



DISPLACEMENT, DISTRESS, AND DEFIANCE: SHARED TRAUMA OF GIRMITIYA AND KASHMIRI PANDIT MIGRANTS IN SELECTED NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT:

Migration of indentured labourers (GIRMITIYA) and Kashmiri Pandits have distinctive natures in the context of history, culture and circumstances but both have shared traumas of suffering, inhuman living conditions, death, fear, displacement, nostalgia, and identity crisis. Girmitiya labourers migrated in the hope of living in better conditions because many of them were outcasts, subject to casteism and treated badly in their homeland. Seeing their difficulties they were lured into agreements by colonialists. On the other hand, Kashmiri Pandits migrated due to fear of religious persecution. They were forced into exile, from better living conditions to worse, they had everything, generations of Kashmiri pandits lived there and built their homes brick by brick but everything was torn apart because of the escalation in insurgency. Hatred towards them by the majority became the reason for targeted killings. Whether it was Girmitiya labourers or Kashmiri pandits they had to face inhuman situations, women and children were the ones who suffered the most. The paper's objective is to understand the pain, suffering and trauma of both indentured labourers and Kashmiri pandits caused due to displacement and how they are coping with it. Some of the theories of trauma studies will be used to provide a better perspective. Text which are used in this paper is Non-fiction Memoirs because they portray subjective reality experienced by affected individuals. Our Moon Has Blood Clots by Rahul Pandita relates to the exodus of Kashmiri pandit while Brij V Lal's *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji* is based on the journey and anguish of Girmitiya labourers.

KEYWORDS:

EXILE, NOSTALGIA, CULTURE, IDENTITY CRISIS, SUFFERING, RESISTANCE.

INTRODUCTION

Human is an emotional being and has feelings for the things which he is associated with, whether it is positive or negative feeling. Choices made by him revolve around his emotions and at some level intensification in negative emotions gives birth to different types of traumas. These traumas can affect an individual or a community at large, it can be a damaging experience of the past and memory of that event occurs again and again which one can't skip. "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 11). It can be described as a tormenting experience which can affect a person profoundly and can impact a person's physical and cognitive abilities it can also be a reason for behavioural changes and leads to depression and anxiety. Overcoming trauma one experiencing can be a difficult task it can take a long time, and, in some cases, people can't overcome these at all. Sometimes knowingly or unknowingly trauma can become a cause for self-harm.

Devastating experiences like natural disasters, accidents, calamity, abuse (of any kind whether it can be sexual, physical, mental or verbal), health, war, conflict and migration can become a cause of social trauma. Exile or

forced displacement is a common cause of trauma, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at the end of 2023, 117.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order. Out of these 43.4 million live in refugee camps and 68.3 are internally displaced. It should be a subject of concern for all the governments and organisations working for the welfare of humanity because all these people live in dreadful conditions, they face threats to their lives, they are deprived of basic things, and sexual abuse of women is a common cause in such cases and children don't get basic education, youth employment and drug use is also a concern. These living conditions are inhuman and cause traumatic neurosis, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), cultural shock, nostalgia, transgenerational trauma etc. in migrants.

"An adult's experience of exile is perhaps most closely rooted in the infant's experience of attachment, separation, and loss" (Lijtmaer 2022). Out of nowhere, he gets dragged into situations which he is unfamiliar with, just like children he gets attached to certain things which in this case are his home, people, surroundings, and environment. Without these things human life feels empty and getting

over this takes the time he gets attached to these things like a child affectioned towards a toy if the child is separated from the toy by any means he will feel a sense of loss because he lost a thing which was placed in his heart, he loved it, thought about it and it made him happy and if by any chance he found it back he will feel a sense of relief but in case of migrants, they rarely get this sense of relief because this sense of relief is just a moon they are seeing in the daylight and it creates mental trauma, nostalgia and ever going struggle for identity building. They can't escape reality and have to face it all they can do is make a mental image of their happy place and cope with the current situation.

In forced or voluntary migration one factor that is the biggest reason for the mental shock is culture change, it can be different from what one has experienced, and in different places, ideas of culture can be different at one place it can be open and liberal and at other it can be conservative due to that migrants experience a culture shock at a new place, and it is forced on them and adapting to new norms can be a challenging task. "The initial experience of "culture shock" in immigration is a reactive process stemming from the impact of a new culture upon those who attempt to merge with it as a newcomer" (Lijtmaer2022).

