted participants. The interview was performed in Hindi and English as per the convenience of the participant, while using an interview guide to allow flexibility. A semi structured interview with open ended question was formulated for the study. Personal narrative gathered through the responses of each individual provided and insight into the psychosocial experience. Semi structure interview is ideal for exploration of sensitive perception and opinion about a topic. It provides a greater freedom of response and introspection, while leading to advent of novel concepts that adds depth and strength to the research (Dearnley, 2005). During the interview clarification and consolidation was achieved through probing questions.

RESULTS

In accordance with the principles of thematic content analysis by Green and Thorogood, three major themes were identified: Pre migration, expulsion, and post migration. 12 subthemes were identified under the major themes (Table 1). The pre migration theme entails the adversities experienced by the participants in the homeland that led them to flee their native land. The migration deals with the stressful travel and subsequent hardships. The post expulsion outlines the difficulties experienced by the Kashmiri pandits in the multifaceted society.

Table 1: Themes and subthemes identified through thematic analysis of interviews

Theme	Subtheme
Pre migration	Oppression
	Insecurity and Helplessness
Expulsion	Loss of trust
	Uncertainty about future
	Loss of honour
Post Migration	Cultural Annihilation
	Feeling of social alienation
	Lack of belongingness
	Societal regression
	Discrimination
	Climate
	Identity organized by historical trauma

Pre-migration

Oppression

The participants defined the culture of Kashmir as syncretic, characterized by diverse beliefs, religions, and cultural practices. Most Kashmiri pandits were intellectuals and held government positions and white-collar jobs while most Muslims in the valley were entrepreneurs or were involved in blue collar jobs. Participants expressed that post the state assemble election in 1987, there was political unrest in the valley and during this period discrimination against the minority i.e., the Kashmiri pandits commenced. The participant mentioned that they experienced discrimination in daily life at personal and professional levels, however ignored it initially and did not recognize the hatred that manifested. One of the participants stated:

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" Discrimination existed since 1987, we were mocked at. Since most Muslims were businessmen, they discriminated when it came to distribution of grocery, vegetables etc and they use to call us names. "

Another participant mentioned:

"Discrimination existed before migration. The Muslims though academically poor, were given preferences in job interviews and selected over a meritorious Kashmiri pandit in state run offices."

Closer to the insurgency in 1990, war crimes were at peak and the subjugation of the Kashmiri pandit community continued. There was wide-ranging scare in the valley as Kashmiri pandits were being abducted and executed, some even based on doubt of being Government agents. The Kashmiri pandits who raised their voices against the atrocities or were unmoved by threats and intimation, allurements or allegations were publicly executed to set an example. The participants mentioned:

"They thought that my father was an informer of the army and kidnapped him, luckily a neighbour told them that they have picked the wrong person so they released him, but we knew that they may attack again so we hid just one bag in our pheran and escaped to Jammu."

" There were two Kashmiri pandits who were vocal about the oppression and crimes, and they were killed point blank, two house away from my house"

Insecurity and helplessness

The forced exile was thrust on the community in the land of their ancestors at the behest of forces from across the border and conspirators within. Simultaneously attempts were made to choke every voice raised emphatically towards the plight of the Kashmiri pandit community. The participants mentioned:

"The young Muslim generation was brainwashed by the infiltrators, and they resorted to guns, dacoity and indulged in rape and killings, didn't even spare the elders, ladies and infants. We had never seen crime in Kashmir and this cause great fear, and it felt that we were left to the mercy of God."

The community lacked a secure base amidst the violence. A community that had never experienced crime in the homeland was caught in the blaze, hunted, mauled, savaged, raped, and murdered. The law and order crumbled, and the aboriginals were forced to leave all their heritage, assets, and emotional belongings behind and flee to survive. The participant stated:

"Targeted killing began in 1989 and the offenders were not prosecuted by government which increased their confidence and we Kashmiri Pandits were always docile and hence could not respond to the violence and escaped leaving everything behind our home, life savings, memories."

