

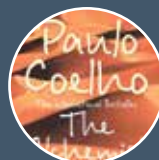


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## YAKJUT: Connecting Kashmiri women across the globe

Arbeena I Srinagar

While women find it tough take time out amidst their busy schedules, Yakjut, a Facebook group is bringing together Kashmiri women across the globe.

Yakjut is primarily a business platform however other aspects of a women's life are also discussed. Yakjut, which means unity, was a brainchild of Syed Hanaz Tariq, who is an Automation engineer by profession and is currently working with a Chinese company based in Pune. The group has grown in fame ever since its arrival on Facebook on six January 2019. It connects whooping 24 thousand Kashmiri women across the globe.

"Seeing people get benefitted through different Facebook groups, I felt that Kashmiri women should also share a common platform to connect and become self-reliant by selling products from their homes without owning a shop. However, the credit for the title of the group goes to my father," says Hanaz.

Women of the group offer plethora of items. The group includes 200 verified sellers. From groceries, clothing to beauty products, Yakjut is becoming a one-stop destination for Kashmiri women.

"You are ought to get benefitted when you have such a huge consumer base to display your items. I found many new customers ever since I stepped into Yakjut," Qawsain Qadri, an online Kashmiri seller based in Delhi said.

Irfana Ali, another online seller of the Yakjut delivers her hand made cakes and pastries to her customers across the valley from her home in Saida-Kadal, Srinagar. She also runs an online page by the name of creative expressions.

"My cakes and pastries are alluring more people than ever before. Kashmiri women residing outside the valley order cakes for their loved ones here. Yakjut has proven very fruitful for me," Irfana said.

Yakjut is not only meant for E-commerce but has also become a stress buster for Kashmiri women. They post different issues concerning their lives and through discussions try to reach a solution. It also has a calendar of topics to discuss on specific days of the week like poetry, health & fitness, matrimony, photography, cooking, parenting etc.

"We get guidance and moreover a platform to discuss things. It is more of woman empowerment, assimilation, and representation," Zahra, a member of the group added.

This group is held together and taken care by a group of seven enthusiastic Kashmiri female moderators who form the bed-rock of Yakjut and consist of Samina Masoodi, Nafhat



Naqshbandi,  
Afshan  
Mantoo,  
Tamana Imran,  
Nazrana Ashiq,  
Abeen Shaiq  
and Shabila Hamid

with Syed Hanaz as the admin. The moderators live in different time zones and work very hard to take care of and manage the group.

"The difference in time zones allows us to have moderators available pretty much round the clock. There are seven moderators, four in Asia, one in Australia, one in Canada and me in Los Angeles. However, we may need more volunteers' eventually," says Samina Masoodi.

"The hardest part is 24000 women with 24000 mindsets and still keeping them all together," says Hanaz.

Yakjut as a platform is allowing Kashmiri women to earn an honest living from their homes, empowering them and being able to speak their mind without being judged.

Hanaz's important plans with the Yakjut include verifying the sellers, provide them special badges to keep the fraud sellers away and improve the quality of the goods being sold, making sure not to put the customers in trouble.



## Athwajan-Soiteng Bridge awaits completion



Faisal Akhooon | Srinagar

While people had to wait a decade before stepping on the incomplete Lal chowk-Rambagh flyover. Panderthan-Soiteng bridge, another such project awaits completion after eight years of incessant construction.

The bridge would connect Panderthan with its adjacent areas across river like Vethpora, Syedabad, Soiteng, Padshahi bagh and other adjoining areas. The Jammu and Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation (JKPCC) has failed to complete Athawajan-Soiteng bridge despite eight years of ongoing construction. The residents have called for its urgent completion as people are facing various problems while connecting with the other side of the river.

“The bridge isn’t yet ready to walk, it would be equivalent to a dream seeing public transport running upon it. The residents have to walk around few kilometers to make it to the other side of the river,” Mushtaq Ahmad, a local resident of Pandrethan said.

