
British-Kashmiris: From Marginalised Immigrants to a Transnational Diaspora



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Abstract

British Kashmiris are those dwellers of Britain who or their parents originally migrated from Kashmir. The earliest presence of Kashmiris in Britain can be traced as back as the earlier decades of the 19th century, where unemployment was the main cause of forcing people to step out of their homes. Tracing the earliest links between Britain and Kashmir through the colonial structures, there has been a process of Kashmiri migration to Britain where British Kashmiris have evolved into a transnational diaspora community through various socio-economic, political, and cultural links. There have been numerous means and routes of migration and settlement along with the development of various community institutions that to an extent empowered the community and enhanced their transnational links, creating a transnational social space where interaction between some public institutions of Britain and 'Azad' Kashmir can be sketched. This paper explores the background of Kashmiri migration to Britain and how over the past century Kashmiris in Britain have developed into a transnational diaspora community and have advanced their role in the socio-economic development of the state.

Introduction

The British population of Kashmiri origin is estimated between half a million to one million.¹ The earliest presence of Kashmiris in Britain can be traced as back as the earlier decades of the 19th century. The process of labour migration to Britain was initiated somewhere towards the end of the 19th century, which by the 1950s developed into chain

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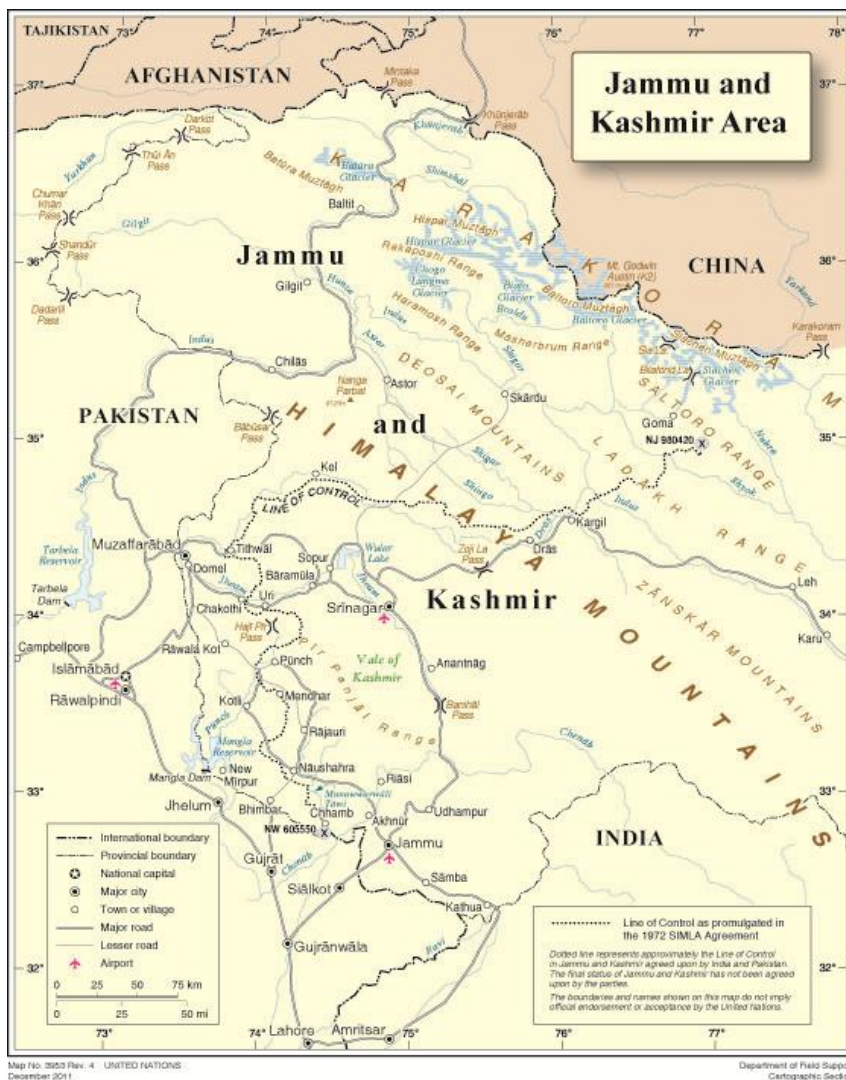
migration. Today, four, and in certain cases, five, generations of Kashmiris are settled in various regions across Britain. Numerous means and routes of migration and settlement, along with the development of various community institutions, have to an extent empowered the community. They have enhanced the community's transnational links creating a transnational social space where interaction between some public institutions of Britain and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) can also be noted. This paper explores the background of Kashmiri migration to Britain and how over the past century Kashmiris in Britain have developed into a transnational diaspora community. The study is divided into two sections: The first section looks into the initiation of British links with Kashmir through colonisation of the sub-continent that then led to the earliest links of Kashmiris with Britain and provided channels for migration of Kashmiris to Britain, gradually growing into 'chain migration'. The next section discusses the settlement of Kashmiris in Britain and the emergence of various socio-economic, political, and cultural networks and institutions that created a transnational space. These networks not only linked the British-Kashmiris with AJK and to an extent with the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Gilgit-Baltistan but also initiated interaction between some public institutions of the United Kingdom (UK) and AJK.

Qualitative methodology has been used in this study to collect primary data by directly approaching diverse sections and generations of Kashmiri population both in Britain and in AJK, including those who migrated in the late 1950s and 1960s. In addition to the familiar and widely cited literature on the history of migration and settlement of Kashmiris in Britain, certain Urdu and Pahari language writings by local writers have also been used as a secondary source of information.

Kashmir and Kashmiris

Kashmir² is the commonly evolved name for the former state of Jammu and Kashmir, which spread across 84,258 square miles.³ It is now squeezed between three nuclear powers: China, India, and Pakistan. It also shares a border with Afghanistan, while Wakhan⁴ separates it from Tajikistan.

