**The Kashmir Files: Myth or Reality (Part II)**

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Tobeya Ibitayo, writer and columnist of St. Louis Magazine’s Culture newsletter, USA asked internationally known Indian scholar, Arundhati Roy on April 22, 2022, about “The Kashmir files.” Arundhati Roy responded in these words, “The film is not about Kashmiri pundits in the end; it’s about Kashmiri pundits standing in for Hindus in India, and all the Muslims are evil butchers who slaughter and kill. Whereas, in truth, there are Kashmiri pundits who continue to live in Kashmir, who continue to maintain relationships with their Muslim friends and neighbours.”

Arundhati Roy explained that “Kashmir is covered with Muslim graveyards. That war has consumed tens of thousands of lives. And all that is just airbrushed out. You take one very tragic thread of an epic tragedy and use it to draw a curtain across everything else, and then turn it into a javelin to drive into the hearts of this very complex country. The only word I can think of to describe that film is radioactive. And, of course, there’s a professor in the film, who the actors go around saying is me. It’s literally trying to get you physically attacked if you go somewhere.”

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Now, some Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits) have started realizing that their fleeing from Kashmir was misguided and ill-advised. Kashmir Sentinel published some accounts of Kashmiri Pandits in its publication of January 2003. Sentinel reported that one K.L. Kaul living in the Nagrota Transit Camp in Jammu wrote a letter in the paper (Daily Al-Safa, dated September 18) stating that Governor Jagmohan sent a message to the Pundits of the Valley in the first week of February to migrate to safer places since the government had planned to kill about 1,50,000 Kashmiri Muslims in its bid to overcome the uprising. “Pundits were assured”, the letter says, “that once the massacre of the Kashmiri Muslims was completed and the movement was curbed, they would be sent back to the Valley. That is why most of the Pundits left without their belongings”. But things were not all that satisfying for the refugees who came to Jammu. After the initial expressions of sympathy of the local people, now “our community is looked down upon and Kashmiri Pundits are treated as nothing but parasites…Our young men have become vagabonds because they have nothing to do except roaming on the roads. Some of our young men have taken to drugs…” The writer of the letter then appeals to the Kashmiri Muslims to “forgive my community for the betrayal”, adding: “We are ready to return home and we are just waiting for a call from you…”

Meanwhile, 23 Kashmiri Pundit refugees living in Jammu in a letter in the Daily Al-Safa (September 22, 1990) came out with the disclosure that they were threatened with “dire consequences” by the authorities if they did not obey Jagmohan’s order to leave the Valley early this year. Acknowledging that they “knowingly or unknowingly committed a great blunder by playing our part in communalising the situation and the freedom struggle”, they condemned “the atrocities that are being unleashed on our brothers by the Indian occupation forces” and concluded with the words: “May our dream of living in a free, independent, and prosperous country of Jammu and Kashmir be fulfilled very soon”.

Azad Essa, a senior reporter, related stories of an exodus of some prominent Kashmiri Pandits on Aljazeera on August 2, 2011. Although, these stories do not directly talk about “The Kashmir Files,” they do talk about the exodus of Pandits itself. Azad said that fifty-one-year-old Motilal Bhat, the president of the Pandit Hindu Welfare Society, formed in the mid-1990s to rebuild relations between Pandits and Muslims told him. “[Those who left] thought they would be gone for three or four months, and that they would return when things improved … no one expected to stay there for years … Kashmir had always been a peaceful state,” explains the softly-spoken headmaster – (Motilal Bhat).

Suman Bhat, another Kashmiri Pandit told Azad Essa “We did not migrate because my father’s Muslim friends refused to let him leave; we were told (by Muslim neighbors) that ‘we will die, but we won’t allow you to go’. Even now that he (Saman’s father) is armed with a PhD from Bhaba Atomic Research Centre in Mumbai, one of India’s premier science institutes, which could land him a top job in any city in the country, Bhat chooses to remain in the valley.

Dina Nath Raina (Kashmiri Pandit) described the exodus in his book Kashmir: Distortions and Reality. There is evidence that the transport was provided in a planned manner to Pandit families in particular localities and the police department was fully involved in organizing the exodus.

In his article ‘Breaking Kashmir Impasse’, Times of India dated 6 August 1992, Praful Bidwai said, ‘The bulk of Kashmiris have been seriously alienated from India after the brutal turning point of January 1990. The policy of encouraging the pandits to leave the Valley widely attributed to Mr. Jagmohan and fundamentalist attacks upon them embittered inter-community relations and led to painful migration.”

A senior retired Kashmir police officer Israr Khan has given clinching evidence of Jammu & Kashmir Police Department having been pressed into service by the Raj Bhawan to organize the Pandit exodus in the early month of 1990, Kashmir Life, published from Srinagar, in its issue of 22 to 28 October 2017 carried a comprehensive interview with Israr Khan who said on record that in April 1990 when he was sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) at Kothibagh Police Station, Srinagar, he was summoned to the Raj Bhavan where Jagmohan’s principal secretary and SSP Srinagar Allah Baksh asked Khan to ensure the smooth transit of buses carrying the Pandits to Jammu and render all assistance to them. Jagmohan himself directed him “Loading shoding mein madad karna aur koi attack shatak nhi hone deyna” (Help the people move their belongings and see that they are not attacked).

Professor Saifuddin Soz, former Federal Minister of India wrote in his book, “Kashmir: Glimpse of History and the Story of Struggle” on page 182, How Governor Jagmohan’s inaccurate judgment led to the exodus of Pandits from Kashmir. Numerous sources offered credible evidence to assert that the mass exodus had occurred because Governor Jagmohan, who had been appointed on 19 January 1990 for the second time, thought it prudent to organize the exodus for two reasons: one, that way alone Pandits would feel safe and secure and further sectarian killings would be stopped; second, he would be able to deal with the situation better where stringent laws to curb militancy were already in force and these laws could not be used freely on a mixed population.

Professor Soz added, ‘I met Omkar Nath Pajnoo at Safa Kadal, Srinagar, where he looks after the birthplace of Rupa Bhavani (1620), a saintly figure and poetess, belonging to a Pandit family, who had built many temples. He added he never felt threatened even though the locality (Khankahi Sokhta-Safa-Kadal) happens to be a predominantly Muslim mohalla, Pajnoo believed like many other the Pandit exodus was an organized episode, but he would not say at whose behest the exodus had occurred.”

Next, I met Sanjay Tikoo, a non-migrant Pandit leader, Soz added. He had first-hand knowledge on what transpired between a delegation of Pandit leaders who met Jagmohan around the last week of January 1990. He said Jagmohan had emphasized he would not be able to provide security to Pandits at different places and, therefore, they would have to move to some designated place where they could be provided security and that the government would select a secure place.

It is fact that over 2,000 Pandit employees have worked in different government offices, including education, police, revenue and other in different towns, like Kupwara, Handwara, Trehgam, and Islamabad for many years. They have not faced any harassment from the majority community.

It is known to everybody that thousands of Pandit students joined colleges such as Kupwara, Sopore, Uri, Bandipora, Budgam, and etc., to earn their Bachelor of Education degree between 2000 and 2009. They stayed with Muslim families. Some of them rented houses and lived side by side with majority community. Not a single case of harassment of Kashmiri Pandit students was reported.

Dr. Farooq Abdullah, former Federal Minister of India & Chief Minister of former Jammu and Kashmir said on March 22, 2022, that late Jagmohan Malhotra, Governor of Jammu & Kashmir in 1990, had put Kashmiri Pandits in buses and told them they would be brought back in two months. However, that did not happen, he said.

(To be continued)

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