



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AFTER EFFECTS OF DISPLACEMENT ON THE MIRPUR COMMUNITY IN JAMMU

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ABSTRACT

The context for the study was the Mirpuri community settled in Jammu, members of which migrated from Mirpur (a town now in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) during November, 1947 after witnessing extreme instances of violence and psychological trauma. The present research was undertaken to examine the socio-psychological consequences of displacement. Sample group included Mirpuri respondents across a wide age group covering three generations, residing in different areas of Jammu city and were selected through snowball sampling. Unstructured interviews were used to gather the information. It was concluded that the respondents have gone through a difficult phase of accommodation to a new set of social and cultural values and their experiences of the acculturative mechanisms revealed that the community, while trying hard to remain rooted and maintain its identity, also adopted the cultural patterns of the dominant community (Dogras) to be able to live peacefully in the new environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Borders have long been associated with the tensions caused to people and have frequently been seen as the source of all problems between neighboring countries and individuals. "The borders dividing these countries (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) are markers of past bitter history, current separate, distinct and independent existence and the sign of territorial integrity/disintegration of these states"(Banarjee & Choudhary, 2011). When people from one culture move into an area dominated by another culture, there are adaptations made by people from both cultural groups. The non-majority culture is expected to make most of these adaptive changes. During this acculturation process, there will inevitably be aspects of the native culture that will be lost. Although it will not be as drastic or damaging as assimilation, the effects cannot be avoided (Berry, 2008). Culture and language appear to be inextricably intertwined in a complex relationship. When an individual attempts to learn a second language, they are forced to not only contend with the linguistic elements of a language, but to the social and psychological variables that present themselves (Mondy, 2007). Displacement and relocation in new setting, thus, lead to multi-faceted problems at various levels. The displacement of POK refugees as reported by Kumar (2012), not only shifted their residence and occupation but also degenerated their cultural values and traditions. For instance, marriages, festivals and other occasions which used to be a village affair also became a short term and a formal affair. The older generation with its past memories is more inclined to call itself Mirpuri, speak the language and practice whatever little customs have survived the passage of time. The present research has been undertaken in response to the growing urge among the academic community to document the effects of displacement on the

border communities. It's a part of a broader research investigation (Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation) aimed at studying the people-border interface. Since Mirpuri community is unique in the sense that their official status is controversial due to India's claim over the territory administered by another country after 65 years, the community has suffered twice: once on account of displacement and its associated trauma and secondly on account of the shift in the occupation, culture and ideology of their present generation. The research was undertaken with the specific objective of Investigating the effects of displacement at personal, familial and social levels from a phenomenological perspective.

METHOD

The present research exercise was based on qualitative phenomenological research design. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research was to describe the "lived experience of a phenomenon". The locale for the present research study was Jammu district in J&K state of India. Mirpuri families who had faced the displacement from erstwhile Mirpur were identified from certain areas in Jammu city where they were allocated land as a rehabilitative measure by the government of Jammu and Kashmir way back in 1948. The areas from where the sample was drawn included Bakshinagar, Sarwal colony and Janipur. These are the urban areas in the heart of Jammu city under the Jammu west assembly constituency. The sample comprised of the Mirpuri respondents across a wide age group covering three generations, majority of whom were born in Mirpur (now under POK) and had survived the Mirpur holocaust. Most of them had suffered the loss of their loved ones, property etc. during this unfortunate happening. Sample also included members of the first generation of the direct witnesses.

