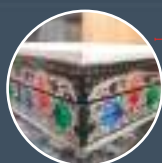


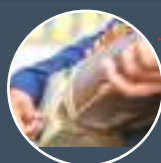


Line of 'Calm'

INSIDE **STORIES**



Kashmiri diaspora help promote papier mache overseas
P02



Migratory birds return to Wular, Khushalsar after decades
P04



Dreams, Despair in Dal
P07

Kashmiri diaspora help promote papier mache overseas



Syed Batool Andrabi

Papier mache is a craft of manufacturing small painted boxes, trays and cases in the middle and far-east since ages. Japan and China also produced laminated paper articles using papier mache. Similarly in India, it was used to add decorative elements to armour and shields. It is one among the crafts in Kashmir and a number of people are associated with it.

It is believed that the craft of Papier mache travelled to Kashmir from Iran during the reign of Sultan Zain ul Abidin famously known as Budshah.

There are a variety of items prepared by craftsmen of Kashmir having embellished designs and colours which include pen stands, coasters, jewellery boxes, flower vases, lamp shades, trays, photo frames and decorative bowls which have a good demand both outside Kashmir and the country.

Due to the tourism in Kashmir, the local crafts have received a boost and the people associated with the crafts are exploring their skills and are famous worldwide.

The Kashmiri crafts can be seen displayed on well decorated shops especially on routes where the tourists flow is copious. Seeing these spellbinding crafts naturally attracts the tourists.

A large number of people in Kashmir are associated with the craft and this craft has gained much limelight in the country and abroad as the tourists take these crafts with them as Kashmir made gifts and souvenirs.

Dr. Qurat Andrabi, who lives in Charlotte North Carolina, USA said that she loves to wear Kashmiri pheran and at times Kashmiri pashmina shawls in social gatherings so that people around her get to know about her culture.

"We buy papier mache and Kandhari

copper dishes from Kashmir and serve our American friends in these dishes. They get fascinated with the charm and uniqueness of our culture," she said.

"Cooking Kashmiri food for potlucks, singing Kashmiri songs, talking to my husband in Kashmiri so that kids pick some of that language, dress up in Kashmiri dresses during gatherings, using Papier mache items to decorate my home and clinic is what I personally do to introduce our friends and acquaintances to the Kashmiri way of life," said another American based Kashmiri, Dr. Ambreen Andrabi who lives in Los Angeles.

"Majority of them enjoy and value Kashmiri culture's splendour, especially the papier mache art," she added.

Another US based Kashmiri Syed Aauqib Andrabi, said that Kashmir has been long known for its art and craft. As we are living abroad we have the responsibility to contribute in any way possible, he said.

"Certain art works available in Kashmir like papier-mache is unique and we as Kashmiris living anywhere own the responsibility to prevent this art from dying. Social media platforms play a huge role these days to promote this art. Kashmir papier-mache purses have found a huge liking in people in the US and we need to make more and more efforts to promote it," he said.

"Living in America over the years we have seen a lot of efforts going in to promote the dying art of papier-mache," he said.

He further said that Kashmiri Gathering of North America (KGNA) is a huge platform where people showcase the Kashmir art. "Vendors set up booths and people from all over the USA participate," he said, adding that 2022 KGNA was held in Niagara Falls and was a true showcase of Kashmiri art, especially papier-mache, shawls etc.

Kashmiri kids talking about this art to

the public was a huge step moving forward. Papier-mache items like wall décor, bangles, ear rings were big attractions for everyone. In 2022 in New York various events were held to promote Kashmiri art and received a positive response.

"Living here I myself have realised the need to support this dying art and educate people about this. Setting up these items at home or some items like pen holders in the office is a small effort we can make to tell people about it," Andrabi added.

On the other end, he mentioned that people who are associated with the craft seem disgruntled because of the low marketing of the Papier Mache items.

Similarly, a craftsman Gh. Hassan Khan, who lives in Hassan Abad, Srinagar, said that they are not actually satisfied because it is a time-consuming job with less reward. "It takes weeks to prepare a piece of this art and then there is no proper marketing channel due to which we face financial challenges," he said.

Khan said that the government is expected to promote the art in the country and the diaspora need to vehemently promote it abroad. "During the tourist season, we feel that tourists love this art and pay a handsome return which reminds us that there is a dearth of proper publicity and awareness," he said.



Certain art works available in Kashmir like **papier-mache** is unique and we as Kashmiris living anywhere own the responsibility to prevent this art from dying. **Social media** platforms play a huge role these days to promote this art. Kashmir papier-mache purses have found a huge liking in people in the **US** and we need to make more and more efforts to promote it



Male fibre artist in Kashmir breaks gender stereotype

Mehroob Mushtaq

Nazar Nasir, 23, a resident of Lal Bazar, has chosen to pursue his passion for crochet, knitting, and macramé as a full-time profession, despite societal stereotypes. Nasir, who holds an honors degree in English literature, gave up on his master's degree to pursue his love for crafting. His journey started in 2016, when he stumbled upon the craft by chance. Since then, Nasir has honed his skills and turned his passion into a successful career.

Initially, he experimented with basic stitches and was immediately hooked. Nasir only fully learned the craft after the internet was restored after a spell of lockdown, allowing him to research and discover the vast potential of fiber art. He has since mastered various fiber crafts and continues to explore his creative endeavors. His passion soon turned into a small business, 'Knotty Crafts', after he started sharing his work on social media and received a flood of orders.

Nazar Nasir has plans to use his craft to address societal issues in his community. He aims to introduce crocheting and knitting



to children as a means to expand their creativity and reduce their dependence on digital devices. Additionally, Nazar hopes to create employment opportunities for skilled people in Kashmir.

He believes that providing new platforms

and exposure to new opportunities will enhance creativity and reduce mental health issues such as anxiety and stress. Nazar, who was diagnosed with PSVT in 2013, has personally experienced the healing effects of knitting and crocheting on mental and physical health. He plans to conduct workshops in schools and raise awareness on the benefits of these crafts in his community.

Nazar expressed his desire to host workshops on knitting and crocheting for people of all ages, citing the mental health benefits of these crafts. He believes that they can be therapeutic and used as a creative outlet for negative energy, and does not necessarily have to be a source of income.

He also wants to combat stereotypes surrounding fiber crafts, which have been viewed as a feminine and pursuits for elderly. To do so, he plans to organize awareness programs, events, and workshops that promote gender-inclusivity in the arts and crafts field. Nazar hopes to encourage individuals to pursue these activities as hobbies or careers with a strong passion and a sense of responsibility towards addressing real-world issues.

Curve Electric introduces first eco-friendly bike service in Valley

Uzma Shabnam

A Kashmir based start-up Curve Electric has launched first of its kind shared electric cycling, e-bikes, in Srinagar, thereby introducing first eco-friendly bike service in the Kashmir Valley. These e-bikes have become a new centre of attraction and an affordable mode of transportation mostly for students.

One of the members of Curve Electric said the step is aimed to encourage eco-friendly transportation and lower air pollution in the city, besides, offering locals and visitors an affordable and convenient mode of transportation.

He said the e-bikes have powerful cells that enable them to travel up to 55 km on a single charge. "They produce no emissions, making them a perfect option for lowering city's carbon impact."

