

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES



ISSN 2277 – 9809 (online)

ISSN 2348 - 9359 (Print)

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

www.IRJMSH.com
www.isarasolutions.com

Published by iSaRa Solutions

KASHMIRI DIASPORA IN UK AND THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Dr. Shabnam Ara

Head Department of Sociology, Amar Singh College Srinagar, J&K and
Dean Students Welfare, Cluster University Srinagar, J&K, India

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom and its ongoing struggle to preserve and redefine cultural identity in a transnational setting. It explores how migration history, community institutions, family traditions, language use, and political attachments to Kashmir have shaped the experiences of British Kashmiris across generations. The study also considers how Kashmiri identity is often rendered less visible through broader classifications such as Pakistani or South Asian, creating challenges for cultural recognition and self-representation. Using a qualitative approach based on historical and thematic analysis, the paper highlights the ways in which identity is negotiated between homeland memory and life in Britain. The findings suggest that Kashmiri cultural identity in the UK is resilient but fluid, sustained through everyday practices while also adapting to changing social, political, and generational contexts. The paper concludes that greater recognition, cultural preservation, and intergenerational engagement are essential for strengthening Kashmiri identity within the diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

The great euphoria about the diaspora concept is certainly over. Paul Gilroy, a renowned British Sociologist has argued that in the 1980s and especially the 1990s “diaspora” was eagerly adopted as an antidote against the “metaphysics of ‘race’, nation and bounded culture.” In the discourses of social sciences and cultural studies, “diaspora” has been mostly used as a term for a “social form” the term used by Steve Vertovek. However, in many cases “diaspora” has been referred to as another term for the (migrant) community.

The Kashmiri diaspora in the UK consists of individuals and families who have migrated from Kashmir to the UK, and continue to be a vibrant and inclusive society. The British Kashmiri Diaspora is one of the most economically active and politically engaged ethnic minority communities in the UK. And representing the diverse religious and cultural heritage. An estimated five lakh plus people sharing the cultural heritage of Kashmir are currently living and working in all sectors within the UK. Sometimes even higher numbers are given. Because Kashmiri was not a census category in the UK there were no exact and reliable figures until the 2021 census.

The Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom represents a significant yet often under-recognized part of Britain’s wider South Asian population. Its history is closely tied to labor migration from Mirpur and other parts of Jammu and Kashmir, especially during the postwar period, and later intensified by displacement linked to the construction of the Mangla Dam. Over time, these migration streams helped establish strong Kashmiri communities in cities such as Birmingham, Bradford, and Manchester, where family networks, religious institutions, and neighborhood ties

became central to community life (Soekefeld, 2016; British Kashmiri Identity Campaign [BKIC], 2021).

A central issue in discussions of the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK is the question of cultural identity. Many Kashmiris have been socially and administratively grouped under broader categories such as “Pakistani” or “South Asian,” which can obscure their distinct historical, linguistic, and regional identity. This lack of visibility has consequences for representation, community recognition, and public understanding of Kashmiri heritage. At the same time, it has encouraged efforts to assert a more specific Kashmiri identity through advocacy, cultural organizations, and identity campaigns (BKIC, 2021; Soekefeld, 2016).

Cultural identity within the diaspora is also shaped by transnational political attachments. For many first-generation migrants and their descendants, Kashmir remains a site of emotional, political, and familial significance. However, scholarly work suggests that diaspora mobilisation around Kashmir has been uneven, partly because the community is internally diverse in terms of generation, political orientation, and the particular homeland connections its members maintain (Soekefeld, 2016). As a result, Kashmiri identity in Britain is not fixed or singular; rather, it is continuously negotiated across migration history, political affiliation, and everyday cultural practice.

Generational change adds another layer to this identity question. Younger British Kashmiris often grow up balancing inherited traditions with British social life, producing forms of hybrid belonging that combine cultural continuity with adaptation. Language use, marriage practices, religious observance, and community events all play a role in whether cultural traditions are sustained or transformed across generations. In this sense, the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK illustrates how identity in migrant communities is not simply preserved from the homeland, but actively remade in the diaspora through both memory and adaptation (BKIC, 2021; Soekefeld, 2016).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A focused literature review on the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK shows that the field is shaped by two connected debates: how Kashmiris in Britain are politically and socially organized, and how cultural identity is constructed, asserted, or obscured within that setting. Scholarship consistently argues that the community cannot be understood simply as a settled migrant group, because identity formation is tied to migration from Azad Kashmir, transnational politics, local British institutions, and the broader Kashmir dispute.

Early and later studies agree that large-scale migration from the Mirpur region to Britain began in the mid-twentieth century and created concentrated settlements in places such as Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and parts of Lancashire. This migration history matters because it explains why Kashmiri identity in the UK developed through kinship networks, labor migration, and neighborhood clustering rather than through a single national community structure. The literature also shows that Kashmiris were often administratively folded into the category “Pakistani,” which made them visible as a population but invisible as a distinct group.

