

Research Article

International Conflict-Induced Displacement and Civilian Problems: A Study of the Balakot Sector of Jammu and Kashmir

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Date of Submission: 17/10/2023; Date of Acceptance: 22/12/2023

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the issue of internal displacement in India, focusing on the people who have been forced to leave their homes in the Balakot region of Jammu & Kashmir as a result of the conflict there. Both the causes and effects of population relocation have been explored, with the link between war and migration receiving particular attention. There is a long history of conflict between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LOC) in the contested territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and the first half of this essay discusses the notion of displacement and provides facts about that history. The purpose of this study is to discuss the research undertaken in the Balakot area of Jammu and Kashmir, its methods, as well as its findings about the role of the border in human displacement and the effects of this phenomenon on individuals, families, and communities. The authors have made an effort to provide a summary of the issue of internal displacement in Jammu and Kashmir as a result of the international conflict along the LOC and some potential solutions to the problem.

Keywords: Conflict, Displacement, Jammu, Kashmir, India, Pakistan, LOC, Balakot, War, Migration

INTRODUCTION

The societal implications of people moving away from the places they once called home have always been a concern. People who have been forced to flee their houses for reasons within their own country are not considered refugees because they

remain within those borders. Individuals are compelled to leave their homeland for a variety of reasons. These reasons include political, economic, environmental factors, etc. There has been a global rise in the number of people having to evacuate their homes as a result of violent conflict. The phenomenon known as “conflict-induced displacement” refers to situations in which individuals or groups of individuals are forced to abandon their homes as a result of political violence (Lischer, 2007). When people’s safety is at risk due to armed conflict or other dangerous circumstances, they are forced to make the difficult choice of whether or not to escape their homes (Adhikari, 2013). The link between armed conflict and people being forced to relocate is one that cannot be denied.

Armed conflicts and internal strife are widely considered to be major causes of the movement of population, within and outside borders. By the end of the year 2021, the estimated population of people all over the world who were compelled to leave their homes as a result of war, violence, the fear of being persecuted, or violations of human rights was 89.3 million. This is nearly double the number of people who were forcibly evicted a decade ago, which was 42.7 million, and it is the highest number since World War II (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

To a large extent, according to UN principles (1998), the definition of home or usual abode is used to quantify and measure displacement. Many people are forced to leave their homes as a result of a chain reaction including the depletion and erosion of essential life-bearing resources, the loss of employment opportunities, and the inability to provide for one’s family. Many times, they end up having psychiatric disorders as a result of post-traumatic stress faced by them (Morina *et al.*, 2018). An estimated 506,000 individuals in India were displaced in 2021 owing to natural disasters, armed conflict, and other forms of violence, as reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (IDMC, 2023).

There are several different factors that contribute to forced displacement in India (Malhotra, 2007). Everyone hates the idea of uprooting their lives and moving away from their hometown or village forever. Even when they are coerced to leave, people have an overwhelming desire to return there right away. Staying in a strange unfamiliar location for an extended period of time is not something that anyone enjoys doing. Everyone misses their family and communities in their native lands and wishes they could return there. People are more inclined to remain in their homes and communities during times of conflict when the opportunity cost of departing, measured in terms of foregone economic potential at the place of origin and one’s commitment to home, is greater than the risk to one’s life (Adhikari, 2013). In her article titled “Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement”, Lischer (2007) argues that

displacement as a result of conflict is primarily caused by two main factors, namely the violence that caused the displacement and the characteristics that resulted in a crisis of displacement. In India, territories along its borders have been subject to a variety of forms of population movement. The worldwide conflict is frequently cited as one of the primary motivating factors behind the population shifts that have taken place.

In the context of India, there are primarily two regions that are involved in border disputes. The first is the region of Kashmir, while the second is the states in North East India. Since India and Pakistan were first created as nations, Jammu and Kashmir has been one of the contentious regions between the two countries. People in the state of Jammu and Kashmir have endured a great deal of suffering as a direct result of the conflict that has arisen between the two countries of India and Pakistan (Roy, 2019). Many people have been forced to abandon their homes as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, and systemic breaches of human rights. Those who had been uprooted found new homes across the entirety of India, and some even moved to neighbouring nations. Because of the constant escalation of hostilities, the standard of living in this state has deteriorated to a gloomy level (Tremblay, 2016).