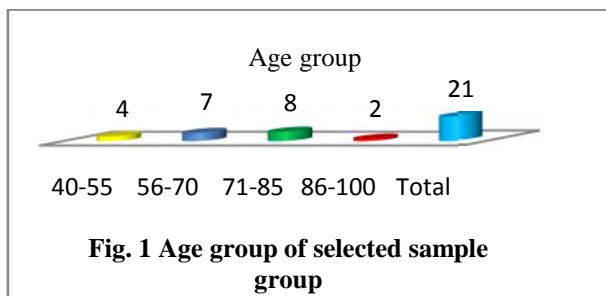


Fig. 1 Age group of selected sample group

The sample respondents were selected through snowball sampling technique from the above mentioned areas. Since the community of Mirpuris is very closely knit, it was very easy to get the reference of other Mirpuris in the locality who were approached for their consent. A directory containing names of members of Mirpuri community also came in handy since many respondents were identified through that directory. Since the research design adopted for the study is based on phenomenological research, suitable tools were used to adopt this approach for field work. Interview method was primarily used as a tool to gather information from the direct witnesses of the Mirpur tragedy. Unstructured interviews using interview guide were used to gather the participant's description of their experiences.

At the time of data collection, extra efforts were made to encourage the participants describe their lived phenomenal experiences. The researchers tried to be as non-directive as possible in conversations. However, the participants were encouraged to give a full description of their experiences including their memories about the events, subjective feelings associated with the happenings, their thoughts, sensations and images. It was seen that the elderly respondents especially those who had migrated from POK in 1947 really looked forward to sharing their experiences with the investigators. It was as if, they wanted to open up, speak about their repressed memories and get some emotional relief. Clarifications were sought for certain issues, wherever the need was felt. The researchers visited individual homes for recording the interviews several times after the initial period of rapport formation. The interviews were recorded verbatim by a research team member when another was in the process of conversation with respondents. The data was collected during April-June' 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Moving Away From Mirpur: Experiences And Memories

The experiences presented in this section are based on interviews of the respondents who had witnessed the tragic incidents of violence in Mirpur during 1947 and had luckily survived the massacre. There are only few persons of that generation who have survived now to narrate their oral tales of the horrifying and gruesome incidents which now appear to be etched in the mirrors of their minds and come back frequently to haunt them especially on certain days (like birthdays of their lost relatives or on 25th of November, the day of the so called 'Fall of Mirpur'). According to the respondents, Mirpur was a small district consisting of Tehsil Kotli, Mirpur and Bhimber in undivided India. 80% of the population residing in Mirpur consisted of Muslims. Second and third in order were Hindus and Sikhs. Most of the Hindus were Mahajans (merchants by profession). In the aftermath of partition in India and as a

result of certain political follies, Mirpur was attacked by Pakistani tribal raiders (Kabalis). Army and people protested against these attacks. On 25th November, 1947(10 maghar according to Hindu calendar), Kabulis attacked Mirpur with troops and people started moving towards Jammu for a safe hiding place. Majority of the respondents reported witnessing intense communal violence in which many young people were killed in front of their parents. Young and old ladies and girls were kidnapped and raped. It was reported by eyewitnesses that these kinds of events stirred up great anxiety in their minds at that time and even now acts as a prototype for several situations which are not anxiety provoking normally. They said they had become more anxiety prone although time has acted as healer in this context. Many of the respondents stayed in Alibeg camp, on their way to Jammu and other safer places and on the way, too, they witnessed looting of belongings such as cash, jewellery and other valuables that they were secretly carrying. The prisoners were brutally tortured and killed. The educated youth were eliminated first during rounds of selective killings. Women were taken to satisfy the lust of men. Those living there survived under highly unhygienic conditions (no soap was provided leading to skin infections) and were forced to eat food containing non-edible things including pieces of glasses. Several respondents also reported separation and selective killing of their close family members. Some of them were later reunited with their relatives while for others, whereabouts of their close kin are still unknown and their memories of those kin still keep on haunting them.