Curve Electric founder Sheikh Yameen said they are proud to be part of this initiative and to help Srinagar reach its sustainability goals.

"We believe our e-bikes are



perfect solution for everyone and are technologically advanced with GPS-enabled system. The top pace is at 25 km/h and these battery powered cycles have a 55 km range per refill," he added.

For the convenience of commuters across the city charging stations are being installed at a number of locations including Islamia College, Dalgate, Botanical Garden, Nishat, Kashmir University, Illahi Bagh, Soura, TRC, Kothi Bagh, Raj Bagh, Sanat Nagar, and Bemina.

Meanwhile, Head of Operations Zubair Bhat explained how riders can use the service by providing their Aadhar Card

and phone number for the first time after which they are only required to use their phone number.

According to Zubair, anyone can pedal the electric bikes. "We want to turn it into a mode of transportation and everyone should use it regularly. It will save time, money, effort, and most importantly the environment, and it is expected to be a safe ride."

He said customers will be charged 0.90 paise per minute and payments can be made online or offline at the docking point.

"However, since nobody rides at night, it is not pleasant to leave the e-bikes on the roadside. With the safety of the e-bikes in mind, our e-autos will pick them up to guarantee safety," he added.

Qamran, a student of Kashmir University, said, "I love riding e-bikes around the city. They are very simple to use, parking and traffic is not an issue".

Another student Bilal said he used to spend a lot of money on transportation and from the university.

"Now I can hire an e-bike with ease, save money, and help create an environment-friendly future," he said.



Migratory birds return to Wular, Khushalsar after decades

Numan Bhat / Aakash Gulzar

Hundreds of migratory birds have flocked to Khushalsar for the first time in three decades while Asia's second largest freshwater lake has witnessed a group of rare migrant and vulnerable species of Long-Tailed Ducks last seen in Hokersar Lake in 1939, after 83 years.

The Khushal lake is situated in the heart of downtown Srinagar which, at its best, extends from Zoonimar to Aali Kadal, the Asia's second-largest freshwater body-Wular is located in the northern parts of Kashmir including Bandipora and Sopore.

The rare sighting of new species in both the lakes have enthralled bird watchers and the people residing around these water bodies. They say the development is happening first time after several decades.

"Even though migratory birds visit Kashmir's water bodies and wetlands every winter, there was no doubt that these birds would prefer to stay at KhushalSar because of its deplorable condition," said Sahil Malik, a local resident of Downtown, who was jubilant after seeing the birds in the water body.

"It was a dying water body that had largely been turned into a garbage dumping spot but the flocking of the birds suggests that the water body has finally regained its lost glory," he added.

Locals expressed their happiness over the change and appreciation for it. "This urban water body was a landfill and was in its latter stages of extinction. It is now having a good number of migratory birds pouring in. It is good to witness the scenes and very encouraging," a local resident said.

In 2021, the Nigeen Lake Conservation Organization (NLCO), an authority which was set up for the lake's conservation and the government joined hands to resurrect Khushalsar, which had been a dumping ground for the previous three decades.

Fishes were bred in the lake again last year. Hundreds of migratory birds are currently residing within the lake, which has become a popular destination for people in general and tourists in particular.

Manzoor Ahmad Wangnoo, chairman of the Nigeen Lake Conservation Organization (NLCO), said that various bird species have been witnessed in the lake this winter.

At first, Wangnoo said, he couldn't believe this development as it had almost been three decades since migratory birds have rested in this lake. However, he said since last several months hundreds of new birds thronged the lake. "We were able to make it happen because of the divisional administration's support," he said.

Wangnoo further said that different volunteer teams are currently assigned to feed and protect these birds. "Our volunteers work extremely hard to keep the lake clean and these birds safe. More birds



These **migratory birds** are also our guests, and we should treat them with the same courtesy that we do humans. We have a habit of disposing of our solid waste in these bodies of water, making cleaning difficult for both the **birds** and the **caretakers**"

are expected to visit the lake in the coming years," he said.

For the last three decades, migratory birds have made this lake again their winter home bringing cheers to hundreds of bird watchers and tourists.

According to Wangnoo, even fishes began to appear in the lake last year after various fish species were spotted and locals started fishing in the lake.

Ifshan Dewan, Wildlife Warden, Wetlands, stated that the NGO and Lake and Waterways Development Authority will be assisted in monitoring the birds. "Restoring the lake was a fantastic initiative. This lake is not under our jurisdiction, but we will assist them in monitoring the birds," she said.

Last year, the Jammu and Kashmir government and NLCO made a significant breakthrough by restoring the traditional navigation routes of Khushalsar Lake. The government and NLCO cleaned the Zadibal-Sazgaripra and Saidapora navigation route of Khushalsar as part of Phase 2 of 'Mission Ehsaas'.

Irfan Rasool, an official of Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA) said that a group of five ducks were seen foraging in Wular lake on January 22 by his field officers and they subsequently recorded its details on their field book and captured pictures of ducks.

The pictures, he said, were later shared with ornithologists (a person who studies birds) for identification and it was discovered that the birds are in fact, rare migrants known as "Long Tailed Duck".

Notably, the last record of this bird was reported from Hokersar lake in 1939 as mentioned by F. Ludlow in a research paper published in "Journal of the Bombay

Natural History Society.

Mudasir said that it is after 84 years that bird has been spotted again in Kashmir and has been documented now. "There are only a few sites in India which meet the 1% criteria necessary for the survival and propagation of this duck species," he said.

The eco-restoration of Wular lake has created ray of hope, as recorded number of migratory birds have visited Wular lake, this year, he said adding that the rare sightings have been of Common Pochard, Red crested Pochard and Long tailed Duck apart from other common water birds normally seen in other wetlands.

According to official, many international and national reputed bird photographers are thronging the Lake to capture these rare sightings of migratory birds in the lake who are making their way back to their homes after decades.

The official further said that on February 15 a bird census which was carried out by the WCMA revealed that 50 thousands birds including common pochards Ruddy Shellducks Grelag Geese and others were recorded.

The arrival of migratory birds this year brought excitement and joy to the lives of locals and tourists who came to see them, and it demonstrated that the wular still has its natural habitat to attract these migratory birds, according to Ghulam Mohammed, a fisherman, who lives near the banks of the Wular near Saderkoot, Bandipora.

He also said, "These migratory birds are also our guests, and we should treat them with the same courtesy that we do humans. We have a habit of disposing of our solid waste in these bodies of water, making cleaning difficult for both the birds and the caretakers."



Ceasefire on LoC brings relief to people



Sajid Raina

With a feeling of optimism, Sara Begum, a 68-year-old woman from Tarbal

village, which is the last Indian village at Bagtore sector of Gurez Tehsil in Bandipora district, approximately 123 kilometres from Srinagar, was busy redecorating her two-storey house that was damaged in 2019 due to cross border shelling.

Meanwhile, the other villagers were cheerfully carrying out their daily tasks, and children were running around in the meadows, no longer worried about the gunfire that had caused so much death and sorrow for so many decades.

For decades, the Gurez Valley—once a gateway on the famous Silk Road—has been fraught with the echoes of cross-border shelling. As the guns have fallen silent now, it is fast becoming one of Kashmir's most popular Himalayan tourist destinations.