Another participant mentioned:

"Based on doubt that we were RSS or Government agents they were executing Pandits and there was chaos in the valley, right after Tika Lal Taploo's death and the law and order collapsed."

Many inhabitants who chose to stay back and wait for the conflict to subside found themselves struggling for survival and sustenance. The Kashmiri Pandits expressed their powerlessness as neither any national or international organization nor the media supported or raised awareness about the atrocities experienced by the community. A participant shared:

" The local media was not strong and foreign media was showing another narrative that we left on our own whims and were not forcefully displaced. After February to show a good

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picture of the Kashmiri Muslims some of us Kashmiri pandits could not leave Kashmir without the permission of the Imam at the local mosque. We escaped without any thing in May 1990"

Expulsion

Loss of trust

Participant shared that a sudden disbelief struck them when their syncretistic community was torn due to the hatred that harboured. It led to the loss of trust as friends and neighbours participated in abductions and executions of Kashmiri Pandits. The participants stated:

"My Muslim neighbour encroached my newly built house and burnt it, now there is just barren land. I feel anger, anguish and betrayal and will never go back, it boils my blood."

"Many of our neighbours who were like family informed the militants about our whereabouts. This broke us."

"My father was assassinated, we lost our home, no one came to console us. I wanted to take up gun and kill the locals, but I had to look after my mother and sister."

Uncertainty about future

Participants experienced or witnessed violence or threat and the escape event and circumstances were extremely stressful in most cases. Most participants shared that they escaped without a plan and possibilities to predict further action. Most participants mentioned that they were hopeful to return to home soon. One participant revealed

"We were confused, never saw crime, didn't know about communal violence, we left everything behind thinking we will come back"

Another participant said

"We thought it is a small-time migration but after 8-9 months we lost hope and didn't know what to do for a livelihood"

Another participant expressed

"There was lot of chaos when we arrived in Jammu, I was in my prime youth and perplexed as to what the future holds"

Loss of Honour

The participants expressed a sense of loss of dignity that compelled them to forsake their eternal home. The Kashmiri Pandit community is deep rooted intellectually and culturally and took pride in contributing to the world history, however the genocide and forced displacement led to a loss of this pride. One participant expressed:

"The militants and our own neighbours started killing and humiliating us, our self-respect was hurt, we had no option but to flee from the valley without our belongings and become migrants in our own country."

Another participant stated

"Lately there were processions and announcements on the loudspeaker, Kashmiri men go away and leave your women behind, it mortified the pandit community."

Post Migration

Cultural Annihilation

Most participants opined that in the initial years post migration since the community focussed on stabilizing itself, sustenance of culture was not a precedence that led to its dilution. However, in recent years efforts are being made by a few community members to revive the ethos.

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The participants mentioned:

"The community fragmented, there were out of culture marriages, children migrated in search of jobs, the culinary culture may exist, but the rest is diluting specially language Now there is slight revival since the community stabilized."

"Challenges to the socio-cultural fabric come from the dominance of the different thoughts process and socio - cultural traditions and beliefs mostly of northern plains. This onslaught is causing identity crisis. Inter-racial marriages have speeded up the dissolution and eventual annihilation of Kashmiri pandit identity and its ethnicity."

"We uncultured after migration, family celebrations came to an end, religious places were lost, the sense of belongingness and cohesiveness no longer existed. We failed to continue our culture"

Feeling of social alienation

Participants stated that they experienced a feeling of social alienation in form of cultural estrangement and normlessness. This further impacted the psychological wellbeing, specifically for the elderly people of the community. The participants mentioned:

"We had a culture of joint family; the community was also so well knit. If we had a marriage in the society, we never called wedding planners as the local community planned everything like family members. Now we don't even know where those people are."

"The community has evolved drastically, priorities changed, we do not have the bon homie we once had in Kashmir."