Mirpur: Rehabilitation and Resettlement

Whenever people migrate from one place to another as a result of force, several issues confront them. To be away from a familiar habitat, into new, possibly hostile surroundings is in itself a challenging task. Coupled with this are the issues related to occupation, loss of identity, continuity of traditions and customs and many other related dilemmas. In the group selected for the study, in addition to above, there stood the 'threatened personalities' who found themselves lucky just to have survived the holocaust themselves, though perhaps they may never have felt complete in themselves, having lost many of their near and dear ones as also their valuables in the unfortunate mishap. When the respondents were narrating their tales, many of them had faces full of tears as if they were reliving the times when they built themselves up. Some of them also had a satisfaction illuminating their faces, for the success they had achieved to reach up to the present state. As reported in earlier section, most of those who came from Mirpur had only their bruised bodies with them, all other things they had lost. Most of them were in pathetic conditions – unwashed bodies, anxious minds and bruised souls. They had not eaten to their full for days together. They were provided accommodation in temporary camps in Jammu. Some of the witnesses of the incident also had lost their elders and earning members in the massacre. Since the Mirpuri community was mostly engaged in business in Mirpur, most of them were rich back in their place of origin and many were educated. Some of them reported working in shops, carrying bags, engaging as daily wagers on their arrival in the new habitat. Those who had some money/assets with them started selling some goods. Others who had some relatives settled in Jammu or other places borrowed money from them to start small business establishments. Overall, the respondents reported going

through an extremely difficult phase, financially, physically and emotionally too. One unanimous sentiment prevailing among all respondents was that they worked hard and determined to build themselves up once again. They had vowed internally that they would never adopt a wrong path and were happy that the Mirpuri community has shown to the world that they are hard working and courageous people in addition to being honest and determined. They believed that education was a great savior for them due to which they could think of ways and means of helping themselves. However since this study included participants only from urban areas, the same sentiments cannot be generalized for the entire community.

Cultural Continuity

Culture, comprising both material and non-material aspects, is seen as an important identification trait by any community. All groups have their distinct cultural traits and complexes which give them their identity. The Mirpuri community, in Mirpur, had their own distinct language, food habits, rituals and traditions concerning marriage, child birth and death as well as religious aspects. The language spoken by them was Potwari or Mirpuri. Cultural patterns are always based on many factors, one of them being ecological setting (Many of the locally available resources/traits got incorporated in our cultural traditions). Upon movement from one place to another, we tend to look for those in the new place or we have to substitute for those things. The respondents of this study reported that originally they used to speak Mirpuri language, which they insist, was different from Pahari or Potwari. They were simple people having modest food. The staple cereal was corn flour and they relished having it with pulses. Men used to wear Kurta Pyjama (an Indian traditional dress) and turban. Women used to wear salwar kameez with dupatta. No purdah system (veiling of face) was prevalent in their community. Women folk used to work on charkhas (spinning wheel) at home and made shawls (sallu) for their daughters' dowry. Men were merchants and usually were busy in their activities. Hukkah smoking by men was also reported by some respondents. Upon their arrival in Jammu after 1947, most of the members of the families continued to maintain their language, food habits and dressing patterns. However, due to the change in economic activities during initial periods of adjustment, they had to sacrifice many of the food and dressing habits. Later they also mixed up with the local community and due to the acculturative pressures; many of them were forced to abandon their local habits. It is seen that usually the community which needs to adjust in the new environment has to part with some of their own unique patterns of living. The Mirpur community tried hard to preserve some of their earlier practices but some members of the older generation did express regrets especially with respect to their language that the younger generation is not particularly concerned about speaking their language. The respondents felt that the younger generation of Mirpur community has been speaking the local language partly because it needs to survive in this environment where majority speak Dogra language and to maintain social and economic ties with them, it is mandatory to do so. Marriage of their children in Dogra families, in some areas, has also resulted in children speaking the Dogra language. Further, since in the present globalized world, most of the education takes place in Hindi or English, young children are learning to speak these

languages more. There is a general decline in number of parents speaking their native language with their young ones. Despite this fact, the respondents felt that they were able to keep many of their cultural patterns intact for some time but these are being lost with the passage of time and because older family members i.e. those who came from Mirpur surviving the holocaust, are now few in number. The community was found to be expressing strong "we" feelings which perhaps could be attributed to their having witnessed similar experiences (Mirpuri holocaust) and their strong need for survival against odds in a strange land. The adjectives used to characterize personality traits of the members of their community were mostly positive in nature and intended to show that the community as a whole stands composed of these individuals and these characteristics are dominantly represented in their community.