Renowned for its beauty, vast forests, pastures, and green meadows, the Gurez Valley offers tourists a tranquil and serene environment. It is also the homeland of the Dards or Dard Shins - an ethnic group from Dardistan, which today straddles India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan on Line of Control (LoC) has completed more than two years. In the past two years, as per officials there hasn't been a report of even a single incident of ceasefire violation.

The agreement was finalised between armies of both the



Festivities and celebrations such as weddings and engagements have resumed with cheer and people are enjoying them without the fear that was plaguing them previously

neighboring nations on 25 February 2021 via Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) level talks.

Sara said that for the past year, a normal life has been lived in the region and the sounds of artillery shells are no longer heard. People are busily decorating their settlements again, which were destroyed during the shelling. The peace that the border residents had been longing for decades is now being felt and she expressed the wish that it would remain so and that people do not have to go through the same tragedy again.

Sara is now redecorating her home with the hope that the atmosphere of peace and order will be sustained on the borders.

Mohammad Afzal, a 60-year-old resident of Karnah Tehsil, located in the picturesque and scenic corner of the Kashmir Valley, between the mountainous ranges of Qazi Nag and Nanga Parbat, feels his residence secure since the agreement.

The beautiful Karnah region is blessed with majestic mountains,

snow-capped peaks, lush forests, and scattered dwellings; however, it has been the target of artillery fire for many years.

He recalled how their lives were plagued by relentless shelling for decades, leading to the loss of many beloved ones and the devastation of their homes. The border residents, he said, had longed for justice. They are now able to forget their pain and suffering as they are enjoying the life of peace and tranquility.

Nahida, an undergraduate student from Kupwara's Titwal, a once-important township and trade center that served as an alternate pony route linking Srinagar with Rawalpindi and Muzaffarabad, expressed her hope that the peace on the Line of Control (LoC) will renew the region's tourism industry, transforming the once war-torn areas into tourist hotspots.

Abdul Gaffar, an elderly local from Nambra village of Uri, recounted a tragic incident from 2019 in which two of his neighbors were killed. He explained that his village has been the battleground for forces from both the sides of the Titwal-Karnah division since 1947, with the exception of last year.

His words came with a heavy heart, as he expressed his hope that the relatives, friends, and ethnic groups separated by the Line of Control would one day reunite in peace and tranquility. "We have relatives across the border. We just pray that the people of both regions will live in peace and tranquility," he said.

The locals of Tulail express hope that such a peaceful atmosphere would endure for many generations. Moreover, they said that their lives had greatly improved in the last year, for prior to this, they were spending their days trying to protect themselves. They further noted that the ceasefire agreement should be maintained in order to keep the newfound tranquility.

The locals said that now they are waiting for the government when there will be development in their village.

Mohammad Mubashir, a resident of Tangdar, said that people have resumed their routine. They are able to work in their lands and do other kind of jobs as situation has improved.

He further noted that there is a sense of calm and order in the atmosphere, "Festivities and celebrations such as weddings and engagements have resumed with cheer and people are enjoying them without the fear that was plaguing them previously," he concluded.

Cancer survivor turns into exporter, employer

Ada Jan

Urfiya Mehraj, (28) a mother of two children born and brought up in the old city, Srinagar started an online business while battling Cancer. Urfiya has been married in Nowgam for the last five years. She wanted to take her legacy of 'Tilla and Zardozi' work forward, embedded with a modern blend. Many generations from her family were involved with this craft.

She wanted to show her legacy to the world. And it was when her cousin who lives in US came to Kashmir to meet the family, Urfiya discussed the idea to start an online business with the cousin and sought help.

Urfiya opened an Instagram page in 2019 namely "Rozgar Kul". She intended to introduce Tilla work in the international market, for people to recognize the work. Her cousin encouraged her and told her to take the first step, "I will make a website for you." Urfiya recalls, "Soon after, I was about to take my first step, Article 370 was abrogated and everything suddenly stopped."

"And when everything started getting better," Urfiya recalls, "I thought that I would give all my time to my business. I needed samples for my website and I did not have them so I started collecting samples from different Tilla Soz (who do the same work as TILLA) from Downtown so that I could grow my business further."

"I was in the final stage of building my website, during that time I felt something unusual in my breasts. I immediately

consulted a doctor, soon after I came to know I was diagnosed with Fibroadenoma. A biopsy test was carried out the result of the test confirmed that it was a grade 3 Carcinoma," Urfiya said.

"My life was shattered, everything seemed strangely deserted. I could not understand what I should do," she added.

After a while, her chemotherapy started immediately and she underwent eight rounds of therapies. "While I was getting my chemotherapy done, there was 15 days of gap in between every therapy session. In these 15 days I used to have so much pain I could not tolerate it. There was no strength in my body to fight this thing," Urfiya said, while recalling her ordeal.

Urfiya after undergoing Radiotherapy, mustered courage and decided to get negative thoughts out of her mind. "My motivation for me was my father, my husband and my in laws too. Those people encouraged me a lot; they supported me. They invested in my business because I myself was not earning that's when I started working on my page," Urfiya said.

"Rozgar Kul" customises Tilla apparels, Jackets, Tilla coats and whatever customer demands. "I started posting photos of my works, my first post was in June 2020 which was the work of my father and at the very first moment I got several inquiries related to it from a number of people," Urfiya said.

"I will try to make my own product and in that I will include more boys and girls who will work with me," she said.

Hoping to take her work to new heights

she said, "Hopefully, our Tilla work and Aari work will go far ahead and many people will like it. I hope I along with my workers find good work."

Urfiya has named her venture as "Rozgar Kul" meaning as a source of employment for all, as she aims to provide employment to youth. "In Srinagar I am delivering the product myself and use an out-source service for other districts," she said.

She is even exporting her products. "We always talk about brands and all but people don't know we have a brand of our own which is now worn by outsiders and celebrities. I want that our art work will get importance as it deserves and it goes in the right direction," she laments.

"Earlier my grandfather used to do this work, and he passed this art to my father and then from him it reached to me. This art is given less importance in Kashmir but the people from outside understand it, they know the hard work that goes behind it and people from outside like our tradition very much," she added.

My motivation for me was my father, my husband and my in laws too. Those people encouraged me a lot; they supported me. They invested in my business because I myself was not earning that's when I started working on my page.

Lake of garbage dumping facility evokes resentment in Kupwara

Faizan Qureshi

In northern Kashmir's Kupwara district, the failure of authorities to arrange a garbage dumping facility has evoked widespread resentment among the locals as heaps of domestic and other solid waste are lying scattered across the town, residents complained here.

The district generates tons of garbage daily and in the absence of proper dumping sites people throw all the domestic waste collected from their homes into rivers and at open places.

There are two municipal committees and one municipal Council in the district but the irony is that they have not been able to find a solution to this problem.

Several senior citizens while complaining about the issue said that the garbage being collected by municipal authorities from various areas is being



dumped in open spaces and rivers here that emanate foul smell making the pedestrian movement difficult.

They further said that the garbage emanates foul smell and has become a health hazard for the people while it also attracts dogs, cattle and insects.

Fatima Begum, an elderly woman said, they would use water from Lolab river for drinking and bathing purpose but due to dumping of garbage into the river the locals now avoid using it even for washing clothes.