Map 1: The state of Jammu and Kashmir



Source: <<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/kashmir.pdf>>.

Kashmir is not an independent state but a homeland⁵ of approximately 18 million Kashmiris scattered across the world with an estimate of up to a million in Britain, about three million in the Middle East, and a significant number in different European countries, Canada, and the US in addition to at least a million in India and Pakistan.⁶

The colonial era princely state of Kashmir was established as a result of an agreement between the British East India Company and the then ruler of Kashmir Raja Gulab Singh on 16 March 1846.⁷ Today, the

Line of Control (LoC) divides this state into two main parts: AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan under Pakistan's administration and Jammu and Kashmir under Indian occupation.

British in Kashmir

'We are here because you were there', is a slogan of the anti-racist movement in Britain. This makes reference to the fact that migration from ex-colonies to the UK has taken place because these countries were colonised by the British. This is also true for Kashmir and Kashmiris. The very first link between Britain and Kashmir was the Cashmere shawl, a product of the Ladakhi goat, and skills and labour of Kashiri (Kashmiri) men and women. This beautiful garment made its way to the UK within a few decades of the East India Company's off-shoring to India. British women loved this soft and delicate garment that soon became a status symbol for the middle- and upper-class ladies in London and across the UK.⁸ The earliest interests that led the British to Kashmir, according to Bamzai, were political and commercial. The first British in what is recognised today as Kashmir was Bogle who was sent to Tibet by the first governor general of India Warren Hastings (1773-1785) in 1774 to explore political and commercial relations between Kashmir Valley and Tibet.⁹ A few years later, in 1783, an officer of the Bangla Army George Forster entered Kashmir on his way to St. Petersburg (Russia). His observations on Jammu provide interesting insights into the policies for promoting peaceful coexistence or what one would call today 'diversity and multi-culturalism' by the then ruler of Jammu Raja Ranjit Dev (1750-1771).¹⁰ Later, Vigne visited Kashmir in 1835 and produced a detailed account of the shawl industry.¹¹

The first Kashmiri in Britain

The British military officers and civil servants who either did not want or could not afford trips back home during summer holidays were also regular visitors to Kashmir. For such officers, Kashmir became an ideal place to escape the scorching heat of the Indian plains during summer. Tosha Maidan near Srinagar was one such popular summer resorts that attracted large numbers of such tourists. According to Yousaf Saraf, in the summer of 1833, a British army officer Colonel Thorpe went there on holidays. While socialising with local elites, he caught sight of a

girl, which turned into 'love at first sight'. According to Saraf, she was a daughter of Dayim Rathore, the then ruler of Kishtwar principality. All we know about this 'Daughter of Kishtwar' is that her name was Jani and that she was exceptionally beautiful. Col. Thorpe fell in love with her and could not leave Kashmir without her. As a pre-condition for marrying Jani, he converted to Islam and brought her with him first to India and then to Britain in 1830s.¹²

Zaheer-ud-Din, however, claims that Jani was actually Jana and that she was from Sugan Yarinar village in Budgam district.¹³ From this record, the first ever known Kashmiri to Britain was Jani of Kishtwar or Budgam. She had two sons and a daughter. Nothing specific is told about the arrival of the first 'British-Kashmiri' couple to Britain or their life and whereabouts. It can be traced from the available literature that the story of this 'transnational' marriage did not end here but grew into what can be called 'transnational intellectual activism' when one of their sons Robert Thorpe Junior also joined the army and went on to visit what was literally his motherland or, at least, 'mother's land', in the 1860s.¹⁴ The ruler of Kashmir at the time was Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the son of Gulab Singh. While in Kashmir, Lieutenant Robert Thorpe, like his father, also became involved with Kashmiris. His involvement, however, was not with the beauty but the misery and sufferings of Kashmiris.

During his stay in Kashmir, he travelled around in the state and collected significant primary and secondary data on taxation, shawl industry, judiciary, police system, and the harsh execution of several laws and policies. He wrote several articles accusing British government of selling Kashmiri Muslim majority population to a Hindu ruler whose rule he claimed was characterised by suppression and exploitation. His articles were published in Britain as well as in the Indian press and were unsurprisingly not appreciated by the people in power.

According to Father Biscoe, who visited Kashmir in 1890, trouble came to Thorpe who was ordered by the Maharaja government to leave Kashmir. Upon refusal, he was tied to his bed and soldiers carried him out of Kashmir's boundaries.¹⁵ He somehow managed to sneak back into Srinagar but to no avail, as the next morning, he was found dead after his breakfast.¹⁶ Zaheer-ud-Din offers some additional information, which could perhaps lead to the reason for the deportation of Thorpe Junior. He maintains that foreigners were allowed to stay in Kashmir for a maximum

of two months, and Thorpe stayed longer to study the horrendous conditions of the people in the birthplace of his mother. He was found dead on the next morning on Suleman Taing Hill after sneaking back into Kashmir on 21 November 1868.¹⁷

Saraf and Din claim that he was poisoned, whereas Tasim Zahid claims that he was strangled.¹⁸ He was buried in the British cemetery at Sheikh Bagh in Srinagar. The epitaph on his ignored grave without any cross in this Christian cemetery reads “Obit [Obituary]—Robert Thorpe-Veritas [means truth in Latin]—He gave his life for Kashmir.”¹⁹ Robert Thorpe is believed to be the first person to be recorded in history who raised his voice against the oppressive Dogra regime in Kashmir.²⁰