Another resident of Soitang Srinagar Ashraf Nazir, while talking to us in a resentful tone said, “In case of any emergency, we have to go through Pantha Chowk or Zero Bridge and it takes hours to reach national highway. While it would have been easier for us to feet over the highway only by crossing a bridge.”

While Shabir Ahmad of JKPCC, who looks after the bridge construction talking to us said,

“We are totally out of resources as the project is funded by R&B department and there is no regularization of funds and material as well.”

“We have already spent an amount of two crores rupees in this project. If the funds are released at a proper time, we can expect the completion within four months,” Shabir added.

Meanwhile, people continue to reel under misery as authorities continue to give deadlines.

## KU Professor wins INSA Young Scientist Medal 2019



Humarira Nabi | Srinagar

Dr. Irfan Rashid, Assistant Professor Department of Earth Science, University of Kashmir became the first Kashmiri to get honoured with Young Scientist Award 2019 by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA).

INSA had awarded 26 young scientists from 10 different fields of science and technology all below 35 years of age with medals, citations and cash prizes for their outstanding research contribution in science. INSA Young Scientist Medal award carries a bronze medal, certificate and cash prize of Rs 50,000. Dr Irfan Rashid received the award during the anniversary meeting of the academy held on 18 Dec, thereby, becoming the first Kashmiri to receive this prestigious award.

Dr. Irfan was awarded for his outstanding research on implications of changing climate and anthropogenic forcing on glacier dynamics and hazards, snow cover changes, land system-alpine vegetation dynamics, lake and wetland health over Jammu and Kashmir region.

“I feel privileged to be among few of the Muslims to have received this award”, Dr. Irfan said while his face gloomed with utter shine of happiness.

INSA is a body of Indian scientists formed in 1935 for promotion of scientific knowledge in the India. The INSA Young Scientist Award is considered to be the highest recognition of promise, creativity and excellence in a young scientist. It is annually awarded to the distinguished young scientists in India for their excellent research work in the field of science and technology.

The INSA president in his letter to Dr. Irfan had written, “It gives me great pleasure to inform that you have been awarded the prestigious INSA Medal for young scientist (2019). You have shown great potential to be leaders in research. I sincerely hope that you will continue to strive hard to reach your potential and prove your leadership in coming years.”

Meanwhile, not only the students from the Earth Science department were ecstatic about the feat, but those from other departments looked equally happy.

“Dr. Irfan is a perfect example of hard work and dedication. He has shown that, no matter how tough the circumstances are, you can mould your destiny with your passion”. Sumaiya Mir, a second semester student of Media Education Research Department said.



## Traditional Music versus Modern Music

Farzana Nisar

**A**s young Kashmiri artists are fusing modern music with the regional Kashmiri tracks, is this trend of fusion somehow posing an existential threat to the originality of Kashmiri music?

**Tanveer Ahmad**

Since music has changed with time, Kashmiri youth have got themselves involved in the Sufi rock bands that are getting popular among the people of valley. They aim to revive the Sufiyana music and at the same time keep the new generation entertained. So, such changes are must for positive result.

**Malik Fiza**

It was important to change it to some extent but we have to make sure that we should maintain the spirit of our music and simultaneously satisfy the demands of recent times. I think that this aura of musical modernity has distorted the essence of old Kashmiri music.

**Rayees Ahmad**

In recent times with the introduction of fast track songs and light music albums in Kashmir, youngsters are showing keen interest in Kashmiri music and prefer it to other forms of music. So, the latest changes have made it more popular in our homes.

**Zainab Sheikh**

The modification of Kashmiri music into modern tones is a good way to care about preferences and moods of present day youth but this modification has to a large extent distorted its classical nature and exported the taste of its legacy as a whole.

**Khushboo Nabi**

Modern music isn't as good as it used to be, as it has gotten much louder. Earlier the lyrics used to convey emotions but now young Artists are taking to rock and rap and lack a passion to folk music. Nowadays, it has become more turbulent.

**Shafiya Zaffar**

Earlier Kashmiri singers used traditional musical instruments like Nout, Tumbaknari, sitar etc. but nowadays the singers have modern musical instruments at their disposal so more improvements are possible. We may prefer guitar over Rabab but that is what made the dying Kashmiri music popular again.

