

## **The Role of Kashmiri Diaspora in Conflict Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

Globalization has played a crucial role in growing number of migrants across the world. These migrants have been seen as a significant diplomatic and development agent in both their origin and host countries. Kashmiri migrants across the world have assumed importance in diplomatic discourse and transformation of their long-standing dispute. However, efforts by Jammu & Kashmir governments to engage the diaspora in conflict have not been followed by formulation and implementation of appropriate policies and strategies. There appears to be an unspoken mistrust between the intentions of governments and the members of Kashmiri diaspora, which has resulted in their low utilization. Subsequently, there is a need to create an interpretative framework to advocate and effectively engage the diaspora. Therefore, the diaspora should be consulted in national action plans and diplomatic initiatives to integrate and to stimulate their sustainable role in the protracted conflict of Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Kashmiri diaspora, Conflict transformation, Diplomatic discourse, Protracted conflict

### **Introduction**

It can be argued that Kashmir conflict is a major cause of instability in South Asia but it is very important to comprehend that how this protracted dispute can be transformed, as all national, bilateral and global efforts over mediation have failed. The governments of Jammu & Kashmir across the line of control seem unable to pursue the right of self-determination internationally and on diplomatic front due to their limited capacity and constitutional limits. Implications of these questions are correspondingly as imperative to Kashmiris in diaspora, from London to Washington, from Brussels to New York, as they are on both sides of Line of Control (LOC). Certainly, complexity has its own roots but in today's globalized world non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, national and identity groups have much influence on national to global levels, which include development, building bridges and peace initiatives that ultimately aimed at the sustainable prevention and transformation of conflicts. Kashmir has wider diaspora settled in Europe and UK. Primarily, their migration has characterized as economic but the political condition of J&K since partition has also effected people's movements. Most of them remain connected to Kashmir conflict through an active social, cultural, economic and political participation at both home and host states. However, their role, influence and

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effectiveness in advancing understanding on Kashmir issue is often missing from the wider narrative in political and diplomatic discourse.

Therefore, this study maintains that it is difficult to offer an unproblematic shared understanding of the concept of diaspora but also takes as a premise that there is enough commonality of understanding of the concept that a comparative investigation of patterns of diaspora interventions in conflicts makes sense. The key empirical research question that contributors were asked to respond to was; In the case of Kashmir conflict, how did the diaspora respond? This research focuses to analyze the capacities of Kashmiri diaspora to secure tangible and intangible resources in support of conflict transformation. It also suggests some obligatory policies to optimizing the potential for positive influences of diaspora.

### **Theoretical Context**

Conflict-transformation theory by Johan Galtung (Galtung, 2007) and John Paul Lederach (Lederach, 1995) guides this research. The major target of this approach is to concentrate on the strategies that would facilitate to dilute the strength of conflict and to produce positive change. The possibility of peaceful transformation is based on the protection of conflicting parties' interests; i.e. political, social, economic and ideological, constructive and productive role of states and favorable environment at the international level. While the coercive and suppressive approaches by state and communal parties turned conflict into violent one, which ultimately lead to more worsening situation because of huge military presence as well as unavailability of basic needs (Miall, 2004).

A peaceful transformation of any violent conflict is merely possible when the political, military, socio-economic and cultural concerns of the disputed parties are addressed. In transformation process, politicians are not best suited because in young democracies political representatives are in hegemonic relationship with their supporters. Therefore, in the interest of peace and legitimacy, social change agents i.e. civil society, NGOs, INGOs, migrants, national identity groups and media should be considered for political actions, who are engaged in active citizen diplomacy. (The Underlying Assumptions in Conflict Transformation) Its focus is mainly to identify the source of conflict and to regulate the reforms in a conflict, particularly in pre and post phases of violence. So, the ultimate objective of the transformers is to shape the behavior and attitude of the stakeholders, which eventually facilitates in transforming "conflict habituated system into peace system." (Hashmi, 2008)

Some features of conflict-transformation mechanism are important to highlight here: First, the chronic trust deficit among stakeholders of conflict that would eventually compel them not to overtly share their insecurities against one-another. Secondly, there should be guaranteed unbiased and equal participation of all concerned parties and individual insight and objectives take-over the collective approach. Thirdly, to bring a change on societal level, the external actors can intervene through accession with local leaders and encourage them to provide appeasing moves to each other. In

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this process, third party has to be extensively connected to the leadership and other active associates of disputed parties (Miall, 2004). Now let us analyze these factors in the case of Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom.