His articles were published after his death under the title of *Cashmere Misgovernment* by Longmans, Green and Company, London, in 1870. The book that can possibly be described as the first social study of Kashmir provides useful information on the taxation system, shawl industry, forced unpaid labour, the 1846 treaty between Gulab Singh and the British government, and migration of shawl workers from Kashmir Valley.²¹ In terms of its approach, Thorpe’s informative study presents racial and religious prejudices as reasons for Maharaja’s incapability to rule appropriately, which, for Thorpe, lay in Maharaja’s Asiatic origins and being a Hindu ruling Muslims. Another mention of a British-Kashmiri marriage that led the bride to Britain appeared in an account of the history of Asian migration to Britain by Rozina Visram titled *Asians in Britain*, which identifies various museums with collections from South Asia during the colonial rule. Visram mentions New Bridge House Museum, Dublin County, in Ireland where belongings of Thomas Alexander Cobb (1788-1836) are kept “who married to Nazir Begum, the daughter of Aziz Jehan of Kashmir.”²²

Labour migration

The ‘discovery’ of Britain as a place for better-paid work opportunities was made by men from Dadyal and surrounding villages in Mirpur somewhere in the closing years of the 19th century and opening years of the 20th century.²³ Roger Ballard, one of the most senior researchers on Mirpuris, offers a detailed story of the beginning of the migration of Kashmiri workers from Mirpur to Britain. According to Ballard, it was the centuries-old tradition of boat-building and water trade

that linked Mirpuris with the British merchant navy ships on which Mirpuris arrived in Britain.²⁴ The way it happened was that many Mirpuris were involved in boat-building and also crewed boats up to Lahori Bandhar.²⁵ In the late 1860s, British colonial government introduced the rail, which obviously provided a lot faster, safer, and cheaper system of moving goods from one place to the other. So water trade quickly diminished and people engaged with it—majority belonging to Mirpur—were rendered out of work.²⁶

Like it happens in such situations, some of these Mirpuris used the new opportunity to go farther in search of work. They got onto the rail and went to Bombay (Mumbai) and Karachi. This was also the time when British replaced sailing with steam for ships, and somehow the Mirpuris and Chachis from Attock area of Pakistan managed to find out about the high demand for workers in the coal rooms of ships.²⁷ Once it started, they informed their brothers, relatives, village fellows, and friends of the opportunities, and facilitated them to find employment. Chaudhary Yousaf was one of such workers who had to increase his age on the papers to be employed on a ship in 1939 by his uncles who were working there as *Sirangs*.²⁸ From there he went to the United States and then to Britain.²⁹

Working in temperature of over 70 degrees did not sound very attractive, but cash payments made it worthwhile because of the harsh conditions in Mirpur and especially the debts, which enslaved most of the peasant population to money-lenders under the system established by the Maharaja.³⁰ Another channel through which some Kashmiris from Mirpur migrated to Britain was that of the army. During the First World War (1914-19) and the Second World War (1939-45), soldiers of Kashmiri origin from Mirpur ended up in Britain either as wounded combatants or released prisoners of war from Germany or Japan. During the Second World War, 71,667 soldiers of Jammu and Kashmir served in the British Indian Force.³¹ While no research is available on how many of them stayed back in Britain, there is a general perception that a significant number did. By the end of the Second World War, the news of work and opportunities in Britain travelled to all sides of Dadyal. People from areas closer to Mirpur town including Chaksawari and Akalgarh (Islamgarh) started to migrate to Britain as well. By the 1950s, the population of Asians in the UK grew into thousands, including a large

number of Mirpuri Kashmiris among them, as mentioned by academics such as Desai.³²

As a result of the United Nations resolution, a ceasefire between India and Pakistan became effective on the New Year day of 1949, which divided Kashmir into three parts: Jammu and Kashmir (Indian-held Kashmir or IHK), Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Kashmir (under Pakistani control). By the end of the 1950s, people began to learn that Pakistan government was going to build a dam on River Jhelum (Vitasta) at Mangla in Mirpur. It appears from long conversations with elders of Mirpur that initially common people with no exposure to the wider world of dam building shrugged the news as a mere rumour. They could not comprehend that those mighty rivers of Poonch and Jhelum could be blocked. However, when the measurement and demarcation of land acquired by Pakistan's Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), along with the arrival of construction machinery, started to appear, the people of Mirpur and surrounding villages realised that something big was going to happen. The resistance movement by the smaller and marginalised pro-independence Kashmiri groups and the lower cadre of the ruling Muslim Conference against the dam was suppressed, and Mangla Dam was completed in 1967. This resulted in the sinking of the ancient city of Mirpur and about 1,700 acres of most fertile land including about 250 villages. Some sources claim that over 100,000 people were displaced, while others mention the figure of 40,000.³³ A large number of those who received compensation migrated to Britain rather than moving to remote areas of Punjab and Sindh provinces where they were offered barren and uncultivable lands.³⁴ That was the big push factor for the people to migrate from Mirpur and its surrounding areas.

Another major factor that contributed significantly to the rise of migration from Mirpur to Britain in the late 1950s and the early 1960s was the introduction of the 1962 Immigration Act to restrict migration from ex-colonies by the British government.³⁵ Migration researchers agree that a large number of men from Mirpur, like their fellows from other migrant areas such as Sylhet and Attock, migrated to beat the 1962 Immigration Act.³⁶ Together, the beating of restrictions and construction of Mangla Dam accelerated the migration of Kashmiris from Mirpur in the mid-20th century. By that time, migration from Mirpur to

Britain had also become a chain process, which means that migration was taking place through kinship and friendship links.

