

Everyday Cultural Practices and Sense of Belonging Among Kashmiri Pandits in Post-Migration Contexts: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: The forced migration of the Kashmiri Pandit community in the early 1990s highlights a significant aspect of internal displacement in India. Existing literature largely examines the aspects of trauma, post-traumatic stress, identity loss, gendered experiences, intergenerational transmissions and policy and structural frameworks allowing integration of the community. However, comparatively there is a limited focus on how culture is experienced, practiced, and reconstructed in everyday context post-migration. The present study employs a structured systematic review to examine literature published between the years 1990 and 2024 that explore the aspects of migration, displacement, cultural identity, cultural preservation, integration and adaptation among Kashmiri Pandits community. Academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and ResearchGate were searched using relevant keywords such as “Kashmiri Pandits,” “migration,” “displacement,” “cultural identity,” and “post-migration experiences.” After screening the studies based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, selected literature was presented through the lens of systematic review. The present review presents four major themes of displacement and changing concepts of identity and home, psychological impact and practice of resilience post migration, cultural adaptation and erosion along with gendered, generational and policy frameworks. While the literature draws focus largely towards traumatic experiences, policy frameworks, and identity and cultural negotiation as experienced by community members there is limited understanding of everyday cultural practices and experience of belonging in post migration settings. The review highlights the need to examine culture not only as a loss or changed process but in terms of an ongoing practice and daily experience in the new socio-cultural settings.

Keywords: Migration, Displacement, Cultural Identity, Kashmiri Pandits, Reconstruction, Belonging, Post-Migration.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Displacement refers to the forced movement of individuals away from their habitats due to a natural catastrophe, starvation, or warfare; one of the two forms of such displacement comprises the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the refugees. The Kashmiri Pandits, who were displaced during the armed conflict in the 1990s, constitute a significant group of IDPs in the area. When people are forced to go into conflict zones, their status is stated as IDPs, but the government designates them as "migrants." (Haq, 2021). The migration of the Kashmiri Pandit community from the Kashmir Valley in 1989-90 was noted as one of the most remarkable internal displacements in modern Indian history. It is estimated that a population of about 160,000 to 170,000 Kashmiri Pandits were living in the valley before the insurgency started (Evans, 2002). It was noted that as the militant violence increased during the late 1980s, Pandits who sought refuge in Jammu and other parts

of India, nearly 90,000 to 100,000 had left by mid-1990 (Pagyal, 2015).

Forced displacement is the involuntary change of residence of an individual or group of individuals. Such movements are often linked with cultural, psychological, and socioeconomic shifts. Before their removal, the Kashmiri people had a firm grip on specific areas of Kashmir and were united by a common Kashmiri identity, culture, and territory. After the exodus, the community became dispersed in refugee camps as well as in the cities of Delhi, Jammu, and other Indian towns. For a long time, the Kashmiri Pandits defined their identity by their land. The displacement unlawfully cut off that bond (Joshi & Dave, 2025).

The process of culture is viewed as learned, shared, and passed through generations, thus the beliefs, values, and practices that tie people into communities. The cultural, ethnic,

and racial backgrounds are the main components of identity that undergo changes over time due to migration and acculturation (Bhugra & Becker, 2008). Acculturation is understood as a concept that captures the whole process of people's change in attitude, behavior, and various life areas as they transition from one culture to another. The essence of acculturation is the reciprocal adaptation and influence among the different cultural groups. Acculturation stress is defined as the exposure and reaction (stress) to the challenges that can occur before, during, or after migration (Olcese et al., 2024).

Bhugra & Jones, (2001) states migration as a factor that leads to processes of assimilation and acculturation where people try to keep their heritage and at the same time get used to the major cultural norms. It also states that these shifts can lead to mental strain, identity crisis, or disconnection in a person's life mainly if the situation is made worse by the loss of social contact or poverty. Eventually, as one acquires not only language but also social skills, this integration results in a new feeling of acceptance and harmony. These slow changes allow gradual adaptation for both the immigrant and the local society, as they collaborate and find new ways to exchange cultures through being more understanding of each other.

