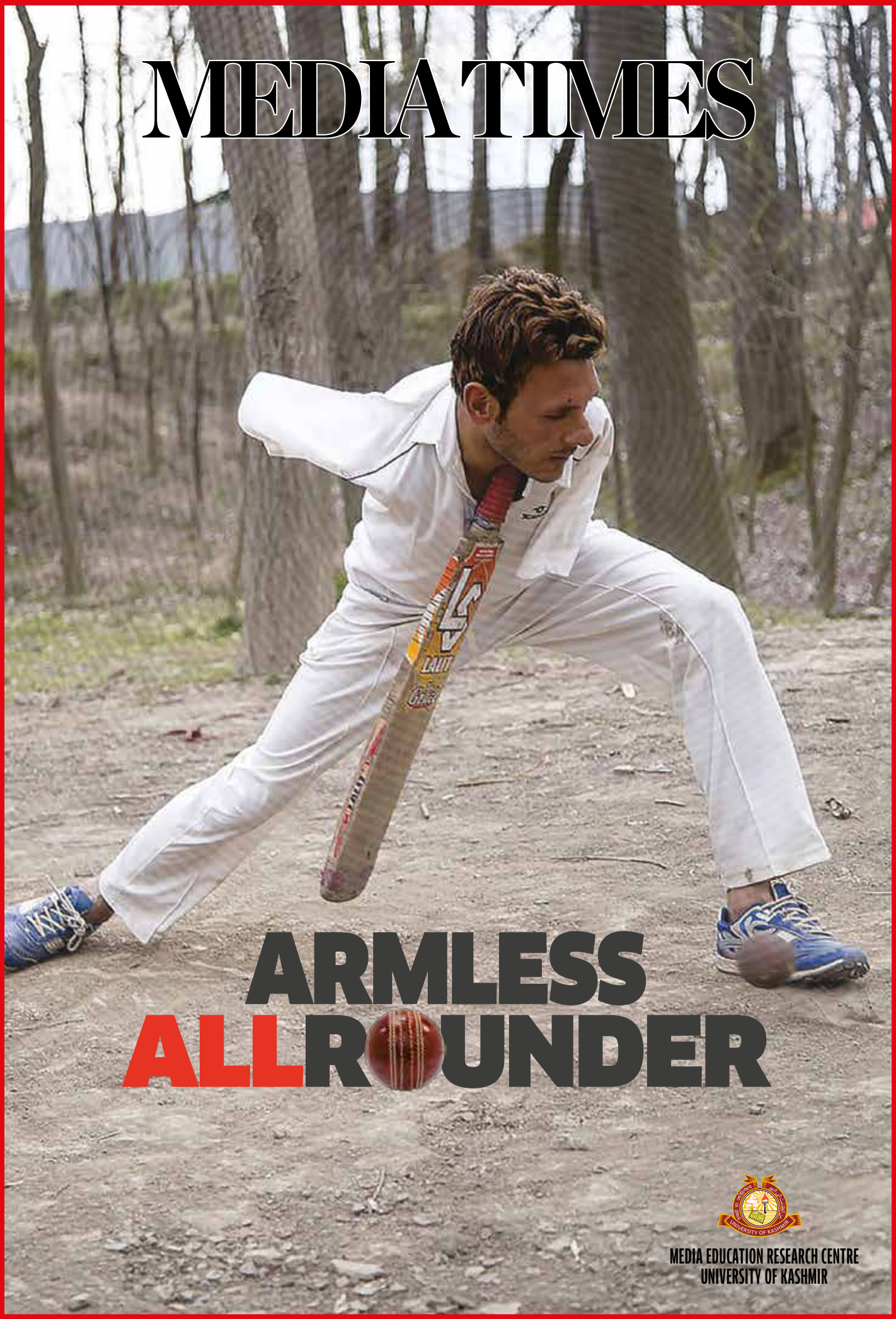
MEDIA TIMES



ARMLESS ALLROUNDER

MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

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The Media Times is a lab journal of Media Education Research Center, University of Kashmir. Its main purpose is to provide a platform to the students and scholars to hone their writing abilities and to chisel their journalistic skills. The journal builds necessary confidence in them to take on the future responsibilities as conscious media practitioners in the society.

All the contributions are the students/scholars of Mass Communication and Journalism at MERC KU. Opinions, views, reports & essays in this issue do not necessarily represent the views of the faculty of MERC. The author are solely responsible for the facts stated including the source of the information and references. The Editor or the centre is not responsible for any kind of plagiarism.

MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to learn the Media Education and Research Centre is publishing forthcoming issue of the magazine "Media Times 2017".

Modern day societies are undergoing fast and enormous changes and it is important that one keeps himself abreast with latest news, issues and trends taking place around him

The departmental magazine, as such, serves as a medium to communicate to the outside world about different activities being undertaken at the institutional level. It is just about the right time for MERC to celebrate and share its trail of success stories, which are evident in National and International media already. I am hopeful that the present issue of Media Times does reflect the same.

Prof. Khurshid I. Andrabi

CHIEF EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Once a family,
Always a family

Faruq Masudi
Chief Editor

EDITOR'S DESK

Journalism at Crossroad

Universally, journalism stands for the advocacy of basic human values. These values, interestingly, are similar everywhere, thus the journalism in the east and the journalism in the west should be doing one and the same thing: advocacy. Worldwide, journalism has largely advocated for peace and conflict resolution. While doing so, it has, at times been successful, and at times it had to face the brunt.

The point here is that the journalism has got a vital role to play, given the change of guard that has taken place in the United States of America (USA), it has become pivotal for the journalists to maintain that image, where they always remain neutral, present different sides of the issue, and allow the masses to shape up their opinion.

Post change of guard in the USA might also stir some behavioural changes in media in the USA, and those changes are simply going to reflect every where in the world.

The change can be: journalist abandoning the path of advocacy, and in other words, journalism that always has stood for the advocacy of human values, may start treading a different path. This path may not encourage moderation. This path may not allow the journalist to stay neutral. This path may not allow the scribe to just present different sides of the story. This path may be a path that will encourage the journalists to take sides.

Taking sides, and that too when it comes to a journalist taking sides, it surely is a catastrophe—catastrophe for the society and catastrophe for the very basic founding elements of journalism. Taking sides leads to the formation of propaganda machinery. It actually becomes the backbone of the machinery that spreads falsehood and misinformation. Thus, this propaganda is widely used to achieve different gains: political, economical and strategic.

Power centres across the world, are trying to have 'full' or 'some' power over those who are having deep and penetrative eyes on certain things (journalists in this case). Directly or indirectly, these powers want to have control over them, which is alarming. This is dangerous for the free and independent press, as this indicates that the press that once was independent is disseminating the information that suits a particular power centre, and that helps in achieving any political or economic goal. Thus, again, as mentioned, the propaganda machinery comes into the existence.

At this crucial, and decisive juncture the responsibilities is on the shoulders of the institutions that are producing a good number of journalists every year. The need of an hour is to inculcate the basic journalistic values in those who are willing to contribute to this field. They are to be taught: how not to compromise on the basic values, and how it is important to stand on the side of the truth. The institutions are duty bound to infuse a sense of deeper understanding and quest to know more among the aspiring scribes, because if the truth is to be brought into the limelight—that's what the prevailing times are demanding—there has to be a deeper understanding and analytical bent of mind.

There is a need that such institutions should make it clear that the outgoing scribes should not become a part of propaganda machinery, the machinery that kills the basic motive of journalism, and shrouds the noble profession with a cloth that turns it into something that's murky.

Let there be undeniable hard facts. Let no sides be taken; let lies and fabrications find no place in the world of journalism.

Muslim Jan

WULAR IS A HOME TO LARGEST FISH COMMUNITY AND THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE LIVING IN ADJACENT AREAS, WHOSE LIVELIHOOD IS ENTIRELY DEPENDED ON FISH AND WATER CHESTNUT CATCHING.

WULAR LAKE: A HERITAGE LOST

Wajahat Shabir

With every passing day we are losing Wular, which is our heritage.

From the serpentine road along the rugged mountains overlooking north Kashmir's Bandipora town, a cursory glance beneath appears a beautiful meadow amid patches of water to every passerby. An illusion soon vanishes once the sight gets closer. The rampant growth of willows and wild grass is what Asia's largest fresh water lake, Wular looks like now.

Lake which has been recognized of international importance under the banner of Ramsar site in 1990, and of national importance as well in 1986 is a source of livelihood for a large human population living along its fringes. The sprawling area of the lake is a boon for the growth of coniferous forests, alpine meadows and orchards. Despite its beneficialness, successive governments have invariably taken it for granted, leaving it vulnerable to the potential extinction in the coming years.

Over the years it has shrunk drastically from 217.8 square kilometers in 1911 to a mere 50 square kilometers. And in the dry spell it further shrinks. Despite the initiatives, in part of Government like 'Wular development project' with the assistance from Centre government, chances of its restoration are bleak.

Apart from encroachment, thousands of willow trees have become threat for the lake. "This lake used to give us meaning of life. It is over now," says Ghulam Qadir Reshi, a 70 year old fisherman who has grown on the serene waters of this fresh water lake.→

With deep wrinkles visible on the face of old man when he spreads his net to catch fishes, he is not sure what lies in store for him. "Gone are the days when we used to catch big fishes. Now we don't manage to catch any single of them for weeks together."

Reminiscing his childhood days, Reshi says his father used to fetch a huge catch from the waters of lake. "In the past few decades, we have witnessed drastic degradation of Wular. Earlier in my childhood the lake contained tonnes of fish. Now there is only plastic and filth," he says in a remorseful voice.

From past many years the greed of human has increased. The willow and wicker cultivation over the lake's swamps is rampant, which is choking lake's inlet channels. "It has not only damaged flora and fauna of the lake, but experts who have worked on Wular believe that Kashmir's hydrological cycle has been hugely impacted," says Mushtaq Ahmed who lives close to lake.

Mushtaq while puffing a cigarette seems worried. "With every passing day we are losing Wular, which is our heritage. I am witness to the slow death of this lake which is also habitat of many species of birds and fishes."

Wular is a home to largest fish community and there are many people living in adjacent areas, whose livelihood is entirely depended on fish and water chestnut catching.

"It is not only the job of our government, but it is also our responsibility to cooperate to make Wular beautiful, attractive and to make source of livelihood to those families who are associated with it from many decades," says Ahmad.

President Fisher Association Wular, Ghulam Hassan claims that Wular used to provide livelihood to one lakh people from fisher community.

"The condition is deteriorating day by day. In the past fishes from Wular used to supply across the Valley and people in huge numbers from adjacent areas used to catch fish and earn their livelihood. The encroachment and government's apathy has forced many among our community to look for other means of earnings."

Jahangir Ahmed who claims to earn his livelihood by selling water chestnut is angry and says that Water chestnut; Nadru (Lotus stem) is vanishing from Wular.

"For us it is a sign of worry as this lake used to generate Nadru in large quantity. Instead of Nadru and water chestnut we find plastic waste floating. Jhelum bring filth and waste of entire Valley into this lake."

He raises his hand and moves it slowly from left to right and says, look there used to be obscure water but now it has turned to wet field which shows no sign of growing Nadru which is famous among masses. He said that fertilizers used in the fields aided with sewage from surrounding areas have led to eutrophication which causes a dense growth of plant life in the lake.

He claims that over the last few decades, this eutrophication has lead to decrease in fish quantity and Nadru in Wular.

While, Jahangir prepares for a jerk with his hands on the net, motion goes off the net. "To my misfortune, catch left. I should wait for some more time," mumbles Jahangir.

He goes along and says dragon net is adding salt to the wounds. It is awful acts done by many local people to catch a fish in one go. Many people try this approach during the breeding season of fish's which is detrimental to fish population which is quite unacceptable. They should understand for any short cut they are putting fish at the line of the danger, but also creating hurdle in the way of many fish catchers that are practicing in old tradition.

Hydrologists believe that that seepage capacity of Wular has decreased, so it could not accommodate surplus discharge of water in it that inundated summer capital. The impact which was seen during 2014 September floods, when city was flooded with water.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) reports suggest that Wular Lake which was once spread across 20,200 hectares, now remains restricted to a mere 2,400 hectares.

FOUR GENERATIONS: MY FATHER, MYSELF, MY OFFSPRING, AND THEIR PROGENY. WE ALL HAVE RELIGIOUSLY AND PASSIONATELY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THIS ART FORM, AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE THE TRUE MEANING OF BHAND PATHER TO POSTERITY.

BHAND PATHER: A LOST HERITAGE

Folk theatre is a composite art and since time immemorial it has been widely used to deliver the critical messages with a spice of entertainment. This kind of an art can be regarded as 'edu-tainment' in modern nomenclature of fine arts, where both education and entertainment are served synchronously to the audience. It is a fusion of different elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, and festival peasantry. Folk theatre has its roots in the native culture and is embedded in local identity and social values. The art, besides being a prototype of mass entertainment provides a platform to involve the indigenous population in inter-group, interpersonal and intra-personal communication, which ultimately strengthens the thread of societal relationships and helps the society to take better decisions.

India is a diversified country and a home to thousands of cultures. Every traditional society has its own distinctive ways to inform and educate the masses, various styles of folk theatre cater to different audiences, though the theory behind every folk media is same- to educate people about different social, political and economic issues.

When SITE (Satellite Instructional Television experiment) was launched in India, in 1975, strategists were advised to disseminate the informational content in the folk medium, as more than half of Indian population was illiterate and to enhance their knowledge about the imperative issues, the folk medium was the most desired tool.

In Kashmir, the importance of Folk theatre can be traced back to 8th century. Kalhan, author of Rajtarangni mentions in his book that Kashmir had the rich tradition of arts-music, painting, dance and drama. The book stands witness to phenomenal development in fine arts from 8th to 15th century. The fine arts received a great impetus during the rule of Sultan Zainul-Abideen. With the gradual evolution the folk theatre in Kashmir received its own indigenous name and it was popularly called as Bhand Pather. The Bhand Pather, secular in its outlook, has satirically questioned the contemporary sociological, political and economic issues. The Pather is considered as an epic drama which is a vivid manifestation of issues a society is troubling with.

Given the conflictful situation and political turmoil in Kashmir, the art has seen many ups and downs in its course. The Bhand Pather industry was hardly hit first with the accession of Kashmir to India and then the infamous uprising of 1989. Now, the artistic performance was either to be relished on Independence day or Republic day of India. Such was the impassivity towards this form of art that people stopped to be a part of it and they gradually enrolled themselves in other professions.

Gh. Mohi-u-Din Aijaz, president of National Bhand Theatre is a resident of Wathora. Since 1965 he has been tirelessly working to bring this art form in par with the modern ways of information communication tactics. Mr. Aijaz, also a former wireless communication officer in J&K police department has made significant contributions to the Bhand Pather.

"Four generations: my father, myself, my offspring, and their progeny. We all have religiously and passionately been associated with this art form, and we →

Munawar Hussain

The Pather is considered as an epic drama which is a vivid manifestation of issues a society is troubling with.

will continue to take the true meaning of Bhand Pather to posterity, say Aijaz."

National Bhand theatre is the lone folk theatre organization in valley which has been approved by Cultural academy, Sangeet Natak Academy, Ministry of Culture-Govt. Of India, and North Zone Culture Center (NZCC). The Cultural Ministry has given a salary grant to the organization.

National Bhand Theatre has won over 25 awards including Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Purskar and an award from National School of Drama for best Angrez Pather (Satirical drama on British colonialists) of the year. Currently around 37 people are a part of his organization.

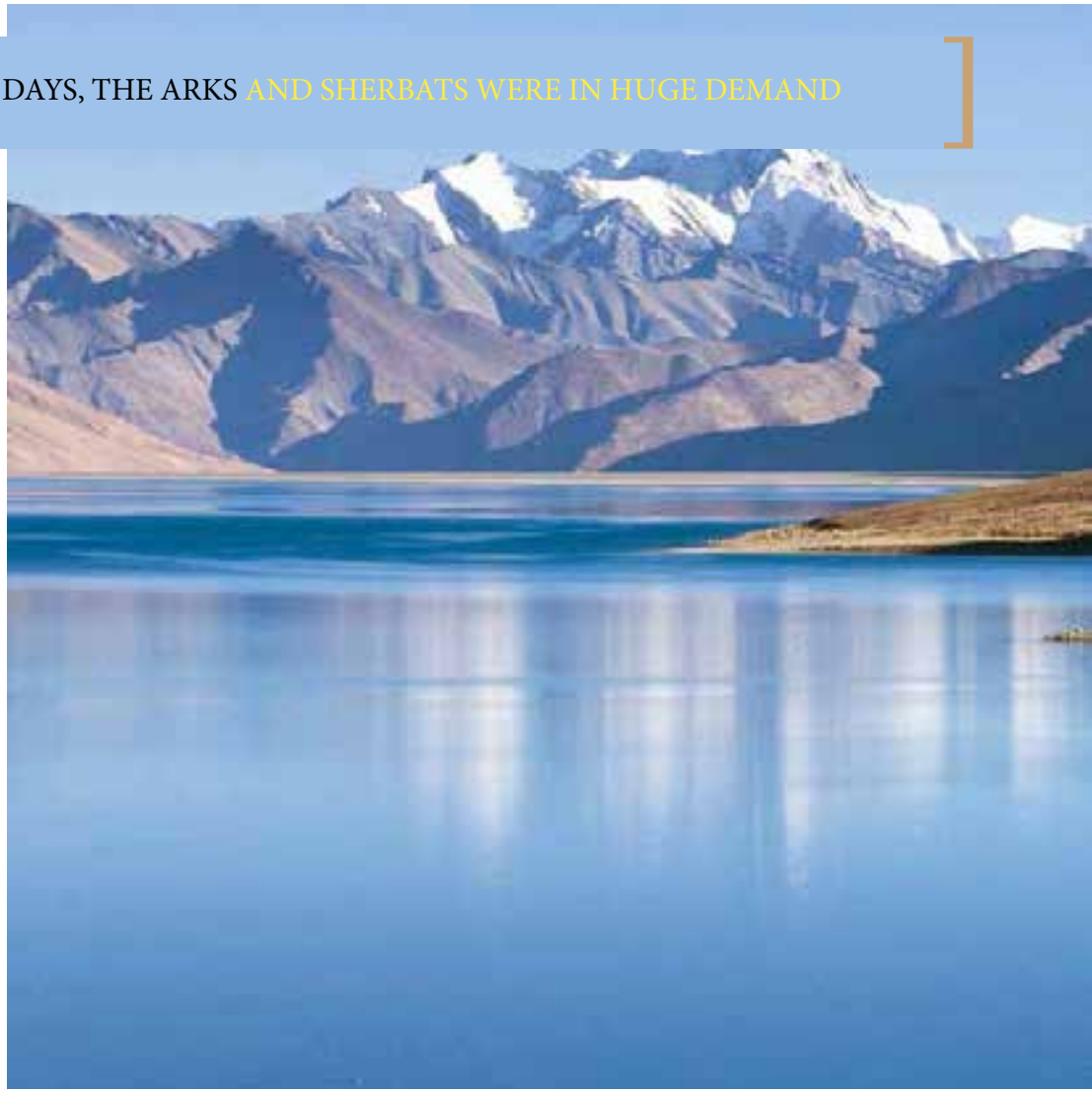
The founder of this organization has seen many harsh and trying times as a Bhand Pather artist. Mr. Aijaz recollects, "In February, 1998, a fake militant outfit threatened us to shut the practice of performing at national holidays. Perturbed by the threat, we stopped to be a part of it. The person went on and asked for money. Fortunately, as I was in the police department we were able to bust the man and get back to the artistic adventure."

Unhurt by the fake threats, the doom didn't stop chasing Mr. Aijaz. On 14 January, 2000, a foreign Lashkar militant hounded by Rashtriya Rifles of Indian army found his way to the house of Bhand Pather artist. Subsequently, the entirely new built house was razed to the ground by the armed forces. The incident came as fatal blow to Aijaz.

Now, seventeen years from the incident, Aijaz and his Four sons are constantly working to pour a new life in the Bhand Pather industry. In their dwelling place in Wathora, the family has dedicated an entire room for the National Bhand Theatre organization. They call it 'Theatre office' and it is equipped with modern advanced gadgets.

"We have brought our own lighting system, digital cameras, multimedia projectors, video cameras. The facilities help us to carry the different task of organization effectively. The National Bhand theatre has its own website where information about every new event is showcased, says Director National Bhand Pather, Shah-e-Jahan." ●

IN EARLIER DAYS, THE ARKS AND SHERBATS WERE IN HUGE DEMAND



TRIP TO LADAKH

Ali Mohammad

A sweet smell of roses wafts out from the shop attracting the olfactory senses of every passer-by.

Ladakh, wedged between, Tibet and Pakistan, is part of India's most northerly province and is one of highest inhabited region on the earth. Its boundary extends from Kunlun mountain range to the main great Himalayas.

Ladakh's stunning landscapes and hospitality of people left an indelible mark on me when I first visited this heavenly place back in 2014.

So, I decided to go for another trip this year. Seven friends responded and we embarked upon a packed week long road trip on 15th June 2017.

As we drove on, the lush green slopes of Srinagar gave way to huge barren mountains .We reached Zojila an elevation of 3,528 meters, the second highest mountain pass after Fotlu pass on Srinagar-Leh national highway which is a vital link between Ladakh and Kashmir valley. Driving Zojilla is scary.

On reaching Zojilla at around 2pm, we stayed there for a while, and prepared some tea. It was such an adventurous moment to have a tea party at an elevation of 3,528mts.

One my friend shouted from top of his lungs.

''Duniyaka sab se oonchi party mai apka suvagath hai ''

(Welcome to world's highest party)

His loud voice was only thing that was breaking the silence of night. We keep cracking jokes and start talking endlessly till dawn broke. At around 6:30 am we headed towards Kargil.

On the way, we visited Kargil War Memorial, also known as Vijay Path, a →

war memorial built by Indian army located in Dras.

As we were about to reach Kargil, we saw the magnificent mountains greeting us. It was an unforgettable moment for me.

We came down from our cars and in one voice shouted. "Ladakh here we come"

Logic and reason demanded that we should rest, but our incorrigible curiosity kept nagging us to explore Kargil on broad day light.