"The loss of loved ones or caregivers and/or livelihood, the destruction of property, insecure living conditions, war, torture, imprisonment, terrorist attacks, abuse, and sexualised violence are among the traumatic experiences that characterize experiences of displacement" (Theisen-Womersley,2021). Girmitya and Kashmiri pandit migrants have faced it throughout their lives and the same is shown by Rahul Pandita and Brij V Lal in their accounts. Brij V Lal is a historian who has worked and dedicated his life to exploring stories of different Girmitya migrants and revealing their agony and grief to the world. He explored history, economic and living conditions, their lives, and suffering through post-colonial lens and depicted beautifully in different accounts so did Rahul Pandita. Some Girmitya voluntarily migrated but most of them were forced to migrate due to circumstances at home, they were not able to make two ends meet at home and apart from these dreadful conditions they were also subjected to casteism in the case of Kashmiri migrants they all were forced and migrated in fear of getting persecuted due religious hatred, Rahul Pandita presents a first-hand account of many such instances in his memoir.

"Girmitya migration was prompted by the historical background of British colonial practices as well as economic hardships in places like North India. The relocation was forced by the economic pressures that forced people to migrate abroad" (Singh, 2024). During British rule in India, people suffered inequality, and cruelty and were barred from basic amenities. Indian people were oppressed and looted, whatever they earned a big sum of that was taken by the Britishers, the whole system was rigged to facilitate the oppression of Indian people so the British Empire could thrive, and after the abolition of

slavery in the British Empire in 1834, there was a shortage of workers who would work for the empire without raising any question, as a replacement of this cheap labour was sought from India on the contract basis this gave birth to a new form of slavery, innocent and uneducated people were lured by giving false hopes of better future. They were in a contract of 5 years but most of them never returned and many even died even before reaching their destination.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

The first common problem faced by Kashmiri pandits and Girmitya migrants and became a cause of intergenerational trauma was the unliving conditions they were put as in case of Girmitya different accounts and historical evidence show that no proper space was provided to them, in proportion to ship size number of travellers was more, they were put in like animals in small spaces and lack of sanitation was also a concern, drinking water and food sometimes got contaminated with human faeces, no proper place to bath. Everything from eating to extracting was done in a small area of the ship and due to that many diseases were spread on the ships and many passengers died before reaching their destination. In fear of infection, many were thrown into the sea alive or dead and were not even given last rites. Unscientific solutions and superstitious cures to diseases like cholera and smallpox also became a reason for torture for those infected. "The diet for all on board was lowered, and children were doused with castor oil, laudanum and rum, and fed on arrowroot and sago for four or five days. Despite all the precautions, 19 lives were lost, a mortality rate of 3.80 percent, well above the average of one percent for the whole period of indentured migration to Fiji" (Lal, 144).

"It was during Sikandar's reign that a cry escaped from the lips of the hapless Pandits, to be spared the sword: Na Bhatto Aham, Na Bhatto Aham! (I'm not a Pandit, I'm not a Pandit!)" (Pandita,15). It is not that Kashmiri pandits had to face these atrocities for the first time, but they had to face all sorts of threats throughout history and a sudden rise in such incidents happened after India's independence, Pandita in his memoir also explored and gave an overview of such incidents, due to constant attacks in different regimes after independence they had to live in threatening circumstances. They had to compromise and accept the atrocities happening to them whether it was done for political reasons or any other reason, they were stopped from performing religious rituals, orders were given to stop them from celebrating festivals like that of Shivaratri and places of worship were destroyed. "In 1986, major anti-Pandit riots broke out in Anantnag in southern Kashmir in retaliation to rumours that Muslims had been killed in the Hindu-majority region of Jammu. Some believed the riots were a conspiracy by one political party to bring down another party's government. Whatever the reasons, the Pandits became the target. Houses were looted and burnt down, men beaten up, women raped, and dozens of temples destroyed. A massive statue of the

goddess Durga was brought down in the ancient Lok Bhawan temple" (Pandita, 35).

