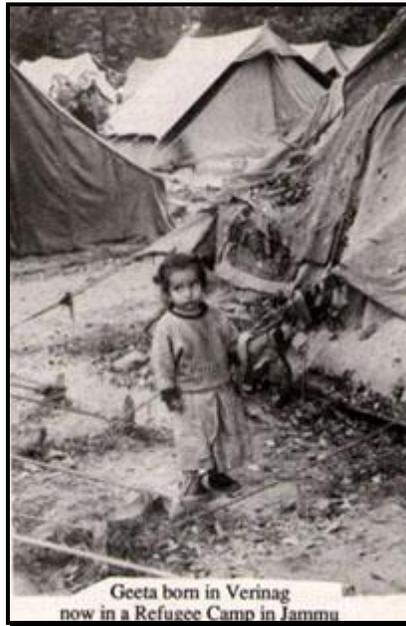




Human Rights Violations of Kashmiri Pandits

An Appeal



Geeta born in Verinag
now in a Refugee Camp in Jammu

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF KASHMIRI PANDITS

AN APPEAL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is an appeal by the intellectuals of a small yet distinct ethno-religious community, the Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) who have a history of more than five thousand years of a rich cultural tradition and a unique religious philosophy of the universality of man, peace and amity amongst peoples. Down the ages, this aboriginal community of the valley of Kashmir has readily opened itself to foreigners of all faiths, creeds and professions who came as travellers and settlers. However, it has repeatedly been the tragic victim of religious persecution, forcible conversion, violence and brutal massacre at the hands of invading muslim zealots and religious fanatics leading to repeated exodus of the community, rendering it a minority in its own land.

This appeal gives a brief outline of the barbarities that the community faced at the hands of the despotic Muslim rulers since the heydays of Islamic fundamentalism, as it made inroads into Kashmir after the 13th century. It traces the present escalation of human rights violations amounting to genocide of this community to a cruel and criminal conspiracy by the fanatical and fundamentalist forces which gained ascendancy and got fresh impetus during the last four decades. It also provides a bird's eye-view of the sprouting of dormant forces of Islamic Fundamentalism during these years in the religious schools that mushroomed in the valley and became nurseries for the growth of religious hatred, militancy and terrorism. This indoctrination prompted and incited young cadres to cross over to Pakistan and Pakistan-held Kashmir so as to receive arms training and carry out the diabolical plan for the muslimization of Kashmir as a prelude to its secession from secular democratic India. The hounding out of more than three hundred thousand Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) from the valley from 1989 onwards was the first phase of this sinister operation.



This appeal brings out in vivid detail persecution of the minority community followed by threats, abductions, extortions, tortures and killing by brutal means of its members from all walks of life which led to exodus. A virulent disinformation campaign was started before the mass exodus against this community and followed up with fanatical zeal, after the exodus, in order to secure total ruination of the community. The present plight of the community, once given to academic, philosophical and spiritual pursuits, and now rootless and without identity, is given in some detail. Over one thousand members of the community have been killed by the terrorists and the thousands are dying in the miserable camps for want of basic amenities, shelter, medicare and family support; and thousands of its youth are getting scattered in search of livelihood. It is feared that at the present rate of dispersal the community is disintegrating beyond redemption and facing total extinction.

This appeal invokes the conscience and compassion of the civilized world to grasp the grim tragedy facing the Kashmiri Pandit community and to stand up and speak for it and help it regain its lost status and get rehabilitated once again, with honor and dignity in its own homeland.



One of many refugee camps at Jammu.

2.0 APPEAL

The armed subversion by Muslim fundamentalist/terrorist youth to destroy the pluralistic, secular socio-political character of Kashmir valley and reduce it to a reactionary, monolithic, theocratic one, has entered its seventh year of operation. The grand design of this separatist insurgency is aimed at snapping all historical, economic, cultural, and political links of Kashmir valley with India and annexing it with Pakistan which is encouraging it overtly and covertly and lending moral, financial, political, diplomatic and military support. The first objective of this diabolical plan i.e. hounding out the Kashmiri Pandit (Hindu) ethnic minority from the Kashmir valley is being pursued with fanatic zeal.