"We have raised the issue of dumping site many times with the concerned officials but they are not paying any heed due to which we are suffering," Lateef Lone, another resident of Langate town said.

Majid Ahmad, a resident of Handwara town said it is a sorry state of affairs that the government department is allowing degradation of environment and the natural resources by turning "blind" towards dumping waste into water bodies.

Meanwhile, the residents across the district have appealed the concerned authorities to locate the land for dumping sites.



Dreams, Despair in Dal



Qamran Javaid Mir

In the summer, at around 4 in the morning as people wake up for Fajr, Mohammad Ramzan Akhooon leaves his single-story house, trudging along the crackling wooden steps outside the front door. This is his everyday routine.

Adjacent to his house, he opens the door of a little shanty laboriously and reaches out to grab the gunny bags full of vegetables his wife picks from their kitchen garden. A few years ago, the shanty, which has now become a storeroom, served as the only shelter for the Akhooon family, one of the few last surviving families on a patch of land placed in the middle of Dal Lake in Srinagar. Most who lived there have left in search of better homes and better facilities in other parts of the city.

By the Shanty, Akhooon loads the gunnysacks into his small, dilapidated boat, which remains fastened to a slender poplar tree, and starts paddling through the stream of water which passes through his home in Habak, Shanpora of Srinagar and leads him towards the Dal Lake.

After paddling through the murky water, he reaches his spot – a wooden skeleton fixed on the roadside where he sells the vegetables – on the boulevard, on the opposite side of Dal. He spreads a tarpaulin, which he takes off every evening, over the wooden structure and starts to stack up the veggies in front of him in this makeshift shop.

'I have sold vegetables on this spot for over 18 years. 5 years ago, I set up this structure for my convenience. I don't own this roadside but the authorities have never touched my spot,' Ramzan says.

Right next to this makeshift shop,

between the roadside and mounds of dredged silt and mud from the lake, is a narrow patch of land where Ramzan has grown turnips.

'In summer, I will sow collard seeds in it. It is like this. For people it is just a usual roadside, for us, it is our livelihood. The situations we face compel us to make adversities into opportunities. Yi gov kanni manz rizq kadun,' Ramzan says implying life teaches one to create something out of nothing.

Ramzan has efficiently made sections of the strip and cultivated various varieties on seemingly barren and useless land. Ramzan grows turnips, radishes, carrots, and collard, among other vegetables on this strip. He has been doing it for nearly eight years now.

'Our kitchen garden is not that big so I came up with this idea to use this muddy mound of lakeside to cultivate vegetables. It does no harm to anyone. The earning from it in desperate times has fed my family,' he recalls.

In 2014, their shanty was flooded with water. For 3 years the family lived in a single rented room in the neighborhood. Recent times have also been hard for the Akhooon family. With successive lockdowns in Kashmir, the family found it tough to survive.

'Although the produce was abundant, there were no buyers. But I could not have afforded to stay stagnant. I started selling vegetables on a cart in the adjacent areas. That didn't fetch much but saved my family from starvation,' he says.

The younger son of Ramzan, Mashooq, 22, is handicapped by polio. He stays at home with his mother. The responsibility to manage his handicapped brother has

always been on Mohammad Iqbal, 25, Ramzan's eldest son. With her mother toiling to grow sellable vegetables in the garden and his father braving the mercurial climate of Kashmir, Iqbal was the only one taking care of his brother at home.

'I love my brother. It is not a burden for me but, at times, one gets annoyed at one's own life. My studies took a hit after 8th. I could not go to school regularly. So, I failed in my 10th exams,' Mohammad Iqbal says reclining against a poplar tree in their courtyard.

After some time, her mother, Hafeeza, was diagnosed with a back problem and was advised by the local doctor to avoid her grueling garden work. Subsequently, Iqbal had to furnish his service for their vegetable business, leaving his studies.

'The decision still pains me but the circumstances made it inevitable for me to continue studying. I believe I could have done better in my studies had I continued. But I and my family would have suffered,' Iqbal says.

With a sliver of hope of normalcy, Iqbal decided to leave his family's business and start working in a clothing shop at Nishat. Iqbal works there as a proprietor to date, and according to his father, contributes to the family income handsomely. His engagement is scheduled for December this year. Ramzan still runs his vegetable shop on the Boulevard.

'Shukur khudayas kun. It is hard to believe that some years ago we did not have a roof over our heads. We have a house to live in, I have an earning son ready to be married off, and I have a nice family. I am thankful after all,' Ramzan says in glee.



Rug for New Parliament

A carpet woven in tragedy, hope

Attaul Munim Zahid

On a cloudy morning, in his village of Khag, Shunglipora, Mohammad Haneef Malik is reading the 'Taleem' – the code of the overall design of the carpet – in a humming tone and his coworkers are implementing the direction on the strands of the loom with no delay.

Haneef and his co-workers sit in the attic of his home. A carpet-loom faces them which they have been weaving since January. A few feet of the warp strands stretching along the loom have been filled with wefts; the desired carpet has started to take its shape.

They are weaving one of the twelve carpets which will adorn the floor of the new parliament of India. They seem cheerful.

"Before this project we used to get some odd 1800 rupees for one feet of carpet we wove. The share was 90 rupees for each three of us a day. Now, with his project at hand, we earn 400 rupees a day, with seems to be development," Tariq Ahmad Malik, one of the two co-workers of Haneef, says.

Haneef draws the wefts into the warp strands with his once severed hand. The depression of the gash is still prominent in his right hand palm.

In 2009, 14 years old Haneef had waded wafting his stick to direct his herd of cattle to a fresh patch of grassland in the meadow of Tosa Maidan. Haneef was accompanied by his friend Mohammad Akram. The vast stretch of meadow was still used by the Army as a firing and artillery range.

"We were following our cattle when I heard sharp bangs. I turned away from the cattle to look, the army was firing. I couldn't figure out the direction they were firing," Haneef says. "It was so chaotic, the cattle started to run away and disperse in every



I have been doing this carpet weaving business since childhood but after coming out of the hospital it was extremely difficult to work. Weaving needs a lot of patience. My legs and arms would be tired immediately

direction. Akram and I had started to run after our cattle when earth shook from over feet and I fell unconscious."

A shell had exploded under them. When Akram regained conscious he found himself in the Intensive Care Unit of SMHS. The femur of his left leg was fractured with his right arm and hand wounded. Akram was injured more severely with his right hand palm severed. They remained there for almost six months.

Almost 65 civilian have been killed in Tosa Maidan by the unexploded shells left as such. More than 200 people have been maimed for life, too. Once an artillery range for the army and airforce, Tosa Maidan was vacated in 2014 and the government immediately started to promote it as a tourist destination. The unexploded shells waited to be cleared.

"I have been doing this carpet weaving business since childhood but after coming out of the hospital it was extremely difficult to work. Weaving needs a lot of patience. My legs and arms would be tired immediately," Haneef says.

Haneef took a break for some time from carpet weaving but couldn't prolong the sojourn owing to the needs of his family.

"I finally started taking orders from contractors. The profit was very less, not more than 80 or 90 rupees a day. But I couldn't quit. I had my own compulsions."