We visited various famous places in Kargil and enjoyed our day to fullest.

Finally at around 6:00 pm we convinced ourselves that exploring can wait, but a lazy nap can't, so, we booked a hotel and stayed there for the night.

Next morning at 11:00 am, we headed straight away to Leh. Leh is approximately 210 kms away from Kargil, takes a drive of around 5 to 6 hours .The journey between Kargil to Leh was special one. The winding mountain roads are accompanied by the meandering streams of Drass, Suru, Indus and Zanskar. After taking some halts to capture the moments, we reached Lamayuru, a small village which is some 100 kilometers before Leh. Moonlike landscapes carved into greater Himalayas are its claim to fame, and the reason it is called moon land.

Finally at around 7:00 pm came this beautiful town surrounded by huge hills and mountains with ice caps on them, yes! We had just landed at Leh! It was a wow moment for all of us.

We stayed in a guest house first to take some rest, and then visited some of the famous monasteries there which includes Thksey Monastery, Alchi Monastery etc.

Our next goal was Pangong Lake which is about 160 kilometers away from Leh city. We started marching towards Pangong at around 11 pm. After visiting glaciers and mountains makes it almost impossible to cross road at certain places. The scary nature of road punctured our spirits and we never thought we will reach Pangong.

A big board displaying "NEVER GIVE UP" rejuvenated our hearts and we start believing that we won't give up until we reach Pangong.

Finally, after passing Changla pass (the second highest motor able road in the world) and braving the toughest road conditions we reached Pangong Lake at around 6:00 pm.

It is a heaven on earth! Crystal clear blue water, rugged trans-Himalayan mountains in the background makes a stunning panoramic view.

Well we saw moon rise between the hills with its mirror image on the water. It was just beyond explanations. We sat on the floor of the lake and started listening to each other's stories. Amir Ali Sheikh's story was special one. The serene, bright blue water, rocky lake shore and my friends with me will remain etched in the memory forever.

There were camps arranged just beside the lake and we stayed there for night.

Next afternoon we left Pangong and on the way back stayed for a night, first at Leh and then at Kargil, finally we reached home on 23 June 2017.

By any standard and from any perspective, the Srinagar- Leh journey has epic written all over it. The road that opens up only few months will test you, shock you, scare you and will leave you spell bound. ●

THE REIGN OF MACHINES IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF HEART,THE FEELING OF KINDNESS AND CONSIDERATION IS CRUSHED BY DEVICES

SPIRITUALITY AND MATERIAL COMFORTS

Has man lost his nerve and poise and peace? Is it an individual phenomenon or a collective disturbance? Have we lost touch with nature and its various aspects? Are our material achievements through industry and technology responsible for it ?

"Human beings in recent times are more out of tune with their own selves, with each other and with nature than ever before. They are susceptible to psychological ailments like neuroses, depression, psychoses, bi-polar disorder and others, and gradually this has made psychologists and social scientists realize the importance of spirituality." says Dr Arif a renowned psychiatrist of the valley.

Man has evolved and his evolution from caves to skyscrapers has been a journey of triumph. Man has been a creator,a discoverer,an inventor, a nurturer. Man creates artifacts, paintings, pottery, etc., for beautifying his world. He uses science and technology for his benefit in the form of discovery of life saving medicine, airplanes, space exploration and creation of various forms of energy so that his potentialities, God given are realized and thus developed further and used for creating a better human society for further evolutionary journey in the medium of space and time. Knowledge explosion and the means and devices for its mind blowing wonders are known even to kids sitting before television sets and computers. Distances are almost non existent now and electronics in the hands of man open up more and more areas of discovery, exploration and invention. So much progress of man kind given, the individual is losing hold on himself, and the society is squeezing him more and more to reduce him to the level of a reptile if we use the term imaginatively to give an idea of the predicament of man. His unbridled love for material gains has given rise to jealousy, and envy leading to aggression and violence in the present day world. Horrors surround him more and more and everyday one or the other kind of labyrinth using technology and material advancement is weakening his will, his heart, his conscience and soul. Unpredictable weapons are threatening the very existence of man on the face of the earth together with the edifice of civilization for which the sweat and blood has been used and wondrous achievements of mind and soul have been applied. It is on one hand the threat to existence and on the other hand an invitation to man to rethink, reorganize and to enlighten his soul-a lure to spirituality. The sense of being one with the whole universe is most important need of the time →

Syed Humaira

Kashmir's mystic poetry and the songs woven round and round it can be utilized for the purpose as Rumi, reborn is applied.

Industrialization is the root cause of man's spiritual degradation as it has, together with its positive implications, made life materialistic, promoting consumerism to the skies . Dr Iqbal as one of the greatest philosophers of the time has denounced industrialization which to him is responsible for weakening the soul of man. His line:

"Hy Dil Kay Liyay Mout Machinon ki Huqumat

Ehsaas e Marawat Ko Kuchal Daitay Hain Aalaat"

(The reign of machines is responsible for the destruction of heart,the feeling of kindness and consideration is crushed by devices)

is a sweeping remark but a very wide perspective in which we can see the tussle between the matter and the soul. In the west even D.H Lawrence produces the same horrible tale in the fiction of Lady Chatterley's lover. One can see in the fiction the whole story of promiscuous sex and the fall of man to the state of animality. One can see how the rattle of the machine and its various mechanizations are bulldozing morals debasing life of man and transforming him to lifeless bone and muscle and all what lies between and around them.

Besides money in the western societies we have had great souls, even in the east to help us in striking a balance between matter and spirit. Gandhi unlike Nehru wanted to uplift millions of downtrodden castes whom he called harijans. He devoted his life to simplicity and merged with common men to lift India through the village because he found the spirit of India in hard work, industry, labor and self dependence. He was not against India's material advancement but having seen the devastation of world wars in which millions of people were killed and a great wealth was destroyed, he wanted to strike a balance between the machine and the man, of course not losing site that everything that is created on the earth is created for the spiritual advancement of man essentially. Like him Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted commonality by waging a war against superstitions and narrow and sectarian approach towards religion and spirituality.

Radakrishnan as the philosopher of India promoted the live tradition of India and Indian values of course welding science and its advancement with it to make it a great colourful design.

This tradition based message of our leaders needs to be understood and used to fight narrow mindedness, religiosity and fundamentalism that has been threatening the balance and poise at the international scene.

Locally, Hinduvata and its poisonous ramifications need to be checked through spiritual awakening and a new *bhakti* needs to be launched throughout India.

Kashmir's mystic poetry and the songs woven round and round it can be utilized for the purpose as Rumi, reborn is applied.

In the west, Rumi, the sufi mystic is the most popular poet. West after reaching the pinnacle of progress through industrialization has not been able to achieve the sense of contentment and joy, therefore its people are returning back to the ancient practices of enrichment of one's inner self. If there is anything that can heal our wounded souls, solve the problems of social injustice, war, economic disparities, it is our connection with the universe and with our own selves. We need to return to our original source so as be composed and experience natural bliss. ●

HISTORY TRACES THE EVIDENCES OF ARYANS CROSSING OVER FROM THE HIMALAYAN RANGE AND SETTLING IN THIS DISTRICT.

CARBON IMPRINT AND LADAKH

Zakir Hussain

It was built in the 19 century on a beautiful hillock in Thanna Mandi.

Ladakh is known as the Land of High passes and is famous around the globe for its unique topography and beautiful picturesque. Over the past decade, Ladakh has evolved into one of the most popular travel destinations for tourists across world, attracting thousands of travelers, bikers, trekkers from different walks of life and diverse age groups. The picturesque landscape of Ladakh and its high motor able passes have opened a box of adventures for many, converting it into an achievable bucket list item for many in their youth. Until a decade or two; Ladakh has been living harmoniously with nature. During those days, the people's lifestyle was in consonance with the environment. Although the tourism activities helped a lot in elevating the socio-economic status of the region by creating opportunities to work for the local residents and brought Ladakh in the tourist map of India. However, there is a downside of it, the Himalayan region being the most fragile terrain is now under threat of environmental pollution and degradation. Ladakh is in the hit list of severe environmental pollution now.

Ladakh witnesses high peak of tourists from June to September, attracting people for religious tourism, wildlife and adventure tourism especially. After the release of blockbuster film 3-idiot Ladakh has become the centre point of attraction for the Indian tourists that has helped a lot in increasing the revenue and some irresponsible tourism too. As per Tourism department last year in 2016 around 3 lack tourists visited Ladakh which boosted tourism but also boosted plastics and non-biodegradable wastes which is an alarming threat to environment." This onslaught of high tourism is →

slaying both the city and Ladakhi villages, because while city explodes with a huge demand on its resources, the rural areas implode with youths migrating to city, leaving behind ageing parents to tend to their farms," said Sonam Wangchuk, Rolex award winner and founder of Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh SECMOL."People from the country and around the globe come to Ladakh by chasing film stories, and turn into villains in the process, by harming the Mother Nature" he added.

Ladakh is also known as cold desert because of wide barren lands and scarcity of water. The people of Ladakh are highly dependent on spring water for their domestic use. Earlier people were so eco-friendly that everything used to get recycled and the consumption and usage of water was in consonance with the natural resources. Dry Toilets are very known concept in Ladakh which needs zero water and where the human wastes can be recycled into organic manure for agricultural purposes, this not only saves water but also saves environment. As per the Tourism department in the past decade with the increasing demand of tourism industry around 600-plus hotels and 300 plus guest houses were constructed rendering the modern technology with modern toilets, which directly or indirectly impacts the natural resources and the habitat too. Local people complained many times against the tourists who scatter rubbish, poly bags and other non-biodegradable wastes near water bodies and tourist spots that harm the delicate environment, but no proper action has seen taking against such people.

The United Nations has named 2017 as the year of sustainable tourism to create greener and cleaner environment. However, the concept seems untouched as far as Ladakh tourism is concerned as the pollution level is increasing with each passing year damaging the delicate habitat.There are several travel organizations and NGOs which are working to promote sustainable tourism in Ladakh, but Government interference is not seen that much. Thus the need of the hour is to look for some bigger and better initiatives and government regulations are very important to ensure conservation of Ladakhi environment and ecology. Moreover, a simple change in habit of a tourist who visits Ladakh can go a long way in saving this beautiful region.

THE PRESENCE OF THE HABBA KHATOON PEAK INCREASES THE ROMANTICISM OF THIS SMALL PLACE, CUT OFF FROM ANY KIND OF TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTION.

UNTAPPED GUREZ

Three Day Gurez festival was organized by the Ministry of Tourism to promote tourism in the Gurez valley. The fiesta was initiated from 5th-8th August at Dadar town of the valley.

Gurez, a small scenic rural community on the banks of river "Kishan Ganga" lies at about 2400 meters above sea level surrounded by snow-capped mountains having a population of 38000 approx.

The Habba Khatoon peak, adorning the beautiful town is considered as the main attraction of the place.

The connection of the place with Habba Khatoon, a sixteenth century poetess who sang about love and loss after her husband's capture and presumed death, seems the most organic association with a town whose beauty knows no bound.

The presence of the Habba Khatoon peak increases the romanticism of this small place, cut off from any kind of technological intervention. The tourism was meant to promote more than this romanticism. It wanted to attract all sorts of tourists. Apart from people trying to get away from busy city lives and craving for time amidst nature with no network, this valley has a lot to offer in terms of adventure.

The Minister of State for Tourism, PriyaSethi said in the inaugural speech of the festival that there are many exciting and unknown places in Gurez which will give the adventure lovers a thrilling experience. Many paths can be used for trekking.

Apart from trekking, there are high potential for adventures like water rafting, camping, mountain biking. A group or trekkers, rafters and the Jammu and Kashmir Mountain Biking Association were present as well to promote their activities along with exploring the place.

The festival witnessed great performances from many known and local artists. Irfan and Bilal were the main attraction. The traditional Shina dance of the people were showcased. This gave a boost to the local talents and gave the world a chance to see the potential of the people of Gurez. Different departments of the government also set up stalls with their respective items.

The festival attracted a large number of people from various parts of the valley. Local people from nearby towns were seen in large numbers. It was hinted by the officials that if Gurez gets more tourists, it will generate much more economy in the valley. The circle →

Hayat Manan

Gurez, until recently was almost a secluded zone due to the closeness to Pakistan.

of cash will also start to flow, increasing the earnings of the locals. People here earn their livelihood mostly by the cultivation of potatoes and the cumin seeds.

However, one question that was raised again and again was the question of army. Being situated so close to the Line of Control, the Gorai people witness a heavy presence of the army. Almost seventy thousand army personnel are stationed there amidst around thirty-five thousand locals. The presence of army bases in the mountains of Gurez makes it difficult for trekkers to trek or explore any area peacefully or spontaneously.

Gurez, until recently was almost a secluded zone due to the closeness to Pakistan. The region, separated from the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan by the Line of Control comes under heavy firing and shelling. Pakistan, occupying the higher geographic position has an advantage over Indian bases and makes the people vulnerable.

But this heavy army presence and the constant threat of Pakistan's shelling hampers the main intention behind Gurez festival i.e. the promotion of tourism. Army should become more flexible if they want more tourists and adventure enthusiast to visit the place, was the sentiment depicted time and again in the festival.

The beauty of the place is enough to attract many tourists and coupled with the adventure sports will give many a reason to keep this place in their must visit checklist. However, one might fear that heavy footfall of the tucked away gem might take away the mystery and romanticism associated with the place. A balanced approach is needed which will benefit both the locals and the wanderers. ●

THE TRADITIONAL MILL IS MADE OF WOOD THAT IS RUN BY USING A BULL TO EXTRACT OIL FROM MUSTARD SEEDS.

A FORGOTTEN LEGACY "TILVEN WAAN"

Haji Ghulam Mahommad Teli, an old man, in his seventies proudly owns and runs a traditional oil mill (called Tilvan Waan in local parlance) in the Kreeri area of north Kashmir's Baramulla district. It is the only of its kind probably operating in the valley in today's times.

The mill remains a major landmark in the area of Tilven Mohalla, where once every family was associated with this profession but with the invention of new technology in food and processing sector and diminishing scope for the traditional technology, they all switched the profession.

Ghulam Mohammad stood tall and firm to continue the family legacy since last 60 years with zeal and vigorlike his ancestors. This old man wakes up in wee hours of morning to start his routine work of extracting oil; it takes him minimum three to four hours to get 4 litersof mustard oil, which he latter carries on his shoulders →

Useeba Bashir

As the deficiency of raw material is rising, it may force me to shut the business very soon.

to different nearby villages to sell at a price of Rs 100 per litre.

"When I was a child, I used to accompany my father to nearby villages to sell mustard oil and now I am carrying his profession forward," Ghulam Mohammad said. Over the six decades of its existence, the mill saw no change but Mohammad constructed a new house near to the mill but left the family business untouched.

Many a times, his family members insisted him to give up this profession like his other relatives and neighbors. Mohammad, however, seems quite satisfied and convinced in carrying on the legacy.

"I didn't talk to my family members for a month because they were saying I should stop this work and demolish my traditional mill, but I didn't giveup. I am grateful to Almighty for providing me with this art. I am content with whatever profit I get from it," he added.

With the arrival of many oil brands in the market, the demand for extracted mustered oil has dropped sharply; but Mohammad retains all his customers. He didn't lose any of his customers and delivers the oil to them every month.

"Now-a-days people prefer market oil but there was a time when people would wait in long queues outside my home to get fresh oil, but still I have some permanent customers who are buying the oil from us since decades" says Mohammad.

The traditional mill is made of wood that is run by using a bull to extract oil from mustard seeds. The animal moves around a wooden scooped circular pit in the center. As the animal moves in the circular ambit, it exerts lateral pressure, thereby crushing the seeds in the pit to extract oil. The bull that is used for extracting oil is not used for any other work.

"From the time when I was a child, our family has been purchasing oil from him. Now I am a married man, fathering three children and we are still doing the same. The oil is very good in quality as compared to the ones available in market. It has a unique taste, flavor and color," Rafiq Ahmad a resident of Kreeri said.

He made a good property out of this work and went to Mecca to perform annual Islamic pilgrimage besides marrying off his six children who are now all well settled. Unfortunately, the seeds required for extraction of organic oil are gradually diminishing.

With lesser people cultivating it, Mohammad is facing difficulties in finding the crop in his vicinity. Owing to non-availability of crop, Mohammad is pondering over to wind up the mill. "I am not getting the seeds anymore since very less people are cultivating mustard oil crops in their fields. As the deficiency of raw material is rising, it may force me to shut the business very soon," he urges.

"The oil extracted by this traditional method is considered to be pure and good for health and quality of which cannot be matched with market oil. It can be used for massaging and softening the skin as it helps to eradicate the dryness in skin," Dr. Inayat, a dermatologist commented.

THIS YEAR HAS BEEN THE WORST FOR BUSINESS AND IT'S BEEN MOSTLY DUE TO THE BAD NATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF KASHMIR

KASHMIR'S FAMED HERITAGE IN FLOATING WATER

Nausheen Naseer

We can neither demolish nor renovate it, the wood has its own life.

On the western shores of Dal Lake lies a sinking, decrepit houseboat, wobbling to stay adrift on the Dal Lake. Built around 1941, the Clermont is a quintessential English houseboat reminiscent of Kashmir's glorious past. Clermont Houseboats, afleet of five houseboats strung along the north-western shores of the Dal, lie quietly besides an old Mughal garden, encompassed by 16thcentury walls built by Emperor Akbar.

The clientele list at the Clermont includes prominent personalities like Dilip Kumar, actress Joan Fountain, violinist Yehudi Menuhin, critically acclaimed filmmaker Ross Kaufman, famed photo-journalist James Natchetway and American Senator and 2008 Presidential candidate John McCain, who visited Kashmir in 2010. "He stayed here for a day and was very happy. He really wanted the tourism industry to reclaim its old splendor," says Ghulam Nabi Butt, owner of Clermont Houseboat.

But those were the times when tourism was at its zenith in the valley. The old, sinking houseboat has been a mute spectator of more than a decade of turbulence. In the 90s when trouble started brewing in the valley, journalists from all over the world stayed at the Clermont and reported on the conflict. "Our business was not really slack during the 90s because we still had national and international journalists staying here, covering stories on Kashmir. But things began to improve from 2005," says Manzoor Ahmed Butt, co-owner of Clermont Houseboats.

The 2014 floods and the volatile situation in the valley have affected

business lately, says Manzoor. "This year has been the worst for business and it's been mostly due to the bad national media coverage of Kashmir," he says.

The lush land near the houseboats is sprawled across three acres and→

surrounded by lotus and rose gardens on either side; the fleet of houseboats hovers at the edge as the water of the Dal glides slowly along. Shikaras lie idly between the houseboats, waiting for the day's sightseers.

The reception room, a small cabin, boasts the celebrity grandeur of the Clermont. The walls display signed photographs of celebrities who have stayed at the Clermont; grinning faces of Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, George Harrison, ABC news anchor Peter Jennings, Barkha Dutt and

actor and writer Michael Palin stare back happily from the walls. Writer Shobha De is one of the most recent people to have visited this idyllic haven.

Another wall at the far end of the room is devoted to newspaper clippings from all parts of the world praising the tranquility and hospitality of the Clermont. Elizabeth Bumiller in the Washington Post describes Butt as "the best-known houseboat owner with the most luxurious fleet," while another article from 1966 includes the Clermont in the "Hotels You Won't Want to Leave" Hall of Fame.

The history of the Clermont dates back to 1941 when an English businessman R. Foster from Clermont Hall, Norfolk was given the land on lease by Maharaja Hari Singh's government to build a houseboat. Foster, besotted by the beauty of Kashmir, erected 4 more houseboats, 2 of which were used for hunting birds in the river Jhelum. But in 1947 when British fled India, Foster decided to gift the land to Butt's father, G.M. Butt, a handicrafts merchant, whose friendship he greatly valued. Butt gladly relented and built four more for a total of eighthouseboats. With the passage of time, only four of these survived while the other four, embittered by lack of maintenance were gobbled down by the lake.

The décor of the surviving houseboats is impeccable with cedar panelled rooms, intricate crewel curtains, carpeted floors, chintz furniture and glass chandeliers glinting above rosewood dining tables. The front porch of the houseboats serves as an idyllic haven with a breathtaking view of the Himalayas and the twinkling reflections of the Chinars mirrored in the Dal. Food consists of mouth-watering traditional dishes and is served by people who have worked at the Clermont all their life.

However, the houseboat under the Chinar, one of the four left, is half-submerged in water with shattered windows and doors, wrecked bottom and a missing roof. "We can neither demolish nor renovate it, the wood has its own life," sighs Manzoor, referring to the High Court order that bans any repairs or renovations of houseboats. "The decision has badly affected the upkeep of all the houseboats, and made it harder to keep the boats in good condition. We can't afford to lose them as they are part of our history," he says.

Meanwhile, the houseboat clings feebly to the edge of the lake, biding its time. ●

TRASH TURNS TREASURE

Imran Ali Buth

There are possibilities to create abundance of opportunities if crafts like Paper-Mache are taught to youngsters, It would not only cater unemployment but also preserve our cultural heritage

The valley of Kashmir is bestowed with beauty, not only of having infinite natural bounties but also gifted with some exceptional skills. Handicrafts of Kashmir are famous throughout the world, whether we talk of Pashmina shawls, carpets of varied designs, or Papier-mâché products, all attain a special fame. A handmade product involves multi-layer processes to accomplish, and all processes are quite fascinating to observe.

When we look at a final Papier-mâché product, we can't imagine how many stages it crossed to reach the market. How many crafting hands it went through to get in final shape. However it is interesting to observe the initial process how papier-mâché products are made; from discarded or trash paper how decorative artifacts are produced. Before reaching the hands of the Naqash (painter), artifacts are molded, shaped, and smoothened, for that exquisite stroke of the brush, which has down the centuries remained the epitome of Kashmiri craft. But the most alluring part is, using the discarded paper adeptly to make decorative artifacts, inspiring to bring soul in dead things, reuse them to recreate their essence in completely different and delightful style.

