

Dynamism of Change in the Food Patterns of Kashmiri Pandits

Abstract

Food occupies the topmost position in the hierarchical needs of human beings. Though it was ignored by sociologists until recently as it was considered something biological but it is very much social, when we think about what we eat, who we eat with and where we eat. An important saying “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are,” clearly explores the importance of food in shaping us and our culture. The present paper is an outcome of a doctoral research work which attempted to understand the food culture of Kashmiri Pandits that makes the social organization of their identity and culture possible.

Keywords: Food Patterns, Kashmiri Pandits, Vegetarian, Yagnopavit, Wazwan, Identity

Introduction

Kashmiri Pandits are highly learned people- small sect of Hindus (top in Hindu caste hierarchy, equivalent to Brahmins) largely confined to the valley of Kashmir of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The changes in food culture occur in response to structural changes either due to the processes of globalization, modernization, urbanization or as a result of migration. The conflict within the Indian state of J&K is characterized by militancy that started in late 1980s. The militancy led to the creation of multiple categories of the displaced from all over the state of J&K. The most perceptible category among the displaced is Kashmiri Pandit community from the Kashmir valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s though other categories including Muslims and Sikhs also migrated. The issue of Pandits leaving the valley after living together amicably with Muslims for centuries is quite controversial. There are contesting explanations but the fact remains that the displacement of the Pandits is unprecedented in India's history – virtually the entire community left their native place. While many displaced Pandits have shifted to other states of India, a substantial number of displaced families are living in various government-run camps and some have constructed their own houses and some are living on rents in various areas in the outskirts of Jammu city and surviving on a fixed quota of food items and financial assistance since last two decades. In the paper an attempt is made to gather information regarding the food culture of Kashmiri Pandits and changes brought about in the food patterns after migration from Kashmir to various parts of India and abroad particularly focusing on Jammu District. For this, a total of 100 Kashmiri Pandit respondents were selected, 75 from Jammu District and 25 from Srinagar by purposive sampling method. Jammu district was preferably chosen because after migration from Kashmir, 56,323 Pandit families are residing in different parts of India. They spread to eleven states. Majority of them residing in J&Ks migrant camps. Out of 56,323 migrated families from Kashmir, majority of 34,644 families are presently living in Jammu. Out of 75 respondents 35 were selected from camps and 40 from non- camps areas including Talab Tillo, Muthi, Roop Nagar areas where majority of the respondents were residing either in their own or in rented accommodation. The major findings of the study are:

1. Out of 75 respondents interviewed and asked about their *place of residence* both before and after the migration, 28%(21) respondents said that they were living in rural areas before migration and 72%(54) said that they were living in urban area. Thus the percentage of the respondents living in urban area was higher as compared to those living in rural area before migration. The sample for the study represent both urban and rural population of Srinagar.
2. Prior to migration, the percentage of people living in Joint family was 72% and those living in nuclear family was only 28%.It shows that most of the families prior to migration lived under the same



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roof in a joint form. But after migration, percentage of people living in nuclear percentage of people living in nuclear families is 80% and those living in joint families is only 20% .This number includes only those who have constructed their own houses.

3. Regarding the literacy status, only 4% of the community is at present post graduate and 16% are Graduate which shows degrading literacy status. The Kashmiri Pandit community traditionally had a very high literacy rate, but education has become a matter of serious concern for them in the post-displacement era.
4. Owing to the cold climatic conditions of Kashmir, the 100% of the respondents prior to migration were non-vegetarian. But after migration change in food pattern of KPs resulted into all the respondents being non- vegetarian to 32% becoming vegetarian and 68% still remaining non-vegetarian
5. It can be concluded, that people prior to migration used to take three meals a day. But after migration due to change of place, climate and working conditions change in their meal pattern has occurred, they are taking from three meals pattern to four to five meals.72%(54) of the respondents used to have three meals a day in Kashmir. But now four meals are taken by 76%(57) of the respondents and five meals by 24%(18) which did not exist before migration.
6. Regarding the consumption of bed- tea, only 24% of people were in the habit of taking bed tea before migration but now 96% of the respondents are having the bed-Tea.
7. Regarding the question of type of meal pattern followed during breakfast and evening tea, it can be seen that before migration locally baked roti was more liked as compared to home-made roti i.e. Chapatti and Parantha (only 20%) for breakfast. Only 20% of the respondents used to prepare home- made roti but nunwai roti also called local baked Kashmiri roti was consumed by all the respondents before migration. Tea was very much in demand and was taken by all the people for breakfast and during evening time mostly noon-chai (namkeen- tea) was taken. Sabzi along with roti was consumed by only 20% of the respondents for breakfast, who prepared home-made roti. Egg was consumed for breakfast by 72% of the respondents.