The history of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir reveals that it has been going on since before India and Pakistan gained their independence. The conflict that exists between Jammu and Kashmir has a long and complicated history (Duschinski *et al.*, 2018). During the time when Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state, numerous movements began calling for the independence of Kashmir. The year 1931 saw the beginning of an aggressive and multi-pronged campaign by the Muslim press of Lahore directed against the Hindu Maharaja and his administration (Rai, 2004). On 13 July 1931, a new movement was initiated in the most contemporary manner; this event is generally regarded as the beginning of Jammu and Kashmir's war for independence. The two-nation doctrine, which was endorsed by Jinnah, gained increasing favour among Muslims, and Muslims urged the partition of the subcontinent. On the other hand, Hindu politicians in British India were concerned about what the future held for Kashmir. This division of India and Pakistan resulted in the displacement of people, and once the countries achieved their independence, hostilities between the two nations broke out along the border region, impacting the people who lived near the Line of Control (LOC) (Zia, 2019).

The LOC is a military line that divides India and Pakistan, or Jammu and Kashmir and territory that is part of Pakistan (Mahapatra, 2011). It is sometimes referred to as the cease-fire line. Jammu and Kashmir contains 1,225 kilometres of the 3,323 kilometres that make up the overall length of the border between India and Pakistan.

The international boundary is only 210 km long, however, the LOC makes up the vast majority of the land boundary. The LOC accounts for the remaining distance of roughly 788 km after the Actual Ground Position Line terminates at around 150 km. Out of Jammu and Kashmir's total of 22 districts, the boundary passes through 10 of them. Jammu itself contains five districts: Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri, and Poonch. Leh and Kargil, are the two districts that make up Ladakh and are on the frontier. The districts of Badgam, Baramulla, and Kupwara are all on the border in Kashmir (Chowdhary, 2012). The LOC which spans 778 KM is a matter of political concern for both India and Pakistan (Mahapatra and Shekhawat, 2007). The land that comes under LOC is Jammu and Kashmir of India and Pakistan-controlled areas are Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan (Puri, 2010).

Fighting at the Line of Control (LOC) is still an issue, even after so many years of India's independence. Even in 2022, reports of shelling in Jammu and Kashmir's border regions, resulting in civilian deaths and displacement, can be found in the news nearly every month. Therefore, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir provides a prime case study of population dispersal due to armed strife. Tensions in people's daily lives are being exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, which is just one of many reasons why this state merits attention. Sharing a border with Pakistan is only part of the explanation; numerous internal conflicts in the area also play a role. So, the Balakot area of Poonch District in Jammu and Kashmir was chosen for this analysis. The study mainly focuses on how the international conflict between India and Pakistan has caused internal displacement and badly affected the lives of people in the border regions of this District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Understanding the nature of the temporary displacement that people living in the bordering villages of the Balakot region of Jammu and Kashmir endure was the primary purpose of the study. In addition to this, the researchers have made an effort to understand how border conflicts and shelling generate displacement, as well as how people adapt to their new environments and continue to exist after being displaced. In the interest of gaining a thorough understanding of the plight of those who have been displaced in Balakot, consideration has also been given to the accessibility of educational opportunities, as well as the health, social, and financial challenges they face.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The findings of this study were written based on primary data acquired by the authors during their research conducted in 2021. The fieldwork in Balakot, Jammu

and Kashmir, lasted four months. Balakot was selected as the study's location due to the city's proximity to the conflict zone and the ease with which its population is temporarily displaced by the frequent shelling. It is a tehsil of Punch district of Jammu and Kashmir union territory. According to the 2011 census, Punch's total population was 24,394 and the total number of households was 4440. Most of the Punch's population lives in rural areas. The district has 100.68 total area in terms of square kilometres. Punch district is comprised of the southern slopes and mountain ranges of the Pir Panjal. This range separates the district from Kashmir valley which lies on its north. Balakot panchayat is backward and is in the rural area. The total number of workers in Balakot is 9,313. In this, 5,631 males and 3,682 females. 1,005 male population are engaged in cultivation and only 548 females are engaged in cultivation (Census of India, 2011).