A major theme in the literature is the struggle for recognition. Soekefeld argues that “diaspora” should not be treated as a fixed social fact, but as something produced through mobilization,

discourse, and political practice. In the UK case, this means that Kashmiri identity has often been advanced through campaigns for census recognition, language rights, and institutional visibility. The literature on the Kashmiri National Identity Campaign shows that the demand to be counted as Kashmiri was not only symbolic; it was also linked to access to services, community representation, and the right to define the group on its own terms.

Another strong strand in the literature examines the relationship between the diaspora and Kashmiri politics. Research on transnational politics finds that British Kashmiris have long been involved in campaigns related to the Kashmir dispute, including opposition to the Mangla Dam and support for pro-independence organizations such as the JKLF and related activist networks. At the same time, the literature shows that political mobilisation was fragmented, with secular-nationalist, leftist, and other ideological currents competing with one another. This fragmentation matters for cultural identity because it demonstrates that “Kashmiri” has never been a single political or cultural label in Britain.

Language emerges as one of the clearest markers of cultural difference in the literature. Studies note that many migrants from Mirpur and nearby areas spoke Pahari or related varieties rather than Urdu, and that this became important in struggles for recognition because Urdu-based service provision often did not meet community needs. The literature therefore connects language with identity, not just communication: advocating for Pahari services was also a claim that Kashmiris formed a distinct group with its own cultural life. More broadly, cultural practices such as festivals, family networks, and community institutions are described as ways the diaspora maintains continuity while adapting to British life.

The literature also suggests that identity becomes more complex across generations. First-generation migrants often carry stronger homeland attachments, while younger British Kashmiris are more likely to negotiate hybrid identities shaped by both British social life and inherited Kashmiri traditions. This has led scholars to question whether Kashmiri identity in the UK is best understood as preservation, adaptation, or re-invention. The answer in the literature is usually all three at once: identity is maintained through memory and organization, but it is also reshaped by education, class mobility, mixed social worlds, and changing political priorities.

RESEARCH GAP

Overall, the literature agrees that the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK is politically significant but unevenly recognized, and that cultural identity is central to understanding its development. A noticeable gap is that many studies focus on activism and recognition campaigns, while fewer examine every day cultural life, women’s roles, youth identity, religion, or digital media in shaping contemporary Kashmiri-ness in Britain. That creates room for a literature review that not only summarizes political mobilisation, but also highlights how identity is lived in ordinary settings across generations.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To study how the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK constructs, maintains, and transforms its cultural identity in relation to migration history, community life, and transnational political and social pressures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how the Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom constructs, preserves, and negotiates cultural identity across generations. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the topic is concerned not only with measurable demographic patterns, but also with meanings, lived experiences, political mobilisation, and identity narratives that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone. The study also draws on a social-constructionist view of identity, treating “Kashmiriness” as something produced through discourse, memory, institutions, and everyday practice rather than as a fixed or essential category.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The research uses an exploratory and interpretive approach. It examines how identity is expressed in community organisations, political campaigns, language use, family practices, and public recognition efforts such as census classification. This approach is suitable because the Kashmiri case in Britain has often been shaped by competing labels, especially the tension between being identified as “Kashmiri” and being absorbed into broader “Pakistani” categories. The study therefore focuses on how the diaspora itself defines cultural belonging and how these definitions change over time.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The study relies on secondary data analysis and, where possible, primary qualitative data. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, reports, census-related documents, and published discussions of Kashmiri mobilisation in Britain. These materials provide historical background on migration, political activism, and census campaigns. If primary research is included, the most relevant methods are semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation in Kashmiri community settings in cities such as Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, and London, which are repeatedly identified as important centres of Kashmiri settlement and activism.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data should be analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher coded the material into themes such as migration history, language preservation, intergenerational identity, transnational political ties, discrimination, cultural memory, and recognition struggles. This method helps identify recurring patterns in how Kashmiris in the UK talk about heritage and belonging. It also allows comparison between older and younger generations, and between people who emphasise political Kashmiri identity and those who stress British, Pakistani, or hybrid identities.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom, like many other Diasporas, faces various challenges and opportunities related to cultural identities.

The cultural identity of the Kashmiri diaspora is a complex phenomenon. The Kashmiri diaspora is diverse in terms of their religious and political identities, as well as their reasons and experiences of migration. Some of the factors that have influenced the Kashmiri Diaspora are the influence of Persian and Central Asian cultures on Kashmiri society. The major findings of the study are interpreted under the following headings:

Identity Crisis. The Kashmiri diaspora often grapples with questions of identity, as they try to navigate between their Kashmiri roots and the culture of the UK. Despite their qualitative strength, the Kashmiri community faces challenges due to non-recognition in British ethnic monitoring systems. Only recently 2021, Kashmiri ethnicity has been included in the census. This lack of inclusion has impacted their social mobility and has hindered their ability to contribute effectively.