But now after migration people have more preference for home-made roti i.e. Chapatti or parantha. This addition is from the prevalent Dogra culture in which parantha or chapattis which are either stuffed with cheese or potatoes etc are always prepared. All the Kashmiri people have started consuming and preparing home-made roti for breakfast although local baked roti is preferred by 80% of the respondents as an alternative by the people i.e. it is consumed when people are in hurry or want to change from daily routine or during winters only.

8. Dals were not included in the daily diet even after migration. They are occasionally eaten and were less preferred as compared to the green leafy vegetables. Thus they are eaten less due to people's habit of eating more of leafy vegetables.

100% of the respondents used to consume green leafy vegetables like Haak Saag , Palak, Mooli ka saag, Shulgam ka saag, Knol Khol greens, Sochal, Amaranth, Kulfa in Kashmir. No change has occurred in the consumption of green leafy vegetables after migration, as these are available in abundance and throughout the year at Jammu. Beside it people have started using Dhania (coriander leaves) in their meals, as it was not much available in Kashmir. Sarson Ka Saag (mustard leaves) is rarely consumed which is otherwise frequently used by non-Kashmiris.

9. When the question of consumption of dried vegetables was asked to the respondents, they said that in winters it was difficult to have green vegetables so they used to preserve vegetables for the winters. But after migration these vegetables are not preserved but instead purchased as they are available in large quantity in the market unlike earlier times when due to snowfall in winter months the roads were closed. Now the vegetables can be in such circumstances be airlifted and made available to the people. But still some respondents are using these methods of preservation as they think these vegetables are having different tastes and are still cooked and consumed by all age groups.
10. Locally available vegetables like Shalgam (Turnip), Mulli (Radish),Gaajar (Carrots), Arvi, Kasroot are being consumed where as bhindi, tinda, kathal(Jack Fruit) were not locally cultivated so their consumption was limited to certain sections of people only. Vegetables commonly consumed were *baigan*, *Kamal Kakdi*, potatoes, beans, *ghiya*, *tori*, *kaddu* also before and after migration. But few new vegetables like *bhindi*, *tinda*, Kathal etc are also used in Jammu.
11. *Salad consumption* was not a regular feature at Kashmir but after migration almost all the respondents have started consuming salad having one or the other vegetables. Before migration radish and cucumber were commonly used but now, onions and tomatoes have also become a part of the salad and are used frequently by the people.
12. Post migration has brought some changes in pattern of consumption of non- vegetarian food. Chicken and fish intake is more frequently by 63(84%) and 39(52%) of the respondents respectively when compared to mutton. Overall frequency of consumption of non-vegetarian food has declined after migration, this change is attributed to either due to climate or due to the influence of Dogra's, majority of whom are vegetarian. But on the other hand, Paneer/cottage cheese is more frequently consumed as an alternative.
13. When the question of *removal of excess water from rice* was asked to the respondents, it was found that 24(32%) of the respondents cooked rice in pan, among them 50% of the respondents removed extra water from rice but now due to change of place and modernization rice cooker is used by 84% of the respondents, making the working of rice more easier and less time consuming and also minimizing the loss of nutrients which are otherwise removed by removal