"The nature of the family has totally changed because of the tough time and circumstances. The relationships were affected. The older people couldn't bare this trauma and turned senile."

Lack of belongingness

Though all participants expressed a relative lack of belongingness to current culture, the desire to resettle into the native land varied based on level of integration in the current society.

"Delhi is not home, it is source of livelihood"

"My roots are in Kashmir; I can't forgo that. Every day I chase the thought of going back to my home."

"Kashmir will always be home, but I am settled here now, I do not wish to be displaced again."

Societal regression

Since the community was intellectually strong and laid emphasis on education, most participant were well settled and held high social positions. The migration led to professional and social regression. The participants mentioned:

"I was in first year PG when the insurgency hit, we migrated to Jammu, and we had no idea about our future. I lost more than one year because the government took time to organize camp classes for migrants on weekends and evenings."

"I was doing B.Sc. electronics but then because of the confusion and dearth of money I had to do a short diploma in Architecture and join a job to earn a living for the family. I would have studied more if this would not have happened."

Another participant stated:

"We moved from our huge home to live in small tents in temples and on barren lands and faced adversities like snakebite, lack of hygiene and sanitation and negligible medical support"

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Discrimination

Most of the participants migrated to Jammu as it was closer home and a part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Another reason was their hope to resettle once the conflict subsided. Since no resettlement efforts were made, many Kashmiri Pandits migrated to other parts of India in search of opportunities. The participants expressed experience of discrimination mostly in Jammu since a large group migrated there.

"Initially we faced resistance from Dogra community because they thought we were a threat for their job and academic opportunities."

"They did not accept us happily, they thought we will take share from their jobs and education. Resistance was their due to politics, we lived in silos."

Another participant mentioned

"Young girls faced molestation in Jammu by local community, this was never highlighted because they accommodated us, and we avoided conflict so that we could coexist."

Climate

All participants mentioned the implication of environmental factors on the physical and psychological wellbeing. One participant mentioned the issues as follows:

"Climate was a major challenge, the heat and humidity, a lot of elderly people lost their lives due to heat stroke"

Identity organized by trauma

Participants expressed that they experienced an intense sense of loss of identity post migration. They could not identify with the host community and since the kinship was fragmented there was a sense of loss. This led to the reshaping of their identity organized by their shared experience of trauma. The participants stated:

"Elderly used to save assets as heirloom, but they left everything behind and were left with pain and hurt."

"I cannot go back to Kashmir, terrorism is like cancer, they will uproot us again, we haven't been able to overcome the suffering, we cannot bear it again."

"A lot of people told us that we should not have runaway, we should have fought even if it meant death. We did not runaway we were forced to leave for the sake of our families"

"Our children understand the trauma, the agony connects the community. The younger generation is now globally raising awareness about our exodus and genocide."

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the psychosocial impact of trauma due to forced displacement from homeland and subsequent acculturation on the Kashmiri Pandits. The findings revealed three themes – pre migration, expulsion, and post migration and twelve subthemes that have a significant impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of the immigrants. The study revealed that in the pre migratory phase the factors that led to the exodus were exposure to violence, fear of persecution, death threats, perceived ineffectiveness of the authorities and lack of a secure base that are predictors of severe psychological distress (Keller et al., 2017). Research have established a positive association between political violence and psychological symptoms including PTSD and major depressive disorder (Steel et al., 2009). The aim of ethnic cleansing is dehumanization and annihilation that involves traumatic events that lead of loss of honour, bereavement, fear of obliteration and helplessness (Ford, 2009). Cultural annihilation leads to feeling of shame, ignominy and depreciation that leads to humiliation often overlooked under the disguise of other deeper emotions like wrath and despair, however, equally harms the psychological wellbeing (Hudson, 2006). The grief develops from the loss of deep-seated human needs. The loss of land, sacred spaces, social

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capital, structure, identity, culture, meaning, and control contributes to the dissatisfaction thus leading to a feeling of alienation that leads to grief.