Balakot Region: It is located in the Pir Panjal Range

The population of the study included civilians living in the region. As one of the authors is from the nearby region, she had a thorough understanding of the people, culture, language as well as the nature of problems arising due to conflict-induced displacement. Her house is 25 km from the Balakot region, so she travelled every day to undertake interviews with the selected participants. The researcher established initial contact with the participants by visiting temporary camps i.e. the people who were living in the makeshift settlement came from the Dahruti, Sandot, Balakot, Dharti, Bharti and Datote villages of the Balakot area. A total of 100 civilians were interviewed which included 40 males and 60 females from the Balakot, Sohala, Dhrothi, Basoni, Sandote, Datote, Bhurti villages. The sample comprised of people from different age groups. Snowball sampling was used for contacting the participants. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for collecting data. Requisite permission

was sought from the government authorities for conducting the research. Due to limited time in hand considering the sensitivity of the area, the study had to be carried out in four months. Secondary literature was also referred to for the work. Thematic analysis was done to know how the conflict-induced displacement has affected the lives of the people living in the Balakot.

MAIN FINDINGS

The findings have been broken down into several categories, such as the nature of conflict-induced displacement, education and economic concerns, gender issues, and other challenges that are experienced by the people who live in the border region of Balakot. The authors have made an attempt to write the findings from the perspective of the affected ones. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, their real names have been modified in this work.

Due to frequent shelling, the people living in the Balakot face temporary displacement. The people are taken to temporary shelters, maybe a school building or a makeshift structure and when the conflict is reduced, they are taken back to their homes. In March 2018, the mud house of Muhammad Ramzan collapsed when a Pakistani shell landed on their house. Five of his family members were killed because of this shelling. Similar stories of sudden shelling and then immediate evacuation of their houses to move to a safe shelter were told by many. Some people said they lost loved ones, while others spoke about material losses including furniture, jewellery, electronics, cattle, and other household items. Few participants even mentioned how they lost their limbs due to bombardment. Loss of life and property was seen as one main problem encountered by the Balakot due to the recurrent bombardment on the border areas.

Armed conflict-related displacement affects important human capital determinants, mainly education and health. Education-related concerns are an important problem faced by the border people as they not only miss their regular classes but are also deprived of quality education. This area has 18 pre-primary schools, 25 primary schools, 16 middle schools, 5 secondary schools, and 2 senior secondary schools. Most of the days during an academic year, the schools remain closed because of cross border-shelling. Due to this frequent closure of schools, students end up missing their classes. Also, no private schools are interested in setting up senior secondary schools in the region due to such unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, students had access to only two senior secondary schools, thus limiting quality education for them.



Shelling marks on the walls of a house in Balakot

On 18 January 2018, an unanticipated explosion took place in Punch District along LOC. The district administration of the area ordered for the shutdown of all educational institutions in the surrounding areas of Punch as Pakistan disrupted the ceasefire during the morning hours. Many students were afraid to go to classes. So, the District Development Commissioner, Punch, on 20 January 2018, ordered the closing of 120 schools in Balakot and Mankot because of firing and shelling from Pakistan along the border. The order to close the Balakot and Mankot was made as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of students and staff. Such scenarios are part of the everyday life of the students living in the Balakot region. In conflict-affected areas, it is common for schools to be closed temporarily as a result of security concerns. This has a major impact on the education of children in the area. One of the respondents from Balakot Mohd. Yaseen, a student's father said that continuous shelling and firing disturbs student education. When their children are in school and if sudden shelling starts, it creates panic among students and parents also. They are unsure about their children's future. At the time of shelling, students remain in their homes and miss their classes. He said, when our children go to school we are not always happy. We feel sometimes bad about their situation.

Even if a child is admitted to a college or university for higher education, the early childhood experiences of violence have an effect on the child's potential to succeed in life. The majority of the students in the Balakot region reported that they had gone through periods of time during which they were unable to attend their primary school. As a result, they felt unprepared for the rigours of higher education. Students from the Balakot area continue to suffer from educational disadvantages and are unable to compete with students from other areas on the basis of their merit.

According to Mahapatra (2007), during the years 1965 and 1971, which were marked by clear hostilities between India and Pakistan, mines were placed in a number of different sites all along the border. The military has been stationed on their territory because of problems along the border. Agriculture is the primary source of income for the majority of people living in Balakot but still, the farmers are unable to harvest their crops in a timely manner as landmines have been placed on the areas they habit. Because of the constant threat of crossfire, their normal work on the land is frequently interrupted or put on hold. There are still land mines on a significant number of cultivated lands, and farmers can unwittingly become victims of these mines while working in their fields or when moving their animals to graze elsewhere. Between the years 1947 and 1989, there were over two thousand people were killed by landmines in the Rajouri and Poonch belt.