Sakht-kar is a Kashmiri term which defines the work of an artist, who makes products from the paper pulp, and works hard to gather and stockpile the discarded paper "After paying minimal charges per kilogram, we accumulate the discarded paper in quantity; the first phase starts with immersing it into a tub containing water and keeps it there for few days. After the paper absorbs water we grind the slackened paper normally in a stone-mortar with wooden-pestle". Shabir Ahmad – a Sakht-kar describes his work.

The other materials like straw of rice plant and copper sulfate are then mixed with grinded paper to make a pulp easy to apply on a mold. There is also a practice to mix the minced paper with rice water to facilitate coagulation. The pulp is applied on molds made of clay, wood or brass as per the desired shapes.

After completing the layering of pulp over the mold, it is left for few days to dry up. "Normally, we put them on the roof in summer to quickly dry" said Shabir Ahmad. The mold is extracted from the product to keep hallow and light-weight; using a saw and then rejoined using organic glue. It is then polished with gemstones; the next stage of work usually done by other craftsmen to smoothen the products for painting. "The surface is polished till all irregularities and edges become smooth" Shabir Ahmad added.

There is wide range of objects made in papier-mâché craft. "Since I came to this field, I made a number of objects depending on the taste of customers. It includes Samovars, flower vases, boxes of varied shapes and sizes, balls and bells, pen holders and so on" Said Shabir Ahmad while showing his work.

Finally, the object reaches to the painter, locally called as Naqash, to get decorated →

with multiple designs like floral designs, embossed designs of various birds, animals etc. "Using a trace paper, we sketch out the design on it and then pierce it with a needle to make minute holes, exactly as per the design outline is drawn. Charcoal powder or simply white-powder, depending on the surface color, put in a cotton cloth is then rubbed on the trace paper after positioning it on the object." Fida Hussain, a Naqash, explains.

After getting the design outline on the object, the Naqash brings life to the object and makes it fascination to human eye. Many of the Master-Craftsmen do away with the use of tracing paper. For them the surface of the object is the canvas. The art object is varnished finally to give it a glossy look, and then placed in a tidy place to save it from dust .after dried up; the product is dispatched to the market.

Preservation of handicrafts; an alternative to tackle unemployment

With the increasing bleak job market in the state, the youth could ponder upon other available sources and opportunities whereas, the government needs to create such apparatus, to counsel the unemployed youth, provide them accessible tools and resources to find other means of job. "There are possibilities to create abundance of opportunities if crafts like Paper-Mache are taught to youngsters, It would not only cater unemployment but also preserve our cultural heritage" said Shabir Ahmad.

"These crafts should be inserted in school-curriculum to make the students familiar at their early stage of life. Like sports, they can adopt it as co-curricular activities and choose the one with own inclination" said, Fida Hussain. He added that one of our kids gets excited whenever he holds a brush. He draws with enthusiasm, keenly ask me questions how to prepare different colors and where to use them. ●

THE WISE AND JUDICIOUS USE OF THESE RESOURCES REMAINS A QUESTION MARK FOR POLICY-MAKERS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND POLITICIANS

CONSERVATION OF ENVIRONMENT IN J&K

Madhiya Nabi

The present situation of water bodies in the state is disruptive. Due to lacking waste management, the water bodies like Dal, Wullar, Manasbal are degrading.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is bestowed of having abundance of natural resources. Because of its natural beauty, the valley is often called 'the paradise on earth'. But due to increase in population and demand for natural resources, the threat to environment is increasing.

The state is considered rich in mineral resources like arsenic, borax, coal etc. If wisely utilized, these resources can uplift the State economy and provide livelihood to many unemployed people of the valley. But, unfortunately these approaches are missing. The wise and judicious use of these resources remains a question mark for policy-makers, environmentalists and politicians as apparently they hardly care for the welfare of the state.

HOD Earth Sciences Department,→

Kashmir University Shakeel Romshoo, said that different sections of the society are differently responsible for the degradation of our environment.

"Indeed there is a direct interface between environment and people. People itself are not a homogeneous entity. It involves both at government level and individual level. Different people have different roles," he said.

These regions are under constant threat due to natural factors like volcanic eruptions, glaciations, drought and man-made pollutants like pollution, habitat fragmentation, poaching.

"Policy making responsibility lies within the hands of the government but let me tell you clearly that our government has failed in making a very robust policy for preservation of our resources. Be it forests, garbage management, water bodies. But if you look at the society, we have equally failed because of our selfish nature," Romshoo said.

The present situation of water bodies in the state is disruptive. Due to lacking waste management, the water bodies like Dal, Wullar, Manasbal are degrading. Reports indicated that the Wullar, Manasbal and Anchar Lake are already under threat.

"Wullar, the largest fresh water lake in Asia, has shrunk from 190 square kilometers to 72 square kilometers. The Hokersar wetland, situated 16 kilometers north of Srinagar, has shrunk from its original area of 13.75 square kilometers to 4.5 square kilometers. The 240 km Jhelum River, with the catchment area of thousands of kilometers, is also quickly becoming polluted. The dredging of Jhelum has been initiated to restore its Glory, but expected results have not been achieved yet. Dumping of garbage on the banks of water Bodies is also responsible for their deterioration," said a senior official of LAWDA department.

"The vital need is to create awareness among masses about caring environment and simultaneously conveying the repercussions or ramifications about degradation of environment. There is lot to be done in order to create awareness among our people before it is too late," Romshoo added.

Another leading issue which causes a serious threat to the environment is improper solid waste management.

Roadside garbage dumping not only portrays a dull image but its stinking odor irritates people to walk along.

"I am not able to perform my duty properly in such a stinky atmosphere. I have to cover my nose with a mask or handkerchief to stand near the place but I am helpless. It surely affects the efficacy of my work," said a traffic police official working around the garbage dumping site at Tengpora area of Srinagar.

"The innovative waste management system is essentially required in which waste should be collected and decomposed by advanced scientific methods. It is a challenging task to create such apparatus here" said a Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) official.

The causal factors which are responsible for creating imbalance are not taken care of yet, however already proposed. For example, Rehabilitation of Dal dwellers - people who are living on the banks of Dal Lake. Since the past fifteen years, the government seemingly failed to implement its proposed decision. If the policy had been matured, the scenario would have been different.

"If the government is not in a position to take decisive steps in order to conserve these natural assets, they should not expect that fruits will come on their own," said Dr. Sami ullah Bhat, an assistant professor at department of Environment Science, Kashmir University.

Speaking about the biodiversity of the J&K State, he said that we have not faced any major disaster in Kashmir. "The moment we will face it, we may start thinking. When it comes to biodiversity, we talk of animals like hangul, deer but there is other side of diversity for which there is no concern. In Indian constitution in 1991, plants were put in the wildlife but due lack of awareness. Unless or until we won't change the mindset of people, we will hardly see any change," the professor said.

Talking about the responsibilities, he added that there are laws 48 (A) and 51 A (g) stating that responsibility towards the conservation of environment lies in the hands of both government and people respectively.

"There should be a balance between duty and right and awareness at both formal and informal level but it cannot be achieved in one year or two. Look at English people; it took them years and decades. Our civilization is not sensitive towards it. There is huge cultural difference in the domestic people and foreigners. No doubt, there is some sort of concern shown by people, student community, environmentalists towards environment," he said. ●

JAFFER'S TRYST WITH PERFUME STARTS DECADES BACK, WHEN HE HAD DECIDED TO RUN AWAY FROM HIS HOME IN HIS TWENTIES.

ALIENS IN ITS OWNED CITY

Iqra Akhoon

City folks have different priorities while the men of mountains are busy in their own life.

A train of thoughts….

This is how we treat our language? We might be the only creatures on the face of this earth who demean and disrespect their mother tongue. Not fair. Meanwhile, have a look and laugh out loud.

"I don't want ki mujhay kabhi dabb lagay."
"Mein subah Hushaar hi Nahi howi."
"Mujhay gar k oopar say laana hai."
"Mujhay toos aaya."

This is gross. This is murder. This is rape. This is utterly shameful. This is unacceptable. Unlike Kashmiri, no other language on this planet has been abused and humiliated by their own people. It is on the brink of collapse. It will die soon- a silent death.

It will vanish in the thin air. Excuse me for my pessimism but it is steadily limping on the trajectory of history.

A teen group was engaged in tittle-tattle in a local mini-bus when the aforementioned non-sense meaningless sentences hit my eardrum. Many widened their lips to spread silly smiles. But I was awe-struck. I could not believe my ears. It pained me inside. I wanted to know more about the girl but I don't know what stopped me.

Instead, I buzzed Dr. Aziz Hajini- secretary of Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art Culture and Languages (JKAACL). Dr. Hajini is a seasoned literary figure. I tossed a volley of questions to him about this murder.

Dr. Sahib was very candid in his answers. In a marathon chat, he said, "It is our identity. Language feeds us. It is our strength." He was quick to add what set a pall of gloom.

"We are witnessing the steep fall of Kashmiri Language. Agreed. Mother is not ready to talk to her child in Kashmiri. A teacher feels shy to talk in our own language." This is who we are. This is how we grow. This is a strange nation. A weird variety of human species is Koshur.

I was again taken a back when an elderly shopkeeper responded to my query in Urdu. *"Talhez yi copy ditov"* (Kindly give me this notebook.

"Konsi waali." He replied.

I left with a train of thoughts in my mind. What if I had asked in English or any other language? What prompted him to reply in a lingo other than my mother tongue? Have we stooped so low? Then I calmed myself.

"He might be used to it now. May be not." I thought.

Without playing the blame game, I believe educational institutions have a key role to play at this critical juncture. To safeguard the language, It is important to converse, discuss, debate in our mother tongue. It will surely have its impact.

Family and parents must make a rulebook toilet their kids-the budding blooms, imbibe the nitty-gritty of the language. That is unfortunately not happening as of now. A very dangerous trend is emerging. An illiterate eighty something granny fails to respond to a Kid's→

query. She remorsefully utters something very awkward. "Beta, pathar khaaw." She wanted her grandchild to sit down and eat his meals. But…….

We have buried our own culture. We are performing its last rites now. Our language is evaporating from here with a rapid pace. It has flying to some alien land. We are shamefully busy trading tongues. Exporting our own and importing the other.

On a parting note, I hope we will make some untiring efforts at individual level to preserve the language which is which dear to us, very close to our heart and soul. ●

UNLIKE CITY RESIDENTS, WHO TAKE MUCH INTEREST IN KNOWING WHAT'S ON IN THE POLITICAL ARENA OF THE STATE, THIS POPULATION PREFERS TO STAY BUSY WITH THE DAILY MONOTONOUS ACTIVITIES.

BOOK STORES IN KASHMIR

Arif Nazir

City folks have different priorities while the men of mountains are busy in their own life.

Anisa, a student in a bookstore is looking for some good reads. She couldn't read much because of the shutdowns but she has already heard a lot about books from Shahnaz Bashir and Abdul Ghani Butt. "These books have reflected the situation of Kashmir and that is why people from all places are reading it," she said.

The book stores of Kashmir have witnessed a rush after months long shutdown for good books to read. One of them is Scattered Souls by Shahnaz Bashir's. It is his second novel published by HarperCollins India. The book of 13 short stories portrays the ordinary lives of people of Kashmir shaped by conflict during 1990. Shahnaz Bashir said, "the army descended upon

Kashmir to quell a massive armed rebellion against Indian rule. They entered not just the land but also the lives of its people, fracturing their idea of home and puncturing their days and nights with curfews. The book brings together the stories of some of the people probing the

quandaries of their precarious existence."

Shahnaz Bashir the author of Scattered souls, he said "the inbox and phone calls makes me feel that Scattered Souls is being received well in Kashmir and across the globe. Even if it wasn't, it wouldn't matter. I will still write what I have to."

Ihsan Malik, a lecturer at Central University of Kashmir gave the more →

insight look as he said, "the book as collection of poignant short stories. "The book is very well written and adds a substantial dimension to the tradition. The best part of the book is characterial interconnection between stories which makes the book engrossing."

Mohammad Imtiyaz, manager at Password Bookstore, has already sold 100 copies of the book. "The book was released recently and people are buying it like hot cakes. People like to read about conflict and the book touches the life of a Kashmiri in a conflict torn place," Imtiyaz said, Another book by Nayeema Mehjoor - "LOST IN TERROR" which was released by Penguin, is such a painful tale of a young, educated and career conscious women.

Nayeema Mehjoor said that the book is about the time of armed movements in Kashmir. she further added, "I think this is the first book written about the women's perspective in Kashmir issues. I have tried to picture a woman who goes through turbulence, what she aspires for and what should be done. With this book, I think people have felt the pain that I have gone through."

The book was mostly reviewed by outsiders due to the recent unrest in Kashmir but Nayeema expects reviews from people of Kashmir as well. Uzrat Nizam, a journalism student said, "the book is must read. This should be a reference book for anybody who writes about Kashmir issue and women should be a part of it."

Muslim Conference Chairman Professor Abdul Ghani Butt's autobiography - Beyond Me got good response among autobiographies. It is a book of confessions made by Abdul Ghani Butt. The book of 15 chapters is full of history, religion culture and tradition till 1986.

Faisul Yaseen, a journalist said, "in his book, Bhat writes about various personalities of those times. He talks about himself and the important events that changed everything. He talks in smileys and metaphors, write philosophically, spiritually and for the intellect with the Islamic and Persian influence quoting Quran and Rumi."

Sheikh Shaheen, owner of Gulshan Books as she said, "The book was read by politicians, bureaucrats, separatist leaders and journalist also."

Other popular books were Zahid G Mohammad's book, Srinagar - The Aly of Resistance and Culture published by Gulshan Books. The other books that were read in the valley were related to Sufism. Sufi books like Seal of the Saints by Michel Chodkiewicz and The Sultan of the Saints by Mohammad Riaz Qadri mostly sold.

Some type of books are available online also, so readers have been buying the same books from online stores as well.

UNREGULATED URBANISATION ALONG THE WETLAND PERIPHERIES WHICH HAS FINALLY LEADED TO THE ENCROACHMENT OF THE WETLAND HAS SHRINKED IT TO A FEW SQUARE KILOMETRES.

WETLAND TURNS INTO WASTELAND

Khushar sar, a lake converted into Wetland, at the verge of extinction. Everyday thousands of gallons of untreated sewage is being dumped into the wetland which has turned the waters poisonous which has lead to extinction of natural vegetation, fish and other aquatic life besides engulfing the neighbourhood with a foul stink thereby putting the neighbourhood inhabitants vulnerable to life threatening diseases. Unregulated urbanisation along the wetland peripheries which has finally lead to the encroachment of the wetland has Shrinked it to a few square Kilometres. Ironically, no one owes the wetland and authorities are shifting the blames from one department to another.

"If one goes by the name and the apparent functioning of the department it should come under us but our domain has been restricted to Dal and Nigeen Lakes only. Khushal Sar is no man's land", an official at LAWDA said.

As per the survey conducted by the Kashmir University Earth Science department there has been nearly 40% decrease in the size of this wet land.

In 1965 it was spread over a sprawling 0.96 square Kilometres but now it has →

Adil Amin

In 1965 it was spread over a sprawling 0.96 square Kilometres but now it has been left to mere 0.6 square Kilometres

been left to mere 0.6 square Kilometres which is a worrying sign for the environmentalists owing to its importance in the biodiversity and climate change, "These wetlands trap the excess carbon dioxide and nitrogen from the atmosphere thereby directly reducing chances of global warming. Degradation of these wetlands has visible consequences as we receive less snowfall and normal cycle of seasons has changed to some extend", Maqsood Ahmad, a Phd scholar at Kashmir University said.

Experts say that the turbidity of water has increased manifold which has affected the vegetation and aquatic life. The Nadru(Lotus bea troot) which once used to be the pride of the lake and a major source of livelihood for the vegetable growers has vanished, " We used to extract it and sell it to earn our livelihood but now nothing is there. Fish has also gone. Not a single insect is here," Mohammad Husain Wani, a local said.

Seventy- year- old Ghulam Mohammad Dar recalls the time when he used to take his boat and row toward Eidgah and Alimasjid to offer prayers but laments that the entire area has been filled up and converted into residential colonies, he said.

He said that one can easily spot these colonies at the peripheries of Khusar sar around Zinemar and Sadipora. "Fidousiya Colony is a one such example which was created after filling a vast area of Khushal sar. The mesmerising sight of tree lines and the outstretched waters have been blocked by the shining roof tops".

Fayaz Ahamd Khan, Joint Commissioner Srinagar development authority, said "Unfortunately it has been no man's land everyone is having gala time here. We have had several meeting with different stake holder but none has come up with a feasible plan to conserve it. It is ultimately our collective loss. Lack of vision has led to its degradation".

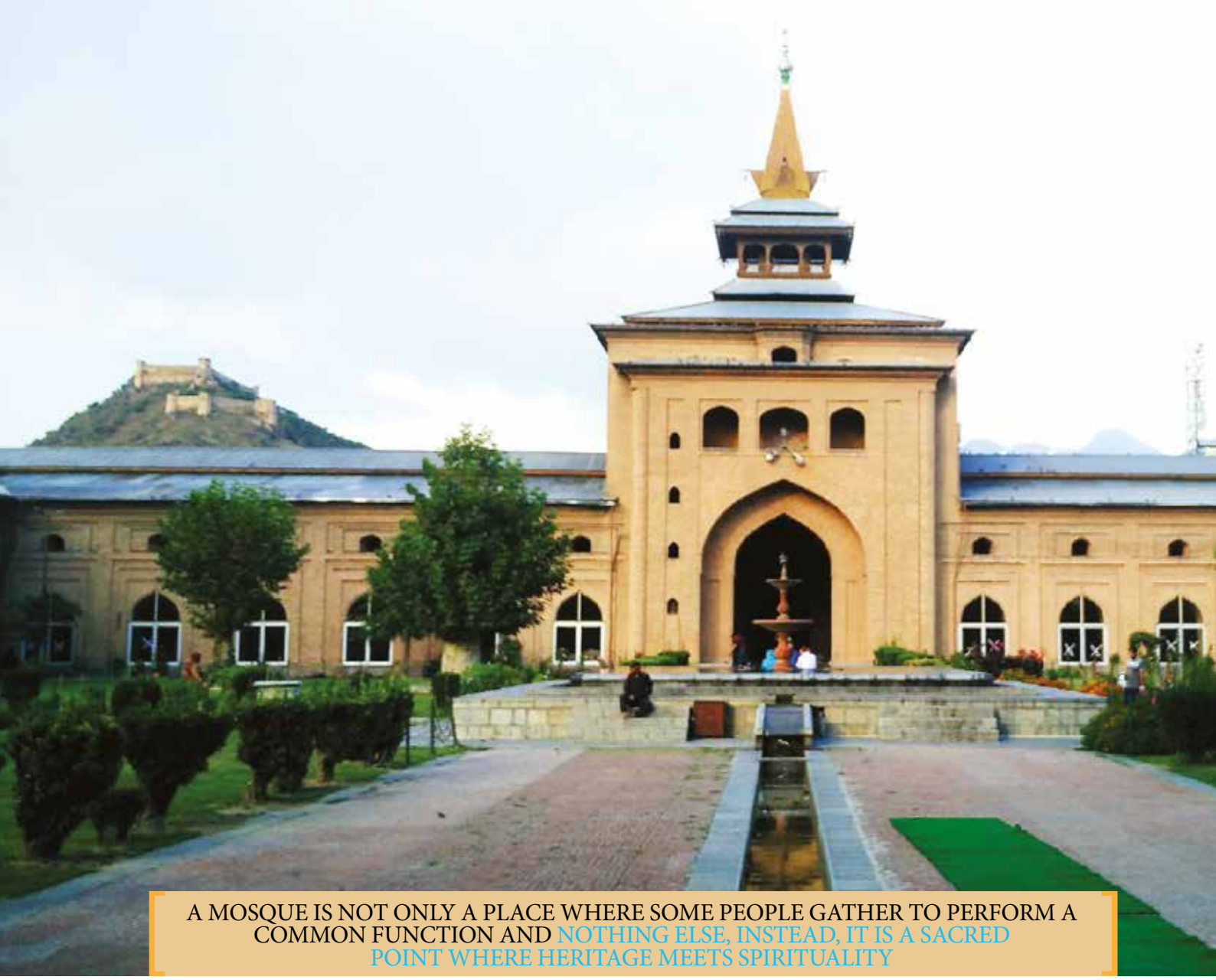
Every year, these wetlands attract lacks of avian visitors which flock to Kashmir from parts of Siberia and Central Asia. Nearly 68 species of water fowls are believed to swarm here.

Among the dozen odd resting places for these winged-guests, Khushal sar – Nestled in the downtown Srinagar – has assumed a paramount important. More six known plant species grow in these marshes, some of which serve as food for these birds while few other are believed to have deleterious effect on the local biology.

"It used to ply host for these avian visitors and the entire area used to be abuzz with cacophony of sounds, breaking the routine silence in the early days of my youth but there is deafening silence and foul smell now". Ghulam Mohammmd said.

This wetland was the breeding ground to certain resident birds like Marsh harrier, Purple Swamap Hen, Moorhen, Resident Mallad duck and Common Red shank which has moved to other spaces due to lack of vegetation which served as food for them.

Professor Shakil Romshoo, Head of the Department Earth Science while explaining the importance said that the it was one of the urban wetlands which are just like sponges that soak all the natural drainage and the fact that these wetlands were linked together they were excellent means to divert water during floods besides being helping in maintaining ecological and hydrological balance, "It is linked to Nigeen lake along with Gilsar lake via Nalamar cannal. So almost all the water bodies were linked together and in case of emergency or excess of water in the major water bodies they used to house the extra water" ●



A MOSQUE IS NOT ONLY A PLACE WHERE SOME PEOPLE GATHER TO PERFORM A COMMON FUNCTION AND NOTHING ELSE, INSTEAD, IT IS A SACRED POINT WHERE HERITAGE MEETS SPIRITUALITY

MORE THAN JUST A PLACE TO PRAY

Mu'azzam Bhat

The valley of Kashmir embodies uniqueness when it comes to architectural styles and values.

Another busy day in Lal Chowk is about to come to an end. As one strolls through Regal Chowk towards Polo View, a candid thought of paying a leisure visit to the famed "Bund" comes to mind. And as one steps inside the Jhelum View Park after climbing the stairs near the famous Lala Sheikh Restaurant, eyes rest upon what is apparently an old sight but one that now presents a relatively fresh and engrossing view.