- of water. As far as the method followed to cook rice is concerned, at Kashmir 72%(54) cooked rice in pan followed by pressure cooking method 20%(15) whereas 8%(6) of the respondents used electric rice cooker. Now after migration has occurred 84% (63) of the respondents is using electric rice cooker, 12% (9) using pressure cooking method and only 4%(3) are using pan cooking i.e. traditional method of cooking rice.
14. Regarding the spices and condiments used for preparing food, it was found that while living in Kashmir due to cold climate KPs use lot of spices as these people preferred hot and spicy food. Originally Kashmiri pandits used no onion, garlic and tomatoes because they were considered *jhoota* (defiled) by them and used them occasionally. Instead they used saunf powder (aniseed), Ginger powder, asafoedita (hing), cloves, black cumin seeds (shahi zeera), Kesar(saffron) in their preparations. These spices and condiments are still used but quantity has decreased. Besides it, now they have started using onions, garlic, fresh ginger and *hara dhania* (coriander leaves) more frequently. Although KPs are carrying their traditional food habits with them but migration certainly has impacted them.
 15. The frequency of milk and milk products consumption has undergone change after migration. Before migration milk was more used for tea both normal and salty tea and for feeding and not so much for drinking purposes by the adults. Curd was consumed in the form of Lassi (butter milk) or as plain curd frequently by 50% people and occasionally again by 50% of the respondents. Paneer was occasionally consumed by majority of the respondents and *kalaadi* rarely consumed. After migration milk and milk products consumption has increased.
 16. Regarding food preparation and serving, Kashmiri Pandit woman of the household cooks the food and also the serving is done by her and generally the elder member is served first.
 17. No sharing of food from the same plate is in the tradition of Kashmiri Pandits though due to recent change under the influence of modernisation one can see some people breaking this norm.
 18. Almost all the respondents feel satisfied by eating while sitting on floor on a *dastarkhaan*, a special mat on which the *thali* or plate is kept because it is thought that if plate containing food is kept in direct contact with earth it will be polluted.
 19. Difference of food habits from the family norms was only in respect of change in meal timings and inclusion and exclusion of new dishes and also time consuming activities are reduced to minimum time because of use of new technology.
 20. Regarding the type of food consumed during birth of a child, all the respondents considered the importance of fish and cooked rice which were available in Kashmir the whole year. But after migration majority of the community becoming vegetarian, the use of fish and rice is replaced by soups of vegetables, pulses etc. But for those who are non-vegetarian the women with new born child were given the mutton soup, chicken soup etc. Also the mother after returning from her parents house to in-laws house was earlier given cooked fish and rice which is now replaced by cheese, rice and curd which is distributed among the relatives.
 21. Regarding type of food consumed during marriage rituals, it was found that almost all the respondents consider *namkeen kheer- Tahaer* and rice flour rotis important for marriage ritual as well as any other activity related to happiness. Kashmiris like sweets lesser than salt. Salt is very well relished. At the time of *Baraat, Baraatis* were served vegetarian food comprising of 15-20 dishes and now large number of dishes are added from Dogra culture like golgappas, chole- bathura, Dhoda saag stalls and also South- Indian dishes stalls, Chinese dishes stalls and also momos, pau- bhaji etc. In non- vegetarian items recent change is that more of chicken and fish is added now. In Reception ceremony full- fledged *wazwan* is prepared.
 22. The ritual of *Yagnopavit* which was celebrated earlier with great enthusiasm has now after migration lost its importance. Many young married women have also discarded wearing of *dejihoru* (long earrings made of gold), which was earlier considered the most sacred symbol of wedlock among the Pandits. There is also dilution of traditional marriage patterns. The traditional songs sung by women at weddings and other ceremonies have given way to Bollywood music played from tape recorders and CD players. Also the traditional dishes served at the weddings have been largely replaced by the local dishes. The displacement has also resulted in the dilution in the tenets and habits of the Pandits. Also the inter- ethnic marriages are a great threat to KPs community
 23. At the time of death of a person among Kashmiri Pandits, sesame and coin are placed before the dead person and also during past dry fish was kept before the dead body because it was thought that dead needs those dry fishes as food on the way to reach the final destination. But those customs have now undergone change as now it is the question of affording. Again dal and rice along with vegetables are prepared during mourning days and no one eats in the house of the deceased for 10 days.
 24. Kashmiri Pandits celebrated various festivals like Shivratri, Navreh, also 100% of the respondents fasts on the day of Shivratri and Janamashtmi, 80% fasts during Navratras 30% fasts during Ashtami and nearly 45% of the sample fasts on all the days mentioned above. One important fast which was not in the traditions of Kashmiri Pandits but now observed is the fast observed by Dogras on Karva-Chauth in which women fast for the long life of their husbands and on this day the women abstain from water and food the whole day and the fast is broken after having the glimpse of husband and by offering water to the moon. The type of food consumed during these fasts were dareu atta tikkis, potatoes, fruits etc. In some fasts people avoid salt, annaj (grain) and in some others even one can have food at one time only. Again it is the influence of Dogra culture of the area that KPs who were traditionally ardent non- vegetarian are now becoming more vegetarian and those who are non-vegetarian avoid taking it on Tuesdays and