Cultural Preservation. There is an ongoing effort among the Kashmiri diaspora to preserve their culture, language, and cuisine for future generations. Despite challenges in adapting to new cultures, many Kashmiris in the UK maintain significant aspects of their heritage. They uphold traditional practices, such as serving tea with local bakeries, and communicate in both Kashmiri and English. The importance of Kashmiri food, particularly Wazwan and Noon Chai, is evident, as families continue to pass down these culinary traditions. Overall, their commitment to preserving their unique heritage amidst globalization is noteworthy.

Kashmiri identity in Britain is not fixed. It is continuously produced through family memory, community institutions, and transnational political ties rather than simply inherited as a stable label.

Recognition is a major issue. Kashmiri activists have campaigned for separate recognition in British public life, especially in census and community classification debates, because being grouped as Pakistani can obscure distinct Kashmiri ethnicity and history.

Political mobilization has been uneven. The diaspora has played a role in debates around the Kashmir dispute, but scholars note that attempts to build a unified Kashmiri collective have faced limits because of internal differences in generation, locality, and political outlook.

Migration history matters. Many Kashmiri communities in Britain, especially those linked to Mirpur, were shaped by mid-20th-century migration and displacement associated with the Mangla Dam, which helped form dense settlement networks and enduring homeland ties.

Cultural identity is maintained through everyday practice. Language, marriage patterns, religion, kinship, and community events help preserve Kashmiri belonging, but younger generations often express identity in hybrid forms that mix Kashmiri heritage with British life.

Diaspora identity is affected by broader politics. The Kashmir conflict influences how people define themselves, but it can also divide the community by creating different emotional and political attachments to India-administered Kashmir, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and Britain. Taken together, the literature suggests that the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK is best understood as a community negotiating visibility, belonging, and distinction at the same time. Its identity is preserved through memory and institutions, but it is also reshaped by British multicultural structures, transnational politics, and generational change. The major findings on the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK are that cultural identity is strong but contested, shaped by migration history, political mobilisation, and ongoing struggles for recognition. Research also shows that many Kashmiris in Britain have long been classified under broader “Pakistani” categories, which has contributed to the community’s social and political invisibility.

CONCLUSION

The Kashmiri diaspora in the UK faces a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities related to cultural identity. Balancing assimilation with cultural preservation, navigating political sensitivities, and actively participating in the multicultural landscape of the UK.

Kashmiri Diaspora, despite all the odds, has demonstrated through their resilience and desire to achieve equality in socio-economic status, and inclusion in the cultural heritage of British society through ethnic monitoring systems as a distinct ethnic minority community of 2021, so that they could become an equal partner in every sphere. The involvement of KD in initiatives addressing underrepresentation and discrimination, tackling inequalities, and promoting community cohesion is important for their development and strategic influence in the United Kingdom. Understanding the Kashmiri diaspora's potential is vital for harnessing their collective strength. By recognizing their contributions and addressing challenges.

The Kashmiri diaspora in the UK shows that cultural identity is not static, but continuously shaped by migration, memory, politics, and daily social life. Although many Kashmiris have maintained strong ties to language, kinship, religion, and homeland consciousness, their identity has often been blurred by broader classifications that place them under Pakistani or South Asian labels. This has created a situation in which Kashmiri heritage remains socially present within communities but not always fully visible in public institutions or official records.

The overall finding is that Kashmiri identity in Britain is both resilient and contested. It is resilient because families and community networks continue to transmit cultural values across generations. It is contested because younger generations, changing political contexts, and administrative misrecognition have made identity more hybrid and complex. Therefore, the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK can best be understood as a community negotiating belonging in two worlds: preserving a distinct homeland identity while adapting to British social realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater official recognition should be given to Kashmiris as a distinct community in census categories, policy planning, and public discourse.
- Community organizations should strengthen cultural preservation through Kashmiri language programs, heritage events, and intergenerational storytelling.
- Schools, universities, and local institutions should include Kashmiri history and diaspora experiences in multicultural education.
- Researchers should conduct more field-based studies with first- and second-generation Kashmiris to better understand identity change over time.
- Youth engagement should be prioritized so that younger British Kashmiris can connect cultural memory with contemporary forms of belonging.
- Dialogue within the community should be encouraged to bridge generational differences and accommodate multiple expressions of Kashmiri identity.