In the Balakot, there are a number of gates, as well as fencing that surrounds the entire region. Prior to entering the fields, both the farmers and any other individuals who enter them are subjected to routine inspections. However, there are times when



The area where smoke can be seen is Dabsi. There are hardly any inhabitants of this place. To ensure that the enemy doesn't enter this area, rising smoke is used as a safeguard.

access is limited and the gate is kept shut for many days when there is a risk that the opposing side will violate the cease-firing. As a consequence of this, the farmers are only permitted to spend a predetermined amount of time on their fields rather than the entire working day. They are required to promptly cease the work they are doing and leave in order to ensure their own safety at times. In the event that the shells land in their field, it will not only cause the standing crops to be destroyed, but it will also make harvesting the crops more challenging.

The majority of farmers in the Balakot region are uncertain about whether or not they will be compensated for the hard work they put into their land. The lack of predictability is leading to the desertification of land that was once used for agriculture. Because of the decline in agricultural production, many of them have begun searching for alternative ways to make a living in order to meet their fundamental requirements. Some of them have started working as daily labour, but because of time-bound travel restrictions, they are unable to put in an entire day's worth of work. Balakot panchayat is a rural and backward place. Its inhabitants get their living mostly via their engagement in the primary sector; nevertheless, as a result of the conflict, their economic situation is seriously harmed.

The people of Balakot deal with a variety of physical and emotional concerns in addition to economic ones. Heavy bombardment in this location frequently results in injuries to locals. One or more responders mentioned losing a body part as a result of an unexpected bombardment. Rasheed, a 29-year-old male, described how a mine explosion caused him to lose his limbs as he was taking his livestock for grazing. During the three wars, landmines were planted along the border in Balakot. The lack of appropriate medical facilities, according to the locals, had an impact on their lives and occasionally resulted in the loss of loved ones if someone was hurt during shelling or even during a period of peace. Balakot Panchayat has only one primary health Centre (PHC) and two child welfare centres (MCW), out of which one is in Dhargloon and other in Dharti village. The primary health centre in Dhargloon is far away from the other most affected areas. The nearest villages along LOC line are Balakot, Sohala, Dhrothi, Basoni, Sandote, Datote and Bhurti. Participants mentioned how inaccessibility to good health care affected their lives.

Even if the population is safely relocated to camps or other structures, they still deal with a variety of health issues. A lack of basic sanitation, drainage, drinking water facilities, etc., might make these locations physically more vulnerable and disease-prone, especially for children and women who seek refuge there. Another issue people encountered during their temporary exile was access to food. Many of the ladies whose stories were recorded described being displaced as distressing. They

are unable to use clean restrooms, and if they are menstruating, they experience additional difficulties due to the unavailability of clean sanitary pads and other medications in these hideouts.



A safe bunker in Behrooti village in Balakot

Due to their greater vulnerability than men, the women of Balakot are the main victims of the conflict state. They have two disadvantages, as was clear from Ruhina's account. Ruhina, a 22-year-old woman, was injured during shelling and lost one of her legs. She had a difficult time finding a marriage partner because of her disability. On the other hand, her parents were concerned about who would care for her after they passed away if she didn't find a husband. Ruhina was thus subject to two forms of deprivation: first, becoming disabled; second, having her social standing as a potential wife decline as a result of her disability. In Balakot, it is typically the women who carry the cattle and sheep out to pasture. As a result, females are more likely to have a landmine-related disability.

It's important to note that any civilian casualties in conflict zones are tragic and have a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and their families. The level of violence is not only felt physically, but also psychologically. The displaced people's psychological problems do not end when they arrive at camps, in particular, those whose loved ones have been killed or who have become disabled due to shelling. Many people are under severe financial pressure, but their dignity prevents them from asking for help. Overnight shelling and firing cause disruption in sleep and their daily routine gets impacted. Due to tough circumstances, many young men or women suffer from depression, sleeplessness, and anxiety.

Borders cannot be compared to other locations where people live their normal lives in accordance with their preferences and circumstances since they are not conventional regions (Anderson and O'dowd, 1999). Before 1947, the natives could live there



A woman taking her cattle for grazing in Balakot village

without difficulty, but the split of the country brought a violent climate where people were frequently caught in the crossfire (Khan, 2017). Since the significant wars between India and Pakistan in 1947, 1948, 1965 and 1971, this region has devolved into a war zone, and the current situation is similar to that of a perpetual war. Sometimes the situation is calm, but unexpected enemy bombardment upsets the entire scene. On the line of control in Balakot of the Punch district, the Pakistani army often resorted to severe mortar shelling and firing, causing damage and casualties. Even cattle are harmed in addition to partial home damage. Multiple locations have

reported heavy shelling in the last five years. Several of the respondents shared their experiences of having to deal with problems that were very similar to one another.