The renovation of Masjid Bilal is nearing completion and the renewed architecture of this 3,024 square feet mosque is nothing short of amazing. A main entrance, a sub-entrance and a side entrance on bi-directional sides of the mosque confront four minarets that stand on lofty columns of Deodar (cedar) wood.

The Masjid that is located on the banks of river Jhelum right in between the flowing river and the flowing traffic of cars and pedestrians in the busy street of Lal Chowk.

Mr. Riyaz Hussain, the chief contractor in charge of the construction of the mosque says that once complete, the ceiling of the mosque interior will boast of "Khatamband" which is widely considered as the most famous type of wooden ceiling in Kashmir.

The renovation work on the mosque, as per the contractor, started on the 28th of May, 2016 but due to the disturbance last year, the work took way longer than usual, though now the completion is in close sight.

The money for the renovation work and all additional construction was pooled in by the shop owners in and around the →

area and collections were made by the members of the Intizamiya Committee Masjid Bilal which ultimately made it possible to increase the capacity of the mosque from an earlier number of 500 to double, i.e., 1000 people besides the Imam in a single congregational prayer.

The renewed architecture of the mosque is one that immediately catches the eye and is of aesthetic significance. The valley of Kashmir embodies uniqueness when it comes to architectural styles and values. The roofs, for instance, take a pyramidal shape and facilitate the sliding down of snow in the winter season and at the same time provide an attractive look to the building that they are on top of.

When it comes to the construction of mosques in Kashmir, generally there are two types of construction plans viz, (i) the square plan; examples of which are The Shah-i-Hamadan and the Madani mosques and (ii) the group of squares plan, the most notable example being the Jamia Masjid situated at Nowhatta in the middle of the Old City.

The architecture of a mosque is shaped most strongly by the regional traditions of the time and place where it was built. As a result, style, layout, and decoration can vary greatly. Nevertheless, because of the common function of the mosque as a place of congregational prayer, certain architectural features appear in mosques all over the world.

In the beginning when Islam was spreading in West Asian countries, there was no specific artistic style of mosques. Gradually over time the mosque design attained specific structure as many important parts were introduced and added such as Mehrab (concave recess), Mimber (Plinth), Sahan (open place), Minar (minaret) amongst Arches and Domes.

Patthar masjid was built during the Mughal era by Empress Noor Jehan, wife of Emperor Jahangir. The mosque is situated on the left bank of river Jhelum and it has some distinct features that separate it from the rest of the mosques in the Kashmir valley. Unlike other mosques it does not have the traditional pyramidal roof. Furthermore, the mosque has nine mehraabs (arches) with the central one being larger than the others, and it is constructed with grey limestone.

Another notable mention is the Mosque of Shah-i-Hamadan better known as "Khankah-i-muallah" or simply "Khanqah."

Khanqah is a shrine of Said ul Auliya Mir Sayeed Ali Hamdani located on the right bank of the river Jhelum between the Zaina kadal and Fateh Kadal bridges. It was built in 1395 A.D and is one of the oldest mosques in the Kashmir valley.

Even a cursory depiction of the architecture in Kashmir is more than enough to highlight the importance of its conservation. One major organization working in this regard is the Centre for Heritage and Environment of Kashmir CHEK's Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). INTACH's primary work is to deal with the unprotected heritage of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and a notable mention with regard to the concerned work would be that of the process of digitization that INTACH has carried out on a number of mosque structures which facilitates inch by inch rebuilding of the mosque in the event of any eventuality that calls for one.

An instance in this regard would be the recommending of proper wiring of loudspeakers and other electrical equipment in mosques, using fire resistant paints and an immediate connection water point in the immediate vicinity of the mosques so that damage is kept to the minimum in case of a fire event.

"A mosque is not only a place where some people gather to perform a common function and nothing else, instead, it is a sacred point where heritage meets spirituality. An earnest effort should be made on our part to ensure that the authenticity of this spirituality is not compromised." Said INTACH's Saleem beigh

The Jamia Masjid was built by Sultan Sikandar Shah Kashmiri Shahmiri in 1394 A.D under the order of Mir Mohammad Hamdani, son of Said-ul-Auliya Mir Sayeed Ali Hamdani. It is constructed in Persian style and has similarities to Buddhist Pagodas the mosque was designed to hold 33,333 persons and has a total space area of 1, 40,000 square feet or 13,000 square meters.

The mosque has undergone major renovations by various Sultans and Shahs over the course of several centuries.

It also has a stone slab with Persian inscription in Nastaliq script. The center of the mosque is an open space with a large tank or Houz, a fountain in the Center enhancing the beauty of the mosque.

ONE DAY, WHEN MY TEACHER TOLD MY FELLOW STUDENT IN HELPING ME OUT. HE RETORTED AND SAID "I AM NOT HIS SLAVE.

ARMLESS ALLROUNDER

One cannot imagine playing cricket without arms. It is not possible to bowl wrong one or to grab the ball without arms. It seems to too difficult to play cricket without arms.

But for the 26 year old, Amir Hussain Lone from South Kashmir's Anantnag district nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it.

A tragic accident at his father's sawmilling unit when he was just 8 years old changed Amir's fate. Doctor had to amputate both of his arms as accident took heavy toll on the family's business of manufacturing cricket bats as Amir's father sold everything to take care of medical expenses.

"I was in my second class at the time of accident". Amir said with a sense of remorse over the accident that changed his entire life. "That accident devastated not only my life but the whole family".

But, Amir did not let the accident to come in his way for achievements, even though when he was made aware of his "reality" again and again. There was always one person who stood behind Amir through thick and thins his Grandmother

Amir recalls that the school authorities one day told his parents →

Saher Iqbal

A tragic accident at his father's sawmilling unit when he was just 8 years old changed Amir's fate.

his family to get me enrolled in some school for special abled children. But it was my grandmother who supported me to attend the school"

"My grandmother was always there for me. She used to say just listen and observe what your teacher teaches. It will help in your growing up as a child," Amir said while looking at his grandmother's picture.

But it was not so easy to continue my studies, Amir continued. "One day, when my teacher told my fellow student in helping me out. He retorted and said "I am not his slave". Those words inspired of being self dependent.

After the incident, Amir said that he went to near shop and bought a pen. "We were poor to afford stationery's for my study". I went to a cloth merchant and asked him for a bolt cardboard around which the clothes are rolled to write upon. "I started writing on walls to practice till I was able to master it".

Amir after completing higher secondary while writing his answers sheets with his feet. He thought of doing graduation from Government Degree College Bijbehara in 2013.

While talking about his college experience, Amir said, "I used to wear only track since it was easy to roll down in case of natures call, but the college authorities told me they will allow him to continue his studies only he starts wearing pants. This is our education system".

While Amir did not get admission but he started practicing of wearing pants on his own. He said, "It took me a whole year to train myself to wear those pants. But, even then I did not go to college. But, refusal of college authorities still haunts me".

Amir believes that he is capable of doing any task be it swimming, shaving, eating, drinking, using laptop or using phone. But behind all these activities lies a tragic story.

One fine morning, the stitch of his pants snapped off while he was on his way to school. Felling ashamed, he stood near the side of the road and called passerby to help him out.

"Nobody bothered in helping me out. I was on the road from morning till it was dark. I thought darkness will shield my shame as I took another route. When I reached home I recalled my incident and every one broke down. Life is very cruel", Amir said while crying.

All these incidents never stopped in achieving what Amir is right now. This led him to consciousness of doing things on his own, even, when it meant playing cricket.

I loved watching cricket on television like any other kid. Since we had no TV, I used to watch cricket at my neighbors but one day told me to leave their house but I peeked through the window hole and watched full innings of that match. "I felt as if they were telling me that cricket does not belong to you. That was the moment when I decided to learn cricket", said Amir while a glimpse of smile was clearly visible on his face.

It was quite difficult in the beginning to practice cricket. Amir says "He had least problem in understanding in batting as he always idealized Sachin Tendulkar as he eagerly used to wait for Sachin's batting whether it was live cricket match or highlights".

My earliest cricket practice started with my grandmother who used to bowl to me. "I wish she was alive today she would have been happy in seeing my representing my state at national level", Amir said.

Now aged 26 Amir Hussain is the captain of Jammu and Kashmir state Para cricket team. Amir is able to bat, bowl and even catch out opponents using his feet.

Amir's unusual technique for batting involves holding the bat between his neck and shoulder. Amir bowls with his toes using a sweeping leg movement

Amir has represented J&K at national level in different tournaments in Delhi and Lucknow and looks cricket as his carrier but he feels that cricket is not going anywhere. it not providing enough money for his future.

He blames the government of neglecting them and providing any kind of support. "Nobody understands us. When I went to New Delhi and Lucknow, I found sensitiveness and special attention towards people like us but in Kashmir, there is lack of awareness. There is no association of Para cricketers in JK. I hope government will look into the matter as there are many people like me who need support from everywhere. ●

IT'S LIKE A WASTE-LAND FOR LOCALS SO THEY SOMEHOW UTILIZE IT EVEN BY ACCUMULATING COW-DUNG WASTE FROM DOMESTIC ANIMALS.

BURZAHOM FORSAKEN

Ikhlaq ul Rehman

They (ASI) excavated the site and took away with artifacts from Burzuhama to Kolkata in the garb to study them. But, they never bothered to take steps in preservation and maintenance of this world famous historical site.

At a historical site which has also been famous world over, one would expect that it will be a highly preserved and maintained place, besides visitors would also be attracted towards the site in huge numbers. But, unfortunately, it is not the case with an important historical site in Kashmir – Burzahom.

Through the pristine areas of Naseem Bagh- Shalimar road, as soon as one reaches near the Karewa in Burzahom where once Neolithic civilization existed and flourished, several heaps of cow-dung on the edges of karewas from roadside downgrades the fame attached to the site.

"It's like a waste-land for locals so they somehow utilize it even by accumulating cow-dung waste from domestic animals. What unfortunate it is,that officials who have been tasked the preservation of this famous historical site don't utter a word to stop locals from spoiling it," Bashir Ahmad, a resident of Burzhom said.

16 km from Northeast srinagar,Burzahom is the first Neolithic site in Kashmir located on a 'karewa' (wuder) between the banks of the Dal Lake and the Zabarwan hills. This site was also nominated for inscription as a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 'World Heritage Site' in 2014, though, waiting for its approval.

After climbing the karewa to have a close look of sites depicting how pre-historic settlements used to live, the domestic animals grazing the grass inside designated territory of historical site is what catches one's attention more than the remnants of site that documents the gradual change in the nature of dwelling spaces among early societies.

Two sign boards, erected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) corresponding each other on the karewa warn the people that 'they are inside the 200 meters of regulated zone limit of the protected monument and constructions are strictly prohibited except with prior approval'. However, the 200 meters that ASI is referring to is nowhere designated or marked with anything or anywhere near the site. The site is open to →

everyone including dogs and domestic animals.

Only good thing that has happened since years according to locals is that people were digging the edges of karewa and taking soil to home for purposes like filling holes of their house' lawns, building new house etc, but that activity was stopped after government agencies and senior citizens of local areas intervened.

During the course of excavation, it was found that Neolithic homes at Burzahom site were pits dug below ground level using stone tools. The sides of the pits were plastered with mud. The pits were usually round or oval, and narrow at the top and wide at the base. Holes discovered around the pits were probably used to fix wooden poles to give support to roofs made out of tree branches. Some of the deeper pits had a few steps leading down while the pit-dwellers people would have stepped down into the shallower ones.

Director State Archaeology and Museums Department, Mohammad Shafi Zahid told MERC Times that it is the ASI who has "ruined" the historical site as they had the responsibility to look after the site but "desperately failed" to preserve it.

"They (ASI) excavated the site and took away with artifacts from Burzuhama to Kolkata in the garb to study them. But, they never bothered to take steps in preservation and maintenance of this world famous historical site. Even they never returned artifacts to J&K. Since the inception of our department, we have been repeatedly seeking return of artifacts even chief minister late Mufti Mohammad Sayeed intervened but they hardly responded," Zahid said.

He said that all other 25 departments returned back Valley after 'Darbar Move' to summer capital this year, but the Srinagar circle office of ASI was the only department which didn't shift here but remained in Jammu.

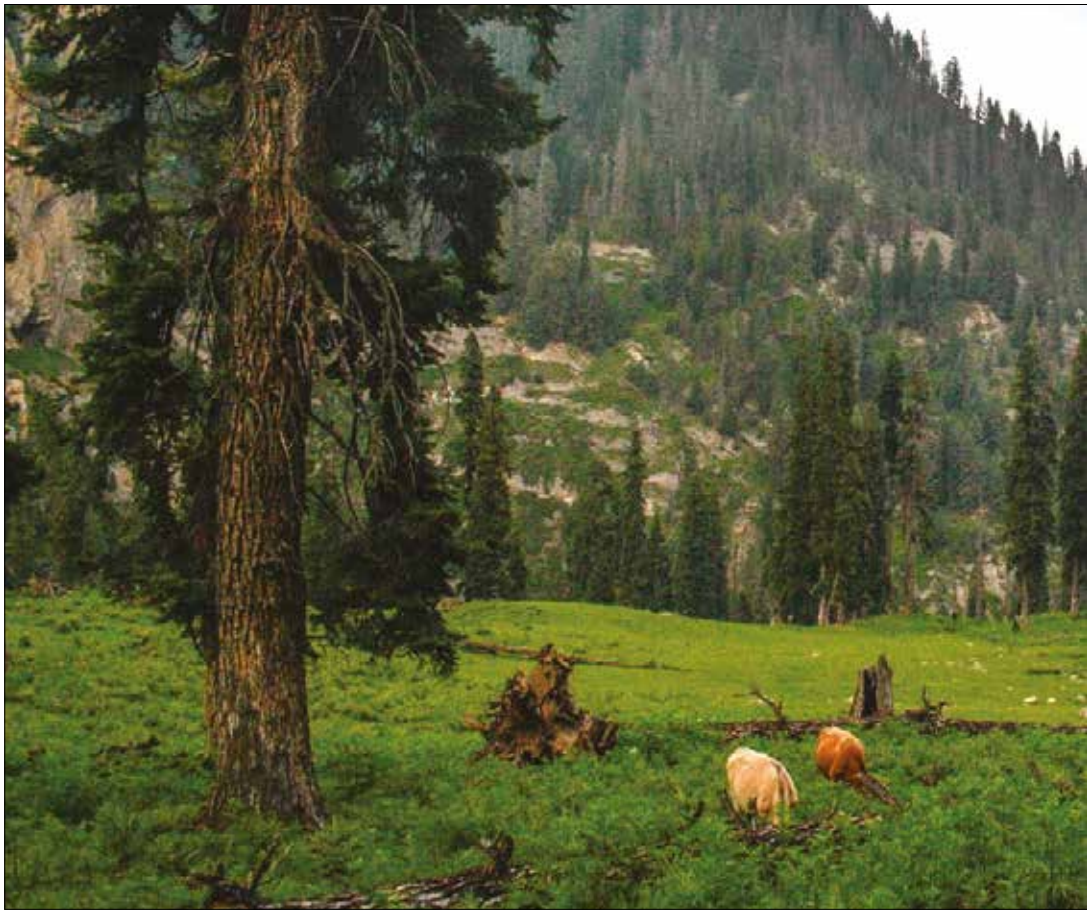
Admitting that the monument was not protected as it should have been, Superintending Archaeologist, ASI Srinagar circle, Vasant Kumar Swarnakar says that "it was due to absence of all-round fencing that external elements manage to enter the site premises".

"Your concern of domestic animals grazing inside the site is genuine and we are building a fencing wall to cover the entire regulated site for its better preservation," he said.

After the discovery and excavation of Burzahom, other Neolithic sites were also discovered at several places, such as Begagund, Brah, Gofkral, Hariparigom, Jayadevi-udar, Olichibag, Pampur, Panzogom, Sombur, Thajiwor and Waztal, all located on karewas mainly in the south-east parts of the Kashmir valley.

IF TAPPED, BEAUTIFUL DOODHPATHRI HAS POTENTIAL TO ATTRACT TOURISTS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE, BESIDES IT CAN BE DEVELOPED AS MAJOR SPOT FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM OWING TO ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

DOODHPATHRI: THE MEADOW OF FAITH



Aneesa Khan

The shrine in the center of the place remains epitome of the religious civilization and faith.

Beautiful is an understatement .clean river ,water as white as milk, huge meadows, sheep and horses roaming freely and all of this surrounded by gigantic mountains –Doodhpathri is located at distance of 42 kilometers from summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir .it has been recognized as new tourist destination central Kashmir's Budgam district

If tapped, beautiful Doodhpathri has potential to attract tourists from across the globe, besides it can be developed as major spot for religious tourism owing to its historical significance.

The origin of the name is not completely known. However it is said that the famous saint of Kashmir Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA] was searching water for performing ablution. He pricked the land with his stick and milk came out .he asked the milk that you can be only used for drinking .hearing this milk at once changed its state to water Seeing the miracle, Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA] whispered Doodhpathri, which can be roughly translated to Valley of Milk. Over the course of time, it took the shape of river, named Shali Ganga it still exhibits the same quality of clear crystal water.

The large area is dependent on the this river for irrigation and drinking water facility, besides the aesthetic value of the river increases the charm of this hill station and people throng the place , usually during summers to relive themselves from dryness of summer.

Gulzar Ahmad Sheikh, a historian who has researched on Doodhpathri →

and life of Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA] said Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA] stayed in Doodhpathri and spend long time here meditating on God and performing Nimaz. On August 14 everywhere people assemble from neighboring parts to get acquainted with the teachings of Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA].The shrine in the center of the place remains epitome of

the religious civilization and faith.

Inside the forests of this beautiful place, people believe that there is the Grate on which Sheikh used to cook food and burn fire and is locally known as Sheikh Daan. People often come to visit this place with wishes and respect. It is also believed that not only Sheikh Noor Din Wali [RA] stayed and prayed here but it has been home of other great saints who stayed and worshipped here. Coming back to beauty of this place. Doodhpathri is known for its natural dress up and meadows. It remains covered by green carpet of grass in summer and in winter white snow covers all.

People living around this place often use to collect minor forest products which are essential for their survival and existence. They collect firewood from which they prepare coal which is used in Kangri a famous Kashmiri firepot.

Also number of medicinal plants are found in the forests of Pathri which has gained the attention of many researchers especially from the field of Ayurveda. Gurwan Sar is the main source of water and is known as Kazan means store of water. This Sar provides water to Shali Ganga and Doodh Ganga and these two rivers distribute this water to different areas, where people use it for irrigation and other purposes.

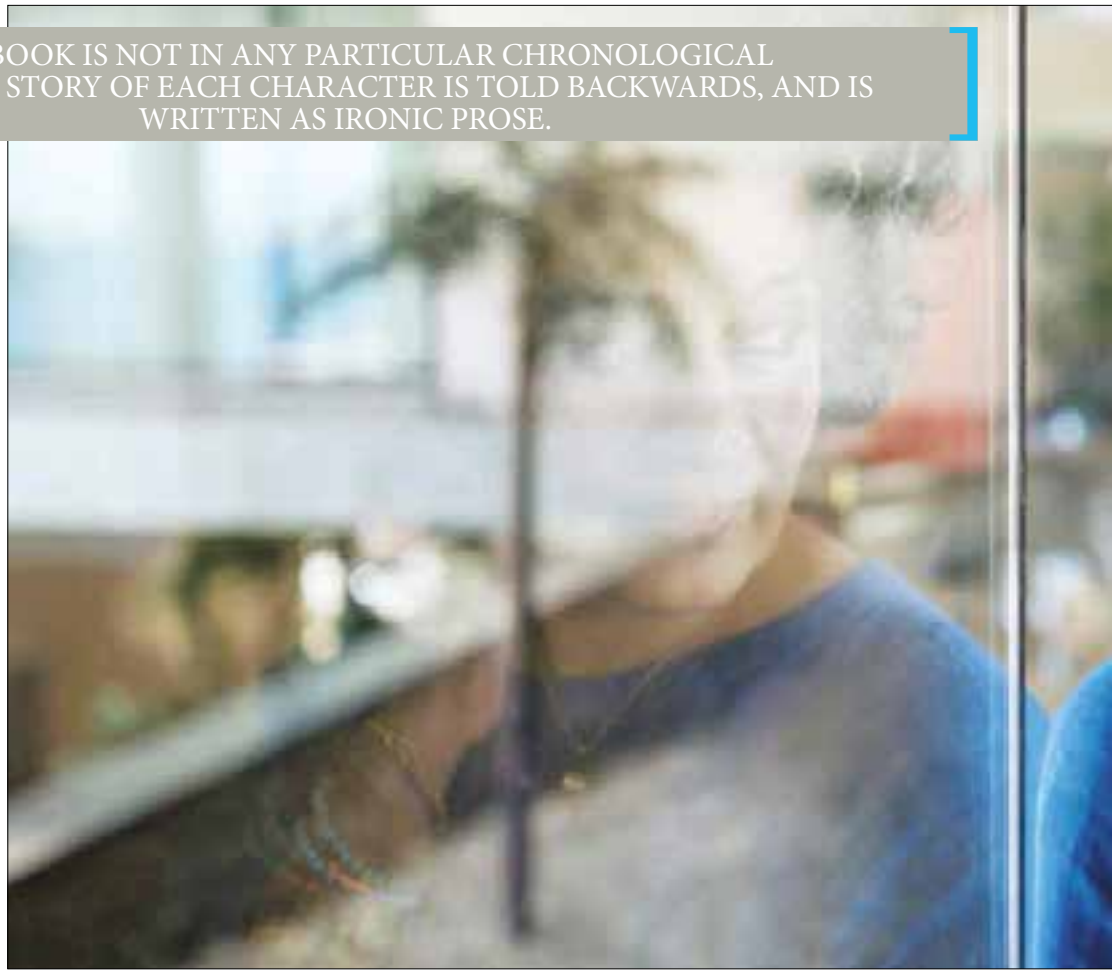
Water coming from melting snow gets stored in this Gurwan Sar and then it continuously provides water to both the rivers all year. Parihas Maidan is the frontal part of DoodhPathri which is too beautiful and cowboys use to graze their flocks of cows and sheep. People said that there was a civilization which sustained in this area of Pthri and there was a separate king of that past civilization. This has been seen from the sources of Archeology and still many things of past can be seen which really exist.

