

RISE OF VIOLENCE AND PANDIT EXODUS IN KASHMIR REGION

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Abstract

The paper explores the debate on the rise of violence in Kashmir region to critically analyze the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community as one of its major implications. The rise of violence from late 1980's and onwards is an unforeseen series of political events and unintended outcomes of political decisions by the political actors. It was not determined by the ethnic factors or historical background. Kashmiriyat as a cultural category also did not produce violence. However, the poor socio-economic conditions before and after this period added to the rise of violence and separatism, but there is not any clear evidence which can reflect that violence is only related to poor socio-economic factors. The culture and identity played a role as a vehicle and not as a cause of violence. Region and religion also did not become the factors for polarization. Hence something more is required if we have to explain and comprehend the cause behind rise of violence and pandit exodus in Kashmir region.

Keywords: Violence, Socio-economic factors, Kashmiriyat, Region, Religion, Pandit, Exodus.

Introduction

The rise of violence in the Kashmir region from 1980s and onwards is an unforeseen sequence of events and unintended outcomes of political decisions of political actors. The outcome was radically different from what the politicians aimed for, thereby presenting an extremely complex situation. Separatism was not determined by historical background or ethnic factors. The poor socioeconomic conditions during this period added to the violence to some extent, but there is no obvious evidence which can reflect that violent separatism is only connected to low economic productivity. There are no indicators which can show that Kashmir region has economically suffered more in comparison to other states in the country during 1980s(Chandhok 1990; Bose 1991). Ashutosh Varshney (1992) has depicted the rise of violence in the Kashmir region as the outcome of competing nationalisms. The competition between nationalisms referred by Varshney may be considered one of the factors for the explanation of separatist violence, but it is not adequate. The cultural preconditions or the competing nationalisms did not create separatism; 'Kashmiriyat' as a cultural prerequisite also did not produce violence on this scale, hence something more is required if we have to explain conflict in Kashmir region. Lawrence (1985) while in Kashmir has observed that there exists a strong confluence between Hinduism and Islam. Kashmiri Muslims as well as Kashmiri Pandits have worked collectively to define Kashmiri culture on the basis of the cultural identity derived not only from the rich cultural heritage of the Rishis, but also from the relationship between culture and politics' (Khan 2017:61) that marks the ideological similarity of both the communities.

1987: The Inception Of Pandit Exodus

Initially during 1987 the violence was signaled by grenade blasts at different places in Srinagar, like the Coffee House, Residency Road, Office of the Daily Srinagar Times, residence