New approach

Till the mid-1960s, migration from Mirpur was mainly of working age men. Almost all of them came with the intention of staying in the UK for a few years to earn enough money to build a house and set up some business back in Mirpur and live comfortably with the families there. However, when the construction of Mangla Dam shattered the dream of immediate return, migrants stopped dreaming of spending retirement in Mirpur. This also changed the previous strategy of Mirpuris not to bring wives and children over to the UK. So migration of Kashmiri women from Mirpur started in the later years of the 1960s, with some exceptions.³⁷ Most men brought their families over when it was certain that Mirpur was going to be submerged. Opportunities for alternative work and business in the region also submerged with the 'Old Mirpur' and surrounding villages. It was also around this period that migration from Kotli and at a relatively smaller scale from Bhimber districts (initially sub-districts of Mirpur) also started.

The 1970s can be seen as the decade of families as far as the labour migration of Kashmiris from Mirpur is concerned. It is usually referred to as family reunion, but in fact, it was the union only of a component of the extended family. Children came with mothers to join fathers but ageing grandparents were left in Mirpur alone or with those relatives who stayed back for a range of reasons. The closing years of this decade also saw the earliest 'transnational British-Kashmiri marriages' amongst the labour migrants. Boys who were brought over in the later years of the 1960s were taken back to Mirpur and got married mostly with first or second cousins.³⁸ The closing years of the 1970s also witnessed the beginning of the arrival of spouses from Mirpur, mainly women.

The 1980s proved to be the decade of girls going from the UK to marry off in Mirpur and bringing over of their grandparents and male spouses. This phenomenon has now significantly weakened but continues to this day. Additional aspects of migration from Azad Kashmir included political migration mainly of nationalist Kashmiris, followed by high-skilled migrants and students, some from Mirpur but more from

Muzaffarabad and Poonch districts (now Divisions). Today, four, and in some cases, five, generations of Kashmiris are settled in Britain, not in the same household but increasingly in the same street or vicinity. In addition to Kashmiris from Azad Kashmir, there are also about three hundred families of Kashmiris from the Kashmir Valley in Britain who are predominantly professionals, mainly doctors and businessmen.³⁹

Settlement and the making of a British-Kashmiri diaspora

Work was the main factor that pushed people out of their homes in Mirpur. Availability of work also determined their settlement in Britain. While most of the earliest migrants from Mirpur who left their jobs on ships settled in the coastal towns of Britain, the later immigrants worked primarily in textile mills in the north-west, steel factories in Sheffield, foundries in midland, southern towns such as Peterborough, and transport industry in Newcastle. Until the arrival of families and the emergence of a 'British-Kashmiri household', the primary focus of most Kashmiri workers was to work as long hours as available. They actually introduced night shifts in mills and factories, especially the textile mills.⁴⁰

All migrants were not lucky enough to find work straight away, though. Some had to wait weeks and in some cases months before they could get any paid work. They were supported by those who were in work through a support system, which was an internal welfare system of the Kashmiri workers in Britain. In terms of work, initially, those from landed *biraderies*⁴¹ background preferred working in mills, factories, foundries, and transport industry rather than setting up any business that some of the early Kashmiri migrants mainly from non-landed *biraderies* ventured into, including door-to-door businesses, and setting up small cafés and clothing shops.

Initial priorities for most workers were to pay off their debts that included travelling expenses to and from Karachi, travel agents' fees, paperwork expenses, and fare to Britain including the five pounds that the travel agent was to give every migrant for taxi fare from Heathrow Airport to their destination in the UK. The next priority was to buy land or build a house, marry off brothers and sisters, or in rare cases sons and daughters, in Kashmir. By the 1980s, the economic situation of Kashmiri workers changed significantly when textile industry—whose demise

these workers delayed by some decades—eventually died down and one-by-one almost all mills closed down.⁴² This was followed by closure of factories and foundries across Britain, and unemployment amongst Kashmiri as well as other British workers soared to all times high. Kalra explored this phenomenon in detail in *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*. Focusing on Azad Kashmiri textile workers, Kalra offers a comprehensive analysis of the Azad Kashmiri labour migration and the impacts of the demise of textile industry on Kashmiri workers in Oldham.⁴³

The majority of the redundant workers went on to work for private hire or taxis, catering or take away, and manufacturing industry in Manchester that is largely owned by Pakistani migrant businessmen mainly from Faisalabad. A large number of former textile workers also went on to open up corner shops. A significant number of British-Kashmiris set up off-licence shops (selling alcohol), which was previously seen as a prohibited business because under the Islamic code of life Muslims are not allowed to handle (drink, buy, or sell) alcohol. By the 1980s, small business ventures of some Kashmiris grew into big outlets of clothes, confectioneries, and restaurants. Kashmir Bakery, Mumtaz Paan House, and Kashmir restaurants are some of several such examples.

Social life

In the early days, the social life of Kashmiris was confined mainly to in-house gatherings on Sundays, and sharing of information about the availability of work and experiences at work, along with reading and writing letters from and to 'back home'. Going to the cinema and watching two and sometimes three Indian and Pakistani films in one go with each film up to three hours duration was also a common way to spend Sunday for some. Some more adventurous ones discovered the world of pubs, and an odd one managed to develop a relationship with a non-working class white woman. Interaction with working class white women and living with them was not uncommon, though. A very interesting narration of this aspect of the social life of early Kashmiri workers is offered by Mehmood Hashmi⁴⁴ in the latest edition of his classic analysis *Kashmir Udas Hai* (Kashmir is Sad). Mehmood Hashmi, one of the best Urdu reportage writers, narrated that white women at this

stage were of great help in many ways, especially with paperwork for many migrant workers because almost all of them were single and with little English. One such exceptionally helpful lady was Margaret who lived with Zaman Ali, also known as Bava Zaman from Dadyal, who later became very famous amongst British-Kashmiris for his community work and links with Pakistan's Embassy in London and through that with the Government of Pakistan. He was awarded *Tamgha-e-Imtiaz* (Distinction Award) by the Government of Pakistan for his services to the community and Pakistan's government.⁴⁵