On moving from Parihas to Doodh Pathri center there is a famous Dubwan which is the place where people in the past use to wash clothes and now this place is used by Shepherds for washing cows and sheep. People mention that this place was used by past civilization Drycleaners for cloth washing. Doodh Pathri is still unexplored paradise, but the thing cannot be ignored that MLA Khan sahib Hakim Mohammad Yaseen has done a tremendous work for development of Doodhpathri and with his will and efforts Government of Jammu and Kashmir got attention towards this beautiful place.

In year 2015 about 50000 non local and foreign tourists visited this place but in 2016 due to strikes the number reduced to large extent and about 20000 non local and foreign tourists visited this place. About lakhs of local people visit this place every year and majority visits in June, July and August.

Local people also visit the place in winter season as well to enjoy heavy snowfall. Locals around this beautiful place request Government of Jammu and Kashmir to pay more attention towards its development and management.

THE BOOK IS NOT IN ANY PARTICULAR CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, THE STORY OF EACH CHARACTER IS TOLD BACKWARDS, AND IS WRITTEN AS IRONIC PROSE.



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A REVIEW OF 'THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS BY ARUNDHATI ROY'

Faila Khan

The book is overpopulated with characters and one may or may not be able to keep up with it, it may create a little chaos in readers head.

About Author:

Arundhati Roy, full name Suzanna Arundhati Roy (born November 24, 1961, Shillong, Meghalaya, India), she is an Indian author, actress, and political activist who was best known for the award-winning novel The God of Small Things (1997).

After two decades, Roy has come with her new fiction book The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, recently shortlisted for Man booker prize, 2017 released in June. , Roy's nonfiction book touches and tracks down different aspects of human society.

About book

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a story having two main strands. One follows Anjum, a hijra, or transgender, struggling to make a life for herself in Delhi. The other follows Tilo, a thorny and irresistible architect turned activist (who seems to be modeled on Roy herself), and the three men who fall in love with her.

There is a question Roy asks quite subtly in the second chapter, "Is it possible for a mother to be terrified of her own baby?" There is an excerpt from the book that captures Jehanara Begum's (Anjum's mother) character, "In Urdu, the only language she (Jahanara Begum, Anjum's mother) knew. All things, not just living things but all things—carpets, →

clothes, books, pens, musical instruments—had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman, everything except her baby. Yes of course she knew there was a word for those like him—Hijra. Two words actually, Hijra and Kinnar. But two words do not make a language."

The character journeys from old Delhi to riot-hit Gujrat and finally finds herself caught in the conflict torn valley of Kashmir.

The introduction of a character called Musa Aka Commander Gulrez, a fundamentalist, a freedom fighter, the man who only finds his place in romantic fiction whose wife and daughter are recently shot dead. Musa's character is layered.

We encounter S. Tillotama, a dusky Malayali beauty, all the men she meets fall in love with her, and her character is written so interestingly and intricately. There are instances where you think, is this Roy or Tilo? The resemblances are coincidental, maybe. The love web exists between Tilo, Musa and Naga Hariharan (a left wing journalist). The introduction of two Miss Jabeens: the first a child born in Srinagar and buried in its overcrowded Martyrs graveyard; the second found at midnight, abandoned on a concrete sidewalk in the heart of Delhi.

After a series of events, it talks of how Tillotama ends up in a graveyard with Anjum, how the story interconnects.

The book talks about all the forbidden topics of present India, Indira Gandhi's assassination, Sikh Massacre in 1984, Kashmir Insurgency, The rise of Saffron brigade, Dalit politics, Gujarat riots 2002, Ayodhya etc. The book reaches the audience who usually avoids Roy's nonfiction, its right to mention that the political subjects she touches are not opinionated; it's the free flowing of a characters journey throughout these phases. That's precisely what Ministry attempts to do: take a view of violence, injustice, suffering over decades of India's history and turn it all into a breathing human story. It is a story of love. It is a story of longing. It is a story of hope.

The book is overpopulated with characters and one may or may not be able to keep up with it, it may create a little chaos in readers head. The idea of the book runs as, everything personal is political and vice versa. The book is not in any particular chronological order, the story of each character is told backwards, and is written as ironic prose. The book though fiction is close to reality and echoes helplessness of contemporary India. The characters are too broken by the world and are then fixed with small acts of love and hope. The story of conflicted characters is told with real emotions and sometimes with bitter laugh, thus adding tragic humor to the story like,

"Young reporters, who spread across the city like a rash, asking urgent, empty questions; they asked the poor what it was like to be poor, the hungry what it was like to be hungry, the homeless what it was like to be homeless."

The clear version of this fiction is to represent the factual modern history. Roy's fiction always touches the social boundaries be it in The God Of Small Things, where parallels are drawn between a Dalit and a high caste society or The ministry, where the narration touches the depth of diverse characters in different societies. Roy's eye for details and gift of storytelling is coherent and interesting.

The lines in the poem at the end of The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness—How to tell a shattered story? /By slowly becoming everybody/No. By slowly becoming everything—are a coda. ●

WE USED TO SEE TOURISTS COME IN HOUSE BOATS SPENDING NIGHTS TOGETHER HERE IN DURING SUMMERS. THE VIEW PRESENTED A SPLENDOR,

'DEAD ANCHAR'

Ubeer Naqushbandi

There were even medicinal plants that used to grow inside lake. Those plants had cancer treating properties. But now this lake is so toxic that it gives back cancer.

The nauseating smell and pack of dogs have pounced over the carcass with eagles hovering overhead at Anchar Soura. Unknown of fact that site was once a pristine water body; anybody can take the place for a "dumping site". This is what has remained of Anchar lake which once spanned over an area of 19.4sq km, has now just got shrunken to 6.8 sq km.

Nazir Ahmad Taploo is an octogenarian carpet weaver. Taking a deep gushes from his hookah, he has aged all along with now "dead Anchar". "There were times when tourists visited this lake in large numbers. But now no one comes here," says Taploo while placing tobacco inside chelum of his hookah.

Anchar formed an important place in the hydrology of Srinagar. The lake is connected with the Dal Lake through a channel known by the name of Nallah Aamir Khan.

Taploo says that it is on record that visitors used to take a boat ride from Dal Lake to the Khushal Sar –another water body which is also on the verge of extinction. "They used to enjoy. Not only them. Even we used to go ecstatic, not now anymore," says Taploo while taking hard gushes from his hookah.

"We used to see tourists come in house boats spending nights together here in during summers. The view presented a splendor," says Taploo pointing with his right hand towards massive Mahadav mountain range that houses highest peak of Kashmir:Harmukh and serene Tungalball hill in Ganderbal district.

Environmentalists after assessing the deteriorated condition of the lake had declared it "dead" in 2010.

Presently, Anchar falls under the domain Srinagar Municipal Corporation which in itself Nazir says is "irony". "Some restoration urban bodies department like UEED or LAWDA should be given the task. But handling it entirely to SMC means that government considers it a dust bin." →

With successive regimes falling to restore pristine water body-Anchar has just been reduced to a memory of past. The encroachments are going on at massive scale. Inside it marshlands have been created which Nazir says are made from its basin. And large swathes of English willow and kani kul (used for wicker work) are grown into the lake. "We are responsible for its ruination," says Taploo taking a rest from his smoking.

In 2010 environmentalists had given reasons for lake's death. They had said concrete chambers used for baking willow branches have been installed close to its shores. Not only this they had mentioned that the fecal matter directly flows into the lake. Besides this the jungle of willows have turned whole peripheral area of lake into a thick forest that prevents sunlight from touching the waters of Anchar proving detrimental for its flora and fauna.

Besides this two important developments Taploo says happened close toAnchar that has proven catastrophic for it. "It's (Anchar's) doom started the day SKIMS hospital was built along its shore in 1977. We never thought life savior for people would turn curse for Anchar".

All the biomedical waste flows into Anchar. Though, officials at SKIMS hospital maintain that waste is treated before being discharged into the water body. "We have a full fledged STP," says an official from SKIMS.

Certain steps like installation of two furnaces for burning solid waste were put up in 2008 but SKIMS insiders say that the measure proved inadequate owing to the huge stress on the hospital. "No doubt main problem for us is liquid waste," says a SKIMS insider wishing not to be identified.

Taploo after taking some rest again lays his hands on the hookah and places hot embers on the chillum to take a gush. The sweat drops trickle down from his forehead. He wipes it with the button less sleeve of his kurta. "There are no more fishes and nadrus(stem of lotus) here in Anchar. Though you may find some but that is all toxic. All you find in the lake is now plastic bottles, polythene bags and other garbage. Even amputated human body parts and animal carcass and wastage from lavish marriage parties are directly thrown into the lake. It emanates unbearable stench," says Taploo.

Another factor that Nazir says as"final nail in Anchar's coiffin" was construction of Achan dumping site by government in late nineties. The black toxic water(leech) that is formed out of the decomposed waste at Anchan, Taploo says has also damaged the lake.

Tributary from Sindh river enters the Anchar from its northern side and brings a lot of siltation alongside. Due to lack of any opening in the lake, the massive siltation has resulted into dry patches of land inside the lake.

"There were even medicinal plants that used to grow inside lake. Those plants had cancer treating properties. But now this lake is so toxic that it gives back cancer," says Nazir in a harsh while shifting his hands from hookah towards kettle.

Barely two kilometers from lies Nallabal bridge at Nowhera-a place famous for dry cleaners particularly associated with world famous Pashmina shawls. The discharge of detergent on large scale on daily bases is also adding to the Ancahr's agony.

Heat of Anchar's apathy is also felt by people living adjacent to it. The lake was once a bread earning place for them. They used to sell its fishes, nadru and other varities that used to grow inside the lake. Known for producing Pharri (smoked fish) – a local delicacy exclusively found in Anchar, its fishermen are now switching to other jobs.

With seepage capacity of Anchar almost reduced to nil. It is also seen as a reason by environmentalists for flooding of Srinagar city in 2014-the first ever urban floods in entire world.

Recalling his yesteryears Taploo says during these summer times, he used to spend his day in lake-swimming, rowing a boat or just playing alongside his friends on the shore. But he no more can take this risk. Now yoy can itching from its waters. They have turned highly toxic."

Taploo now shifts between sips of nun chai and gushes from his hookah. "It(Anchar) is a dead body bound to emanate smell," gnaws Taploo. ●

I HAVE GROWN UP WATCHING COLORFUL AND EXUBERANT YARNS GIVING LIFE IN OUR COURTYARD

DYING THE YARN TRADITION ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

Fourth generation "Rangar" is struggling to save the traditional art of dyeing the yarn from onslaught of modernity and indifference.

Every morning, as the market around "Rangar" Masjid in Srinagar's old city buzzes with activity, Mushtaq Ahmad Posh, 68, resumes daily work at his dyeing unit, where he puts life in the colorless yarn.

A fourth generation dyer, Mushtaq and his family is keeping this tradition alive since last 150 years. Mushtaq still has fresh memories of his grand-father, father, and uncles working at this dyeing unit. "This entire locality was full of dyers with colourful yarns hanging all around. The streets were coloured with the dyeing water. It was mesmerizing," recalls Mushtaq.

Rangar Masjid located in Khanyar area of Srinagar, got its name after the occupation of majority of inhabitants. "Rangar" means dyer in Kashmiri.

Adjacent to Rangar Masjid stands a multi-storied, old crumbling structure, made of earthen bricks, mud and lot of timber, with traditional Kashmiri patterns hand carved over its surface. This is the ancestral house of Mushtaq family which presently houses the dyeing unit in its compound.

"My two sons work with me in this unit," said Mushtaq who is one of the last dyers of yarn for Kashmir handicrafts.

Once a bustling unit with around twenty people working round-the-clock, the house now wears an isolated look. After the construction of shops around the house, the dyeing unit now remains squeezed to a few marlas only.

Mushtaq, who is working at the unit since he was 12, vividly recalls the fall from grace. "As the family grew this business proved insufficient to feed all," said Mushtaq. "Then everyone started looking for alternative source of income."

The change started with the falling demand for manual dyeing of yarn for handloom products. "It was hard to imagine this compound without colorful yarns hung all around," said Mushtaq.

"I have grown up watching colorful and exuberant yarns giving life in our courtyard. I could do nothing else, thus, I began helping my father when my uncles left this work. I was contended with whatever we would earn," he added.

Around same time Mushtaq's uncle developed severe lung ailments after inhaling fumes emanating from yarns during dyeing. "He then left the job along with his two sons," recalls Mushtaq. They are now government employees.

"If a person is exposed to such fumes for a long time, he develops certain lung ailments including bronchitis," Experts said. "I love handmade Kashmiri embroidery works (Kadai), crochets, and carpets," said Mushtaq. These handicrafts use colored staple yarn that Mushtaq's family makes for over a century →

Mehvish Mumtaz

This entire locality was full of dyers with colourful yarns hanging all around. The streets were coloured with the dyeing water. It was mesmerizing,

now. Also, they provide colorful staple yarn to artisans, handicraft manufacturers, and garment factories in mainland India.

"We are the oldest and the most sought after dyers for artisan in valley," said Mushtaq insisting that it has never been about money. "I am in love with beautiful flowery patterns and the embroidery work of Kashmiri handicraft artisans," he added.

"Despite good educational background my sons work with me as they cannot find a decent job," said Mushtaq. "But once they get a job they will abandon this family business," he added.

Mushtaq still uses ancient German dyeing technology for coloring the staple yarn that his father had obtained some seventy years back. "A German garment manufacturing Company's worker once passed by our unit while on a Kashmir visit," recalls Mushtaq.

The visitor suggested Mushtaq's father to contact his company for help. "They sent the color sample and the literature for fabric dyeing. Ever since, we have been using the same method of dyeing the yarn," said Mushtaq.

After weighing the coloring powder, Mushtaq puts it in a large container of boiling water. The staple fibres are packed into a vessel and then dye liquid is forced through them. Although the dye solution ispumped in large quantities, the dye may not penetrate completely into the fibre and some areas may be left without dyeing.

However, the blending and spinning processes mix up the fibre in a way that it results in an overall even colour. "This way the dye stuff penetrates the fibre to the core of the yarn," said Mushtaq.

MY PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PEOPLE, PLACE AND THEIR HABITS WAS MUCH MORE THAN I COULD HAVE LEARNED FROM BOOKS. THE EXPERIENCE OF MY TRAVELLING WAS APPEALING TO SENSE AND SOOTHING TO SOUL.

TRAVELLING IN TERROR

Shahzad Ashiq

The simple living of the people there, the unforgettable hospitality of rural people left lasting impressions on my mind.

In the words of Francis Bacon, an English philosopher, "Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder, a part of experience".

First ever trip out of town, years ago during summer holidays made me nostalgic. The excitement started from the moment my father announced that the family was planning a trip. As the day to start the journey drew nearer, I started thinking and talking about it to my friends and family. The wave of →

excitement did not subside until I stepped out of the house for the journey.

My experiences during my trip to the southern mountainous areas of Kashmir were totally different from what I had had in the area where I lived. The wild and withered beauty of the mountainous areas was pleasing to one's sight. The greenery around was splendid and the lake had made the whole area look even more splendid. The simple living of the people there, the unforgettable hospitality of rural people left lasting impressions on my mind.

For me it was a new experience altogether. The cultural difference between the two places was an eye-opener for me. Roasts, naans, kababs and many other delicious dishes were good enough to satisfy my appetite. My personal observations about the people, place and their habits was much more than I could have learned from books. The experience of my travelling was appealing to sense and soothing to soul. If you have not been able to get an opportunity to travel around this globe you may, to some extent, consider yourself less fortunate.

Travelling, whether for pleasure or business increases your knowledge about different cultures, languages, foods etc. Frequent travelling to different areas helps you in making friends from around the globe.

The purpose of travelling can be different for different people. While statesmen visit other countries on a goodwill mission; the businessmen for business, the poet and writers may take a trip for collection of facts and impressions for their writings and others may want to travel as tourists. Travelling is considered as a powerful tool for personal development. It builds confidence in you and teaches you to become a responsible person as you learn to take care of your belongings and look after your companions during the trip. ●

WE WERE PLANNING TO ORGANISE A THREE DAY SHOW TO PROMOTE ART AT THIS SITE. BUT BEFORE WE COULD SEND OUR INVITATIONS, WE RECEIVED A NOTICE FROM THE UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES THAT THEY PLANNED TO DISMANTLE THE STRUCTURE."

BUMPED FINE ARTS

Hirra Azmat

Students from other departments began thronging the site, giving way to music performances, discussions, and poetry recitations.

A chirpy group of boys and girls are clicking selfies at a deserted piece of land circled by mighty Chinars at Naseembagh in Kashmir University. A few are chit-chatting, reclining against the chopped pieces of a fallen Chinar.

The empty space might be a place of entertainment for the outsiders, but it serves as a grim reminder for the students of the varsity's Fine Arts Department: the last summer, they had toiled hard to give this place an artistic touch using paper-machie work, elements of flour, and water on the fallen tree trunk; sketches and graffiti were drawn on the torched building to make it reflect unconventional art.

"We worked as a group of 10 students from the department. Initially, our teachers were not supportive of this idea, but after our art installation hogged the limelight, their support started pouring in," said Qazi Tabiah Muen, a second year Fine Arts student.

The students had contributed money to purchase the material for the art work. And their 10 days of labour bore fruit, as the space grabbed the eyeballs and garnered appreciation from all sides.

Students from other departments began thronging the site, giving way to music performances, discussions, and poetry recitations.

Little did they know their happiness was short-lived!

"We were planning to organise a three day show to promote art at this site. But before we could send our invitations, we received a notice from the university →

authorities that they planned to dismantle the structure," added Tabiah.

The students had demanded preservation of the remnants on which their art was being showcased.

"We held a protest," Tabiah said. "Our pleas fell on deaf ears. We knew this would end up like this as it was a site-specific activity. If they were so concerned about the art preservation, they would have given us a separate place where would paint freely."

"If nothing else, they could have encouraged us. On the contrary, they labeled this place as a hub of illegal activities, which was untrue."

Showkat Katjoo, faculty at the department, however, chose to differ.

"I have always been appreciative of their efforts and the amount of hard work they put in this project," he said.

"Since it was a site-specific activity it would have withered away one day or the other." ●

THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD OF BEST QUALITY IS TO HAVE BERRY SIZE OF 4-4.5GMS AND OUR GRAPES HAVE A SIZE OF 12.5GMS EXCEEDING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS."

REPORA: VILLAGE OF GRAPES

Showkat Wani

A great advantage of Repora grapes is that it is ready when fresh grapes are not available anywhere in the world except Italy.

Repora Village in Kashmir is perhaps the only place in the world where fresh grapes are available. And, this Kashmiri Grape is no ordinary fruit. Kashmir is well known for some of the best quality apple but not many are aware of the grapes produced in Repora village, which according to some experts exceed international standards fixed for the fruit. A great advantage of Repora grapes is that it is ready when fresh grapes are not available anywhere in the world except Italy. "When Maharaja (Hari Singh) once had (Fresh) Grapes in winter, he was surprised." says Gh Nabi, a resident of →

Repora. Repora is a village in block Lar, district Ganderbal.

The south facing aspect of village makes it feasible for the cultivation of grapes besides being well irrigated and open to maximum possible hours of sunshine. Known for its grapes the village has a mention in the first volume of Tareek-E-Hassan, one of the most reliable historical accounts about Kashmir.

The villagers attribute the thriving of grapes in area to the blessings a saint, Mir Syed Shah Sadiq Qalander (RA) who they believe lived in the area. "It is the blessing of Shah Sahab (RA)." says Ghulam Mohammad, resident of Repora. The grapes of Repora got attention when someone gifted it to the Rai Bahadur Thakur Janak Singh- the military general of the Maharaja Impressed by the quality he inquired about the place where the grapes where produced. He purchased most of the fertile area and introduced improved varieties of grapes. "We have heard that the rulers used to make wine out the grapes of Repora." says Ab Majid, a resident of the village.

Later Janak Singh built a bungalow there which now is also called as Bunglibagh as a Remants of the building exist there." prominent commercial verities grown in the area is the Hussaini-imported from Iran and Shahabi imported from Hyderabad. There also Kishmish, Anabeshai and Ruby verity. The department has now got Thomson seedless variety for raisin making. Lack of local technique in making raisins is hindering growth in the produce. "We lack entrepreneurship in this field." says Tasaduk Mueen, horticulture officer who the incharge of the orchards. "As in Ladakh they have process of drying apricot at commercial level, we don't have that here" he said.

The locals have their own technique to preserve the fruit. They keep it in earthen pots and cover them with mud. This way the life of grapes is increased to six months. The Repora grapes fetch a good price in the market. Per kilogram rate of Sahabi is Rs 200 and for Hussaini it is rupees 100. "The local demand is some much that it seldom reaches out side." Majid told.

The quality of Repora grapes is considered to be best in the world. "The international standard of best quality is to have berry size of 4-4.5gms and our grapes have a size of 12.5gms exceeding international standards." says Tasaduq. The department has developed Kralbagh in adjacent village of Repora as the model vineyard, measuring 67 Kanals, for the purpose of administration. "We have put all the representative varieties there." says Tasaduq.

The model vineyard has its own system of training in place the 'bower system' for commercial exploitation in which a network on iron rods are built to make a vineyard. it takes around nine lakh rupees for one kanal of vineyard.

The department has put this system only for 13 Kanals of land. Annually this land is fetching more than Rs ten lakhs annual profit. "In 2009 the bid went for 6.5 lakhs and when we checked how much the contractor earned, it was around 18 lakhs." says the officer incharge. The other systems are place in head system, telephone system and Kniphion system. To help the village in having vineyard in their home, the department is giving 50%. subsidy in managing the bower system. "Until this point of time we have covered around 400 beneficiaries. To have this off their own is very difficult." Tasaduq told. The orchards are under staffed. The approved staff is 28 people but the present strength is only three including the incharge and two technicians. "We don't have a gardener here" says Abdul Rashid, the technician. The stuff inadequacy is marring the options of getting the best result. "We had stock of 4000, in which only 2400 was fit to breed and my two member staff have managed 2900.whatelse i can expect from them." says Tasaduq. "The stuff I have is not even fit for watch and ward." ●

IT IS CERTAINLY A MATTER OF CONCERN THAT SNOW AVALANCHES AND LANDSLIDES OCCUR TOO FREQUENTLY NOW.