The existing research has highlighted aspects related to migration, displacement, identity, cultural preservation, and adaptation among Kashmiri Pandits community, trauma and structural resources while there is a limited focus on everyday cultural practices, intergenerational transmission, and lived experience of belonging among the community members in post migration settings. Therefore, the present review aims to identify and highlight patterns, gaps and emerging themes in the context of everyday cultural practices and lived experiences of belonging among Kashmiri Pandits in their post migration settings by focusing attention towards cultural continuity and reconstruction.

II. METHOD

➤ *Design*

The present study employs a structured systematic review approach to examine existing literature on migration, displacement, cultural adaptation, and belonging experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community post migration.

➤ *Data Sources*

A structured literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases including Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR and ResearchGate. These databases were selected to ensure interdisciplinary and wide coverage across dimensions of psychology, sociology, migration studies, and cultural studies. The search included publications from 1990 to 2024 to explore literature after the occurrence of displacement in early 1990s.

➤ *Search Keywords*

The search for the literature included using the combinations of the following keywords and phrases: “Kashmiri Pandits,” “migration,” “forced displacement,” “cultural identity,” “acculturation,” “cultural preservation,” “post-migration,” “lived experiences,” “belonging,” and “intergenerational transmission.”

➤ *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

The studies were included if they focused on the Kashmiri Pandit community, addressed and explained migration, displacement, identity, culture, belonging or adaptation and if they were empirical (qualitative/quantitative) or analytical secondary studies and if they were published in peer-reviewed sources. The studies were excluded if they were purely political commentaries or posted as blogs, non-academic publications or if they were not directly related to the Kashmiri Pandit community.

➤ *Screening Process*

For the current review approximately 60- 70 studies were initially identified through database searches. The titles and abstracts were initially viewed and analyzed for relevance to culture, migration, psychosocial experiences and for a better understanding of the paper a full-text review was conducted based on inclusion and exclusion criteria of literature. The studies that did not align with the themes related to cultural reconstruction, adaptation or belonging were excluded and the final selected studies categorized and arranged thematically to identify recurring patterns and gaps in the literature.

➤ *Data Synthesis*

A qualitative thematic synthesis was employed to identify major themes across studies. Themes were identified and categorized by placing particular attention to cultural preservation, adaptation, intergenerational transmission and lived experiences of belonging in post-migration settings.

III. RESULTS

The themes that emerged in the present review are as follows:

➤ *Displacement and Changing concept of Identity and Home*

The existing literature describes migration and displacement not only as changes in habitat but also change in the nature of their identity (Banki & Adhikari, 2024). Identity is stated as not a static trait that is transferred but rather as a process of maintaining identity in the places. Often, community rituals are made stronger after migration, there can also be the case that traditions change or die out as people become accustomed to new environments (Hack et al., 2021).

Studies on Kashmiri Pandit's reflect upon the period of 1990s during which approximately 90% of the families of Kashmiri Pandits moved out of the Kashmir valley. It was understood that traditional marriage patterns, close-knit family

systems and traditional customs were altered due to migration. Generational differences were evident among younger generations who were quickly adapting to the new situation, while the older generations supported the maintenance of traditional practices. Overall, the study highlights how migration can affect not just where one lives but also how they view themselves and their cultural identity (Singh, 2023).

Literature also highlights aspects of reconstruction of “home” post migration. Datta, (2016) explored that a lot of Pandits have made changes in their lives to adjust to the new physical and economic realities, but the feeling of “home” is still tied emotionally to Kashmir. Shameem & Khan, (2015) and Shekhawat, (2012) also highlight that there is a feeling of alienation and loss of identity experienced by Kashmiri Pandits to preserve their traditions while a strong emotional attachment to Kashmir continues to shape their collective identity and memory.

At the same time Kumar, (2021) studied how displaced families who have settled in Jammu and Delhi have successfully restored their way of life but still face challenges in maintaining their culture. It was concluded that migration has created a hybrid identity that combines adaptable modern habits with traditional Kashmiri features. In contrast Manzoor, (2024) and Datta, (2016) showed the notion of “home” as fragmented because returning often revives memories of trauma while confronting new forms of alienation.

Across studies the concept of identity and home appears as shifted and negotiated as a result of displacement. However, there is a limited understanding of everyday cultural practices and lived experiences of belonging among the community members.

