

Disillusionment And Faith - The Future Of Kashmiri Pandits

When a man is robbed of his belongings, kicked out of his home, and forced to leave his land where his ancestors had lived for thousands of years, it is very hard to imagine that he will continue to have faith in the human values of his tormentors and destroyers - even of his neighbors and countrymen at large, and even that of the people around the world.

Human life is a fragile phenomenon, where the support of the physical environment and the faith in the fellow human beings is a requisite for meaningful existence.

Kashmiri Pandits, the original inhabitants of Kashmir, have been kicked and destroyed before, but never have they been so grossly brutalized, victimized, and dehumanized as this time. This destruction of Kashmiri Pandits is the most profound in their history and it will have a significant impact on their survival and happiness.

The annihilation of Pandits happened while the central government of India was watching and well aware of the dimensions of the tragedy taking place but chose to play soft with its perpetrators, Muslims, in the hope of winning the civil war in Kashmir one day. Cries of help to the people of India and beyond evoked little effective sympathy and help. Ambushed in daylight, Pandits left Kashmir Valley in pain, misery, and utter revulsion toward Muslims and disgust toward their central government - but invisibly, deep beneath their day to day consciousness, many of them harbored hopes of justice and human treatment. It took many years after being kicked out of the valley before most of them started losing faith in the mankind's mythologized human values and civilization's much vaunted democratic institutions.

Most of the KP's pass time in the dreary, pigeon-holed, futureless existence in Jammu. Thousands of men in mid-30's to mid-50's never go to work, as they have chosen to survive on government handouts given in lieu of the salary they would have earned, if they had the proper conditions to work in Kashmir. This psychological-self-annihilation is the worst price KP community is paying at the hands of the civil war. The lack of zeal, ambition, and a sense of honor to work has had devastating effect on the family happiness and the proper psychological health of KP children. Many young, professionally educated KP's have chosen to fight the mental illness and the consequent physical illness than attempt to carve a new future in places distant from Kashmir. This long immersion in slothfulness and hopelessness will cast a dark shadow on the development of the future Kashmiri culture. It will take generations before Kashmiri Pandits of Jammu and Kashmir will regain purposefulness, confidence, and cheerfulness in their lives. One has only to look at the volume of anti-depression, ulcer, and blood-pressure medications consumed by KP's in this region. Some time back there was a report that the average birth-weight of KP babies in the region was significantly deteriorating. The young KP boys and girls do not harbor big and many dreams.

One thing is clear in the present Kashmiri Pandit catastrophe, that they will never reoccupy Kashmir Valley in the same fervor, legitimacy, and bond as before. Although Kashmir will continue to remain under India, its past social and cultural atmosphere will never remerge, as it has been badly shattered. It is as if the spine of a human being has been broken in a violent collision and thereafter he can never reclaim his old poise, gait, and grace. Kashmiri Pandit's have to accept the fait accompli of the situation the events have thrown them into. Bleeding our hearts on the mammoth loss will not make us recover it. All the diplomacy, the political jostling and posturing going on in the world on Kashmir problem does not touch the plight of KP's. They are the side-show of the side-show in this insane and ancient drama played between Muslims and Hindus. All the intense and prolonged efforts by KP's round the world to draw attention to their injustice and pain have not produced any significant results. KP efforts have by now reached an apex, any further intensification and revision of strategy to win people to their cause will not be helpful. No energy should be expended to influence Govt. Of India, as it has its own strategy and agenda, in which KP's have a marginal

weight. In such a situation KP's should give up on the hope of reclaiming Kashmir in the way it occupied it before. Kashmir can not become their home in the same way as it was before. The recent catastrophic experiences in Kashmir have alienated the dominant majority of Kashmir, Muslims, and the Hindus for a long time to come. How can a KP return to a place where his fellow KP's have been murdered, many of their houses have been burnt, by a majority community who hates them. It would not be possible to have a normal emotional and psychological life there. And an attempt to raise KP children there would be a leap into insanity. Even though Kashmir will continue to remain a part of India, it is no longer a home of KP's.

With the above perspective, it would make a lot of sense for KP organizations like Panun Kashmir and KOA to withdraw from the cause of returning KP's to Kashmir and rechannelize their energizes and financial resources to the placement of young KP's in jobs, helping in the education of the destitute children, and the creation of international networking for the sustenance of KP identity and ambition. KP's should be helped to run for local elections. They should stop beating their chests and look to future for the betterment of their children and community. There hang myths about Kashmirs that they have a sharp sense of survival and a keen mind. Although they are not accurate but Kashmiris do have some sense of survivability and some measure of mental keenness - both greatly needed in their present circumstances.