FARMERS FEAR AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Raja Aasim

Deteriorating weather conditions in Kashmir may be a consequence of climate change.

Farmers in most of the rural areas of Kashmir are constantly worried about the weather conditions. The last four-five years were totally different, said the farmers. Farida Akhtar, a farmer in Kashmir narrates her ordeal of climate change and how it affected her crop cultivation.

Every morning, 44 years old Farida wakes up, she peeps through her window, before casting a look at the clock to see if there is any probability of a sunny day ahead. The past four days of complete sunshine have brought some relief to her, first time in the past two and a half months. Deteriorating weather conditions in Kashmir may be a consequence of climate change. Apart from forcing permanent changes in topography of land, farmers are the worst hit.

She has no idea why the weather is turning too erratic with each passing year. Every year it springs a surprise. Last year Kashmir had an exceptionally hot summer followed by an extremely cold winter and now a long spell of rains and windstorms.

For Kashmiris, it is the start of second fortnight of June that marked the actual beginning of summer this year. The charm of spring in April and May was almost absent because of an extended spell of erratic weather which also brought devastating windstorms at regular intervals.

In March 2012, a destructive windstorm, which lasted for four consecutive days, →

wreaked havoc across Kashmir. The storm, according to official estimates, killed five people and injured another 35, apart from causing damage to 9214 residential houses, 235 were completely destroyed.

Akhtar has never seen such a windstorm in her life which would last for days together. Before the windstorm of early spring, people in Kashmir had to repeatedly hear about snow avalanches and landslides claiming lives and damaging infrastructure in the hilly areas because of heavy snowing.

More than 150 people got killed in over two dozen incidents of huge snow avalanches and landslides. There are apprehensions that the damage can be worst, if such incidents occur in the areas which are covered with landmine, planted during the past two decades of armed conflict in Kashmir valley.

It is certainly a matter of concern that snow avalanches and landslides occur too frequently now. And it is too frightening as they may even occur in areas covered with landmines. Most of border areas are covered with landmines, so the damage can be worse when a landmass filled with landmines would slide down in a habitation.

Farida has hardly any hope that the areas covered under landmines, can be sanitized with urgency. Extreme weather events have surprised the people and they are clueless. I have seen weather turning rough, but not the way we are witnessing now. When it rains, it rains for days and weeks together, and when the weather stays dry, it stretches far too long.

For her, it is beyond comprehension why the weather should behave this way all of a sudden. Her concerns are much like those expressed by the people in picturesque Ladakh where a flash flood in August 2010 left a trail of destruction behind. The flood killed 233 people and rendered thousands more homeless.

The floods washed away crops, along with huge chunks of cultivable land. According to official figures,1420 hectares of land were affected by the floods and 51 percent of crops, which included barley and vegetables, were damaged.

I have never heard of a disaster of this kind in Ladakh's history. Much before the calamity struck, the people of that mountainous region already wondered about the curious changes in weather and temperature that were in sharp contrast to the way they live.

There region is known as an arid region and it had small glaciers, through which they draw water from. But over the last several years, many of these glaciers have receded which may inundate the region in future. Some of the pasture land is also drying up in the region, because of water scarcity.

Lamenting over the changing conditions is pointless. What we need to do instead, is to look for solutions, we have either adapt or become extinct. According to her, people from poorer regions of the world are suffering because of the policies of the industrial world. But she still finds it useless to indulge in blame games. Though I a m sure that we are paying for none of our faults, we have to think about adapting to the changes, which are taking place due to the actions of the developed world (in producing greenhouse gases.)

WHEN THE CRISIS RETURNED TO HAUNT THE FAMILY, ATHROUT'S WOMEN SPECIFIC INITIATIVE, AL-NISA CAME TO HER RESCUE.

EMPOWERING EVE

Athrout- The name itself speaks the service it provides. It is a name of a helping hand. This organization has been doing something commendable to the larger cause. Off late, they started empowering the women folk.

Initially, women are trained for cutting and tailoring. The idea is to get in touch with a good designer and link up with a good website to create a new brand. This Al- Nisa initiative is aimed to help girls from poor background to earn respectfully and support their families.

23-year-old Qurat-ul-Ain from modest background had an urge to provide a better living to her parents. Being a bright student, she had a wish to get a good job after completing her education. Nine years ago before she could have joined class 11th,she faced a tragedy as doctors diagnosed her father having damaged liver.

Caught in a quagmire of pursuing her own dreams or helping her father to survive, she left her studies and started taking care of her ailing father.

"He could never stand on his feet again," she said, regretting doctors being unsure of his fate. Shattered emotionally, the finances of family crippled with the cost of treatment. They exhausted all of their savings and lately, food became a luxury, sleeping hungry became routine.

Before it could have serious ramifications, NGO Athrout sponsored their family of three and started helping them on monthly basis with groceries.

"Continuing education in such extreme conditions was not possible. We used to save every single penny for father's treatment and it continued for almost nine years. The disease was under control. But now his liver's condition has deteriorated again and he has been put on medicines again," says Qurat, who desires to study again.

When the crisis returned to haunt the family, Athrout's women specific initiative, Al-Nisa came to her rescue.

Qurat joined the centre in Bul Bul Lanker in March 2017. She believes that she will earn for her father's treatment and is hopeful →

Tahir Bhat

It was difficult to gain their trust and work here.

someday she may start her studies again.

Joining Al-Nisa was my mother's decision says Ruksana, 23. After Four months in training, she is satisfied.

Ruksana was just ten in 2004 when her father, a laborer in local band-saw, died. She doesn't know the cause of his death. But that left the family of seven in shambles.

The plight of her family compelled Ruksana and her elder sister to learn the art of needle work on table cloth when they were barely in their teens. "We had to get this work from our maternal house in Khag Budgam," Ruksana said.

"Here in Srinagar, nobody knew our work so it was difficult to gain their trust and work here."

Ruksana joined Al-Nisa in March and a month later she could stitch the first suit. It took her three days to stitch it.

"It was for my mother. That gave me immense happiness when she touched and wore it. Those teary eyes I still remember when she said she will ask me frequently to stitch suits for her. Otherwise, she avoided stitching new suits fearing tailor may cost her more but she wanted to save that money for us." said Rukhsana.

44 year old Suraya is Rukhsana colleague. She is a widow. "Tailoring is a noble profession and for uneducated women, who cannot get a good job, it is a perfect job for them. It gives us the opportunity to work from home."

Bashir Ahmad Nadwi, chairman of Athrout says that the idea behind it was to facilitate the needy ones especially the orphans and widows.

Athrout is planning to avail better options for Al Nisa students. After female clothes, these students will be trained to stitch male clothing as well. "And we are working on an online shopping website where we'll put the clothes girls on sale," says Nadwi

Athrout has a proper verification procedure to ensure that only needy are facilitated.

The centre currently runs from 2 pm to 4:30 pm. But they intend to have a morning shift as well. The first batch will be given training from 6-12 months.

INSTEAD OF HELPING HER, PEOPLE HURLED CHOICEST ABUSES AT HER, WHILE THE MAD MAN HELD HER FORCIBLY, TRYING TO PUSH HER IN THE JHELUM RIVER FROM THE BUDSHAH BRIDGE.

SCARS OF SEXUAL HARRASMENT

Musaib Mehraj

Girl screamed and cried in agony but what happened next was heart wrenching.

Does someone have to touch you for it to be sexual harassment? Do sexually suggestive words count? If someone is staring at your body, is it sexual harassment? Can a friend sexually harass you? What if it only happens once?

Identifying sexual harassment can be confusing. Sometimes we are unable to express exactly what we believe happened to us. We may be unsure of why it happened or whether what happened was okay, especially if the perpetrator is our friend or a complete stranger. We may not understand why we feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. These are common questions and reactions that, unfortunately, don't have easy answers.

Although sexual harassment involves sexual behaviors, it's actually not about sex. People who harass others are acting →

in a way that communicates aggression, hostility, and a desire for control. They feel powerful by making someone, who they see as inferior, feel scared or uncomfortable. Sometimes they simply want attention. Regardless of their motivation, perpetrators of sexual harassment need to be stopped.

Of late, a female journalism student of women's college MA road was allegedly harassed by mentally unstable man, while the police and people turned a blind eye. She is left traumatised by the whole incident taking a deep toll on her and is yet to come to terms with the inhumane treatment she received at the hands of spectators.

"Instead of helping her, people hurled choicest abuses at her, while the mad man held her forcibly, trying to push her in the Jhelum River from the Budshah Bridge. The police present on the spot watched without taking any steps to prevent harm to her. She was anxious crying and pleading the people around her to intervene and free her from the clutches of this person," said an eye witness.

Few young men passed by and one of them rebuked her by saying "Why do you girls set affairs, and share you phone numbers. Now die and go to hell?"

Insane person is suspected to be 6 feet 2 with fairer complexion also having a defective eye. The girl was beaten to pulp by the person when he grabbed her wrist and dragged her from Jahangir Chowk to Budshah Bridge. As girl started screaming, police interrupted and the person tried to jump in river along with the girl. Her fist was held by a man very firmly. He threatened the police and asked them not to intervene.

"It's unfortunate that Police did nothing except the fact that the person had already jumped into river previously on different occasions. On the contrary they watched him dragging me," said the girl

He then took her to a Cloth Shop and asked the shop owner to gift her a black suit. Girl screamed and cried in agony but what happened next was heart wrenching. The shopkeeper instead of taking a step and doing something, he said "Iss pe ye wala kapda suit hoga mam kitne metre rakhun". Girl in disarray said, "How insane a human can be, I can't express what's going through my mind. I am in a state of shock."

The story doesn't end here. Ironically the insane person drifted into the college, the college where parents are not even allowed. He entered the college by beating the security guard as he tried to restrict him from getting inside. He stayed in college for half an hour. He broke the umbrella of security guard and thrashed him. The security guard immediately informed KothiBagh Police Station. After a while police came and arrested him. The girl ran and went to her friends narrating them the whole story.

College Dean came into action after that and started to blame the girl for having an affair with the accused in the past. Tears were rolling down when she said, "How can a Dean being a woman herself utter such provoking statements? I was in a danger of being raped, killed but instead of sympathizing a lady of such reputation is blaming me as if I am a culprit."

I can expect such strange things as everything is possible in this cruel world," she said in her painful voice.

After that College authorities confirmed with security guard about the incident and wrapped things there.

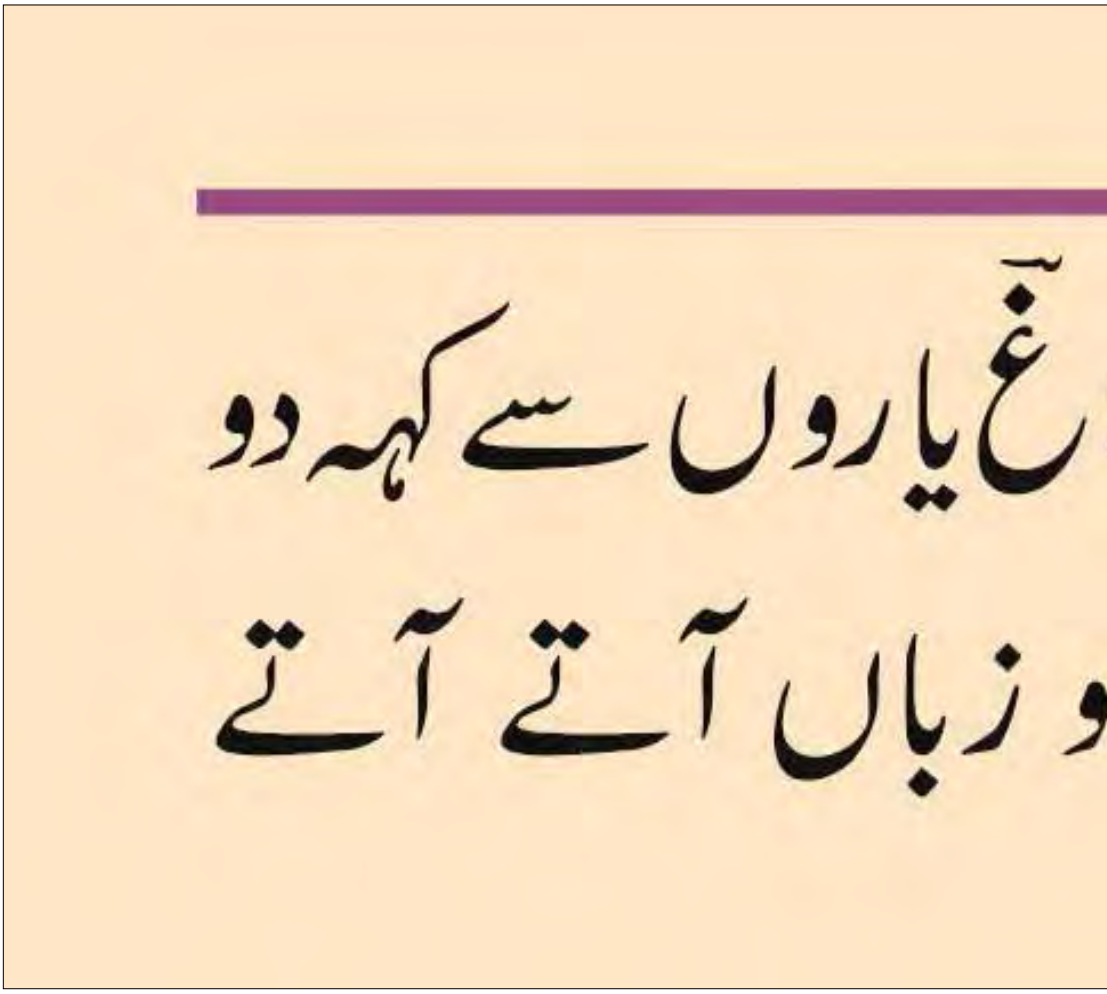
Surprisingly Principal of Women's college Shaheen Altaf said that "I was in college for the whole day and I am unaware of this incident."

Police officials at Police station Kothi Bagh told Media Times, "We haven't received any such complaints nor we have lodged any report."

The girl was emotionally shattered while narrating all this and she repeatedly tried to convey the fact that "It's very unfortunate on the part of humanity that not even a single person came forward to my rescue. Instead of helping people just blame, rebuke rubbish words and nothing else.

IT HAD WORKED AS THE REPOSITORY OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL HERITAGE NOT ONLY OF THE STATE BUT OF THE WHOLE COUNTRY.

THE EXPOSITION OF URDU LANGUAGE



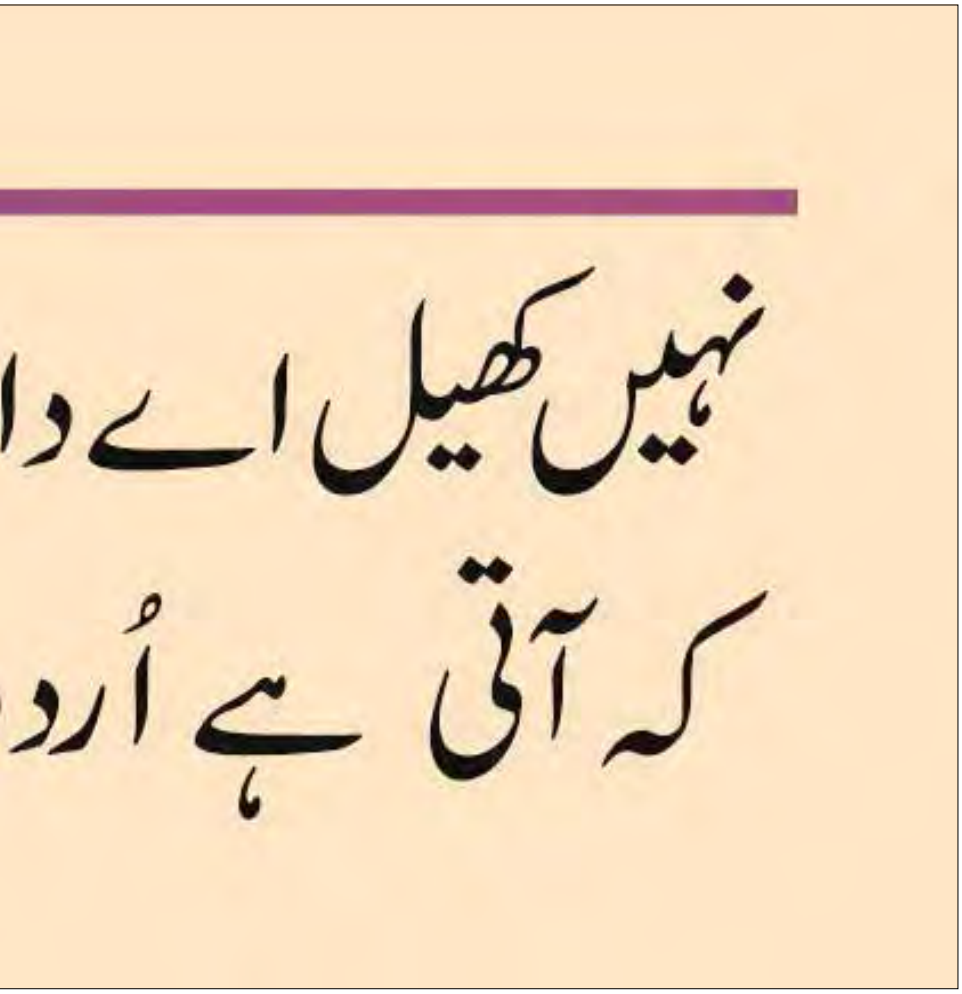
Nazima Rashid

Undoubtedly, Urdu is one of the means of communication in all the three divisions of Kashmir Valley

Urdu is considered as one of the important languages spoken in the whole world and particularly in the Indian Sub Continent. It is the a mixture of many languages (Lashkari Zubaan), born in India. It is historically an established fact that after the decline of Persian Language, it became an official language of India for a long period of time. It began to emerge as a developing language, during the reign of Maharaja Ghulab Singh (1846-56). Chronologically, it is said to be the oldest language spoken in India after Sanskrit and Persian.

It was in the 19th century, during the rule of Maharaja Ranbhir Singh (1885-1925), Urdu for the first time in Indian history, emerged as the official language of Jammu And Kashmir state. Because of the sweetness and high attraction, Urdu came forward as an official language of State and reached to its peak only in 20th century. In the valley of Kashmir the incomparable paradise on Earth, it is an intelligible and familiar language, though not the mother tongue. Perhaps the Govt. of India,because of such affiliation and proximity of Kashmiri populace with the language, credible it for state's official language, with English having a place only by permission of legislature. However section 145 of →

the Jammu & kashmir constitution declares "Urdu to be the official language of the state while providing continued use of English language for all the official purposes". The status of Urdu as the official language is strongly resented by many people in Jammu&Kashmir. It's seldom used in these two historical region. While in Kashmir it is used by most people in everyday life.



By attaining the state patronage,despite its relatively late development and resentment. It holds the largest collection of works on religious literature and appeared as one of the premier languages of poetry developed a rich tradition in different varieties of poetic genres. Thus it can be said without exaggeration that the past of Urdu was very rich. It had worked as the repository of cultural and social heritage not only of the state but of the whole country. It is ranked in the 3rd among the 33000 languages of the world and is the medium of conversation about 60 countries in the world, the one among the 22 languages recognized by the constitution of India.

To maintain its glory, number of Govt. and Semi-Govt. Organization had rendered their service in the promotion of Urdu language in Kashmir from Time to Time.

"Way back in 1954 a policy was framed with electronic media like Radio Kashmir to broadcast 75% of Programmes in Urdu medium.Even today to boost up its usage in our lives, we broadcast most of our programmes in urdu language" said Javid Andrabi, Announcer at Radio Kashmir.

Besides this, information Department and J&K Academy of Art Culture and Languages played their part in its promotion.These agencies have contributed a lot in the promotion and development of Urdu in Kashmir

"It is now considered as an important language as the diffusion of modernity and English Phobia prevails among the contemporary Kashmiri Society, but also due to the non-availability of employment avenues in government sectors" said Farhat jabeen a student of urdu department KU.

Undoubtedly, Urdu is one of the means of communication in all the three divisions of Kashmir Valley i.e, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. So to intact the culture of unity in diversity of the valley and prevent it from linguistic discrimination and constitutional violation, it is necessary to focus on the crucial issue and make a frame work of policies in the govt. offices and educational institutions for the improvement and promotion of Urdu language. Both Govt. and civilians have to play their role in promoting the Urdu language in one or the other way. Obviously it is the time for all of us to procure our responsibility as a noble hospitable with the old relative guest (Urdu) in order to bring back it towards its lost glory.

''Urdu is not merely a language in India, rather it is a fusion of cultural sensibilities. Languages do not belong to any borders, laws, governments or divisive forces. Post-partition politics has certainly impacted acceptance of the language, as it has been identified with a particular religion,'' said Professor Bushra HOD Urdu department KU. "Also, there is a perception that Urdu is a foreign language. Both these perceptions are erroneous as Urdu is spoken across the entire sub-continent by people of all religious communities" she added.

Reading is the KEY to

THE COMPANIONSHIP OF BOOKS IS SINCERE AND FAITHFUL. ANOTHER PLEASURE PROVIDED BY READING NOVELS OR POETRY IS THE PLEASURE OF ESCAPE.