The artisans from Khag, Shunglipora, a distant area in Budgam, are famous for

making internationally hankered carpets. The order of 12 carpets have been distributed among various families and working groups. Last year, in November, they got the order and have complete 7 carpets till date. The deadline to complete all 12 is March of this year.

"It will take us just 2 months to complete the remaining 5 carpets," Mohammad Akram, Haneef's friend, says.

The actual order for these carpets had come to Haneef and other artisans of Khag from a local contractor of Khanpora, Budgam. The contractor had tried to coerce them to work on a menial amount of 80 rupees a day.

"We stopped working when the contractor decreased the sum he was supposed to pay us per day. The local contractor was usurping the half the amount he had to give us. After negotiating for a week and the mediation of the actual contractor from Delhi, the amount was set at 400 per day. That made us work again. These contractors have always been exploiting us poor labourers," Mohammad Ibrahim, another worker, said.

The local contractor, as per the artisans of Khag, has been bringing local media to Khanpora and giving interviews as to how they are making the carpets.

"This makes me angry. There is no carpet weaver in Khanpora but Khag, Shunglipora. They are taking the due credit from us. The contractor has been exploiting us in whatever way possible," Haneef says.



MERTimes

Vol 16 | Issue 02 | Pages 08 | MARCH 31, 2023

**MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR**

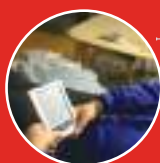


Women 'Waza'

INSIDE {STORIES}



MERC organises Iqbal Library,
Museum visit for students
P03



KU's literature students promote
reading hard books
P04



Aisha's determination to educate her son
inspires whole community
P06



KU organises cultural program at Y-20 Summit

Mir Mehmood

In honor of the delegates of the Y-20 consultation summit, a cultural program was organised at the University of Kashmir in Srinagar. The event aims to celebrate culture, diversity, and friendship and will feature a range of cultural performances depicting the vibrant Kashmiri culture.

According to Shahid Ali Khan, the Cultural Officer of the University of Kashmir, the cultural committee, under the leadership of the Dean of Students' Welfare and the mentorship of Vice-Chancellor Prof. Nilofer Khan, has curated a diverse range of cultural performances. These performances will include light, classical, and traditional music, folk dances, and more, which will



capture the essence of the region and its people.

Khan also expressed his satisfaction in the hard work and dedication of the organizers and performers, hoping that the event will promote a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and its role in fostering peace and

understanding.

The Y-20 consultation summit will showcase the University of Kashmir as a hub for intellectual and academic excellence, reflecting its commitment to promoting critical thinking and innovative solutions to the world's most pressing problems. Additionally, the summit's hosting will bring significant economic benefits to the local community, attracting a large number of international delegates and leading to increased tourism and investment opportunities in the region.

Overall, the cultural program is expected to be a vibrant and exciting celebration of Kashmiri culture, providing a platform for delegates to connect with the people and traditions of the region.

Night bus service in Srinagar brings relief to people

Mehroob Mushtaq

The government in recently started a new initiative in Srinagar city to provide night bus services on several routes, ensuring that people without their own transportation can have access to an accessible and reliable transportation system in the evening hours.

This move was a huge relief for the local people who had been struggling to commute after dark.

The decision was announced by V K Bidhuri, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, during a meeting where he directed the State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) to make their buses available until 10 PM starting at 2 PM.

Regional Transport Officer (RTO) Kashmir, Syed Shahnawaz Bukhari, said that the introduction of night bus services on several routes was aimed at providing people with a trustworthy transportation system, as well as to give people access to the Dalgate-Boulevard road.

The decision, he said was also influenced by past events where people without access to transportation wanted to visit places but were unable to due to a lack of transportation services.

"With the Boulevard Road now open to the public in the evening, the introduction of night bus services was considered necessary to ensure that people could breathe a sigh of relief," the RTO said.

Many local residents expressed their happiness with the new initiative, stating that it would be a huge relief for them.

Mohammad Shafi, a local resident, said that in the absence of public transportation, people



do not come out in the evening. However, with the introduction of night bus services, he said that people would be able to move around with ease.

Abdul Hameed, another elderly resident, said that although Sumo taxis travel along certain routes throughout the day, they switch to shorter routes after 3 PM.

He said that the introduction of night bus services on the Chadoora-Soura route and the Lal Chowk-Dalgate to Harwan route was a welcome move by the authorities and people like us were grateful to RTO Kashmir for taking this step.

The SRTC's Chadoora-Soura bus service operates ten buses in two shifts, running from 8 AM to 9 PM. The buses travel from Chadoora to Soura through various stops, including

Wathoora, Kralpora, Mouchwa, Bagi e mehtab, Chanapora, Natipora, Rambagh, Solina, Jahangir Chowk, Batamaloo, Qamarwari, Cement Bridge, Ali Jan Road, and Soura.

Similarly, the Parimpora-Harwan route will have four buses operating between 5 PM and 10 PM, with a 15-minute break between them. The buses will travel from Parimpora to Harwan through several stops, including Batmaloo, Jahangir Chowk, Lal Chowk, Dalgate, Brien, Shalimar Bagh, Pazwalpora, Shalimar, Arabal, and Chandpora, Harwan, before returning along the same route.

Overall, the new night bus services initiative was welcomed by the people across the city as it provided a reliable transportation system that they could rely on even in the late hours of the evening.



MERC organises Iqbal Library, Museum visit for students

Yasmeena Rasheed

Media Education Research Centre (MERC), University of Kashmir organised a visit to the varsity's Central Library known as Allama Iqbal Library and the Central Asian Museum housed in the library block. The visit was conducted to familiarise the students with these important institutions of the university, the authorities said.

Kashmir University's Allama Iqbal Library has a long-standing history of serving the academic needs of students, scholars, and researchers.

Established in 1949, the library was created to cater to the growing needs of the university community, shared by both the University of Jammu and the University of Kashmir until 1975.

The University of Kashmir then moved the library to a new multi-storied building, where it currently stands, renaming it twice, first in 1984 to Iqbal Library and then in July 2002 to Allama Iqbal Library.

With an extensive collection of over six lakh books and growing, the library is divided into 16 well-decorated, centrally heated divisions. The library's staff is well-trained and qualified to manage it, providing a cosy, clean, and calm

environment that offers a conducive atmosphere for users to concentrate.

The students were awed by the vast collection of artefacts displayed beautifully in glass cases. They saw a variety of objects, including old pottery, coins, jewellery, and musical instruments from Central Asia.

One of the most interesting exhibits was a section dedicated to the ancient Silk Road, a network of trade routes that connected Asia, Europe, and Africa. The students learned about the cultural exchanges that took place along the Silk Road and how they contributed to the development of various civilisations.

Upon entering the museum, the students were greeted by the sight of ancient artefacts displayed beautifully in glass cases. The variety of objects on display was impressive, including old pottery, coins, jewellery, and even musical instruments from Central Asia.

One of the most fascinating displays was a section dedicated to the ancient Silk Road, which connected Asia, Europe, and Africa. The students learned about the cultural exchanges that took place along the Silk Road and how they contributed to the development of various civilisations. Another interesting exhibit was a collection of old manuscripts containing

valuable information about the history and culture of Central Asia, displaying intricate calligraphy and beautiful illustrations.