The participants expressed experiencing the feeling of uncertainty with regards to return to the homeland and the future. Most participants left Kashmir without any belongings and did not have the opportunity to plan or chose their resettlement city which further led to fragmentation of the community. This led to a lack of sense of belonging and perceived social alienation. Participants also reported a loss of trust in the authority and other community. They share witnessing processions to terrorize them by the dissidents and other community which was a part of their syncretic culture that led to disbelief and fear. Uslaner (2016) posited that personal experience and mutuality forms the basis of interpersonal trust and hence is relatively unstable and changes over time like institutional trust. Evidence suggest association between interpersonal and institutional trust and happiness and wellbeing (Hudson, 2006). Further the victims may feel the need to share their experiences of injustice and lack of institutional responsiveness. The victims may foster a feeling of alienation and lack of sense of belonging thus weakening the social connection if they feel receive a negative response or denial (Thoresen et al., 2014). A cross sectional study revealed positive correlation between low institutional trust and psychological problems, lower life satisfaction, poor social assistance, or impediment to seek out support (Thoresen et al., 2018).

Participants reported facing initial resistance and marginalization in the host city as the native community perceived them to be threat for their employment and educational opportunities. The perception of discrimination may exist due to the oppression experienced in the pre migration phase thus making the community vulnerable. They also reported societal regression, mainly professional as the government took time to align the educational and employment needs of the immigrants. Studies suggest that minority often perceive discrimination in job, pay and promotion leading to a 'generic rejection' regardless of the interaction of the sphere of influence (Dion et. al., 1994). Marginalization can lead to negative psychological outcome for immigrants that can be deterred by social connection with host community thus establishing a sense of belonging, assimilation, and acceptance (Marinucci & Riva, 2021). Exodus brought about a drastic change in social network and kinship as the community travelled to different cities often countries in search of suitable opportunities. In collectivist culture, individuals chose to stay back in the conflict area to preserve their kinship and those who are displaced hold a sense of guilt and unfulfilled responsibility of abandoning the extended families (Somasundaram, 2011). Research indicates a strong association between loss of social capital and psychological distress in immigrant population (Johnson et al., 2017).

Participants reported that the elders, above the age of 50 were significantly impacted by the exodus that led to various physical and psychological ailments and increased mortality. Climate played a significant role since most elderly immigrants had not left Kashmir before and hence experienced a tropical summer for the first time. Research suggests the elderly population affected by forced displacement is susceptible to mental disorders and psychosocial difficulties mediated by age, gender, pre migration trauma, and acculturative stress (Virgincar et al., 2016). A few participants reported transgenerational trauma, wherein the second generation of Kashmiri Pandits experienced distress, however this was determined by the situation and coping strategy of the first-generation victim. Transgenerational trauma is often unconsciously passed on by the parents through attachment styles, family dynamics, preservation of identity organized by trauma and shared by sociocultural continuance and internalized by the children (Danieli, 2007). Further studies may reveal the prevalence and causality of intergenerational trauma in the community.

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When justice is denied in matter of high emotional value it leads a feeling of being vulnerable that leads to mental health issues. The process of healing for a victim entail sharing their ordeal, however often they are not understood or neglected. The indifference makes them feel futile and their story meaningless thus strengthening the humiliation instilled by the perpetrators (Mollica, 2009). Thus, influencing their successful reintegration into the society due to the fear and detachment. A unified holistic approach comprising of increasing public awareness, nurturing cultural practices, and rebuilding community and fostering family and social network can heal the collective trauma manifested by the community (Somasundaram, 2014). While the community has a strong sense of rootedness, an existential anxiety is the fundamental part of the culture due to the past attempts to annihilate the community. This corroborates with the research that suggests narratives established by the culture defines the national character of the Jews in Israel represented by the pervasive existential anxiety (Yair, 2014). Despite of a strong sense of rootedness there was mixed response on the proposition of returning to the homeland, largely varying based on age, integration status in the society and personal trauma. Evidence confirms older first-generation victims who do not have a negative personal trauma of pre-conflict interethnic relations are considerably more likely to return. Further individuals who are well assimilated into the society and have a permanent job are less likely to return (Stefanovic & Loizides, 2017). Literature reveals that 'return' is more of an 'inconclusive phenomenon' with regards to the resettlement and repatriation policies for the Kashmiri Pandit community.