## Kashmir wetlands: a haven for migratory birds during winters



Mir Mazar

**A**s the temperature drops precipitously and their homelands begin to freeze each year, flocks of birds all across the globe begin their journey towards Kashmir.

By the time summer begins to end, the aesthetic exodus of the migratory birds from different countries to Kashmir, is what signals the arrival of winters here. As mercury starts to fall in their own habitats, the birds start migrating to Kashmir from September, every year.

Migratory birds from Eastern Europe, China, Siberia and other areas arrive in Kashmir every year to spend winters in Kashmir. For hundreds of years, these birds have been keeping their annual tryst with the valley. The birds usually continue to feed till the weather is just favourable for them to go back. It's during winters each year that such birds become refugees in Kashmir.

"It's from early autumn that temperature begins to drop with at a rapid pace. It's then that the migratory birds start landing in Kashmir". Akber Ali, a tourist guide said.

These birds don't only restrict themselves to wetlands but trip around other beautiful lakes too.

"Besides the wetland reserves, migratory birds also throng to other lakes like the Dal Lake, Wullar Lake and other big and small water bodies," He added.

These migratory birds from across the globe besides bringing winters with themselves also add to the beauty of Kashmir. Thereby, boosting the tourism sector by attracting people from different parts of the world.

"These birds attract tourists from across the world and if we protect their habitat, they can really boost our economy," Mushtaq Ahmed, a shikara owner said.

"The experience of seeing such different species of birds at a single place is simply enthralling," Chris Hartz, an American tourist, who was capturing the birds from the banks of Dal lake said.

Though people have already destroyed some wetlands by illegally constructing houses there. And lately, there have been debates surrounding the encroachment of these wetlands. But only time will tell whether the people of Kashmir would be able to preserve and welcome these foreign guests in guests.



# The Alchemist

Book Review

Dazzles in its powerful simplicity and soul-stirring wisdom

**Arbeena**

**T**he Alchemist is a fictional and philosophical book written by Paulo Coelho in 1988. The book was initially written in Portuguese and published by Editora Rocco Ltd. Its English edition was published in 1993. It is an international bestseller and has been translated into more than 70 languages.

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian lyricist and novelist, best known for *Eleven Minutes* and *The Alchemist*. He has been the recipient of prestigious international awards including Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum and France's Legion d'Honneur.

This book is about the story of a shepherd boy named Santiago from Spain. He dreams of travelling the world in search of a treasure after getting recurrent dreams of it. He embarks on a journey to Egyptian desert to follow his dream after meeting an old king who advises him and offers magic stones to him. He travels to exotic markets of North America, crosses the Mediterranean and

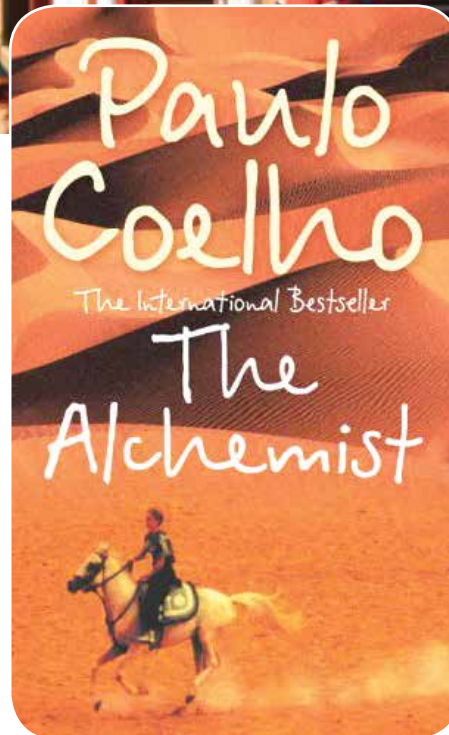
Sahara, then enters into the Egyptian desert where a significant encounter with alchemist awaits him.

The book details his journey and the various encounters that he experiences while following his dream. Santiago meets many new people on his way. He faces lot of difficulties throughout his journey which eventually helps him to learn and grow.