CONCLUSION

In human beings, unlike animals and birds migration does not merely imply physical movement of people. The moving people also carry with them a socio-cultural baggage containing their identity, values, beliefs, food habits, language apart from their customs and traditions (Jayaram, 2004). Emotionally too, these migrate may carry with them 'the myth of return' (i.e. physical and mental contact with their homeland). The factor responsible for migration (voluntary and involuntary) influences the future course of adaptations of the migrating community.

Displacement and relocation have been significant independent variables affecting the life course of the community studied in the present research. The experiences of the Mirpur tragedy narrated by the witnesses of the event revealed its deep rooted effects on their personality and psycho-social well being.

At the personal level the effect could be observed in the form of deep insecurities and anxiety that could be noticed at the time of remembering the incidents related to Mirpur tragedy. Some of the respondents (direct witnesses) reported symptoms of mild form of PTSD (for example excessive anxiety, getting up at night in fear, increased concern for their dear ones) even after passage of 65 years of time. (Needless to say these might have affected the developmental life course of these respondents. However, this study was done in a very brief period of time, hence; no systematic investigation of this aspect could be undertaken).

The respondents explained in detail about the happenings of the tragic event and it seemed they tried to relieve themselves of the burden of memories they had been carrying. Narrating those stories had become a cathartic mechanism for these elderly respondents.

At the social level, the respondents seemed to have gone through a difficult phase of accommodation to a new set of social and cultural values and their experiences of the acculturative mechanisms revealed that the community, while trying hard to remain rooted and maintain its identity, also adopted the cultural patterns of the dominant community (Dogras) to be able to live peacefully in the new environment. It still tries hard to maintain the delicate balance. The elders seemed to be more concerned about maintenance of their original cultural traditions.

This difficult process of adaptation, though found to be stressful, also led to certain positive developments according to the respondents of this study. This included increased beliefs in values related to hard work, ability to survive in adverse circumstances, courage, hope and increased self-esteem. The community members felt that this experience also helped their community to grow even closer bonds and interact at a different social plane. It gave rise to a 'we' feeling among the members which the research team noted to be quite peculiar. The elders of the community also felt it gave rise to a feeling in them that they should give back something based on their experiences to their community (a feeling of 'Generativity' in Eriksonian psycho-social terms).

There were several mechanisms adopted by the community to strengthen social ties and maintain cultural continuity after their displacement. Religious rituals among them appeared to be strong mechanisms since members continued to follow these, some for the blessings of the supernatural forces, others due to the fear of wrath on not performing their obligations while members of younger generations seemed to view them as moments of recreation and relaxation in addition to social get together. Language was found to be a major casualty in the process of acculturation since Mirpuri language was being spoken in its pure form only by the elders while the youngsters favoured mixing of Dogri and Punjabi words or preferred pure Hindi for routine communication.

According to psychologists (Freud, Bowlby) Witnessing a traumatic experience and separation from family members at such a young and impressionable age is bound to create a permanent imprint on the personality of children, which was very evident in their responses. The narration of the experiences orally seemed to stir strong emotional turmoil in respondents. Observations of respondents during this period revealed many signs of repression or blocked emotions. These included facial gestures, tone, eye movements and physiological change such as perspiration, trembling hands etc. They, however, expressed overt enthusiasm in narrating the experiences owing to the feeling of

catharsis which speaking up about their sordid experiences produced in them. The Mirpuri community, primarily merchant community, have managed to establish their hold in the business owing to their determination, hard work and experience (back in Mirpur). The respondents appeared to be satisfied with their progress in the sphere of economic activity but still hoped that their youngsters be provided, reservation in jobs on owing to the disadvantage their generations have faced. The respondents believed their children were getting education mainly because they had seen that knowledge helped them rebuild their lives after displacement.

The homeland, the native place where a person has spent initial years of his/her life continues to hold attraction to everyone. The attraction increases many fold in this kind of context when one is forced to move involuntarily.

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