➤ *Psychological Impact and Resilience Post Migration*

The existing literature highlights upon the psychological impact of migration among Kashmiri Pandits. Banal et al., (2010) revealed psychiatric morbidity among migrants in camps with major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Similarly, Mondal, (2022) highlighted the migrants experience of extreme psychosocial trauma post migration due to increased acculturation stress and violence during the migration.

Research also highlights the aspect of psychological well-being. Lone & Singh, (2011) examined the relationship between acculturative stress and general health among Kashmiri students who had migrated to Bhopal for higher education. Higher levels of acculturative stress reported significantly poorer physical and psychological health among the students and were viewed as a strong predictor of anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction particularly due to differences in language, climate, food, lifestyle and isolation from familial and community networks. Virupaksha et al., (2014) further explored that migration can lead to psychological distress due to cultural, linguistic, and social challenges along

with frequent experience of heightened levels of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and psychosomatic symptoms. Wani, (2023) similarly highlights continued experiences of discrimination and social exclusion among Kashmiri Pandit migrants living in transit colonies in Kashmir post migration.

Literature also provides focus on intergenerational effects such as Ali & Geelani, (2025) revealed high levels of psychological distress in exhibiting PTSD, anxiety, and depression along with educational disruption and interrupted schooling. Whereas, Manhas et al., (2017) worked on life satisfaction and resilience among adolescents from Kashmiri Pandit migrant families and only average life satisfaction was experienced due to limited financial resources and unstable living conditions. The study highlights how displacement and intergenerational trauma continue to influence the psychosocial well-being of Kashmiri Pandit youth.

Studies also focus on resilience among the community members. Chouhan & Gupta, (2015) states optimism, perseverance, self-reliance and family and community support, better living conditions as collectively fostering resilience and psychological adjustment among displaced populations.

Overall, psychological distress emerges as a majorly focused aspect among the studies along with trauma and resilience. While there is a limited understanding of everyday cultural practices and lived experiences of belonging among the community members.

➤ *Cultural Adaptation and Erosion*

Across the literature, culture emerges as a central theme around post migration experiences of Kashmiri Pandits. Studies suggest that culture extends beyond rituals to an entire lifestyle and sense of belonging among the community members. It also focuses on how the younger generations, family and media have positively contributed to reconnecting youth with their heritage along with cultural events and educational initiatives playing an important role in forming a collective commitment to preserve their distinct identity (Sharma et al., 2024).

Inan & Harris, (2025) highlight that the Heritage language maintenance (HLM) plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity and fostering intergenerational communication among migrant communities such as the Kashmiri Pandits. Yet reduced community cohesion, limited institutional support, and generational shifts favoring more dominant languages has challenged language preservation. Similarly, Raj et al., (2025) similarly stated patterns of blending in post-migration settings where use of both Kashmiri and Hindi was also common reflecting gradual linguistic adaptation. Similarly, festival celebrations showed gradual adaptation observing Kashmiri traditions such as Herath (Shivratri), while others combined local customs with their own, suggesting the beginning of cultural synthesis.

Studies also emphasize the aspects of adaptation. Bhan & Bindra, (2020) noted that many traditional practices were modified or dropped to align with the norms of the host community, some cultural aspects particularly cuisine and certain rituals remained central to community identity. Similarly, Kapoor, (2012) suggests migration as an aspect of fostering opportunities rather than causing cultural loss. Jamwal & Khanna, (2019) also highlighted the role of digital platforms in allowing easy adaptation though digital access remained limited among lower-income groups.

Hussain & Rashid, (2017) examines the younger generation living outside the Valley are becoming increasingly detached from shared traditions, while elders continue to uphold religious and social practices in isolation. It highlights how displacement and community fragmentation can lead to the gradual dilution of cultural continuity.

Overall, the literature presents aspects of preservation and adaptation while mentioning the cultural practices as changed and incorporating with the surroundings whereas there is a limited attention towards understanding of everyday cultural practices and lived experiences of belonging among the community members.