3.0 PRIME TARGETS

The Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) in the valley of Kashmir, irrespective of their age, sex, position status or situation became the prime target of the terrorists' onslaught. They were warned and threatened, individually and collectively, through word of mouth, through insinuation and innuendo, through posters and press and over loud speakers installed in thousands of mosques all over the valley. Fear loomed large and the terrorist shadow stalked educational markets and other public places wherever the Kashmiri Pandits had a representation, however small. They were identified and denounced; hit lists were exhibited on electric poles, office doors and entries to numerous institutions; and the public at large was exhorted to watch them and hound them out. They were followed and kidnapped from their homes and places of work and interrogated and tortured. A spree of killings of the intellectuals of the community started. This was followed by indiscriminate gunning down, hanging, dismembering, tying with grenades and blasting into pieces, skinning, burning and sawing alive the members of this ethnic minority of all walks of life. Many of the victims after being butchered were thrown into streets as exhibits for everybody to get terrorised. The bereaved were not permitted to mourn the dead and perform the last rites. Those who dared to attend the funeral were earmarked for reprisals. Molestation and rape was the order of the day.

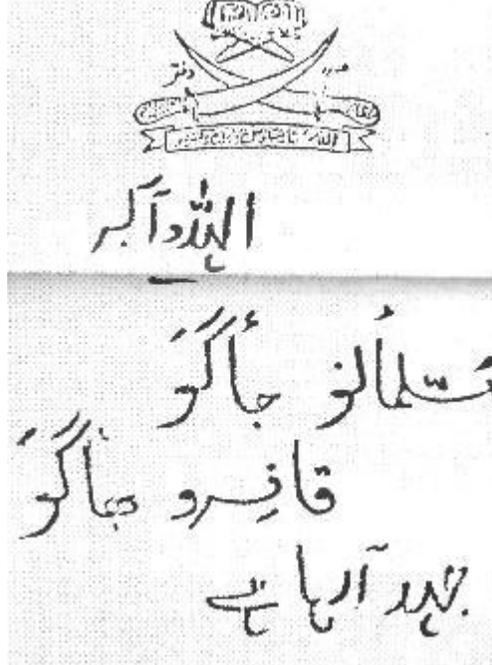


Ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits.

The gamut of the terrorists' depredations puts the notorious programs in shade and leaves nobody in doubt about the design of the terrorists to exterminate Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) who started fleeing temporarily out of the valley to seek shelter in the Jammu province of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, in Delhi and in other towns of India during the months of January-March 1990. A large number preferred to stay behind, partly hopeful of a let up in the persecution and the frantic killings and partly on account of the reassurances by their friends, neighbours and colleagues of the Muslim majority community. However, indiscriminate murders gained momentum as also the taunting, ridicule, accusations, denigrations and warnings issued to the Pandits (Hindus). Those who dared to return to the valley even after a brief absence were frisked and taken for questioning and accused of having spied against the terrorists and of having received arms training to counter the terrorism. They were followed like a shadow or given a time limit of a few hours or a day to quit the Valley.

4.0 INTIMIDATORY WARNINGS

Not content with the tempo of exodus of the ethnic minority community, the Muslim religious zealots pressed into service the local daily newspapers and started periodic write ups in a vituperative and malicious propaganda offensive against the Kashmiri Hindus, culminating in repeated warnings and final ultimatum through the pages of "Daily Alsafa" on 14th April, 1990 giving the community two days to leave the valley or face retribution and death. The good Samaritans of the Muslim majority community who had offered help, solace and protection to the Kashmiri Pandits were also threatened, coerced and subdued to fall in line with the fundamentalist designs and they, therefore, advised the Kashmiri Pandits to leave the valley for a 'temporary period' till normalcy returned to the valley. Both gentle and well meaning persuasion was adopted side by side with covert and overt threats to recalcitrant Hindus forcing them into exodus. Meanwhile unbridled violence and brutal murders went on . More than one thousand Hindus have been killed, hundreds are missing, possibly dead or kept hostage. Women have been held captive in remote hideouts of the terrorists to satisfy their lust . An unspecified number of those Hindus who are still living in the valley in mortal terror are victims of extortion, religious persecution and kidnappings.