If KP's follow two things - and it seems that they eventually will - they will do quite well in future. One is to work hard and the other to not to tamper with their identity. KP's are college-education minded and this helps them greatly in these technological times. KP's are into all kinds of technological and scientific fields. One area they are not good at is private entrepreneurship, no wonder not many KP's are in that. Working hard, though not natural for Kashmiris, is accommodated by them when circumstances demand. We have to see how KP's work when they are outside Kashmir. They being permanently exiled from Kashmir Valley is in a way a boon for them, as their mental keenness coupled with diligence may take them to hithero unrealized achievements. Kashmiris are very comparing, that is before embarking on important things they see whether fellow

Kashmiris are also doing the same. In the universal climate of hard work, engendered by cutthroat competition, KP's will follow the tide.

Identity is one of the basic structures of human psychology, any attempt to modify it is risking a lot. KP's have to keep nourishing their identity (but not necessarily continue with some bad things of the old culture). This should take form of the community cultural clubs, international gatherings on history, art, and literature of Kashmir, etc. The internet revolution is obviously a bonanza to the uprooted communities like KP's. As long as KP's consider themselves first as Kashmiris and then as Indians, they have a better chance of retaining their Kashmiri identity. Having been rendered refugees in the country of their citizenship, they can not do any better. Like Jews we have been rendered rootless and like them we will become cosmopolitan and mixable with other communities. but without losing our identity. Like them our history will become our destiny. Our greatest pitfall will be if we try to become Americans or British or French, etc. We have to live through our Kashmiri identity to live in peace, dignity, and happiness.

Contrary to popular opinion there will be people living in the world a hundred years from now, who will not only call themselves KP's but be KP's - though different from us, to account for the passage of time and the change of circumstances. They may not be speaking Kashmiri, same way as many Europeans in U.S.A. do not speak their ancestral languages. The whole world is changing in that the ethnicity of its groups is diluting as global village metaphor is hitting the ground. We will be a colored element in a vast kaleidoscope. From the high pedestal of Kashmiri Brahmin we have to descend gracefully to become a mere flower in a widespread garden. History has taught us that ethnicity does not disappear, though it may change its appearance. Also, Kashmiris , in spite of complex relationships they often have with each other, do not mix well with other ethnic groups. Networking will remain the backbone of the Kashmiri psychological survival. They are vastly more inclined to the psychological condition of "being," rather than of "becoming." Kashmiris seek their kind, even the one's they would have reservations about mixing with back home, outside Kashmir, in foreign lands, wherever they are spread thin. Kashmiris, history has shown us, have resistance to change. Kashmiris will survive ethnically as Italians,

Irish, Spanish, and other groups have. Identity and survival are in their genes.

Moving out of Jammu and Kashmir as refugees and restarting their lives has been traumatic for more than one reason. A refugee's resettlement is expectedly fraught with anguish and perspiration, but in a KP's case the added dimension of heart-break came from our central government's apathy and neglect - which has been so bad that it seems it was calculatedly done. Add to it the lack of sympathy and help from the non-Kashmiri Indian (the significant help from Bal Thackeray and others has only been a drop in the ocean), which has hurt the KP pride very badly. There are only about 800,000 KP's round the world, but they have a high estimation of their legacy, character, and personality, and ,therefore, they are understandably a proud people. Indian people are battling a universe of problems, the plight of KP's is only a small air current in a hurricane they live in. KP's can not find proper sympathy, help, and opportunity to transplant themselves in India outside Jammu and Kashmmir after their destruction and desecration in land of their ancestors. They have to seek refuge outside India, if possible.

United States is a special place in the world at this time in history. It is not only the biggest nation of the immigrants but also a champion of democracy and is economically the strongest engine in the world. No wonder it has been a magnet to the world's disaffected, disfranchised, and deprived. KP's have a logical place to attempt to emigrate to in their circumstances. There are some one thousand KP families in U.S. eager to help them. Given the ethnic multiplicity and tolerance in the country, U.S. is the most suitable place for KP diaspora to land at. Even though it is far from Kashmir, it is the most suitable garden in which the fragile KP plant has the best chance of transplantation. We can try, at a larger scale, to influence U.S. Govt. to give us refugee treatment in giving us land and financial support. This simple idea has unfortunately not been give a chance. Better than living in India, U.S.A. would best serve the long-time goals of many KP's.

Disillusionment is the present state of mind of the KP refugee, we could not expect any different from his circumstances. For thousands of years he clung to his mother Kashmir but now time has come for him to take a radical step, a step

to make a clean break from the past illusions, and at last tread on the ground leading to liberation. We have been a target of religious hatred, a political bargaining chip, and a peripherally insignificant minority for a long time but now fate gives us a chance to escape the turmoil and a torture of hundreds of years - a chance we can not lose, an opportunity we can not spoil. Future beckons us. Faith has been simplistically described as belief without reason. But we need not abandon reason in having faith that KP's will transcend the present impasse and emerge as a more successful and happier community than before. All we have to do is work hard, retain our identity, and try to leave India. The subconscious religiosity of KP's, their non-conformist inclinations, their strong love for nature, and their disinclination toward a personal god are all ingredients for a people who can transplant themselves to different places and cultures in the world.