It is a memorable story which gives us the message that we should listen to our heart and follow our dreams. It is about finding our destiny or purpose in life. The story is engrossing, delightful and bursts with optimism. It highlights the significance of faith, hope and spirituality through the story of an ordinary shepherd boy. The book is fantastic and exciting & relatively short having around 165 pages only. The language is lucid and full of wisdom and philosophy.

Favourite quotes from the book: "It's the simple things in life that are the most extraordinary; only wise men are able to understand them."

"Everyone seems to have a clear idea of



how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own."

"And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

"There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure."

This book is a must read for all those who desire to fulfil their dreams. It is an inspirational book and deserves a space in everyone's reading list.

# Religion and Science

Book Review

Insightful study of the conflicts between science and traditional religion

**Danish Noor**

**W**ritten by Maulana Wahid-Ud-Din Khan, *Religion and Science* tries to explain the ideological shaft between the religionists and non-religionists. The author first explains the theory of non-religionists who claim God to be non-existent. These statements are followed by the writings of Bertrand Russell where he tries to explain different theories like Darwin's Theory of Evolution claiming that not God but nature shapes the things around us. The book tries to give a complete picture of the researches done by Non-religionists or Atheists and

even they have come to the conclusion that external forces are always around, forces that science can't describe. External forces are presented to the reader in the form of "Protoplasm" known as the basis of human life. The author questions why we can't explain or overcome death if we know all about Protoplasm, forwarding this question directly to Atheists.

The last chapters bring forth the comments and analysis of religionists and all of them have a common understanding that man is the central aspect of study. Julian Huxley says, "Religion is necessary but what we need is a Modern Religion and not a Traditional One." In Chapter VII author

has quantified that one life is not enough to know everything around us just like Marx whose study of economics was incomplete even after 35 years of research countering the arguments by Carrell who believes if man studies everything maybe in future there will be no need of God.

Chapter IX, "A Last Word" tries to reach a conclusion that man is always in search of "Absolute Reality" and man's quest to reach God is a proof of it. *Religion and Science* is suited for the readers who are keen to focus on the theoretical works by Atheists and the Non-Atheists but there are some sections in the book which need more elaboration as their meaning remains unclear to the reader.

## When I see spring in your eyes

Toiba Bashir

*The alley must be wondering why its so soothing and calm  
The reason being that i see spring in your eyes  
Ohh! You wandering child; pray in the helm of god  
For the sake of this unmourning spring to come  
In the hands of green, red chinar blooms of life  
They loot away for what they find is predominating  
They are the barbarians of their own  
They never feel like the sought ones  
Ohh! You wandering child when your ears feel the sound of spring  
Turn around your face and look for the destiny of your tied hands  
The cuffed hands that were never untied from that time of rule  
The new exasperated sound will wave and shake your body  
But you never move along with those shaky cluchy hands  
When they will seek you lend them your soul full of liveliness  
As they can't wither the vibes of an eternal soul  
They can just be the oppressors of external being  
Ohh! You wandering child feel like an arrowed bow of a shady staunch  
The echoes of which chants yours and mine every linked soul  
Let the genre of music be changed for you and me  
Let the chasm of spring and the chants of water soothen your mind  
Let the heaven speak of its cloudy whitened valour  
And let it roar like a melody of revolution and evolution  
So then can I see spring in your eyes ohh! You wandering child  
Those cold grey eyes of winter changed to the priceless charming of spring*

## The ripple

Badar Bashir

*How far I shalt come, from thee  
Whil'st roaring into thee, if she see  
Thy seas rolling water, thy tides, let me go  
Thou coming into dream, my tempering low  
For thy beauty shalt leave me thou  
Thine velvet shine hidden, if it was for show  
If thou solitude worth, mine mintage bare  
For some reason, mine impression of worthy care  
For that, if shalt I become, my vintage of thou aspire  
If thy thought shalt seen, half my nights desire  
When asked, why my gloomy days  
So shalt you not lie, what thyself says  
Exact that I shalt not ponder my need  
Thy gifted wonder, if so is my greed  
If somebody reaches beneath my eyes  
Perhaps, thy sold menace, not wise  
Melt my strictest dream of grace  
For that I shalt not win the race*