The students' experiences in the museum were enlightening, with Uzma Shabnam, a student of MERC, stating, "It was a great experience for me to visit the Central Asian Museum as each artefact told a story, and each exhibit spoke about the diversity and beauty of the museum."

Nuzhat Masoodi, another student of the same batch, also commented on how they saw symbols of assurance in the museum while learning about different kingdoms such as the Mongolian, Alexander empires, and Kushan movements that had come and gone in Central Asia.

After exploring the ancient coins, manuscripts, dresses, and historical items of Kashmir, the students also saw the skeletons of cavemen found in Burzuhama, an eye-opening experience that taught them about the evolution of humans and the ancient history of the region.

The artefacts preserved in the museum provide a clear picture of the ancestral cultural heritage and the reigns of different rulers. This museum is helpful for the new generation so that they could have detailed information about the history," stated another student, Ilhak Ahmad Tantray.



KU, District Police Sgr jointly organise cultural program under civic action programme

Ada Jaan

A cultural program was held on Monday at University of Kashmir (UoK) which was jointly organised by the Department of Student's Welfare, UoK, and District Police Srinagar (Zone Hazratbal) under its civic action programme at the University's main campus.

Students from the various departments, affiliated colleges, other higher education institutions and social workers attended the programme. Many musical performances and Kashmiri traditional dance forms were performed.

Vice-Chancellor, Kashmir University Professor Nilofer Khan was the Chief Guest on the occasion, while Superintendent of Police, Hazratbal, Mashkoor Ahmad Zargar was the guest of honour.

The programme was also attended by senior KU officers including Registrar Dr Nisar A Mir, Dean Students Welfare Prof Aneesa Shafi, Director EMRC Dr Salima Jan, Joint Registrar Dr Ashfaq Zarri, I/C Director IT and SS Dr Maroof Qadri, Chief Proctor Dr Imtiyaz A Khan, besides several police officers from Hazratbal Zone including DySP Showket Ahmad Dar, SDPO



Zakura; DySP Azhar Rashid, SDPO Zadibal; Inspector Javeed Ahmad Khan, SHO, Police Station Nigeen; Sub-Inspector Mohammad Arif Dar, D.O Hazratbal and all other SHOs and DOs of the Zone.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Nilofer Khan thanked the J&K police department for holding the cultural programme at the university. These events provide a platform for the students and they get an opportunity to showcase and bring out their hidden talent, she said.

"Such programs should not be limited we should go beyond to raise awareness on social issues like mental health, drug abuse and other issues as these programs channelize the potential of youth and it is

important for youth to understand the role being played by the police for the welfare of youth," Prof Neelofer Khan said.

Speaking on the occasion Superintendent of Police, Hazratbal Mashkoor Ahmad Zargar thanked the university authorities for providing space for the cultural programme. He said the police will hold more such programs with the university in future.

Later, the Vice-Chancellor, Superintendent of Police Hazratbal and other invited dignitaries presented mementoes and cash prizes among the participating students as a token of appreciation.

Earlier, Dean Students' Welfare Prof Aneesa Shafi while highlighting the purpose of the programme said, "We use to organize such programs to generalize the youth and to give opportunities to the youth. We keep organizing such programs and this is not the first time we are doing it. Today we have got a chance in which our students are participating with full of enthusiasm and this program will be under the Y20." Cultural Officer KU Shahid Ali Khan conducted the proceedings of the cultural program.

KU's literature students promote culture of reading hard books



Saima Shaban

In today's world, with the advent of digitization, literature has become more accessible to people. With the ease of accessing soft copies of literature at lower prices, a large number of people, especially the millennials, are opting for the convenience of online texts and eBooks. However,

there is still a segment of readers who are passionate about the traditional way of consuming literature, which involves reading hard copy books.

In a recent discussion with literature students at Kashmir University, they expressed their thoughts about literary texts and their interpretations of them. Some students claimed that reading a book or a novel is an emotional experience that requires concentration and focus.

"Reading a text is about feeling removed from the ordinary world and transported into a fictional realm, where the reader can travel through time and space," Asif

Maqbool one of students said and argued that literature stimulates the creative minds of the readers.

When asked why they choose to read hard copy books, he along with other students responded that the satisfaction of completing a book and the tactile experience of turning pages and feeling the texture and smell of the paper cannot be replicated in

reading eBooks on gadgets.

Furkaan Khurshid another student said that the essence of highlighting text and writing in between the lines is lost in eBooks. Another student put it, "You can see the world in a small grain of dust through literature."

Despite acknowledging the benefits of eBooks and online journals, the students were concerned that fewer young people were reading hard copy books and visiting physical libraries. Furkaan fear that this trend may lead to the extinction of books. They urged young people to seek out books, visit libraries, and prevent books from becoming obsolete.

The passion for reading hard copy books is not dead yet, as many students still value the tactile experience and emotional journey that comes with reading physical books.

While technology has brought convenience and affordability to literature, it is important to preserve the tradition of reading physical books and visiting libraries, as they offer unique experiences that cannot be replicated in the digital world.



Kashmir's first women 'waza' making history

Uzma Shabnam

In a first-of-its-kind fair, women from different areas of Kashmir came together to break the stereotypes and showcase their passion for culinary skills. The locals of Kashmir witnessed a never-before-seen sight of Kashmiri ladies serving up traditional Kashmiri Wazwan and popular barbecued dishes at an 11-day women-led fair organized by the Jammu & Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission along the shores of Dal Lake in Srinagar. LG Manoj Sinha also attended the Saras Aajeevika Mela

These women, who continued to inspire many with their courage and skills, opened new doors for themselves and empowered other women to follow their dreams.

The mela, organised under the SARAS (Sale of Articles of Rural Artisans Society) scheme, aimed to provide a platform for women entrepreneurs and bring their locally produced quality goods to the attention of a wider audience. The Mela began at the Banks of Dal Lake from 15th to 25th March. The female chefs at the event came from diverse backgrounds.

Khushbu, a Self Help Group, has established its own unit with pride, thanks to the contributions of Humaira, Ishrat Irshad, Zahida Basheer, Akhtar Jan, and Yasmeena Bano.

Humaira, a young woman from the Lar area of Ganderbal, is the head of her group. She is committed to preserving

traditional Kashmiri cuisine and sharing it with a broader audience. She recounted the obstacles she faced as a woman pursuing a career as a 'Waza' in a predominantly male field.

"Since I was a child, I've been admiring my mother's and grandmother's culinary skills, and I've been determined to make it my profession. I've always been passionate about preserving our cultural culinary traditions, particularly learning to prepare the customary Kashmiri dishes," said Humaira.

"I dedicated significant time towards consistently working and practicing daily. I am proud to be one of the pioneering female waza in Kashmir, and to have served as an inspiration for numerous other women," she added.

A vast crowd, comprising tourists and locals alike, flocked to the event and relished the mouth-watering dishes prepared by the women. In addition, the event coordinators had set up stalls for regional craftsmen to exhibit their handcrafted goods, ranging from exquisite hand-woven shawls to delicate handicrafts.

The mela was not just an opportunity for the women entrepreneurs to showcase their culinary skills but to also connect and learn from each other. They shared their experiences of facing challenges due to economic, social and cultural barriers and how they overcame them.