Seal of the Central Office of Allah Tigers
Allah-O-Akbar
MUSLIMS AWAKE
ALL INFIDELS VANISH
JIHAD IS APPROACHING



The terrorist's intimidation:
Leave Kashmir in one month otherwise danger to life and family.
This is Last Warning.
By Order
Dist. Commander

5.0 CANARDS GALORE

This communal carnage and forced exodus was followed up with a virulent campaign of vilification and disinformation against the Kashmiri Hindu community with the twin objective of covering up the true communal-fundamentalistic character of the so-called freedom struggle of the terrorists and securing total ruination and annihilation of this ethno-religious minority. This propaganda offensive was backed up by canards floated across the length and breadth of the country that:

- i) the Kashmiri Pandits migrated out of the valley because they were touted by Mr. Jagmohan, the then Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, who promised them relief, ration and land. That those who were gunned down, hanged or tortured were informers and enemies of the "freedom struggle". This canard took such deep roots inside and outside the valley that the poorly informed public even of cosmopolitan cities like Delhi and Bombay who go by the common knowledge that in India Hindus are in majority and by corollary the majority in Kashmir valley are Hindus, failed to understand why Kashmiri Hindus had to flee their homes and hearths. Only the committed demographers in the country realise that Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) are a minority in the Muslim majority Kashmir valley of a Hindu majority India.
 - ii) the Kashmiri Pandits are over-represented in Central and State Government Services and private Jobs and that this was a major source of irritation with the disenchanting Muslim youth, who out of frustration took to arms to fight for their justful rights. This canard has been supplemented and reinforced by distorted statistics and the thread has been skillfully taken over by some self-proclaimed humanists and over-zealous politicians of the country who want to prove more secular than their credentials allow. In fact they found it a useful tool to convince themselves and the world that terrorism in Kashmir was not an armed subversion aimed at the secession of the State from the union of India but an act of frustration of a handful of "disgruntled and misguided youth". This ill conceived notion though countered by the exiled Kashmiri Pandits, fell on deaf ears and did not get the attention of the media which were only vying with each other to score points for the terrorists and their cause. It did not take long for the communal, fundamentalistic and subversive character of terrorism to emerge in its true colour.
 - iii) the Kashmiri Hindus because of their merit, cunning and influence would become usurpers and take over educational institutions, professional colleges, trade, industry, Government jobs etc. in Jammu, Delhi and other places where they have taken refuge. This disinformation caused tremendous confusion, panic, over-reaction and even hostility in the host towns which were ill equipped to accommodate such a sizeable- influx of refugees, especially in Jammu where seventeen camps have been set up in the suburban dingy areas, Stiff resistance was put up even for admission to the exiled students in various educational institutions; jobs were denied to the youth and all doors were closed for the rehabilitation of professional and non professional personnel of the community. A community which prided itself in its academic excellence and high professionalism is idling and rotting, for the last six years.
- While torture, persecution and killing were going full steam side by side with the canards floated against the fleeing community, the marauding terrorists started loot, plunder and arson of the properties and estates left behind by Hindus. They desecrated and destroyed their temples, confiscated their stores and stocks, stole their kind, harvested their crops and encroached upon and annexed their lands. Till date more than three thousand Hindu houses have been blasted or razed to ground. The remaining have been looted, vandalized or occupied.





نخلہ ہر چار سو ہے نعرہ تکبیر کا
جاگ اٹھا ہے مسلمان وادی کشمیر کا
جراعت فاروق و حیدر، حوصلہ کشمیر کا
موت کا کچھ خوف ہے دل میں نہ دار و گیر کا
یا شہادت پائیں گے یا ہوں گے اب ہم فتح یاب

لامیں گے کشمیر میں اسلام کا ہم انقلاب
سرفروشی کے لئے تیار ہیں بیرو جواں
نقدہ توحید لب پر، عزم چروں سے عیاں
رائفل اک ہاتھ میں ہے، دوسرے میں ہے قرآن
پھر سے دہرانے کو ہیں بدر و احد کی داستاں
فتح و نصرت ساتھ ہے اور کامرانی ہم رکاب
لامیں گے کشمیر میں اسلام کا ہم انقلاب

Terrorists' propoganda.