### **Capacities of Kashmiri Diaspora**

Diaspora is best suited to seek understanding of the respective administrations to help set a stage for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. (Ghulam Nabi Fai, personal communication, April 10, 2016) The started generations of British Kashmiris and organizations played role in keeping this conflict alive through demonstrations, meetings, discussion, and parliamentarians' questions about Kashmir. Now as things are changing and peoples' role in politics increasing, Kashmir dispute is raised more often than before in both Houses of the Parliament in UK and there is much stronger All Parties Parliamentary Group on Kashmir (APPG). This strengthening of the position and awareness of the issue can be cashed by the British Kashmiris who can form a strong pressure group because a large community owns the same cause. (Lord Qurban Hussain, personal communication, May 12, 2016) However, one weakness of this group is that having 20 different organizations, all holding more meetings here and there, resources and times are split, British politicians are getting confused and that does not help the Kashmir cause.

The UK-based Kashmiri diaspora has an effective outreach, liberty and space for action because of their foreign connectedness and linkages, and they have the legitimacy to act as ambassadors, catalysts in the process of conflict transformation. On the top of this, the Kashmiri diaspora has a considerable political influence too. (Waqas Mughal, personal communication, September 7, 2016) By getting engaged with the policy makers or policy making institutions and members of the parliament can help in creating a climate of transformation. European and American Kashmiris have more responsibility because they are living in a democratic setup, which supports liberty, freedom and human rights all over the world. Diaspora should persuade them that these countries claim themselves as global human rights defenders but their right to self-determination has been openly violated for the past seventy years, which needs to be exercised through political and diplomatic pressure by the diaspora. It can be possible when migrants participate in the local parties and political system. (Manzoor Hussain Gillani, personal communication, March 5, 2016)

Kashmiris are British nationals and many constituencies rely on Kashmiri votes. If diaspora makes certain their presence in different institutions such as educational, law making etc., they can play effective role like the Jewish community in the US. Now the fourth generation of Kashmiris is growing up in Britain and many have made significant positions in various departments of British society. It is being suggested that they should form a country-wide Kashmiri platform in Britain with exclusive aim of developing strategies and channels to engage with Kashmiris beyond the Indian and Pakistani narratives and provide access to the world media, NGOs and political parties

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for expanding the democratic space inside Kashmir state in all regions. (Shams Rehman, personal communication, May 15, 2016)

Diaspora is a potential power, they cannot just play the role in conflict but in economy which is quite parallel, as transformation needs a combination of many dimensions i.e. politics, economic, social etc. Moreover, diaspora can mainly focus on its academic contribution for the narrative building as the Jews have done. They can also sensitize the students about the cause of Kashmir at various university campuses. They can also finance back-home (Kashmiri) students in getting enrolment in world's top institution. (Dr. Javaid Hayat, personal communication, April 10, 2016) However, it must only be a supplementary role to a genuinely indigenous framework. In other words, if a creative mechanism for conflict resolution does not exist within the State of Jammu & Kashmir, there is little the outside world can do, irrespective of how influential they may be. (Tanveer Ahmed, personal communication, May 6, 2016)