LIMITATIONS

A key limitation of this methodology is that the Kashmiri diaspora is not formally counted as a separate category in all datasets, which makes exact measurement difficult. Another limitation is

that identity claims can vary across generations, localities, and political orientations, so findings may not be generalisable to all British Kashmiris. Nevertheless, a qualitative design is well suited to capturing the complexity of identity formation in this community.

REFERENCES

- Ali, N. (2003). Diaspora and nation: Displacement and the politics of Kashmiri identity in Britain. *Contemporary South Asia*, 12(4), 471–480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958493042000194318>
- Ali, N. (2009). The making of Kashmiri identity. *South Asian Diaspora*, 1(2), 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438190903109545>
- Ali, Nasreen, Patricia Ellis and Zafar Khan. 1996. The 1990s: A Time to Separate British Punjabi and British Kashmiri Identity, in M. Gurharpal Sing and Ian Talbot (eds.). *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change*. Delhi: Manohar, 229-256.
- Aspinall, Peter J. 2009. The Future of Ethnicity Classifications, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35, 9, 1417-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830903125901>. (August 2010)
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.
- British Kashmiri Identity Campaign. (2021, March 20). *British Kashmiri Identity Campaign - BKIC - Census 2021*. <https://kdfuk.org/bkic/>
- Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338.
- Cressey, G. (2006). *Diaspora youth and ancestral homeland: British Pakistani/Kashmiri youth visiting kin in Pakistan and Kashmir*. Brill.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (UK) 2009. *The Tackling Race Inequality Fund – Prospectus*. April 2009. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1200339.pdf> (October 2010)
- Earthquake, Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority, at <http://www.erra.pk/> (October 2010).
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
- <http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/uk-aid-network.html> (October 2010).
- Khan, Z. (2000). Diasporic communities and identity formation: The post-colonial Kashmiri experience in Britain. In *World Dialogue on Intercultural Exchange*.
- Mendizabal, Enrique, Ben Ramalingam and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. 2008. *Strengthening Humanitarian Networks. Kashmiri Diaspora in the ‘Big’ Society for Development and Just Peace*. Background Note, April 2008. <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/579.pdf> (October 2010).
- New World Encyclopaedia, Kashmir Earthquake 2005, at http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/2005_Kashmir_earthquake (September 2010).

Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1), 83–99.

Sökefeld, M. (2016). The Kashmiri diaspora in Britain and the limits of political mobilisation. In A. Wonneberger, M. Gandelsman-Trier, & H. Dorsch (Eds.), *Migration – Networks – Skills: Anthropological Perspectives on Mobility and Transformation* (pp. 23–46). transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839433645-002>

Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 447–462.

Project Kashmiri. (2006–2009). *Kashmiri-Diaspora, Transnational Politics and the Kashmir Dispute*.

Soekefeld, M. (2016). *The Kashmiri diaspora in Britain and the limits of political mobilisation*. https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/41164/1/Soekefeld_2016_Kashmiri_Diaspora_in_Britain_and_the_Limits_of_Mobilisation.pdf

Sökefeld, M. (2016). *The Kashmiri diaspora in Britain and the limits of political mobilisation*. [epub.uni-muenchen](https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/41164/1/Soekefeld_2016_Kashmiri_Diaspora_in_Britain_and_the_Limits_of_Mobilisation.pdf)



EARN YOUR

MBA

WWW.IIMPS.IN



Accreditation & Ranking



UGC / NCTE Approved.

INFO@IIMPS.IN

☎ 011-41005174

RESEARCH
GATEWAY

STOP PLAGIARISM



Arogyam Ayurveda
Holistic Healing through herbs



AROGYAM
ONLINE

PARIVARTAN PSYCHOLOGY CENTER

परिवर्तन

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY : HOW COLOR AFFECT YOUR CHILD



BLUE

Calms your Child's
Mind & Body

YELLOW

Promotes Concentration,
Stimulates the Memory

PINK

Evokes Empathy,
makes your Child Calm

RED

Excites and energizes
your Child's body

GREEN

Improves Reading speed
and Comprehension

www.parivartan4u.com



परिवर्तन



Confuse about your children's future?

भारतीय भाषा, शिक्षा, साहित्य एवं शोध

ISSN 2321 – 9726

WWW.BHARTIYASHODH.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN – 2250 – 1959 (O) 2348 – 9367 (P)

WWW.IRJMSST.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
COMMERCE, ARTS AND SCIENCE**

ISSN 2319 – 9202

WWW.CASIRJ.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES**

ISSN 2277 – 9809 (O) 2348 - 9359 (P)

WWW.IRJMSH.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF SCIENCE
ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN 2454-3195 (online)

WWW.RJSET.COM



**INTEGRATED RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**

ISSN 2582-5445

WWW.IRJMSI.COM



**JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES, POLITICS
AND ECONOMICS RESEARCH**

WWW.JLPER.COM

JLPE