Despite of the fact that a considerable time has passed since the exodus the book of memory still lies open for the community. Though the community has survived through the adversities and established a position in the society reconciliation and healing is imminent. An integrated multilevel approach that incorporates medical, social, political, and historical perspective aimed at understanding the refugee experience shall be more efficacious to deal with the trauma (George, 2010). The H5 Model is an evidence based culturally relevant theoretical model that addresses major cause of threat and susceptibilities affecting the traumatized individuals. It is five-dimensional overlying model of trauma and recovery with the trauma story at the anchored at the centre of the model. The five dimensions incorporate human rights, humiliation, self-healing, health promotion and habitat (Mollica, 2016). Closure refers to a sense of comprehensiveness, final resolution of a dissonance through interaction, evidence or practice that helps an individual to move past the traumatic event. Victims of collective trauma often build memorials as a representation of shared mourning, soothing yet evocative. Research defines closure and reconciliation as 'psychological concepts' aimed at unrealistic and uncertain outcome (Weinstein, 2011). The Kashmiri Pandit community never found closure. Despite of the fact that they have assimilated in the host community they remain in transit and the concept of 'Home' continues to be fluid. Acknowledgement and validation of their trauma story perhaps shall be a step towards their recovery.

CONCLUSION

There is a dearth of research on the impact of forced migration on the Kashmiri Pandit community. Previous studies have focussed on the current inhabitants of the valley with emphasis on trauma and pathology. Findings of this study revealed that the victims of the forced migration experienced tremendous psychosocial stress due to the pre migration violence and acculturative stress post migration and are still emotionally scarred by the event that occurred 32 years back. While the community has moved forward demonstrating incredible resilience and works to create their bequest through strength, dignity and meaning, the yearning for the homeland remains with them. The study suggests that while most survivor

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continue to carry residual emotions of fear, anger, and humiliation they continue to stride forward to reconstruct their culture and community.

Most participant mentioned that the strength of the community that helped them cope with the adversities was their desire for a bright future and their belief in power of knowledge. As Frankl stated, “those most apt to survive the camps were those oriented toward the future towards a task, or a person, waiting for them in their future, toward a meaning to be fulfilled by the future”. Perhaps the community found meaning in commitment to reviving their culture and building a secure future.

Limitation of the study

A few caveats may be acknowledged in the study. The sample was not selected randomly but through snowball sampling technique which is recommended for exploratory studies of relatively unknown population such as migrants and refugees. However, it is less reliable than other sampling techniques. Further, due to trauma a lot of individual refrain from sharing their experiences or lack motivation. Nonetheless the response rates for the study were high. Studies suggest that the social stigma associated with mental illness and the cultural differences may affect the response of participants. They may under report symptoms thus leading to discrepancy in the data.

Implications

This study has implication regarding the policies and psychosocial intervention for traumatized internally displaced population and ethnic minorities. The mental health professionals dealing with traumatized individuals of such events should not restrict their assessment to pathological or post traumatic symptoms. They should analyse the impact of the pre migration and post migration factors that may deteriorate the mental wellbeing of the individuals. The findings of the study can be applied in clinical setting by social workers to assist the trauma survivors of such events for healing and reconciliation through a multidimensional perspective. The study adds to the limited literature available on the impact of trauma and forced migration on internally displaced population. Further studies to study the impact further are necessary. Future studies may also consider studying the post traumatic growth and the impact of transgenerational trauma on the community.

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Conflict of Interest

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