Margaret did most of the paperwork for many of the workers in the neighbourhood where Bava Zaman lived in Birmingham. With the arrival of families in the UK, many workers then left their white ladies, as living with more than one woman particularly without marriage was not acceptable in Muslim culture. Some of the ladies left their boyfriends when they found out that they were actually married or when they found someone better. The pressure on Bava Zaman also mounted to leave Margaret. According to some, even Margaret asked him that he could bring his wife over to the UK and that she would leave, but Bava Zaman refused to accept the community's mounting pressure and never left Margaret. According to some sources, Margaret did all the paperwork to invite Bava Zaman's wife from Dadyal and both women lived together.⁴⁶

It seems that in addition to the practice of 'basic contribution', the earliest community welfare institution amongst the British-Kashmiri workers was the funeral committees formed to pay for sending dead bodies back to Kashmir. Initially, these committees consisted mainly of a few villages from the areas of migration joined together and contributed a few shillings per person to meet the funeral expenses and airfare. Gradually, with the growth of population, the membership of the committees reduced in some cases to one village. More recently the committees are formed on the basis of relatives in the same town or settlement in Britain.

The earliest religious institution of migrants was the mosque, which initiated with the need of Friday and Eid prayers, where a relatively large number of people tended to pray together. Initially, it was done in someone's house, then renting a house, and later purchasing the house through contributions by the community. More recently, purpose-built mosques worth millions of pounds are being built. With the establishment

of mosques and mosque committees, migration of specialist *moulvis* (clerics) and *ulema* (religious scholars) also emerged. Today, approximately a dozen mosques exist in each town with a significant Muslim population, of which Kashmiris constitute at least two-thirds in over two dozen towns across Britain. Kashmiri population is approaching one hundred thousand in Birmingham followed by over 60,000 in Bradford, and over 20,000 in Luton, Leeds, and several other towns.⁴⁷

The publication of *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie in 1988 and issuance of a *fatwa*⁴⁸ against this controversial novel politicised the Muslim population of Britain, including British-Kashmiris, and enhanced the sense of being Muslim among them as a political identity. To an extent, Muslim was a new umbrella identity that replaced the previous wider identities of ethnic minorities—Black and Asian. However, a closer look would reveal that this Muslim identity is not coherent and homogenous, but fractured along sectarian identities of Wahhabis, Barelvis, and Deobandis etc. The Islamisation has also given birth to several political networks and organisations including Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) as the leading ones. Madrassas or religious schools are another product of the growing interest in religious education. Scores of schools and education centres of different sects have sprung up across Britain with a significant contribution by Kashmiri Muslims along with other Muslim communities. The growth of mosques and growing engagement with religious lifestyle also fed into the mushrooming of apparently spiritual institutions of *peers* (spiritual leaders) and Sufi *silsilahs* or schools.⁴⁹ *Peers* attract mainly the first and second generation Kashmiris, while the Sufi *silsilahs* engage the third and fourth generations. There is, however, a great deal of overlap. Moreover, almost all expressions of religion are increasingly opening up to women as well.

On the political front, the British-Kashmiris were originally activated, mobilised, and organised around two main traditions: First, the Kashmir issue, and second, left-leaning working-class and anti-racist politics. While the Kashmir issue mobilised the elder generations who had some experience of and affiliation with the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference⁵⁰ as well as Plebiscite Front politics,⁵¹ the younger generation was motivated by anti-racist politics. Some examples of Kashmiri workers joining union activism and international socialist groups

can also be traced. Initially, activism around Kashmir issue remained the monopoly of Plebiscite Front with some exceptions, such as Raja Mohammed Azam of Akalgarh as the leading and pioneering activist of Muslim Conference in Britain. In later years of the 1960s, Plebiscite Front provided space for pro-independence activists as well as some left-wing activists who were engaged in student politics of the 1960s led by the renowned British-Pakistani Marxist Tariq Ali.⁵²

Other Kashmiri political organisations included Jammu and Kashmir United Liberation Front, Kashmir Independence Movement, Kashmiri Workers Associations, and Kashmir Youth Movement. In 1976, when Amanullah Khan and Abdul Khaliq Ansari were invited to Britain and changed the Plebiscite Front into Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), the above organisations or most of their members also joined this new Kashmiri political movement. The JKLF grew substantially as a result of the execution of Maqbool Bhatt in 1984. It gained further strength after the eruption of the mass uprising against Indian rule in the Kashmir Valley following massive rigging in the 1987 election to keep the Muslim United Front out of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. The 1990 mass border crossing call by the JKLF in AJK also increased support and membership of the JKLF. By 1992, the party had branches in 32 towns and cities across Britain. Till then, there was no other organised and structured Kashmiri political party in Britain except Tehreek-e-Kashmir. Following the dissolution of JKLF by its chairman Amanullah Khan, however, the party experienced a steep decline. Gradually other Azad Kashmiri parties were formed and grew across Britain—including Muslim Conference, Pakistan Peoples Party, and recently Pakistan Muslim League (N), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf.

Over the years, the branches of other pro-independence political parties have also been established in Britain including Jammu Kashmir National Awami Party, Jammu and Kashmir Freedom Movement, Jammu Kashmir People's National Party, United Kashmir People's Party, and Jammu Kashmir National Party.

The leftist tradition of Kashmiri politics in Britain has also declined over the years. More Kashmiris are now engaged in mainstream British political parties than ever with nearly 300 councillors, six members of the British parliament, two members of the House of Lords, and many town and city mayors. The growing participation of

Kashmiris in British politics indicates that in future, this strand of politics will gradually incorporate all other strands. Therefore, the role of British-Kashmiris in the British mainstream politics will grow further.