ENDURING THE NATURE'S WRATH

After all these problems sudden change in the environment was a concern many of them hadn't previously experienced the climate of a sea, it was all new to them many of them didn't know how to swim but without some training or keeping the cost of their lives in mind they were put on dangerous journeys so colonist can get cheap labour same has happened in case of Kashmiri Pandits they were accustomed to a cooler climate but after they migrated to refugee camps in Jammu and parts of India they had to face a hotter environment which was unbearable and made prone their bodies to many diseases it happened due to weaken immunity. They had to live on bare minimum rations in our moon has blood clots Rahul Pandita shared an incident where he saw that people had to get in queue to get tomatoes and other rations and in many cases, half tomatoes were given to refugees. "By the time our turn came, and it came in a matter of minutes, it was clear that not everyone would get tomatoes. One of the men distributing them procured a rusty knife. They began to cut the tomatoes into half and give them away. I thought I was hallucinating. Or maybe this was the effect of the hot loo wind that, the inhabitants of this city maintained, could do your head in. I remembered our kitchen garden back home in Srinagar, and all the tomatoes I had wasted, plucking them before they could ripen and hitting them for sixes with my willow bat. And now in my hands somebody had thrust half a tomato" (Pandita, 3), this shows that migrants get treated differently and everything come at an expense, their whole life get turned upside down.

MARGINALISED IN AN ALREADY MARGINALISED GROUP

Another problem which is common in both narratives is the condition of women, in both texts it is shown how Girmitya and Kashmiri Pandit women had to live in fear in unfavourable circumstances, they were subject to sexual abuse, and they were assaulted, raped and tortured. Girmitya women were repeatedly abused first by crew of the ship; some of them were Indians too and then by overseers, owners and workers at plantations apart from that they were also abused and beaten at home. Some of them were seen with low self-esteem because they had rumours about them being sex workers but even girls under 18 were also raped and sexually abused. There was no proper health care system, and these women had to face many complexities in pregnancy, lack of sex education and not having a proper understanding of the procedure may have led to miscarriages and the death of the mother. In India, there were experienced women called Dhai-maawho used to take care of pregnant women and newborn children but in Fiji, these women depended on the help they got from locals if any may have helped these women, but it doesn't mean they didn't face racial discrimination or physical abuse from them. "When a child or infant died between the years 1879 and 1919, blame for

their death was almost always attributed to the mother, often before an official investigation was carried out. Lal challenged this position by illustrating that in the majority of the cases, the high death rates among Indian infants and children in Fiji were the result of poor sanitation and living conditions" (Mishra, 2024).

Women who were raped and got pregnant had to take care first of themselves and then their children because the rapists coercion them to keep quiet and due to that their children became a reason of shame and all of them were not shown any respect. They were marginalised in an already marginalised group and became subject to constant abuse. They had to do humanly impossible physical labour and after that, they had to perform the duties of a housewife and take care of their children. They were not able to explain their sorrows to anyone because there was no one to help them and nowhere to go while in their homeland they could have gone to their father's house if things weren't right but here on the plantation, they had to keep all to themselves and just hoped for improvement and had to fight to their way out of the misery

When there were attacks in Rahul Pandita's neighbourhood and his mother saw a dreadful accident, and houses of Kashmiri Pandits were attacked seeing this she decided that she will kill her daughter and herself with a knife so they don't get raped or tortured it shows the dignity of these brave women and that they will go to any extent to save their honour. Both Kashmiri Pandit and Girmitya women were resilient and fought for their survival, overcoming all the burdens of a patriarchal society there were many obstacles to stop them, but no one helped them. They played their duty of working women, housewives, daughters and mothers perfectly. It is the resilience of these women that kept both communities motivated, to fight the circumstances and to hope for a better future.

CONCLUSION

Indentured Labourers or Kashmiri Pandits both have faced different types of traumatic experiences, and these traumas have taken the form of intergenerational trauma. In the context of literature and history, no proper space was given to these issues and were left unexplored, but Brij V. Lal and Rahul Pandita tried and depicted in their respective narratives perfectly the sorrows of these migrants and revealed their traumatic experiences to the world. Their fighting will, resilience and how they coped with different traumas and overcame them is also a thing of motivation for the ones who are experiencing some sort of traumas. More steps should be taken to understand why involuntary migration happens, to stop it, and to provide a better future for the children of migration and a better life to the migrants.

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