➤ *Gendered, Generational and Structural Dimensions*

The literature highlights how displacement increased women's emotional burden of preserving family unity and culture in exile, while altering traditional gender roles such that many women became breadwinners and community leaders. Overall, portraying women as both victims and resilient carriers of cultural identity Dhar, (2023). Similarly, Sood & Bakhshi, (2014) observed the quality of life among migrant women and stated that their confinement to domestic spaces, widowhood, and emotional dependence led to poorer health and well-being, suggesting the need for empowerment programs and gender-sensitive interventions to improve their quality of life.

Studies also highlighted the intergenerational dynamics among the community. Tikoo, (1994) explored how migration severely disrupted intra- and interfamily relationships, causing a decline in living conditions, employment, and emotional well-being among the community. Similarly, Rani, (2018) explained that second-generation migrants exhibited significantly higher levels of adjustment and psychological well-being compared to the first generation largely due to increased acculturation and social integration among the younger generation. In contrast, first-generation migrants continued to struggle with nostalgia, trauma, and displacement-related stress, leading to lower emotional and social adjustment.

The literature also places displacement of Kashmiri Pandits in the broader context of structural and policy frameworks. Johar, (2018) examines the sociopolitical and cultural position of Kashmiri Pandits after their displacement. It highlights how the community is granted special reservations and state support after their migration from the Valley in 1990.

Similarly, Hamid (2013) explored measures such as financial relief, housing, and employment packages introduced by the state and central governments to encourage return. It also emphasized upon efforts for long-term peace and reintegration. Among communities. Pagyal, (2025) further recommends culturally rooted education initiatives such as community-led schools, inclusion of Pandit heritage in curriculum, and trauma-informed teaching as means to foster self-sufficiency.

Overall, these studies highlight that displacement must be understood in the terms of gendered experiences, generational shifts and institutional frameworks that allow formation of the community over the years.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present review largely highlights studies from 1990 to 2024, which reflect a methodological diversity and includes studies ranging from qualitative, ethnographic to psychological assessment. However, the studies focus on the displacement of the Kashmiri Pandit community which has been examined through lenses of trauma, identity, and emotional suffering, structural and policy frameworks and aspects of gendered experiences. Across themes identity appears as negotiated and reshaped or fragmented due to the experience of migration by the community. There remains a significant gap in understanding how this community navigates cultural preservation and transformation in terms of daily practices and how these practices have evolved amidst post migration in context to new social environments.

The findings further reveal the view of culture as negotiated in the terms of adaptation, blending and selective retention of rituals and practices. The aspects of hybrid identities and gradual shift in linguistic practices reflects upon the blending into host communities. At the same time the generational differences suggest younger generations as more adjustable and adaptable in terms to the new socio-cultural settings in comparison to the older generations. The gendered experiences of women reveal certain burdens upon them in relation to cultural preservation while overcoming economic and emotional hardships. It can also be understood that the structural and policy frameworks help shape the adaptation process experienced by the community members by focusing on the aspects of resources, recognition, and policy factors.

However, while trauma experiences and psychological impact, adaptations and cultural continuity remains central and mainly focused in the literature, there is limited focus towards the everyday cultural practices, intergenerational transmission of these practices and experiences of belonging experienced by the community members. The understanding of culture is often viewed in terms of trauma, erosion or preservation at a broader level but less in terms of daily negotiations within the household, neighborhood and social interactions within the post- migration settings.

Overall, this suggests the need to focus research towards understanding aspects of intergenerational transmission practices and belonging among the community members in post migration settings through understanding the everyday practices of the community members.

V. CONCLUSION

The displacement of Kashmiri Pandit's literature has focused largely on trauma experiences and psychological impact, adaptations and cultural continuity. This systematic review presents the existing literature and identifies four major thematic areas: Displacement and Changing concept of Identity and Home, Psychological Impact and Resilience Post Migration, Cultural Adaptation and Erosion and Gendered, Generational and Structural Dimensions. While the literature draws focus on sufferings, policies, resilience there is limited understanding of everyday cultural practices in terms of cultural adaptations and continuity.

The understanding of the culture while going beyond the aspects of loss and trauma allows the understanding of community interactions in the new socio-cultural context. Future research for this review focuses on employing the use of qualitative methods to explore daily practices, intergenerational transmission and lived experiences of belonging among the community members in greater depth. This method allows contribution to the understanding of cultural reconstruction and continuity in post-migration context.

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