## Infidel Animal

Asif Khan

*My ravenous heart's infidel animal  
Refuses to respect your veil  
It has been fasting for long  
Reduced itself to a bony structure*

*Clench its stiff neck in the jaws  
of your plier-like legs  
Immerse it in the sugar syrup of your beauty,  
Make it prostrate and worship you.*

*For decades has it been keeping itself steadfast,  
Leave a land mark upon every part of his body,  
Which you visit.*

*Let your delicate parts move in sync  
With the human parts of the animal  
It wants to repent for all sins  
And commit to you for salvation  
Baptize it in you  
And rename it as animal or me.*

## Movie Review

# Highway

Wealthy Veera is kidnapped by Mahavir. Is she on a highway leading to hell?

**Mukeet Reshi**

**H**ighway is a 2014 Indian road drama film written and directed by Imtiaz Ali and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. The film stars Randeep Hooda and Alia Bhatt. Screened in the Panorama section of the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival, the film released worldwide on 21 February 2014. It tells the story of a girl (Alia Bhatt) who, for reasons later revealed, discovers freedom after being kidnapped. Upon release the film met with positive reviews, with Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda's performances praised by both audiences and critics alike.

The film starts off as days ahead of her wedding, Veera Tripathi (Alia Bhatt), a happy-go-lucky daughter of a politically connected Delhi tycoon, goes for a spin on an impulse in her beau's swanky sedan. At a deserted gas station off the highway, the city girl is abducted by a gang led by a rustic criminal, Mahabir Bhati (Randeep Hooda), after she gets caught up in a gas station shootout.

As the gang finds out who she is, the men decide to keep her abducted till a big, fat ransom arrives. The girl, initially petrified, starts warming up to the strangers. The Stockholm syndrome – where the captive falls in love with her aggressive captor – is only a distraction, a sort of red herring that keeps you away from what the film wants to say till it does. Veera becomes comfortable with her captors, to the point that she confides in Mahabir the horrors



of her childhood, when she was sexually abused by her own uncle as a nine-year-old. She views the abduction as a blessing in disguise, since she finally has the chance to experience life and find herself.

Eventually, when she returns back home after a series of turbulent incidents and introspections; she decides to cut-off all ties with her past and decides to go independent on her way of living. She thus makes peace with herself by knowing that turbulence and trauma shall remain in the history but the so-called unknown "scary outside world" is much better than the safety of the "hypocrite domestic" one. A rather non-pragmatic conclusion, but, in the unusual circumstances presented such step seemed rather wise.

The movie adopts a novel mode to address issues pertaining to the class and culture divide, the exploitation of women in feudal communities, and the safety, or lack of it, of the girl child within and without the family. The burden of the film's message is: when the home and the world feel like a cage, the wide open road, no matter where it leads, is a surefire path to liberation. I think this movie is worth some hours of our time.

The movie won the had won the filmfare awards in 2015 in the following categories:

Best Playback Singer (female), Best Editing, Best Story, Best Cinematography and Best Film Album. The music of the film has been composed by the Oscar winning music director, A R Rehman, who recieved numerous awards for it.

I would give it a 4 stars out of 5.



Movie  
Review

# BOOK THIEF

A refreshing and reflective fable about death  
and the Holocaust

Shahid Nazir

The movie *BOOK THIEF* is based on the novel written by Markus Zusak. This movie is directed by Brian Percival. Death is the narrator in the voice of Roger Allam. It is a non-fiction movie. The main characters in the movie are Hans Hubermann played by Geoffrey Rush, Rosa Hubermann played by Emily Watson, Liesel Meminger by Sophie Nelisse, Rudy Steiner by Nico Liersch.

"The Book Thief" has its moments of brilliance. It is a movie about a girl adopted by a German couple during World War II. Based on a novel, the movie tries heartily to contain writer Markus Zusak's myriad plot points but the result is a rushed conclusion which brings in a jerking climax.