With the goal of achieving financial

independence and creating their own success stories, another team of seven, spearheaded by Gulshan Yousuf, launched their own business venture, which specializes in barbecued fish, chicken tikka, nadru yakhni and other fast food items. The barbecue vendors from Kashmir are breaking gender norms as they are the first women to sell barbecue in the region.

Gulshan Yousuf, hailing from Habbak area of Srinagar said, "Participating in fairs like SARAS help us connect with women from different areas and backgrounds. We learn from each other and get motivated to do better". Despite the obstacles faced by women in the business world, Gulshan believes that with encouragement and support, these challenges can be overcome.

The SARAS mela achieved tremendous success by empowering and elevating female entrepreneurs from all over India. It offered a distinctive platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase their excellent skills and dispel gender-based stereotypes. It also exhibited the vibrant culture and authentic cuisine of the stunning Kashmir region.

Since I was a child, I've been admiring my mother's and grandmother's culinary skills, and I've been determined to make it my profession.



Aisha's determination to educate her son inspires whole community

Ilhak Tantray

Aisha Begum, a resident of Ganie Mohalla in Gundpora Village of North Kashmir's Bandipora district has brought a remarkable change to the education scenario in her community.

Despite the prevailing apathy towards education in her community, Aisha prioritized her son's education and supported him in achieving a Bachelor's degree, making him the first in the community to set the mark.

Aisha's determination and commitment to her son's education is commendable, and her achievement sets an excellent example for other parents in the community to provide their children with the blessing of education.

Aisha's story is a reminder that with perseverance and dedication, anyone can overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

"Being from a marginalized tribe where education was a distant dream for many, I was inspired by the pens and papers I saw in the houses where I worked as a domestic servant. With a desire to provide my son the blessings of education I worked so hard and saved every penny I earned to pay for



my son's education," Aisha said.

All the efforts that Aisha put to educate her son brought a change in the community, where children were once found taking cattle for grazing instead of attending school. The children in the community now are much determined to pursue education.

"I am the only graduate in the community, and I owe all the credits of my success to my mother's sacrifices and determination," Aisha's son Javid recalled.

Despite facing numerous difficulties, I worked so hard and remained focused towards my education," Javid said.

"I felt a sudden relief and tears of joy streaming down my face when results were

out," he continued. "It was a journey with many hurdles. Nevertheless, with time I managed to make it fruitful," Javid added.

Initially I studied for four hours a day but later increased it to eight. Being the student of Government school where English education started late, I managed to acquire the language by reading more and more. I genuinely give all the credit to my mother and she is my inspiration, and I wish to emulate her resilience and determination," Javid added.

Aisha's firm behaviour towards prioritising the education of her son is an inspiration for those who face obstacles and struggles to achieve their goals. The stiff journey that dedicated

Aisha conquered enthusiastically shows that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance.

Being from a marginalized tribe where education was a distant dream for many, I was inspired by the pens and papers I saw in the houses where I worked as a domestic servant.

Mehandi artist who brings smiles to faces of poor, orphan brides

Iqra Qayoom

Aaliya Emran, a 23-year-old mehandi artist from Bemina Srinagar is providing free services to the poor and orphan brides "to make their precious moments memorable".

"I offer services at affordable prices as I want everyone to be able to make good memories on their wedding day. However, to make the special occasion memorable for orphans and less fortunate brides, I do it for free.

Aaliya has completed her BA and is now pursuing MA. Without any formal training, she has turned her passion for applying mehandi into a profession.

She said that for Kashmiri brides, the mehandiraat is one of the most important functions when the bride patiently watches her hands and feet being adorned with trending mehandi designs.

Aaliya is running a page on Instagram



with the name of 'Aaliyah_Emran' from where she gets bookings.

"My expertise grew with time. Initially, many in our locality began preferring me over any other professional artist in the

area. Now, I have excelled in the field," she said. "I like to take the designs to the next level by experimenting with the latest motifs which give attractive choices to brides."

She applies all kinds of mehandis, including functional mehandi, festival mehandi, bridal and non-bridal mehandi.

It brings peace to my heart and makes me happy to help the poor and orphans make their special occasions more memorable, she said.

Aaliya said her family is her biggest support. "They have always respected, understood, trusted and guided me," she said.

"Her work and compassionate personality have won the hearts of people, and she is putting smiles on the faces of orphan brides by dyeing their hands, free of charge. Aaliya's work is not just a profession, but a passion for serving the community with love and compassion," said her mother.



From Skiing to Judo Mat

Numan Bhat

There are few people who can be good at anything they try. If they spend time in art, they become good artists or if they spend time in sports, they become good sportspersons. They are gifted, tremendously talented and when they work on it, they develop skills and this combination makes them a force in any field. But even with all that talent and physical gifts, it takes a lot to recognize it and bring it out. Then one has to make the right decisions at the right time with capable people around to assist and an array of intangibles to tackle and we have a successful athlete. That's how they are made and today we have with us who has gone through all of this, **Kabra Altaf**.

Numan: Starting with the introduction, where do you reside, your age, and your academic background?

Kabra: My name is Kabra Altaf, I am 23 years old from Nishat, Srinagar. I did my schooling from Sunrise Public High School and then from GHS, Sonwar. I am currently pursuing my bachelor's in the field of Arts from Women's College Srinagar.

Numan: So, how did you get into judo?

Kabra: I always loved the "Sportsperson" tag. I had no idea about Judo or other sports, it was just the feeling of being called a sportsperson that I loved the most. I used to practice mixed martial arts with my father at home he taught me different techniques of self defense and some throwing techniques. I always loved the way he used to tell me how mentally and physically strong sportspersons are. So, finally, in 2010 he told me to try in professional ranks. We went to Sher e Kashmir Indoor Sports Complex Wazir Bagh and confirmed about different sports, they told us about Judo and other kicking games. I heard the name Judo for the first time on that day, I asked them what it's all about and my father said, you have to do throws in Judo and that was when I said yes to Judo.

Numan: It is believed that sports like Judo are hard to master, what inspires you to stick to it?

Kabra: As I always say that Judo makes me feel like "Yes I belong here". Judo makes me feel special, my passion, dedication, and love for Judo and the dream of my parents of seeing me becoming the best sportsperson of the nation makes me stick to it no matter how hard it gets for me to continue.

Numan: Was there a point, while practicing judo, when you had the intuition 'Yes, I can make it big in Judo'?

Kabra: I was selected for the national only after 3 Months of Judo training and when I played my first school national I got an opportunity from Bhopal academy, they offered me training in Bhopal. It was really inspiring that only after 3 months they called me there and that happened a lot of times since then and after that winning the first national medal for J&K followed by selection in India camp was the most inspiring thing for me. I have played in several weight categories and won medals in all of those which is a quite rare feat because a player always tries to play in one weight category and may even fail to win a single fight but alhamdulillah I changed this norm which is a big success story in itself. And it's not that only such things made me feel that I can make it big but my dream of making it big keeps me motivated.



Numan: Why did you choose judo over Skiing?

Kabra: I found my calling in Judo. I tried to continue both because I was already a national medallist in skiing but lack of support in skiing and growing love for Judo made me choose it.

Numan: You've obviously gone from strength to strength since then, if somebody asked you why they should choose judo, what would you say?