Philanthropy is another area in which British-Kashmiris have made an active contribution from the very early days of their settlement. Initially, this was confined to informal kinship and village networks to support struggling relatives or village fellows in Azad Kashmir. However, gradually several registered charities mushroomed across Britain to support various welfare projects across Azad Kashmir. Prior to the 2005 earthquake in AJK, registered trusts included Kashmir Relief Fund, Kashmir Charitable Trust, Islamgarh Welfare Trust, Sarfraz Welfare Trust, Reid Foundation, Kashmir Education Foundation etc. The latest initiative in this field is the foundation and sharp rise of Kashmir Development Foundation that has adopted a more professional approach and has made a significant contribution towards unlocking the potential of British-Kashmiri diaspora in the development of the community in Britain and back in Kashmir.⁵³

After the 2005 earthquake, dozens of initiatives were taken in almost every town with a significant number of Kashmiris to provide relief for the earthquake affected areas. Some of the prominent ones among these include Kashmir Orphan Relief Trust, Mirpur, Kashmir International Relief Fund, Alkhidmat Welfare Trust Sehensa, Ayesha Memorial Chaksawari, Umeed Welfare Trust Mid Bainsy, Alqayum Foundation Mirpur, Kashmir National Welfare and Cultural Trust Leeds, and Burnley for Kashmir. Meanwhile, informal networks mainly run by women continue to support relatives in education and health related needs. However, with more and more relatives having migrated to Britain now, the scale of this has decreased significantly.⁵⁴

Culturally, British-Kashmiri diaspora space, like that of Kashmir, is characterised by the Pakistani and Indian linguistic and cultural influence through the Indian movies, which are now a regular feature of the British mainstream cinema, and scores of satellite TV channels as well as Pakistani songs and *mushairas* (poetry recitation). The working classes have also kept the Pothwari music and language alive, which has recently experienced a boost through initiatives such as *Chitka*,⁵⁵ the first ever Pahari-Pothwari magazine, Asian Literary Forum (ALF), and such media attempts as Appana Channel and KBC channel. While

Chitka began to publish Pahari-Pothwari language in Britain and linked Pahari-Pothwari writers in Kashmir and Pakistan, the ALF provided a platform for Pahari-Pothwari poets and writers from Kashmir, Pakistan, and Britain to get connected.

Recently the culture of *Naat* (religious praises) has dominated the cultural space of British Muslim culture and has sprung into a fairly profitable industry along with religious satellite channels. British-Kashmiris are a significant part of these transnational initiatives and developments as well.

Diaspora and transnational dimension

For a few decades after the bulk migration, most Kashmiris were not thinking in terms of staying in Britain. They believed that once the *Rozipani* (food and water) that had brought them over to Britain was finished, meaning once they got their share of it, they will return to their birthplace. Ballard called this, the phase of sojourn when migrants believed that in a few years' time they would return to their countries of origin. The years got prolonged, though. Once the families were called over, their *Rozipani* and stay in Britain gradually became permanent. The integration in local society also increased significantly, although the degree of integration may vary in different communities. Since British-Kashmiris are not recognised as a separate ethnic community in the ethnic monitoring system of Britain, no specific data is available on Kashmiris. But it is a common perception that they remain perhaps the least integrated community, and most excluded and marginalised.

With the growth of various political and cultural networks, Kashmiris entered into the next phase of *Jithey Basso Hoovey Kashmir* (where you live is the Kashmir). While almost all Kashmiri groups in Britain contributed to the rise of British-Kashmiri identity as well as the political situation in Kashmir, especially the uprising in the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s, the demand for recognition in Britain as British-Kashmiris was raised by the Kashmir National Identity Campaign in the closing years of the last millennium. At the same time, all formal and informal networks in all areas of life mentioned above have grown a transnational dimension through regular and increasingly congesting ties with Azad Kashmir and flow of information, people, capital, and skills across the transnational connections.

While individual trips to Azad Kashmir may appear to be in decline, particularly of the third generation, which needs further research, new links can be traced in the fields of investment between the UK and Azad Kashmir along with cultural and political interaction.

It seems that from the turn of the millennium, growth in transnational links of British-Kashmiris also contributed in efforts to forge transnational links by some of the British public institutions and services especially the local councils, education, health, police, judiciary, and social services. Currently, several British towns and cities are twinned with or have treaties of friendship or friendship links with Mirpur or Kotli including Bradford, Waltham Forest, Sheffield, Oldham, Birmingham, Manchester, and Luton. Attempts were made to increase interaction and cooperation between police in Bradford and Mirpur. The initiative collapsed, however, following allegations of human trafficking on the renowned police officer of AJK Chaudhry Sabir Hussain who was later reported to have committed suicide by jumping into River Jhelum from Muzaffarabad Bridge. An effort was also made to link Bradford Hospital and Mirpur Hospital by exchanging health professionals. This initiative was terminated when Dr Mohsin Shakil, the top urologist and surgeon who was in Bradford as part of the transnational health link between Mirpur and Bradford, had to go back to Kashmir to provide treatment to the victims of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.⁵⁶ Similarly, several links can be traced in the fields of law and social services mainly related to various criminal cases including child abduction, and honour-related and domestic violence, where people involved lived or operated in the transnational space between AJK and Britain.⁵⁷

This, of course, is only a quick overview of the aspects of the transnational space that British-Kashmiri ties have developed over the years, and are increasingly becoming dense with a range of socio-economic, political, cultural, and philanthropic practices, ties, and connections straddling British and Azad Kashmiri geographical containers. Each of these aspects needs to be further explored and analysed to understand this phenomenon of transnationalism amongst British-Kashmiris with the intention of seeing what opportunities and threats this space offers for now and in future.