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Jammu and Kashmir involved the entire part from Indian-held Kashmir (IHK), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). Astonishingly, these three parts are equally bifurcated; GB has detached from this entire dispute, IHK is under the strangled hold of India, whereas this diaspora representation is mainly coming out of AJK. (Raja Qaiser Ahmed, personal communication, January 19, 2016) The need to know is the demographic character of the British Kashmiris, so that the voices they represent may become the aspiration of all but not necessarily aspirations providing ladder to all to come out and speak. (Arif Kamal, personal communication, February 3, 2016)

Conversely, as mobilized group with robust sense of identity, diaspora can contribute both in domestic and international politics. During 1950s-60s British Kashmiris were not able to think of getting integrated in the local political system, simply because they were dislocated, displaced and they were busy in their respective arrangements. (Sardar Atique Ahmed, personal communication, February 7, 2016) Gradually, by late 1970s they have started as a part of local democracy and from mid-1980s, people were getting involved in local politics as few councilors were elected. Then process got impetus and British Kashmiris have constantly been part of UK politics. (Lord Qurban Hussain, personal communication, May 12, 2016) Since 1990s the number of British Kashmiris councils and local authority officers has grown significantly and this has opened up the doors for the British politicians of Kashmiri origin to contribute in making the local politics reflect the issues and needs of Kashmiri community as well. (Shams Rehman, personal communication, May 15, 2016) Before the June 2016 elections, there were hundreds of councilors, more than a dozen Mayors and Lord Mayors in local Councils, six MPs, and three members in the House of Lords of Kashmiri origin, which make them one of the largest minority ethnic group in terms of representation at all levels of political system. (Sardar Aftab Ahmed Khan, personal communication, September 15, 2016)

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The Kashmiri origin British Parliamentarians has a significant role in highlighting the Kashmir conflict internationally because of their legitimacy and influence in the power corridors of United Kingdom. Therefore, their hands need to be strengthened through different resolutions and speaking over the settlement of Kashmir conflict. Accordingly, an All-Parties Parliamentary Kashmir Group (APPKG) in the British Parliament supports Kashmiri's right to self-determination through dialogue; to highlight the human rights abuses in Kashmir; to request support from British parliamentarians; and to advocate peaceful and just solution for Kashmiri people. It consists of the elected members from both houses and works to highlight the ongoing problems, invite the speakers and raise the issue of Kashmir. And make it prevalent in the minds of politicians and trying to encourage the UK government to take more practical steps to find a solution. (Andrew Griffiths, personal communication, May 24, 2016) However, its effectiveness is suspicious, as even selected committee of APPG cannot force the executive but demand to answer their question. So, governments mostly diplomatically handle the question. These parliamentary groups are basically volunteer based faction for lobbying. But the British government prioritizes its national interest, which is deeply concerned with India; so, this dispute remains on the back-burner. (Lord Nazir Ahmed, personal communication, May 8, 2016)

The engagement of diaspora organizations with peace-building can be defined into direct and indirect activities. As direct activities concentrates on country of origin directly through capacity building, financial/material support, institutional support and advocacy/lobbying. While indirect activities emphasis on the origin state through mediating actors, lobbying on diplomatic level and state bodies to place an issue on international agenda and making NGOs to start campaigning against occupation, human rights violation etc. In order to justify what and how diaspora organization can contribute in peace-building, the capacities to engage, desires and determination of these organizations must be understood (Horst, 2009).

There are few prominent diaspora organizations e.g. Kashmir Development Foundation (KDF), Jammu and Kashmir Council for Human Rights (JKCHR), Jammu and Kashmir Self-determination Movement (JKSDM) and International NGOs Conciliation Resources (CR). They frequently arrange events on Kashmir and lobby Kashmir Cause at the UK Parliament. Amnesty International organizes seminars, public meetings, lobbying events at the Parliament and publishes reports. NGOs are mainly active, learning sources and participated in local system. Interestingly, members of the parliament find it more convenient to consult NGOs well equipped reports and information to lobby Kashmir cause. It is quite recent phenomena as previously there were no NGOs, there were political parties, elite parties, group, individuals and members of Parliament. (Sardar Aftab Ahmed Khan, personal communication, September 15, 2016) However, diaspora NGOs are not as much active in conflict but mostly doing developmental and welfare activities. (Manzoor Hussain Gillani, personal communication, March 5, 2016) There should be issue specific i.e. gender empowerment, youth mobilization, capacity building, tourism, and human rights. If they specialized in their domain then they would be able to showcase

their agenda and receive sort of understanding and support from the corresponding sectors of setting. (Arif Kamal, personal communication, February 3, 2016)