READING: A MUST

Hikmatyar

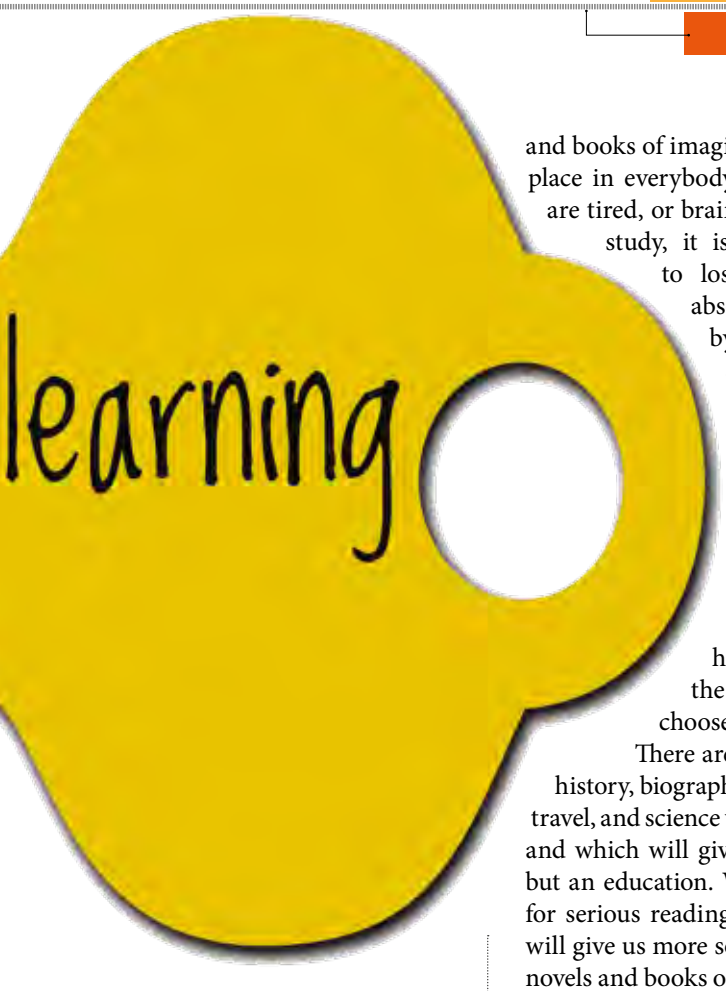
Pleasures of reading are many and they are not at all expensive.

Happy is the man who acquires habit of reading when he is young. He has secured a life-long source of pleasure, instruction and inspiration. So long as he has his beloved books, he never needs to feel lonely. He always has a pleasant occupation of leisure moments, so that he need never feel bored. He is the possessor of wealth more precious than gold. Ruskin calls books "kings' treasures"-treasuries filled, not with gold and silver and precious stones, but with riches much more valuable than these-knowledge, noble thoughts and high ideals. Poor indeed is the man who does not read, and empty is his life.

Reading may be a compulsion for a school going child, pastime for a retired person, but a pleasure for many. You can discover smile on the face of a novel-reader, a gleam in the eyes of the reader of a poem and furrow of seriousness on the forehead of a person reading a newspaper report. Waves of thinking and emotion are generated by reading. So the pleasure is immediate and it continues to linger in the mind.

"Reading lifts us from the harsh realities of life into the world of imagination. The magic touch of fancy transmutes grief into joy, failure into success, pain into pleasure and fear into hope," Jibran, a book reader said. Even an unhappy man sheds his unhappiness and realities no longer press hard.

The blessings which the reading habit confers on its possessor are many provided we choose the right kind of books. Reading gives the highest kind of pleasure. Some books we read simply for pleasure and amusement—for example, good novels →



and books of imagination must have their place in everybody's reading. "When we are tired, or brain is weary with serious study, it is a healthy recreation to lose ourselves in some absorbing story written by a master hand," he added.

But to read nothing but books of fiction is like eating nothing but cakes and sweetmeats. As we need plain and wholesome food for the body, so we must have serious reading for the mind. And here we can choose according to our taste. There are many noble books on history, biography, philosophy, religion, travel, and science which we ought to read, and which will give us not only pleasure but an education. We can develop a taste for serious reading, so that in the end it will give us more solid pleasure than even novels and books of fiction.

Pleasures of reading are many and they are not at all expensive. It does not cost much to have them. If time hangs heavy on our hands, we may pick up a book of short stories. We shall find that we are lost in the story and we do not know how time is passing. Reading light literature like novels and short stories brings us entertainment. Reading often helps in removing our gloom and collecting cheerfulness. When we are deserted by our friends and kith and kin, we can have the company of books.

The companionship of books is sincere and faithful. Another pleasure provided by reading novels or poetry is the pleasure of escape. A book like Gulliver's travels will take its reader into a strange and unknown land where completely strange creatures live.

"Our daily life often becomes routine and boring. To cut ourselves off from it for a short time, we may read some romantic novel which will take us to some fairy land," he further added. One more pleasure is the pleasure of identification. When we are reading the adventures of some hero, we get so much lost in the text that we become forgetful of our surroundings.

We happen to identify ourselves with the hero. Reading also stimulates our brain, and widens out outlook. A well-read man cannot afford to be shallow, narrow-minded and fanatical in his outlook.

Books are the most faithful of friends. Our friends may change, or die; but our books are always patiently waiting to talk to us. They are never cross, peevish, or unwilling to converse, as our friends sometimes are. No wonder a reader becomes a "book-lover."Books can give company when human beings cannot.

We can happily spend our lonely ours in the company of the author – tailored characters. A train journey may be tiresome if we do not have a magazine or a newspaper by our side sleepless nights may not be spent without mystery thriller.

Reading gives us varied pleasure. A sensuous poet may provide a rich feast for our senses, another may satisfy our aesthetic sense and another may give intellectual edification. Reading gives spiritual, intellectual and even sensuous pleasure.

When we are tired, or brain is weary with serious study, it is a healthy recreation to lose ourselves in some absorbing story written by a master hand

WHAT IF WE TURN THESE INTO POWERFUL STORIES OF HUMAN CONNECTION, AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND ENGAGE MORE PEOPLE IN CHANGING THE WORLD.

SOCIAL MEDIA

TOOL FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Imran Naikoo

The past few years have seen the critical rise and mass adoption of social media for social change.

As the times progressed, so did the human urge to evolve and explore. Is this human pursuit, technology has been the game changer. One such technological move that literally on to the scene over the last decade too is this mobile phone. We exchange audio, video, images and all the possible combinations of communication that one can think. The mobile phone has since become a basic life need that i would not be exaggerating if i call it part of our functional body! Since a mobile phone typically connects people to people or a society to society and act as a channel for communication, it has consequently assumed centrality to the point that a new phenomenon emerged in the contemporary world, Social Media. Most of the people think that social media is all about technology. Well there is a little secret about it; 'IT IS NOT' 'It is about relationships, connections and people. There are more people on Facebook than there were on this planet 200 years ago.

More than 1.2 billion people worldwide use social networks. The social media has fundamentally changed the relationship between information ,time and space. Information is now portable (you can carry information to anywhere in your pockets) and participating (which means you can actively participate in what is being provided to you on social media.

The past few years have seen the critical rise and mass adoption of social media for social change. As global conversation has escalated around using social networks to reach new audiences and spread philanthropic and charitable messages, questions still remain about how to effectively use social media to achieve measured results in communication strategy. In the past, media provided a filter(an authoritarian censorship). If something was on the front page or the evening news, it was considered important. If not, it wasn't. Yet today , anyone can be a broadcaster whether it is a distraught mother, a crusading journalist.

Think for a while, what if we turn these into powerful stories of human connection, amplify their voices through social media and engage →

more people in changing the world.10.5 billion minutes are spent on social networking sites every day. What if human efforts could be channelized for collective good.

Every great question that has advanced the civilization has started with 'What If'...We have the illustration in front of us. We know how occupy WALL STREET CAMPAIGN was run on social media and how they succeeded. We all know that what happened in Egypt in 2009 where a video showing how a man set himself on fire was shared on YouTube. It was enough to mobilize millions of people and it resulted in what later came out to be known as 'The Arab Spring'.

The Red Cross raised $33 million in text donations following the Haiti Earthquake Setting a record for largest amount ever raised in a text in a text -to give program. Change is a website where 10 million members have mobilized to sign look online petitions resulting in thousands of victories.

Social media are a catalyst for the everyone's rights .It's where we are reminded that we're all human and all equal. It's where people can find and fight for a cause, global and local, popular or specialized ,even when there are hundreds of miles between them.

There are a couple of questions that i want all of you to ponder over. These questions are :

How are you going to use social media? How are you going to build community? How are you going to create social good?

We have the technology, access to the resources we have everything which we need .This is the time for all of us to stand up and promise to ourselves that we will make a difference, we will make a change a positive social change. ●

AFTER THE DEVASTATING FLOOD OF 2014, THE COURT YARD OF BUD SHAH'S MOTHER'S TOMB WAS ALSO AFFECTED FOLLOWING THE BREACH OF RIVER JEHLUM BANK.

BUDSHAH TOMB: A LOOSING HERITAGE

Firdous Azad

The tomb, besides being a master piece of brick work reflects the love a son had for his mother. .

Amused! What would have been the glory attractive edifices of the old srinagar town during the bygone years, I entered the tomb of bud shah's mother: Meerana Devi, the only edifice of Kashmir that has a dome atop its roof. The edifice explicitly reflects Turku-Persian architecture.

The place is a blend of ancient and medieval architectures. The edifice had →

been built on the plinth of some ancient stone slabs. The compound wall is made up of giant stone slabs.The tomb also affords a vantage point, where from one could easily get wind of what is happening on the banks of Jhelum. The area around the tomb is abuzz with hustle and bustle .the market place around the tomb: Maharaja Gunj is known for its gold smith shops, copper utensil shops and other edible items.

Prof. IShaq,a reputed kashmiri historian mentions this tomb in his book: The History of Srinagar..

"The tomb, besides being a master piece of brick work reflects the love a son had for his mother. Bud shah, the illustrious king of Kashmir had great admiration for his mother, thus after her death, he got a tomb made on her grave."

However the historians have reported that the tomb was plundered during sikh rule who usurped the throne of Kashmir from time to time.

While I was struck by the spell binding aura of the tomb, a shriek disturbed me. The compound has been kept unguarded, and is a favorite spot for many wayward teenagers, who were seen indulging in gambling that affects its sembalan.

The place however narrated a different tale to me. The dilapidated buildings, unabated encroachements though robs the beauty of the tomb speaks of the apathetic attitude of the government in preserving the rich cultural heritage.

After the devastating flood of 2014, The court yard of bud shah's mother's tomb was also affected following the breach of river jehlum bank. The deluge had wretched destruction in the court yard by eroding a sizable portion of it. However, the restoration work at many places along the banks of Jhelum was not expedited immediately.

The courtyard houses the epitaphs of various Shahmiri sultans of Kashmir and their courtesans. If restored to its pristine glory the place could earn revenue for government. ●

THE LAND OF BEAUTIFUL MEADOWS, FLOWERS, GREEN PASTURES, CONIFEROUS FORESTS, GLACIERS AND SNOW COVERED MOUNTAINS HAS BEEN FACING COMPLETE NEGLECT

THE UNFATHOMED VALLEY

Kaiser Majeed

Bangus has remained largely restricted and an unfavorable tourist SPOT.

About 75 kilometers from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir, in district Kupwara lies a vast treasure of nature's beauty. Among the many one is Bangus valley. Standing at the altitude of 10,000 ft above sea gives one a mesmerizing view of the valley. Enveloped within the Shamsbery ranges and Leepa valley, the Bangus sees less footprint of tourists, both local and outsiders. This is attributed to the volatile nature of de-facto Line of control separating India and Pakistan in Kashmir. The Bungus flora is one of the best considered for cattle grazing in the

area. The pasture lands of the area produce some of the finest grass in the State.

One of the interesting facts of Bangus is it has more than 100 meadows. The studies have suggested the grass from meadows has tremendous nutritional and medicinal value. Not only this, Bangus is the main source of various streams and springs in the Kashmir region. The Quaizinag is considered one among them, a source of various streams which flow through the adjoining areas including Qualamabad, Quaziabad and other areas. Other streams which traverse through bangus valley are, Roshan kul, Tilvan Kul, and Doud kul. The water of these streams form one of the waterheads of the Kamil river which, in turn, joins the Lolal stream, thus forming the Pohru river. The valleys forests and plains serve as the breeding, feeding and protection grounds for many wild animal species. The wild life includes about 50 species of birds. The animal species include the musk deer, black bear, brown bear, monkeys and red fox. A large number of resident and migratory birds can also be found in the valley. The prominent resident birds include the bush quail, →

black partridge jungle, and wild fow.

The valley of Bangus had been neglected by government and no attention was given to it until 2010. However in the year 2013 the Government of J&K announced a package of 6.99 crores to develop the

Bangus valley as a biosphere tourist destination and also to maintain its ecological balance and natural beauty. According to Bangus Valley Authority there would be no construction within the 300 sq kms of the Bangus valley.

"Blessed with natural beauty, Bangus, the land of beautiful meadows, flowers, green pastures, coniferous forests, glaciers and snow covered mountains has been facing complete neglect from almost past one decade from the successive regimes," the locals said.

The residents alleged that Tourism and other government department agencies had been deliberately slow in carrying out developmental projects in the area.

"Poor road connectivity and ill planning is hampering the prospectus of Bangus," they said.

The locals suggested that tents, pre-fabricated huts and other accommodation should be made available by the government at Bangus to promote the tourism.

Government has now accorded top priority to the development of the Bangus valley in order to turn it into a beautiful tourist destination. It has been observed that the movement of tourists towards Bangus is comparatively very low than other tourist destinations in Kashmir mainly due to the non availability of adequate transport facilities.Transport is not readily available as the roads are in poor condition. Bangus can be approached via 3 routes - Chowkibal to Drangwari, Handwara to Wadder & the shortest way is Nowgam to Reshwari. The need is to provide effective communication to Bangus so that valley becomes an attractive point for people so that more and more people will start their journey towards the valley. It looks heavenly beautiful under the cover of snow. Due to lack of infrastructure and armed conflict

Bangus has remained largely restricted and an unfavorable tourist SPOT. However, in recent years efforts have been made to bring the valley on the tourist map. ●

GULMARG'S ENVIRONMENT IS SLOWLY GETTING DEPLETED AND THAT THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE ON PROPER WASTE MANAGEMENT SO THAT IT DOESN'T HARM THE ENVIRONMENT IN ANY WAY.

PARADISE IN PERIL

Junaid Manzoor

Huge traffic flow has highly polluted the serene and fresh environs of Gulmarg.

The Europeans played a big role in introducing Kashmir, its natural beauty and adventure prospects to the outside world. Places like Gulmarg, which was originally the summer resort of the British, have become the bedrock of modern tourism in Kashmir and a favorite destination of international tourists. While Gulmarg has enjoyed a great tourism boom over the years, it has come at a huge cost to the environment.

From having just one established commercial hotel in 1947, Gulmarg now boasts full-fledged all season resorts and hotels with state of the art traditional and adventure tourism facilities. The pioneers of the tourist trade in Kashmir had identified Kashmir only for adventure and vacation tourism that would coexist with its fragile ecosystem. However, the exponential growth in tourist infrastructure has led to numerous compromises with the environment. The density of forest cover in and around Gulmarg is down considerably because of monstrous constructions and tampering with the existing landscape. "Sewage mismanagement, flow of traffic and deforestation have all damaged Gulmarg in several ways. Locals and tourists throw litter everywhere and don't use dustbins," said Ghulam Qadir Khan, Associate Executive of Gulmarg Development Authority.

While establishing Gulmarg as a resort, the British had given due consideration to least interference with the ecosystem. For instance, the construction material was restricted →

to easily available local stone and wood and this construction regimen was strictly adhered to by authorities till the early eighties. But now it is free to all. Earlier, under meticulously formulated rules, waste management through civic and health authorities was mandatory at Gulmarg. But at present even after making required amendments these rules are flouted blatantly with impunity.

"Waste management is an important issue and we need to focus on a cleaner environment so that a popular destination like Gulmarg doesn't lose its sheen," said Mushtaq Chala, owner of the famous Grand Mumtaz resorts in Gulmarg.

"Our resort has a proper drainage system so that waste doesn't get collected at one place and there is no foul smell," said Chaya.

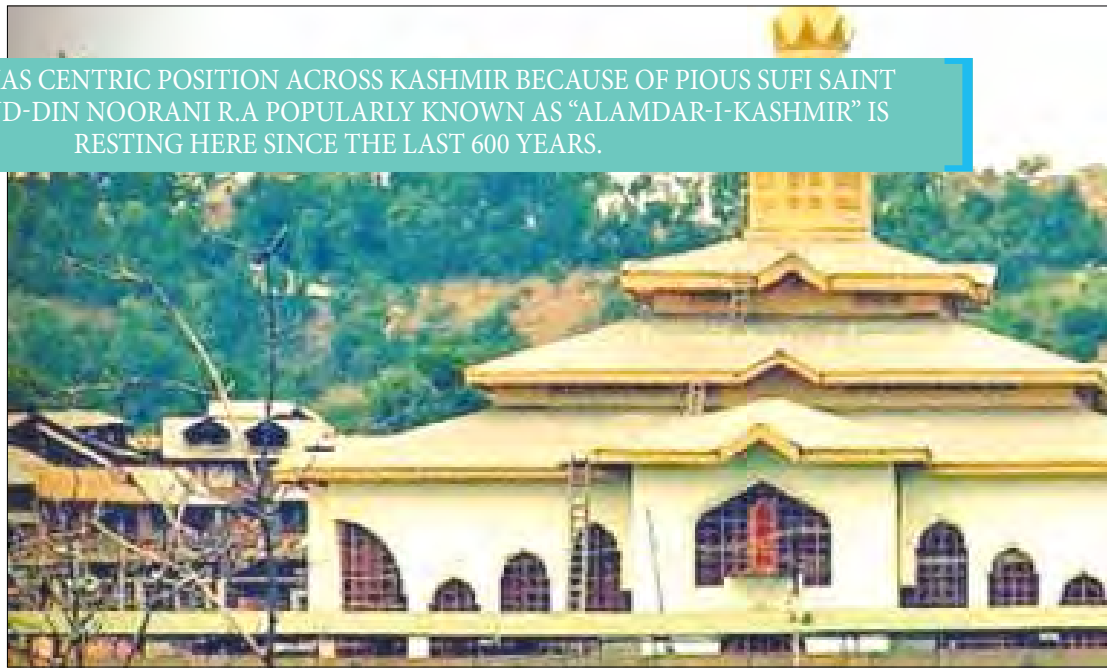
Another hotelier, Abid Rasheed who owns the Kashmir Cottage Inn, agrees that Gulmarg's environment is slowly getting depleted and that the primary focus of authorities should be on proper waste management so that it doesn't harm the environment in any way. "We keep the hotel sanitized and also maage the biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste in the most efficient way," he said.

Lack of solid waste management and sewage treatment has polluted not only the ground water and soil profile in Gulmarg, but has also led to all sorts of wastes getting washed down to catchment areas and ultimately to waterways and water bodies down in the plains. The mushrooming of concrete jungles in Gulmarg since mid-eighties has changed the whole landscape of Gulmarg. A place where earlier planners had recommended only single-storied hutments in harmony with the existing landscape, concrete constructions have completely pockmarked the whole picturesque scenery.

Huge traffic flow has highly polluted the serene and fresh environs of Gulmarg. The present efforts to encourage all sort of tourism activities without giving due consideration to the environment and the adverse impact of heavy footfall have proved detrimental in promoting quality eco-friendly high-end tourism.

"we are in direct contact with the hoteliers and keep a regular check on their waste management. We have prescribed them a set of guidelines that they need to follow strictly failing which an immediate, strict action will be taken against them," said Khan. "We have also installed dustbins in and around Gulmarg and we hope people will start using them instead of just scattering the litter everywhere," he added. ●

CHARI SHARIEF HAS CENTRIC POSITION ACROSS KASHMIR BECAUSE OF PIOUS SUFI SAINT SHEIKH NOOR -UD-DIN NOORANI R.A POPULARLY KNOWN AS "ALAMDAR-I-KASHMIR" IS RESTING HERE SINCE THE LAST 600 YEARS.



CHARI SHARIEF : A PICTURE OF SLUGGISH DEVELOPMENT

Farooz Ahmad

The devotees tie their votive rags (threads) on the grills and walls on the shrine in order to fulfill their wishes (covet).

Kashmir, the heaven on earth is blessed with very elegant and architecturally rich shrines and mosques. While counting them, the shrine at Chari Sharief is not to be forgotten. It is 30 kms away from Srinagar. The terrain is uneven and it is approximately 1933 meters (6346 feet) above the sea level. As per the statistical figures from the Census 2011, Charar i Sharief has a population of 15000. Where in males constitute 53% and females the rest. Chari Sharief has an average literacy rate of 59%, lower than the national average of 59.5%, with male literacy of 58% and female literacy of 38%. Not to forget to mention that 12% of the population is under 6 years of age. However, the town has shown rapid increase in literacy rate.

Chari sharief has centric position across Kashmir because of pious Sufi Saint Sheikh Noor -Ud-din Noorani R.A popularly known as "Alamdar-i-Kashmir" is resting here since the last 600 years. There is always a tremendous flow of devotees including people from all hues. Especially, the Thursdays & Fridays, the shrine premises are thronged immensely by the pilgrims. Pilgrimage gives a chance to members of all communities to discuss their mutual matters, to get acquainted, bring good will and genuine amity among the members of the faith. The devotees tie their votive rags (threads) on the grills and walls on the shrine in order to fulfill their wishes (covet). One of disciples of Alamdar-i Kashmir R.A namely "Baba Nassar" is firmly believed to be an ancestor of eminent poet Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, the poet of the East.

In 1995 a catastrophe manifested in the form of conflagration when the whole town of Charar-i-sharief got burnt down during the encounter between Indian troops and militants. it is estimated that 800 residential houses, 500 shops and multitude of other non-residential structures were gutted. The town has since been rehabilitated by a grant of 31 crores; 16 crores were announced by Union government and 15 crores were provided by State Government. The town has remained at a centre stage because of the dignity of the shrine. In late eighties Chari Sharief was having a tremendous religious and cultural significance. It was also declared model town by Jammu and Kashmir government. This was the only town in the valley which was to be developed as a Model Town.