The sticky-fingered title character is Liesel. With bouncy blond hair and big, sad eyes, actress Sophie Nelisse utterly embodies the character of a girl given up for adoption shortly after her brother dies. When Liesel's on-the-run Communist mother can no longer care for her, she's taken in by Hans (Geoffrey Rush) and Rosa (Emily Watson). The child immediately bonds with her new father, a smiling accordion player who calls Liesel "your majesty." Rosa is more standoffish and looks constantly for excuses to yell.

Despite her tendency to pick up lost books, Liesel can't read or write, and that momentarily makes her a punch line at school. One bully learns quickly, though, that although Liesel can't spell, she can fight, and that's just the first hint of her tenacious personality. After Hans teaches her to read, Liesel's world begins to expand, both through stories from books she sneakily "borrows" and in a reality that's informed by an oppressive regime. In this small German village, she finds reasons to be optimistic thanks to a friendship with another youngster, Rudy (Nico Liersch), but she also comes to understand the saddest repercussion of Third Reich rule after a man named Max comes to the family's door one night. The son of Hans's old friend, Max is Jewish and on the run, and he ends up hiding in the family's basement.

This is a drama that touches the heart. The audience can easily connect with all the central characters. Director Brian Percival has done an amazing job, capturing your mind, making you root for the betterment and safety of the characters. The film takes you on an emotional ride as during the course of this film, the audience would feel joy, fear, love, friendship, sadness and possibly even cry. The lighting, props, acting, direction, and cinematography are all well executed, remaining within the same sphere throughout the film never seeming out of place. The editing and color grading only enhance your experience. And the sound design truly drives the film. This film could easily become one of your favorites.

Taiba Hameed

Based on Markus Zusak's novel, *The Book Thief* expertly tells the story of a young German girl named Liesel, who is thrust into the horrors of World War II Germany and its many complications. Those familiar will not be disappointed with the theatrical version which differs from the book in only minor details. The scope of the story is seen through the eyes of Liesel, making it quite an intimate tale that is less about war and more about the importance of remaining human in callous times, and affecting those around you in a positive and profound way.

This isn't the first film to adopt this perspective. "The Diary of Anne Frank" is the classic example, but more recently, "No Place on Earth" (2013) covered some of the same ground as did "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas" (2008) and especially "Lore" (2012).

The film is hauntingly beautiful, and moves at an effortless pace- not too fast, not too slow- allowing the viewers to become immersed in the realities of Liesel's situation.

"The Book Thief" has wonderful photography by Florian Ballhaus, an excellent musical score by Golden Globe and Oscar winning John Williams ("Schindler's List", "ET", "Star Wars"), and mostly, marvelous acting from Sophie Nelisse as the young girl, Geoffrey Rush and Emily Watson as her adoptive parents, and Ben Schnetzer as the Jewish boy they hide.

Sophie Nelisse is stunningly perfect in the role of Liesel, capturing both the bright-eyed innocence and the eventual world-weary quality needed for the role. Liesel's good-natured friend Rudy is also expertly and realistically portrayed by young Nico Liersch. It is a delight to watch such wonderful young actors at work. Geoffrey Rush and Emily Watson, of course, are their usual extraordinary selves as Liesel's adoptive parents.

There is an excellent blend of different pieces that move the film along well - the violence and the intensity of the time period, the touching relationships between friends and family, and the humor they all share. Though it's nothing new, the writing and lines are still great and make the characters very likable.

This is truly a movie that is not just for young people. It operates on many levels, as a commentary on the disastrous effects of World War II or a poignant tale of one small soul fighting for her own sense of humanity. While it might be a bit intense for small children, a film such as this should be mandatory viewing for mature children and teenagers- a thoughtful and heart-tugging reminder of the fragility of life, and the importance of looking beyond yourself.

*The Book Thief* received Oscar, Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations for its score. For her performance in the film, Sophie Nelisse won the Hollywood Film Festival Spotlight Award, the Satellite Newcomer Award, and the Phoenix Film Critics Society Award for Best Performance by a Youth in a Lead or Supporting Role – Female.

MERC  
TIMES

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