Consequently, the pro-independence Kashmiri parties such as Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Jammu & Kashmir Peace Foundation (JKPF) approach the parliamentarians, who occasionally raise issues in the parliament and press and also sittings in APPG with parliamentarians to proceed. (Quayyum Raja, personal communication, April 27, 2016) As organized political formations are doing most effective job, a pro-independence academician Zafar Khan thinks that diaspora members of parliament are bound by their political parties. And their effectiveness depends on how committed they are and not all of them are committed. Therefore, success factor and challenges can be recognized, improved networking and development of mutual support structure is likely to happen only if diaspora organizations take the responsibility for developing full range of their capabilities, and step-up to the leadership & management challenges. Most importantly, if diaspora organizations combine force to work together on national, regional and global levels; their formidable strength can definitely be significant. (Zafar Khan, personal communication, May 19, 2016)

In addition, the advocates for human rights organization reported that individuals from diaspora communities has their own influence in human rights awareness campaigns through capacity-building, communication technology, direct political advocacy and brain-gain. In diaspora, civil society organizations can uniquely influence policy, well document human rights abuses and advocate on behalf of the victims from their state of origin. (International Organization for Migration 2012) However, there are different thoughts and arguments under the theme that what the human rights issues are across all the regions of J&K and the response of diaspora. There is not one single actor/organization (UN, UK & USA) that can solve this influx but community itself and leaders coming together, and raising the issue of Kashmir internationally will result to get some change. (Andrew Griffith, personal communication, May 24, 2016) Moreover, it does its bit from time to time via social media or protesting outside the Indian or Pakistani embassies throughout the UK. Though there is very little that has emerged in mainstream media and perhaps less so in academia there. (Tanveer Ahmed, personal communication, May 6, 2016)

### **Integration of Kashmiri Diaspora**

There is another issue of integration of Kashmiri diaspora at different levels; integration among diaspora itself, integration with host state and state of origin. One has to be objective, as the diaspora consists of different communities. The pattern of kinship to an extent remains quite solid in British Kashmiris but it is also slightly breaking because the 4th generation has discarded this concept. (Zafar Khan, personal communication, May 19, 2016) However, this socialization is incremental; it cannot be expected to be in one and half generation. It will take another half generation or another two decades to have the desired integration levels. It is true of everywhere not

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only in Britain and they are able to keep up their identity and should be the part of larger whole. (Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, personal communication, February 15, 2016) However, migrants from Indian-held Kashmir are in very small number and the integration level among AJK & IHK people is quite unsatisfactory. (Ansar Ali Khan, personal communication, May 13, 2016) On the other hand, Kashmiri diaspora is unfortunately divided in different platforms and there is a real division amongst diaspora community because of their differences in political affiliations. (Dr. Nazir Hussain, personal communication, January 19, 2016)

In today's world, diaspora is progressively recognized as a major actor in national, bilateral and global arena, in the migration-development nexus and also widely acknowledged as bridges between states and societies. (Schatzer, 2013) Kashmiri diaspora has shown lot of concern to get integrated within the Western system. But huge British Kashmiris are too alienated and a reason somehow is the difference of home and host states system. As a result, there is both type of community who is fully integrated as well as separated. (Tahir Aziz, personal communication, May 19, 2016) Generally, compared to Pakistani diaspora in outside countries, Kashmiri diaspora is more integrated into the local communities which they are residing. They are politically active and on the mainstream, contesting the elections and they have the political representation into the local parliaments. Kashmiri diaspora has now deep inroads and roots into the local communities.