Opportunity

The 21st century is the age of economic links as well as trade across regions and continents. Therefore, it is a need of the hour to provide certain incentives (including tax rebates and infrastructural development for easy access to the regional markets) to the British-Kashmiri business community to invest their capital in diverse industrial sectors in their country of origin as we have the example of fast-growing Indian industry, which is the product of Indian government's incentives for Indian business community in Europe, the US, and the Middle East. One of the most crucial provisions for this is greater autonomy for AJK government. Control over corruption, improvement of material and social infrastructure, and security and safety of investors and investment in the region would also be very helpful. A long-term policy in this direction can put the fluctuating economy of the region on the right track rather than make it dependent on charities and foreign borrowings.

Conclusion

Till the mid-1960s, people from Mirpur Division migrated to the UK with the intention of staying there for a short duration just to earn sufficient money to build a house and set up some business back in Kashmir. However, the construction of Mangla Dam shattered their dream of return. This also changed the earlier plan of Mirpuris not to bring wives and children over to the UK. The next two decades also witnessed the earliest 'transnational British-Kashmiri marriages' among labour migrants. The 1980s proved to be the decade of chain migration. The economic recession of the 1980s in Britain resulted in unemployment amongst Kashmiri workers. These redundant workers went on to work for private hire or taxis, catering or take away, and manufacturing industry.

A large number of former textile workers also went on to open up corner shops, and a significant number of British-Kashmiris set up off-licence shops selling alcohol, which was previously seen as un-Islamic. As their businesses grew, they started developing relations with white people in politics and businesses.

With the passage of time, the British-Kashmiris established community welfare institutions like funeral committees, followed by religious institutions such as mosques. Later, the campaign against

publication of the *Satanic Verses* turned political. British-Kashmiris along with other Muslim populations enhanced their Muslim political identity. On the political front, British-Kashmiris were originally activated around two main traditions: First, the Kashmir issue, and second, the left-leaning working-class and anti-racist politics. Around that time, the Azad Kashmir political parties, especially the ruling parties, became active and mobilised a larger number of British-Kashmiris than the pro-independence groups.

Due to the shift in the on-going movement in Kashmir from secular to religious, the left-wing tradition of Kashmiri politics in the UK has also declined over the years. More Kashmiris are now engaged in mainstream British politics. It seems that in future their participation in the British mainstream politics will grow further. On the economic front, several registered charities across Britain have supported various welfare projects across AJK, particularly after the 2005 earthquake. A significant number of Kashmiris have provided assistance to the earthquake affected areas. Some projects are still going on. Hence, the Government of Pakistan should encourage the Kashmiri business community by giving them incentives along with security and safety to attract their investment in their country of origin.

Notes and References

- 1 These are projected figures because there is no separate census for Kashmiri community in the UK. They have travelled to the UK on a Pakistani passport, where they have been counted as a part of Pakistani community since their arrival, so it is very challenging to give the exact data of Kashmiri community.
- 2 The term Kashmir historically referred to the Valley of Kashmir just to the south of the western end of the Himalayan mountain range. Currently, Kashmir refers to a much larger area, which includes the regions of Kashmir Valley (Kasheer), Jammu, Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Ladakh.
- 3 The figure 84,471 square miles has been used in many publications. The 1891 census put the area as 80,900 square miles. This figure was repeated in 1901. The 1911 census showed the area as 84,432 square miles. According to the 1921 census, the area was 84,258. In 1941, the census commissioner considered 84,258 square miles to be the correct figure.
- 4 Wakhan is situated in the extreme north-east of Afghanistan. Wakhan Strip separates Pakistan from Tajikistan. It was created as a buffer zone between British colonial territories and Tsarist Russia in 1893.
- 5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 6 Since Kashmiris are not recognised in the statistical systems of the countries of their settlement, their accurate numbers are not available. The estimates are based on such academics as R. Ballard (1991) who claim that two-thirds of Pakistanis in Britain are from Azad Kashmir. The estimates for other countries are based on general information.
- 7 D. K. Ram, *Gulabnama: A History of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu & Kashmir* (Srinagar: Sheikh Mohammed Usman & Sons, 2005).

- ⁸ Michelle Maskiell, "Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000," *Journal of World History Vol. 13, No.1* (2002): pp.27-65.
- ⁹ Hastings appointed George Bogle to undertake a diplomatic and fact-finding mission to chart the unknown territory beyond the northern borders of Bengal, with a view to opening up trade with Tibet and possibly establishing a back-door trade relationship with China, which strictly controlled foreign trade at Guangzhou (the 3rd largest Chinese city).
- ¹⁰ "Runzeid Dev, the father of the then chief of Jumbo, who deservedly acquired the character of a just and wise ruler, largely contributed to the wealth of and importance of Jumbo. Perceiving the benefits that would arise from the residence of Muhammadan merchants, he held out to them many encouragements and observed towards them a disinterested (sic) and honourable conduct. He avowedly protected and indulged his people, particularly the Muhammadans, to whom he allotted a certain quarter of the town which was thence denominated Mughalpur; a mosque was erected in the new colony. When he was riding through their quarter during the time of prayer, he never failed to stop his horse until the priest (Moazan) had concluded his ritual exclamation [Azaan]. An administration so munificent and judicious at the same time that it enforces the respect of the subjects, made Jumbo a place of extensive commercial resort, where all descriptions of men experienced, in their persons and property, a full security." G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashīr: Being a History of Kashmir from the Earliest Times to Our Own, Vol. II* (University of Punjab, 1949), p.755.
- ¹¹ G. T. Vinge., *Travel in Kashmir, Ladakh, Iskardo* (London: Henry Colburn Publishers, 1844).
- ¹² Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris fight for Freedom* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1977).
- ¹³ According to Din, Thorpe's father E. Thorpe visited Jana's village often and on one of his visits, he saw Jana and fell in love with her. Din does not tell why E. Thorpe visited Jana's

village? According to this version, Jana was not a daughter of any Royal Dayim Rathore but a buffalo herder from Teli family and when the colonel fell in love, he divulged to Habibullah Teli, an uncle of Jana, who then organised everything. The rest of the story is analogous to the one told by Saraf and Father Biscoe.