Kabra: Judo is not just a sport, it's an art. Judo can be practiced and explored by all ages. It gives us a code of ethics and a way of living. Besides it being an Olympic sport, Judo helps people to develop physical fitness in many ways, judo has a number of benefits that can foster good mental health. Judo is a way of living!

Numan: What are the core trainings involved in Judo?

Kabra: Judo training involves a full-body workout, improved cardiovascular fitness, endurance, strength, flexibility, agility, speed, dynamic and static balance, explosive power, and endurance developing training.

Numan: How do you manage the roadwork during winters?

Kabra: My passion towards my sport makes it easy for me, I don't feel winter when my clock rings for my practice time.

Numan: Which athlete or sportsperson inspired you?

Kabra: Initially, when I started Judo, it was my father's strong mindset combined with my fitness and confidence that inspired me. Although, there's no specific athlete, but I get inspired by all those sportspersons who play with proper sportsmanship and follow the code of ethics of the sport they are involved in.

Numan: Since MMA is quite famous nowadays, what is the contribution of Judo in MMA?

Kabra: Well, Judo gives in some amazing moves which can be used by MMA athletes like locking, chocking, and throwing. Judo is beneficial in so many ways it gives you a true fighting spirit, improves clinch work exponentially, and most importantly MMA athletes need to have quick reaction timing among other techniques. Judo is the best sport to develop reaction timing and it also helps in reading the mind of an opponent.

Numan: How is the organization of Judo in Kashmir? Do you train in Clubs or do you always train together with the entire team? How can you get to the national team? Who are your trainers?

Kabra: We have only one indoor stadium in Kashmir where we practice Judo. I rarely practice here. Usually, I practice outside state and practice with the whole team, whenever I find some loopholes that need to be filled, I invest more time in training and improving that particular area. For national, one needs to win a gold medal at the district level and then win gold in the state championship. Only after that one can participate in national championships. When I started Judo professionally, my coach was Shafkat Shafi after that I went to the Center of Excellence and practiced under one of the best coaches in India Mr. Jiwan Sharma, and later joined IIS academy Bangalore and trained under a Georgian coach Mr. Mamuka Kizilashvili

Numan: Every judoka looks to improve – what areas are you working on?

Kabra: I am currently working on developing my agile strength.

Numan: Recently you have been awarded as an outstanding State sports person, your views about it?

Kabra: Alhamdulillah, it's difficult to describe in words the happiness but it feels great to be awarded with the state's most prestigious award, a state award, and that too in the sports category. This award boosted my morale and I feel like my struggle is paying off. There is still a long way to go and InshaAllah I will train more harder to make it big.

MERC TIMES



‘Brothers’ Shikara’ initiative revives tourism at Asia's largest freshwater lake

Mohsin Mushtaq

Deep in the Kashmir Valley lies Asia's largest freshwater lake, Wular Lake, a vast body of water surrounded by the majestic Himalayan mountains. The lake's shimmering surface reflects the rugged terrain and the verdant forests that flank it, creating a mesmerizing landscape that draws tourists from far and wide. But despite its natural beauty Wular Lake had yet to realize its full tourism potential.

Enter the two brothers Firdous Ahmad Bhat and Ghulam Hassan who live in a small hamlet Zurimanz also known as Bangladesh of Kashmir, near the lake. The duo has grown up hearing stories of their ancestors who used to ply the waters of Wular Lake in their shikara, the iconic wooden boats that are the pride of Kashmir.

With the vision to revive this tradition, Firdous Ahmad Bhat and Ghulam Hassan, have built the first-ever shikara and launched it in the waters of Wular Lake intending to boost tourism in the area and improve their means of sustenance.

The brothers scoured the woods around the lake, searching for the finest quality wood to craft their shikara. They spent weeks sawing, sanding, and polishing, fashioning each piece of wood with utmost care and attention to detail. As the boat slowly took shape, the brothers' enthusiasm grew, and they knew they were onto something special.

According to Firdous, it took them many days to build the Shikara to attract tourists to the lake. Despite being the best water place to explore, the lake has always seen less footfall from tourists.

"Wular is a beautiful lake. Tourists who come to Kashmir from different parts of

India and the world should visit this lake as it has all the beauty to add to enthrall nature lovers," Firdous while gliding his boat smoothly over the glittering waters of the Wular Lake said.

The two brothers in their 40s are also enthusiastic about the sanity of the lake. Firdous while sharing his fisherman experience of his juvenile days highlighted the need to save the lake from pollution.

Ghulam Hassan while cleaning the weed of the lake with the oars in his prune fingers said, "The Wular is not only a source of income for thousands of fisherman inhabitants who reside on its shores, but the lake is also a vital part of the ecosystem", Ghulam Hassan says.

As the brothers launched their Shikara on Wular Lake, it glided smoothly over the water, its graceful curves and intricate carvings catch the eye of every onlooker. Intending to hit the lake with the tourists, Firdous and Hassan spared no effort in making the shikara a thing of beauty.

"We believe in empowering our community and protecting our natural resources," says Mudasir Mehmood, Coordinator of the Wular Conservation Management Authority (WUCMA). "That's why we've made four additional shikaris available to our locals, not only to create more job opportunities in the village but also to help them discover and appreciate the breathtaking beauty of our lake."

Firdous and Hassan's initiative to craft the first Shikara in Wular Lake has not only become a symbol of the lake's beauty but also helped boost tourism in the region. The success of their venture has provided a source of income for many families in the area.

Ms Nalini, an intrepid traveller from Mumbai said she defied the advice of her travel agent who warned her against

visiting Wular Lake. "My trip was worth every minute," she exclaimed, recalling her enchanting experience on the traditional wooden Shikara, surrounded by stunning views of the lake and the warm hospitality of the locals. "The best part of Shikara riding in Wular Lake is that it's not crowded," she added, encouraging tourists to take a chance on this hidden gem.

The initiative by Firdous and Hassan to craft the first Shikara in Wular Lake has become a sensation among tourists. Word of their venture spread like wildfire, drawing visitors from far and wide to experience the magic of the Shikara ride.

The Shikara rides offer a chance to soak in the stunning scenery of the lake, while the brothers regale visitors with fascinating stories of the lake's history and folklore. The popularity of their initiative has breathed new life into tourism in the area, providing a unique source of income for many families

Shabnam Bashir, an eco-tourism explorer from Bandipora, shared her thoughts on the initiative and said, "The introduction of the shikara is expected to increase footfall as more people begin to explore the lake's beauty. However, the government needs to put more effort into restoring the lake's lost glory and work on its development."

"The government's emphasis on enhancing tourism and uplifting the fishermen community has the potential to make the shikara service a pivotal moment for the area. The influx of tourists from other regions has also begun since people became aware of it through social media. The introduction of the shikara is a significant step in promoting sustainable tourism and creating awareness about the significance of preserving the lake's ecosystem", Shabnam stated.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Chief Patron: Prof. Nilofer Khan, Vice-Chancellor

Chief Editor: Sabeha Mufti | **Editor:** Syeda Afshana | **Assistant Editor:** Dr. Rashid Maqbool | **Graphic Artist:** Aga Shahi

Students Editorial Team: Mehroob Mushtaq, Numan Shabir, Sajid Raina.

e-mail: editor.merc@gmail.com | **website:** www.mercs.uok.edu.in