There is one ministerial seat for diaspora in AJK government. Some members of the Kashmiri diaspora also served as member of the AJK Council. They are connected but either through their individual financial contribution or baradari (tribe) and what influence these members of diaspora community have for wider interests and benefits of the diaspora community in their places of origin, is a question marked. (Sardar Aftab Ahmed Khan, personal communication, September 15, 2016) Most importantly, almost every Pakistani and Kashmiri political party has a branch in the UK, but not productive or result oriented as well as they have no influence over their political bosses here in the country. (Javaid Hayat, personal communication, April 10, 2016) British origin Chairman of All Party Parliamentary Group on Kashmir revealed that it is interesting and surprising that being a British Parliamentarian (even many are British born) they are less interested in talking about David Cameron and Jeremy Corbyn but have an interest to talk about PPP, PML (N), PTI and big understanding of political situation of Kashmir & Pakistan. They even develop all these national political parties in UK, which is one of the dangers because these political parties have their own vested interest, Pakistan centric approach not Kashmiri, and nothing to deal with longstanding conflict. Consequently, Indian Diaspora here is much integrated within the British politics. (Andrew Griffith, personal communication, May 24, 2016)

### **Effectiveness of the British Kashmiris Role**

The British Kashmiris are actively involved in politics, more so in local level. But over the past 10 years, greater participation of members of Kashmiri diaspora has

been witnessed in all political parties, which in fact is quite remarkable. Because traditionally, Kashmiris always supporting politics in the context of Labor Party. Kashmiri diaspora has representation in both Houses of UK parliament. Kashmiri members of parliaments are questioning and every little bit counts, but the question is whether British government takes any notice of it? On the other hand, JKLF type effort is based on voluntary work that is what makes it an effective driver if one wants a result-orientated struggle then it has to be very people centric effort; one cannot rule out struggle for right to self-determination, as British government has its own policies and interests with India and Pakistan. (Zafar Khan, personal communication, May 19, 2016)

Moreover, community is not united; every organization opens up its own Kashmir agenda, lack of coordination, no collective leadership, everyone wants to free Kashmir solely with their own way and this would never be practical. Their efforts are not united; vision is not clear and has other political ambitions which dent their efforts and role in the resolution of Kashmir issue. So the British Kashmiris have to increase their number and role in policy making institutions for this cause. Instead of chanting slogans on roads, that can be good for news but not practically pressurize India over this conflict. (Ansar Ali Khan, personal communication, May 13, 2016)

### **The Way Forward**

The fact that conflict-persuaded diaspora are often categorized by fragmentation and politicization. Kashmiri diaspora should think in broader perspective and to get united on national cause. They should leave the promotion of back home political parties, as well as to reconnect with the roots of the origin country. The ultimate aim is that diaspora should get recognition of 'Kashmiri identity' in their current states of residence. It is only then that Kashmiris as victims of atrocities can lobby successfully. It is important that their identity is recognized in local ethnic monitoring systems to enable equitable participation in local decision making processes and provision of services and use whatever the institutional forums are available to them.

Those citizens who live in a 'disputed' territory feel the effect of economic strangulation, limited freedom of movement and speech, dearth of art and culture, despicable infrastructure and diabolic facilities for health and education on a daily basis. Thus, the diaspora needs to supplement or support an indigenously created political process in J&K. Diaspora should understand the spirit of Kashmir freedom movement; they should not address the dispute which is not a dispute but purely a freedom movement. It is not a territorial, religious or humanitarian but political dispute or the fate of millions of Kashmiris future. Currently, the issue is wrongly perceived as a religious issue as the concentration of the 'problem' is in Muslim majority areas. They have to address this and at the same time get it recognized as a political and humanitarian issue and it should be presented to the international community. In the absolute presence of the 'nationalist school of thought' across the Line of Control (LOC) as well as in Kashmir diaspora, without facilitating their



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aspiration, ongoing conflict can never be peacefully transformed in the win-win outcome.