6.0 COLOSSAL TRAGEDY

Within months of the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits the Government, whether out of misplaced optimism to placate and appease the terrorists or with deliberate intent, started recruiting and promoting Muslims to the posts and positions vacated by the Kashmiri Pandits. This has boosted the sinister designs of the terrorists to discourage and thwart the minority Kashmiri Pandit community to return to the valley for it has neither the jobs for livelihood nor the houses for shelter left behind.

So a tragedy which began with religious persecution and genocide, climaxing with the exodus of the community, has now attained colossal dimensions . This ethno-religious minority is presently going through a grim battle for survival and facing the torment of a bleak and uncertain future. Having been forced to live under torn and tattered tents, in ramshackle camps or in one room tenements and stables vacated by cows and buffaloes and rented at exorbitant prices, they are subject to the vagaries of a harsh climate, a hostile populace and an indifferent and callous administration. They have to go through a tortuous procedure to establish their credentials as exiles to be entitled to a meagre relief and measly rations for which they have to queue up for long hours and face untold miseries and humiliation to satisfy the whims and moods of relief commissioners and their minions. They have become the victims of bureaucratic bungling and corruption. They are pawns in the hands of political parties and power brokers. They are being pushed around and harassed for demanding their justful rights; and kicked, cane-charged and arrested for raising their voice against a deaf administration. Thus they have been reduced to abject poverty and a state of utter helplessness and apathy. Their greatest tragedy is that they have become exiles in their own land, aliens in their own country which they inhabited for thousands of years.

The community is now caught in a piquant and unsavory situation as the State and the Central Governments are treating it as expendable. The authorities are hushing up the genocide, the exodus and the present plight of the Kashmiri Pandit community which have resulted as much out of the total abdication of their authority and responsibility, as out of the religious crusade of the terrorists. Nor is the international community aware of the refugee status of this community as countries around the world recognize refugees only when they are forced to flee into another country.

7.0 NAKED VIOLATION

The last few years have witnessed a perpetuation of human rights' violation against this community which had to leave the valley helter-skelter and got dispersed far and wide in different parts of the country. Most of the nearly three hundred thousand refugees came out with clothes barely enough to cover their bodies. They came out with the illusion of a return to their homes and hearths in the near future. Families got split and scattered in the scramble for shelter and livelihood. Parents got separated from children, spouses from their partners, brothers from sisters. They are still on the move from one place to another like wandering nomads looking for help and succour. As a result of this dispersal the social fabric of the community is torn asunder, the economic structure has collapsed, material possessions have vanished and the political base has been overturned. The old and infirm of the community have met a premature end, dying for want of health and family support. A large number of youth suffered mental breakdown. Depression, panic attacks, phobias, nightmares and insomnia have seized all age groups. Unnatural deaths in the form of sunstroke, snake and scorpion bites, hydrophobia and accidents have taken a big toll. The terror, a feeling of siege, a sense of rootlessness and loss of identity, the trauma of forced migration, exposure to an alien and hostile environment, problem of acclimatization, poor housing, insanitary conditions, lack of basic amenities like drinking water, scarce medicare, malnutrition and idleness compounded by hurt and humiliation have orchestrated to result in physical, mental and psychological trauma of unimaginable magnitude. The community has reached the end of the tether and its reserves of patience and hopes have dried up. The spectre of disease, death and extinction are haunting the community. It seems unlikely that the community will ever be able to organise itself again into a cohesive social and political entity which is vital for its survival and resurgence. Far from regaining its pristine glory, it is hard pressed to keep body, mind and soul together.

It is indeed deplorable that some human rights' organisations reporting on the Kashmir situation have conveniently ignored the gross human rights violations against Kashmiri Pandits. Their silence on the genocide of this community and the terrible plight facing the community after the exodus, is intriguing and exasperating and puts the credibility of these organisations into shade. The one-sided, partisan and extremely prejudicial views of certain agencies that have chosen to black-out the brutalities and murderous killings of Kashmiri Pandit minority in their reports, leads one to believe that such organisations have fallen victims to the dangerous ploy of the terrorists and become tools in their propaganda machinery against this community and against India.