The people of Balakot also struggle with a loss of social life, interruption of festivals, restricted travel, and a reduction in tourism-related activities, amongst other challenges. Movement restrictions are placed on residents in this region for a variety of reasons, including a dearth of available transportation options and concerns for their safety. In this area, there is only a single road, and there are not too many buses that travel through there. As a result, when shelling occurs unexpectedly, people become stranded owing to poor connectivity and are unable to reach the safe hideouts in time.



The only road that runs in the Balakot region

People in the Balakot region confront additional challenges in the realm of housing. Their homes are constantly at risk of being damaged because they are located in a conflict zone. As a result, the people who live there have expressed a strong desire to acquire real estate in a secure area so that they can relocate their family to the newly acquired homes. The majority of the families, however, are unable to construct a new home in a safer location because of financial constraints; as a result, they have no alternative but to continue to live in constant fear. They have made a request to the relevant authorities in the government for safe zone dwelling facilities. The lack of safety in this region makes it a less desirable destination for tourists to visit. Even though Jammu & Kashmir is well-known across the world for its stunning natural scenery, the Balakot region is unable to profit from any tourist-related activity, not even during times of holiday or festival celebrations. This is despite the fact that the region is a gorgeous beauty. There are times when the natives of the area are unable to celebrate even the most holidays or other important events, such as weddings etc. Thus, such circumstances make the tourists terrified for traveling to the border regions.

People who live close to the LOC deal with a variety of difficulties. They are rendered vulnerable both physically and mentally as a result of the international conflict that is taking place between nations. Internally displaced individuals in the Balakot region come from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, including Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others. The constant shelling and firing, as well as the frequent relocation necessary to preserve their lives, has become a normal aspect of their life.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties faced by displaced people in the state of Jammu and Kashmir were the focus of this research. A large number of persons or entire family groups in the Balakot district of Jammu and Kashmir flee the conflict zone in order to save their lives. Different techniques are used by the uprooted people in order to readjust their social structure once it has been altered by relocation. The uprooting of a population consequently results in both personal and political setbacks and gains. It is challenging for the people who are internally displaced to provide an education for their children. Additionally, they contend with a wide range of health problems. Shelling has a negative impact on the mental health of the local population in this area. The most vulnerable members of this region are those who are unable to protect themselves, including women and children. As a result of the numerous dangers they face, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living along the Line of Control (LOC) need to have access to an effective protective system. The disagreement between the two

countries about Jammu and Kashmir is a highly complicated and ongoing topic. People in Balakot simply want peace and progress, as well as stability, improved employment and other opportunities for their children, and an end to any form of violence.

One of the difficulties in researching internal displacement is that those who are uprooted sometimes do not have access to the same forms of official acknowledgement that are available to refugees. Many people who have been displaced within their own country are at risk of being lost in the shuffle of other migrants. The displacement that has occurred in Jammu and Kashmir dates back to the time when the Indian subcontinent was first divided. Millions of people were compelled to relocate as a result of the split, which happened simultaneously with communal uprisings. The problem of people being uprooted was eventually resolved, and rehabilitative efforts were made for those affected. However, the problem of people having to move because of a conflict has not yet been resolved in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Those living in the Balakot area want nothing more than to live in peace and safety. The hardest thing that people have to go through on a regular basis is leaving behind their loved ones and their possessions. A region's economic growth and social peace depend on its political stability, which is in peril if it is not realised. Constantly touched topics include the anguish of abandoning farmland, the fear of what the future holds for their children's schooling, and the emotional and psychological challenges they face. People in the Balakot region, which has been plagued by violence, also value relocating to a more safe and prosperous location. However, their relocation to such a site requires help in the form of suitable means of income and land for resettlement. In order to alleviate the sorrows of the displaced population, the government and civil authorities need to play an active part in providing the requisite support.

FUNDING

This study was not funded by any organisation.

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How to cite this article: Gill, R., & Anjum, S. (2024). International Conflict-Induced Displacement and Civilian Problems: A Study of the Balakot Sector of Jammu and Kashmir. *Journal of Exclusion Studies*, 14(1), 62-76.