Unless to involve the British public, diaspora cannot get the opinion of the government changed and unless the government change its policy nothing will happen from this side. So, they should influence over host state policies, politics and political parties and to work on single policy and inculcate that in the local politics. And diaspora have to raise international awareness and to coordinate their activities in all intercontinental forums. Undoubtedly, demonstrations and protests are democratic way to show moral support to the victims, but that cannot practically pressurize India, Pakistan and the international community over this conflict. So, diaspora have to increase their number and role in policy making and bureaucratic institutions in their respective host states.

British Kashmiris should establish an 'Information Centre' in UK which produces up-to-date information and there has to be one umbrella organization to bring all/many Kashmiri groups under one umbrella because of the shared interests of the member organizations involved. They need to engage the British born Kashmiris to take up the issue, as far as now, majority of the people, even who are in the parliament and take up the Kashmir conflict are those who were born in Kashmir. Once the younger people are educated, this issue needs to go into the universities, debates, trade unions, human rights organizations in the UK and in the mainstream media. Above and beyond, it is important that the Kashmiri diaspora, in relatively free and democratic societies, try to establish platforms and create avenues for an institutionalized Intra-Jammu & Kashmir dialogue. There is an urgent need to build consensus among the different and divided people of Jammu & Kashmir. An institutionalized Intra-Jammu & Kashmir Dialogue can pave the way for consensus, take away divisions and resentments and as such reinforce a case for the whole of Jammu & Kashmir.

The Jammu and Kashmir governments must identify and define in clear terms the objectives to achieve in engaging the diaspora. These well stated objectives would be the guiding principles and would help to build commitment towards engaging the diaspora through a continuous process. The setting of goals for engaging the diaspora must involve members of the diaspora. After building trust with the diaspora, the next step is to persuade the diaspora towards the transformation of the homeland conflict. Government must endeavor to streamline and effectively coordinate various initiatives of the diaspora and link them to the main political & diplomatic plans of the country. Diaspora needs its representation (from diaspora) in back-home government on the basis of free and fair selection.

### **Conclusion**

Having passed around seventy years under stress and strains, Kashmiris are still on to the point of deadlock, still feel that they have not gone one step forward in any way; this is the worst of the dilemma; this is the worst of the impasse that has happened. If it needs to be resurrected, if it needs to be redefine, if it needs to be remapped, in that

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regard people have to engage all the stakeholders of Kashmir dispute including diaspora people. In the case of occupied territory, mostly voices remain unheard and natives have bound to be silent. Conversely, diaspora being a global citizen living in a democratic setup have natural opportunity to highlight the narrative of their oppressed nation. Kashmiri diaspora has substantial political influence, economic strength, educational spirit and free democratic setup to lobby their cause of self-determination. They are active by all means but not consolidate, consistent and much politicized which could hardly contribute to keep the issue alive, there needs more to be done because yet the impact of their participation is under question.

The effort of Jammu & Kashmir governments in reaching the diaspora has been disappointing. An administration of their origin and residence countries has not genuinely responding to their needs. Unfortunately, they are completely deprived from J&K political system, and there is no effective institutional medium of communication among them. Their adhoc policies are neither sustainable nor part of systematic strategy to include diaspora in conflict, political and diplomatic discourse. The mistrust and lack of integration in diaspora with back-home government and institutions needs more holistic and comprehensive approach designed and coordination at national level. What appears to be really missing is the institutional framework and capacity to formulate and implement appropriate policies and effective strategies that will promote, enhance and consolidate the participation of diaspora in conflict and peace-building. And British government has their own policies and interests with India and Pakistan, so, they seems uneasy to being accused in interfering in the matters of two sovereign states. Over again, the diaspora has the capacity to overcome all these gaps but this can only be possible when they unlock their potential and release and realize their influence in both the host and origin places.

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