It is a sad commentary on the perceptions and sensitivities of the civilized world that a community which has been the original inhabitant of the valley of Kashmir with a chequered history of more than five thousand years, a rich cultural heritage and a distinct ethno religious identity, the proponent of and heir to a unique concept and creed of Hindu thought - the philosophy of Kashmir shaivism with its message of Universality of man, peace, non-violence, amity and brotherhood - is being deliberately and systematically destroyed.

History is replete with the records of religious persecutions and barbarities perpetrated against this community since the advent of Islam in the thirteenth century in Kashmir. While the community accommodated, mingled with and absorbed the culture and traditions of all outsiders who came to Kashmir, it was repeatedly rewarded with the most inhuman and brutal treatment. From time to time various cruel Muslim rulers driven by religious zeal and communal frenzy demolished Hindu institutions and shrines, burnt religious scriptures and libraries of Hindus and unleashed a reign of terror leading to the imposition of heavy taxes, forcible conversions and general massacre of those refusing to embrace Islam. They inflicted bestialities like the chopping off of the noses and tongues, beheading, drowning in water after tying people back to back etc. on the community. Those who escaped forcible conversion, mutilation and death were forced into exile reducing this community to a minority in its own land.

8.0 SUSTAINED CONSPIRACY

Even after attainment of independence and accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India the fundamentalist forces in the Kashmir valley refused to accept the principles of secularism and democratic pluralism and intensified their nefarious designs against the minority community of Kashmiri Hindus and against the Indian Republic. Under a macabre programme, 'makatabs' (Religious schools) were established in every nook and corner of the Kashmir valley with the putative aim of teaching religious scriptures to youth but with the real intent of indoctrinating and envenoming these impressionable minds with anti-Hindu and anti-India hatred. Funds were lavished on these schools openly and clandestinely by local patrons as well as Muslim countries espousing Islamic fundamentalism round the world led by Pakistan, and the schools became nurseries for the growth of fundamentalism and terrorism. A ban imposed by the Government of Sheikh Mohd. Abdullah on these schools in 1977 was lifted soon after its imposition under relentless pressure by Jamat-i-Islami and other fundamentalist organisations.

These pressure groups gradually extended their tentacles in every sphere of administration, bureaucracy and judiciary in the State and molded these institutions in a cruel conspiracy against Kashmiri Pandits resulting in discrimination, alienation, denial and deprivation of this community over the years. The process of Islamisation and fundamentalism which started in 1947 took firm roots by 1986 when the fundamentalist/terrorists enacted a dress rehearsal of the present terrorism on a small scale by arson, loot and plunder of Kashmiri Pandit property and their temples in the Anantnag district of the Kashmir valley. No serious effort was made by the administration to bring the guilty to book. This encouraged them to cross the border to attend arms training camps in Pakistan over the next three years during which they brought with them large quantities of sophisticated arms and ammunition to carry on full scale subversion and terrorism. The cataclysmic events leading to genocide and mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community from 1990 onwards is the culmination of this long process of regimentation, indoctrination, religious frenzy and terrorism.

9.0 APPEAL TO WORLD CONSCIENCE

It is high time that the conscience of mankind awakens to the reality of the situation in Kashmir where the so-called freedom struggle is merely an extension and escalation of the ongoing offensive against a small yet ancient and distinct ethno-religious community which has been turned into a minority - the Kashmiri Pandit (Hindu) - who is being exterminated under a diabolical plan masterminded by religious zealots turned terrorists with the direction, support and connivance of their mentors from across the border in Pakistan. We appeal, therefore,

- to all the nations of the world;
- to all peace loving, secular and democratic countries which value and recognise the urges, aspirations and just rights of minorities round the globe;
- to all organisations that monitor and report on human rights' violations against ethnic religious communities; and
- to all individuals, groups and institutions that stand for justice, equality, religious tolerance and human dignity to break their silence and speak out and save this ancient and distinct ethnic-religious minority of the world which has been thrown out of its own land, made a refugee in its own country and which is, now, facing dispersal, disintegration and extinction.