Thursdays as the tradition followed by rest of the Hindus.

25. Regarding the food taboos in KP community, various types of food emerged which were avoided in combinations like Fish and curd , Fish and Milk, Egg and Dal, Egg and Milk, Curd and Dal. Also beef was avoided. When the question of food avoided to be taken from other community was asked, it was found that the community avoided acceptance and even sharing of food with the Kashmiri Muslims. The main reasons cited for this was that they consume Beef. In taking halaal mutton they have no problem as they thought it is free from impurities and it is ordained by their religion. Also the majority of the respondents replied that they avoid eating outside on fast days
26. Regarding the types of changes coming in terms of inter-relations, the respondents replied that the relations are becoming distant and impersonal as the community is widely scattered either due to inter-ethnic marriages or due to migration to different places.
27. Regarding the question of difference between Kashmiri Pandit food and Kashmiri Muslim food was asked to the respondents, 30% said that KP food is almost vegetarian and KM food is non-Vegetarian.50% of the respondents said that the only difference is KP avoid Beef and Kashmiri Muslims avoid Pork and the latter eat Beef . The remaining 20% said that it is the use of spices which makes the foods of two communities different from each other.KP food is less spicy and KM food is full of spices that is strong and also KM food uses onion, garlic in a strong manner which was initially avoided by the Pandits. But now even they are also using onions and garlic after migration.Profound influence was observed on Kashmiri Pandits of Dogra culture and vice- versa in the use of Dogri dishes in marriages of KPs like *golgappas*, *toda* and *saag*, *chole* and *puri*, *curry* with different vegetables etc. Also the use of *saunf* and *sund*, curd in preparations of Dogra dishes like *nadru yakhein*, *Dum-Alloo*, varieties of *paneer* are adapted from Kashmiri Culture.
28. As far as *Eating outside* is concerned, 40% community do not prefer to eat outside while remaining 60% like it by having food outside in a restaurant or ordering it from the restaurant. Regarding the dishes chosen while eating outside, 45% like to have fast food items like *momos*, *Chinese burger*, *Italian pizza* etc and remaining 15% ordered only *wazwan* or other Kashmiri dishes

29. Regarding *identity lost or maintained*, 70% replied it is lost either due to marriages out of community or due to non- use of Kashmiri language which is a symbol of their identity and remaining 30% are in fear of losing their identity.

Conclusion

Thus one can see from the above details that with change in climate and geography, lot of changes are coming in food patterns as the case with Kashmiri Pandits after migration. But those Kashmiri Pandits who have stayed in Kashmir, maintained their food patterns to some extent by living in a similar environment but in certain activities of day today life (wearing of *tilak*, *dejihor* and eating non- vegetarian food) the KPs of Kashmir are living in a compromising situation means just questioning ones identity which is again threatening their existence. One of the respondents Avinash Koul said, "Most of the Kashmiri Pandits who have migrated from Srinagar are refusing to marry their daughters to the boys of Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir at present as they think they have become Muslims. This has posed a real question mark on their existence." The real challenge is to see where the identity (of both migrated Pandits and the one living in Kashmir) has gone, it is of course fading away.

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