- 14 Saraf, *Kashmiris fight for Freedom*, op.cit.
- 15 C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade* (London: Seeley Service and Co. Limited, 1922).
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Saraf cites the date as 22nd November.
- 18 Tasim Zahid, "Kashmiris forgot Robert Thorpe, his grave," *Daily Greater Kashmir*, Srinagar, 6 March 2008, available at <<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2008/Mar/6/kashmiris-forget-robert-thorpe-his-grave-46.asp>>.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Many of these shawl workers' families settled in Mirpur from where along with Mirpuri peasants and workers they were to migrate to Britain in the closing years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century.
- 22 Rozina Visram, *Asian in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
- 23 Shahid Bhatt from Birmingham told the first author in a personal interview that his maternal grandfather Karam Elahee came to Britain somewhere around 1900, and great grandfather Mohammed Aziz aka Kalu in 1886.
- 24 Roger Ballard, "The Roots of Emigration from Mirpur," available at <<http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/asian/origins/local4.htm>>.
- 25 The seaport of Indus where rivers of Lahore and Multan discharge themselves in salt sea. See John Dowson, *History of India: As Told by its own Historians* (London: Trübner & Co., 1871).
- 26 Ballard, "The Roots of Emigration from Mirpur," op.cit.

- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Sirang was a coal room supervisor overlooking the stokers.
- 29 M. Yousaf, *Karvane-e-Yousaf* (Mirpur: Al-Umar, 1997).
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Richard Symonds, "Reports on the Poonch Uprising," *The Statesman, Calcutta*, February 4, 1947.
- 32 Rashmi H. Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).
- 33 "Mangla Dam," available at <<http://cms.waterinfo.net.pk/pdf/md.pdf>>.
- 34 No study is available on what happened to those who, due to lack of compensation or out of choice, went to Sindh and Punjab.
- 35 Prior to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, commonwealth citizens were allowed to enter Britain freely and usually made the journey by sea. The Act made temporary provisions for controlling immigration into the UK of commonwealth citizens. The Act received Royal Assent on 18 April 1962.
- 36 Roger Ballard, "Emigration in a wider context: Jullundur and Mirpur compared," *New Community* 11, No.1 (1983): pp.117–36.
- 37 Munir Akhtar from Dadyal was one of the few exceptions who came to Birmingham with her mum and dad in early 1960s.
- 38 Sadeeqe Baba's, personal interview with the first author, Leeds, 12 July 2008.
- 39 First author's personal conversation with some British-Kashmiris from the Valley. Also See Majid A. Siraj, *Kashmir: Desolation or Peace* (London: Minerva Press Publishers, Ltd. 1997).
- 40 Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour, and Social Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000).

- 41 *Biraderi* literally means brotherhood and is perceived varyingly and sometimes interchangeably as caste or tribe, or clan as well. In Azad Kashmir, it is defined around professions and within that has tribal distinctions. Broadly *biraderies* had been distinguished between landed and non-landed ones.
- 42 Angela Monaghan, "UK Recession in the 1980s: What Was It Like?," *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2009, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/recession/4323064/UK-recession-in-1980-What-was-it-like.html>>.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 One of the few educated Kashmiris from Mirpur at this stage who qualified as a school teacher from Leeds University in the early 1950s.
- 45 First author's personal interview with Mehmood Hashmi in Birmingham, 12 June 2006.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 2011 census using Roger Ballard's 'two third of Pakistanis are actually from Azad Kashmir estimate.
- 48 In Islam, a fatwa is a legal decree made by someone who has extensive knowledge of Islamic law and authority to issue a fatwa.
- 49 Sufis emphasise and promote a mystical form of the Islamic faith that is known as Sufism. Similar trends can also be seen in other religions and even amongst people who do not have any religion.
- 50 Established in 1932 at Srinagar as a pioneer of Azad Kashmir state. It was converted to National Conference in 1939 and was re-formed in 1942.
- 51 In 1965, Azad Kashmir Plebiscite Front was established where Abdul Khaliq Ansari Advocate was elected as its president and Amanullah Khan as general secretary. While it had no organisational link with the party of similar name announced by Sheikh Abdullah of National Conference in the mid-1950s in Kashmir Valley, both shared the slogan of the plebiscite.

- 52 Tariq Ali is a British-Pakistani historian, novelist, film-maker, campaigner, political commentator, and former president of the Oxford Union in 1965. He has been a leading figure of the Left internationally for more than 40 years. He has been long associated with the New Left Review and joined the International Marxist Group, in 1968.
- 53 Aftab, Ahmed, 'Unlocking the Potential of Kashmiri Diaspora' in Berghif Peace Support and Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (2011).
- 54 Shams Rehman and Virinder S. Kalra, "Transnationalism From Below: Initial Response by British-Kashmiris to the South Asia Earthquake of 2005," *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol.15, No.3, 2006, pp.309-323.
- 55 *Chitka* committee initiated writing Pahari-Pothwari language in the 1990s as a means to empower the Pahari and Pothwari speaking communities. Subsequently, the script of the language was developed with significant input by linguists from Azad Kashmir and Pothwar. Akhtar Imam Rizvi, the renowned Pothwari writer, broadcaster, poet, and linguist described these developments as seeds of marginalised language blossomed away from their soil.
- 56 <http://archive-org-2014.com/org/k/2014-03-10_3826973_11/Kashmir-Record-amp-Research-Council-KRRC/>.
- 57 <<http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/CrimesOfTheCommunity.pdf>> also see <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1073966>>.