Chari Sharief is the largest town of the district Budgam. It is the Tehsil headquarter. Hoever there is a lack of office accommodation. No clear bifurcation of area has been taken place till date. The town is surrounded by many villages and hamlets within a radius of few kilometers. It is not easily accessible due to the lack of road connectivity. This has caused inconvenience to thousands of →

people living in the adjacent areas.

Central Government's policy is to improve road connectivity across the country. Industrial Training Institute (ITI) is lacking sophisticated equipment. Sub District Hospital (SDH) is without sufficient medical and Para-medical staff, with improper maintenance of cleanness. This is highly unhygienic and there is always a chance for infectious diseases. Higher Secondary Institutes are without proper infrastructure and has dearth of teaching staff.

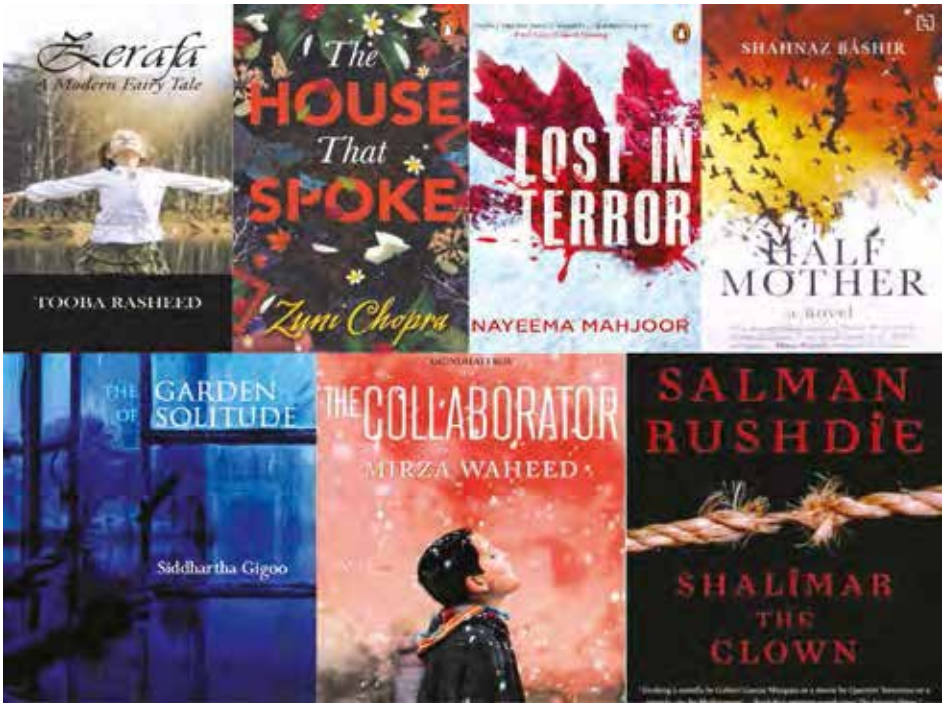
Government authorities have always glued their eyes to address the problems pertaining to this land. Chari Sharief Development Project, R&B and Municipal Committee were established for the proper development of the town and to reduce umpteen hardships of inhabitants of the town. Government functionaries are not so much enthusiastic about its implementation. This has mounted many problems related to the dwellers due to the lack of coordination among these agencies.

"There is a huge record of misuse of funds, mismanagement and irregular utilization of funds meant that the development of this town was by and large hampered, due to vested interests by the unscrupulous people, "said Aziz Ahmad, a local resident.

Devotees feel discomfort during the prayers. Some even skip their prayers during precipitation, when the rain water start seeping inside the temporary tin sheds outside the shrine. The development which has been under progress since a long time, is a ridiculous gesture in the concerned authorities. The work is also not being carried out whole heartedly. ●

CONFLICT CREATES ART', SOMEONE SAID. OVER THE PREVIOUS HUNDREDS OF YEARS, COUNTLESS WRITERS, POETS, RESEARCHERS, PRIESTS, ARTISTS, DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY THE 'KASHMIR STRUGGLE', HAVE WRITTEN COUNTLESS ACCOUNTS,

KASHMIR IN FICTION: A LITERATURE ON THE RISE



Muhammad Nadeem

The youngsters understood the story behind violence but not many stories conceived in the womb of the conflict.

Much has been written about Kashmir in prose and poem. Hundreds of brochures have been published, thousands of theories punched, tens of thousands of blogs written, at individual and institutional capacities.

It is said that the last time Kashmir was free, was under the rule of Yusuf Shah Chak in the 1500s. Ever since, the →

valley has been under an influence of countless cultures and inquisitions in the form of religious doctrines, and foreign invasions.

'Conflict creates art', someone said. Over the previous hundreds of years, countless writers, poets, researchers, priests, artists, deeply influenced by the 'Kashmir struggle', have written countless accounts, fictitious and non-fictitious, of the raging spirit of its inhabitants.

Some of the books written on Kashmir by authors, indigenous and foreign, are:

1. Shalimar the Clown (2005) by Salman Rushdie

Written in several different registers, Rushdie combines the wonder of fairy-tale with the grittiness of hard, political realism; at times, especially in the long section recounting Max's wartime experiences, it reads as something close to reheated journalism. Shalimar, the Clown is Rushdie's most engaging book since Midnight's Children. It is a lament. It is a revenge story. It is a love story. The story portrays the paradise that once was Kashmir, and how the politics of the sub-continent ripped apart the lives of those caught in the middle of the battleground.

2. The Collaborator (2011) by Mirza Waheed

The unnamed protagonist, with his flawed character, now courageous, now cowardly and yet, always human… a soul who now has friends only in his memory is a chilling figure to behold. The flashbacks pull the reader into an abyss of nostalgia, of longing, for how things used to be. The villages before the exodus, the valley before its dead, Kashmir before the destruction– the images are vivid and make you want to find a way back into the blissful past.

3. The Garden Of Solitude (2011) by Siddhartha Gigoo

The Garden of Solitude is a poignant tale of a Kashmiri Pandit family driven away from the Valley in the wake of armed insurgency and political turmoil. Sridar, a young Pandit boy, is torn apart as he reluctantly leaves his home situated in the beautiful Valley along with his family. The family, like the other Pandits, settles in Jammu, where an entire generation of Pandits spends the rest of their lives suffering from a sense of loneliness and alienation.

4. Half Mother (2014) by Shahnaaz Bashir

A sorrowful journey of a Kashmiri mother looking for her lost son through the valleys. This well-written novel documents the tragedy which has befallen many families in Kashmir and about which not much is known outside the region. The Half Mother is the story of Haleema – a 'halfmother' today; tormented by not knowing whether Imran is dead or alive, torn apart by her own lonely existence. While she battles for answers and seeks out torture camps, jails and morgues for any signs of Imran, Kashmir burns in a war that will haunt it for years to come. Heart-wrenching, deeply troubling and lyrical, The Half Mother marks the debut of a bold new voice from Kashmir. The story is extremely riveting, enthralling yet poignant in every aspect.

5. Lost in Terror (2016) by Nayeema Mehjoor

Cast in the background of the uprising against the armed forces in Kashmir in the late 1980s, Lost in Terror is the tale of a young, educated, career-conscious woman who finds herself sucked into a maelstrom of death and destruction. She also cherishes the dream of Azadi and plays strong to face the wrath of Indian soldiers. But when she finds her husband's discreet links with gunmen obsessed with the dream of Azadi, she becomes fragile and begins to lose her hold on her home, her relationships and Azadi itself.

When her dreams for a perfect family and a thriving career are turned upside down and her life comes to a standstill due to the turmoil around her, fate offers her a leap of faith—but will she take it?

6. The House That Spoke (2017) by Zooni Chopra

Fourteen-year-old Zoon Razdan is witty, intelligent and deeply perceptive. She also has a deep connection with magic. She was born into it. The house that she lives in is fantastical—life thrums through its wooden walls—and she can talk to everything in it, from the armchair and the fireplace to the books, pipes and portraits! But Zoon doesn't know that her beloved house once contained a terrible force of darkness that was accidentally let out by one of its previous →

owners. And when the darkness returns, more powerful and malevolent than ever, it is up to her to take her rightful place as the Guardian of the house, and subsequently, Kashmir.

7. Zerafa – A Modern Fairy Tale (2017) by Tooba Rasheed

Story of Zerafa, the first born to Omar and Zareefa is a special child whose specialty keeps her from normal schooling. Zerafa manifests her ability not through the use of words but colors, avant-garde. The coming of Zunaira, their second child, alleviates the suffering of the parents for she conforms to the normal in every possible way. She is schooled but soon Zerafa's influence begins to tell. In order to save their normal child, the parents take a hard decision to separate the two; one of them is sent to a boarding school. While Zerafa's talent is unleashed with time, Zunaira unable to come to terms with the separation withdraws into a shell. She rebels against her studies only to be mistaken by her mother as being pampered. The mother-daughter relationship soon turns sour. The story delves deep into a child's psyche to unveil parenting mistakes.

THE REAL DOCUMENTATION OF EVENTS IS DONE THROUGH PICTURES. BUT IT ALWAYS COMES WITH A COST.

Syed Shehriyar

I advocate a strong reason behind it. Everybody with a Smartphone and a digital camera is a photographer now.

FRAMES SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Visuals speak volumes. How true? Who else can know it better than a person having a firsthand account of snap grabbing? Photos are my future. Photos make me cry. A frame is what I am concerned about. My key job is to show what is happening on the ground zero. So far so good.

Kashmir has turned to be a battleground for photographers. Photos always fascinated me. What the soldiers of the "fourth estate of democracy" were doing

always interested me. Somehow, I wanted to join the tribe. It is here, that I decided to compile a rough Scrap book from the newspaper cuttings I didn't missed a single day of the pictures that appeared on the newspapers and stated cutting them for papers.

A picture of a young Palestinian boy pelting a stone towards an Israeli tank and a picture of a Kashmiri boy hoisting an Islamic flag on Lal chowk's Clock Tower are the two snaps which I like the most. The real documentation of events is done through pictures. But it always comes with a cost.

Photography has emerged as one of the best mediums to tell moving stories, to document the humanitarian crisis, to create art of deep meaning. World is pumped with legendary photographers, so is Kashmir. Now, the young boys and girls, both professional and amateur, are passionate shutterbugs. I am happy for the youngsters breaking barriers and producing quality work. But photojournalists in Kashmir work on a razor edge. They become the worst victims of violence.

At times, I deliberately blur pictures but the sharpness of the situation till remains deep inside my mind. My camera always was eager to shoot things which had struggle and pain in it. I could never shoot things that didn't affect and feel me; pictures have always been a reflection of my thinking towards things. In Kashmir, It is always risky to be a photojournalist since we are being reprimanded by various quarters.

It is the most abused profession here. Senior photographers always dictate the terms at respective organizations. We are being humiliated and paid peanuts in the name of salary. It is said that dedication earns you bylines; it didn't happen in my case since my passion was touching the threshold. Working with senior photographers is always a learning experience.

Time and again, why I mention that there is a bleak future for photographers. I advocate a strong reason behind it. Everybody with a Smartphone and a digital camera is a photographer now. He/she claims to be a photojournalist without knowing the difference between the two.

I am not saying that they should not follow their passion but they should no way try to enter the domain and make fun of our profession. Without having been to any Journalism school, these roadside photographers are demeaning our profession.

In this e-world, stories are locked in photographs. Susan Sontag who writes about photography aesthetics talks about the present scenario with photography she writes 'Switching from bullets to film' she explains when we are afraid we shoot but when nostalgic we take pictures. With the passage of time, I developed a keen interest to document the culture and daily lives of my homeland.

The plight of being a photographer is such in Kashmir that editors don't understand the value of pictures and take them for granted. They use pictures as fillers in the papers and this attitude of taking pictures end's up when a leading newspaper of Kashmir uses a picture of a woman from Nishat area of Srinagar injured by a tear smoke shell year ago to show a woman killed in Handwara town.

Pictures have always been a witness to the happenings around the globe today. World reminds the wars and conflicts thought pictures, The famous picture by Nick ut of the Vietnam war where the naked children are running or the picture of the youngest victim of 2010 uprising in Kashmir lying dead on a stretcher still reminds about the plight of children during wars.

Moving from the usual picture making during protests in old city I went deep into the art of taking pictures of people and understanding their ways of living, covering funerals of killed was something new I was witnessing.

Once the damaged non-functional command dial of my camera functioned just for seconds as a body of a killed militant passed by in a funeral and then again went non-functional the camera took me to the places where no others could be, it gave me strength to be at places from where people ran away. The journey moves on with everyday a new picture to take and with everyday new people to meet. Reading an interview about a famous photographer on a magazine narrates photography nothing but a tool to fight against social injustice the photographer believes when the tool is not useful he can move on with other things whether it is a gun to satisfy his own conscience, that's what really camera and pictures do with me.

IT WAS LIKE A SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR ME, THE ONLY SOUND I WAS HEARING WAS SLOGANS, SOUND OF BULLETS AND SHELLS.

HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT: REDUCED TO ZERO

The phrase 'Human capital flight' has got its meaning well defined by the present turmoil that has engulfed Kashmir. Wikipedia defines Human capital flight as the emigration of highly skilled or well educated individuals also referred to as Brain drain"

Kashmir, A Himalayan state sandwiched between different ranges of Himalayan Mountains has now found itself inside a conundrum, a worst case scenario of enigma, owing its cause to the turbulence of stability in the region which got revived by the happenings of 2016 unrest. The aftermath of which is still going on leaving many sects of society from students to entrepreneurs, labors to daily wages, businessmen to employees equally affected.

The 5 month long unrest of 2016 and the latter part of that agitation, which still has not cooled down in the 2nd part of 2017 left no stone unturned to make a large section of Kashmiri's feel that valley is no more a safe place to continue with. Migration of entrepreneurs and startups is a huge loss to state economy. In addition to this problems like unemployment, less job opportunities are forcing the youth to move outside ofbthe state.

Schools and colleges being most susceptible to all kinds of disturbances in peace and tranquility, recently a huge flow of children from the valley took its way to schools in Jammu and other places in the country which is seen as a direct consequence of the prolonged unrest. Reputed schools like Burn hall, Mallinson Biscoe and other such institutions too couldn't resist it. Migration of students can't be seen as a brain drain in real sense of term, but indirectly it leads to the brain drain because those students who basically moved outside state to pursue education are deciding to settle down there.

Saniya Bashir (15), from district Pulwama, was enrolled to a private school in her locality. 2016 was an irreparable part of her life because most of the time she found herself inside four walls of her room.

'It was like a solitary confinement for me, the only sound I was hearing was slogans, sound of bullets and shells, →

Rashid Manzoor

Migration of entrepreneurs and startups is a huge loss to state economy.

stones and sounds coming from speakers of mosques, hues and cries of people, said Saniya

She was supposed to be in the school most of the time, inside lab's and libraries. All of them seemed to be a missed past for her. Now her parents got her admission in a reputed school in Jammu, she is waking up to a new dawn. Gone are the days when she used to woke up in the middle of night because of the nocturnal raids of security forces, gone are the days when she was afraid of going to a nearby shop for an ice cream. Gone are the days when meeting friends was a breath taking trip for her. Gone are the days of disappointment, dissatisfaction, hopelessness.. She has started her life from a new page, she has got new friends and acquaintances but the only thing she has lost is her homely childhood, something which no place on earth can compensate.

"I am happy because I can go to school every day, I can get my favorite chocolate 7 ice cream whenever I want, I am no more afraid of flying stones, pellets and stray bullets, I wish there was something like a 'rewind' option for this world and everything goes back to the day when this tragedy struck Kashmir, I wish no other child faces this calamity."said Sanyia .

Talent retention, negligence towards human capital, and inability to draw a boundary between conflict and education are the challenges that our state is grappling with. We don't have enough productive work areas to harness their intellectual to technical talent. Apart from this, internet provided Kashmir youth great and easy access to globe. The world is there with open welcome, inviting them for education and jobs. Globalization and greater global movement is also taking a greater number of our human capital away. ●

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PROMISES RIGHT TO EDUCATION TO EVERY CHILD BUT THIS RIGHT IS OPENLY VIOLATED WHILE IMPLEMENTING THE MOBILE SEASONAL SCHOOL SCHEME WHICH IS THE PART OF THE CENTRALLY SPONSORED SCHEME SERVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAAN (SSA).

"SCHOOLING GUJJAR COMMUNITY"

SHABIR AHMAD

In addition to this each mobile school is provided with tents and stationary from government.

The Jammu and Kashmir government has approved 100 mobile schools for the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities of the state to enable the children of the migratory population receive proper education.

Known to everyone, education enriches ones way of living and is the need of an hour. Educating someone means to educate a generation. Children nowadays have full access to education either through books or gadgets but there is other part of the story as well; there are many children who are left far behind, children who dream but have no way to achieve or fulfil their dreams. They are unfortunate ones who are left high and dry at their homes.

Mobile school system is a system through which education can reach →

nook and corner, it can reach to far flung areas where people especially children can get education without walking 10-15 km from their respective places.The mobile school scheme for Gujjars and Bakerwals was started by the Shiekh Mohammad Abdullah during his tenure as Chief Minister but received set back after the eruption of militancy.

Mobile school system was started in 2007 as an initiative to upgrade the level of literacy rate among children in far flung areas. Children who are under the concern of this system are nomadic children. Gujjars and Bakerwals, the illiteracy rate among them is high, around 75-80%. The mobile schools in Kashmir region has more cons then pros.

"The scheme has been a failure, teachers hardly turnout" said a parent.

The government through the respective Zonal education office take services of local educated youth, the education volunteers. These volunteer (teachers) are provided a monthly stipend of rupees 4000. In addition to this each mobile school is provided with tents and stationary from government. The teachers are deputed to various places where there is sufficient nomadic /migratory population. Children are enrolled on spot and the school starts their academic session from May till October. These schools provide education up to primary level only.

The mobile seasonal schools are supposed to provide mid day meals to the enrolled students but for some unknown reasons the majority of the mobile schools (90 % +) do not provide these meals thus raising the question on the credibility of the school education department.

The tents are provided but since years they have never been replaced. The tents are totally damaged and filthy. The children are compelled to sit under open sky while taking lessons, and that's only because tents are covered in dirt. During rainfall schools don't function. Parents complain lack of blackboards and stationary in schools.

"The teachers are engaged for over a period of 6 months and from last many years they have been demanding job security, which they are denied and no allowances are paid to them. But we are taking it in consideration," an official said.

The government of India promises right to education to every child but this right is openly violated while implementing the mobile seasonal school scheme which is the part of the centrally sponsored scheme Serva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA). It is the need of the hour to revisit this scheme in order to provide quality education to these children belonging to nomadic tribes.

"This is something that needs to be addressed, or else we will have another generation with no prospects. The initiative of making mobile schools is wonderful but all we need to do is that it needs proper attention and implementation," parents alleged.

"This start up of mobile schools helps scores of nomadic children and can help many more if taken care off.Main motive of these mobile schools is to provide basic education, ensure constructive engagement and hostile development of these children. Not only children from the nomadic communities but children from neighbouring villages are also attending these schools," an official said.

Globally education has been improved very much, teaching methods have been changed, making it more susceptible to student learning and meeting the educational, physical and emotional needs of students; but in Kashmir all schools in general and mobile schools in particular are devoid of these changes which makes it tough for children to compete with the rest of the students.

So there is the need of special attention towards mobile school's to bestow them the quality education and ensure their smooth functioning. Lot has been promised in this regard by the government but very little being put to practice so far.

"In the locality, where I reside there are at least 20+ children of these communities but they hardly attend any such school due to their non availability of these schools. Tears trickle down from my eyes whenever I witness that these unfortunate children wonder door to door to collect milk for their family on the advice of their parents, this site is almost unbearable and when ever such things happen it leads to tears," saher, a student said.

"This sorry condition will continue to hamper the development of our country in general and our state in particular which prompts us to take an immediate action so as to bring our state on the track of progress and prosperity," she added.

THE FLOATING MARKET OF SRINAGAR IS A PLACE WHERE KASHMIRIS LIVING WITHIN THE LAKE BUY THEIR DAILY FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SUPPLIES. THE LAKE IS FAMOUS FOR ITS HOUSEBOATS BUT THE FLOATING MARKETS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE TO FUNCTION WITHIN THE LAKE.

THE FLOATING VERDURE

Qazi Tanzeela

The vegetable market is an important source of income for Dal dwellers for which tourism and farming are major livelihoods.

At the crack of dawn, around 50 boats gather at a point in the interior of Srinagar's Dal Lake, creating ripples in the turquoise water. Within two hours, they will be gone — when the sky's faint blue will give way to clear sunlight. The boats are loaded with vegetables, waiting to be traded. The Dal Lake's floating vegetable market — which is a popular destination on tourist itineraries and has been functional for over 100 years now — has become one of the most important source of vegetables and the market functions every morning uninhibitedly.

The rich ecosystem of the Dal wetland produces numerous varieties of vegetables: tomatoes, brinjals, kohlrabi, cucumbers, water chestnuts and lotus stem (popularly called nadroo in Kashmiri), among many others.

Vendor Ashaq Hussain, who sells nadroo, explains the dynamics of the floating market. "The sellers here are all Dal dwellers. They also trade amongst themselves, apart from selling the items to shop owners coming from outside Dal. We do not use fertilizers in our vegetables, and that's why it's fresh and tasty."

The vegetable market is an important source of income for Dal dwellers for which tourism and farming are major livelihoods.

"Vegetable vendors from across the city come here, buy stuff and then →

they go and sell it. We mostly sell what we cultivate," says Abdul Rehman, a vegetable vendor selling tomato and brinjals, as he rows his boat.

Summer is a great time to green up your diet by eating more fresh or cooked greens. This includes those most commonly seen in grocery stores like

Spanish, Collards and Mallos. The tops of many root vegetables such as Beets, Turnips and Rutabagas can also be eaten as greens. Leaves from some plants such as Dandelions and Lambs quarters can be eaten as well.

Green leafy vegetables such as Amaranth, Drumstick leaves, Spanish, Fenugreek mostly cultivated in Dal Lake are the most nutritious because they contain high amounts of Carotene, Riboflavin, and Folic acid and are also a great source of dietary fiber which helps to prevent constipation and reduce the rate of absorption of dietary cholesterol.

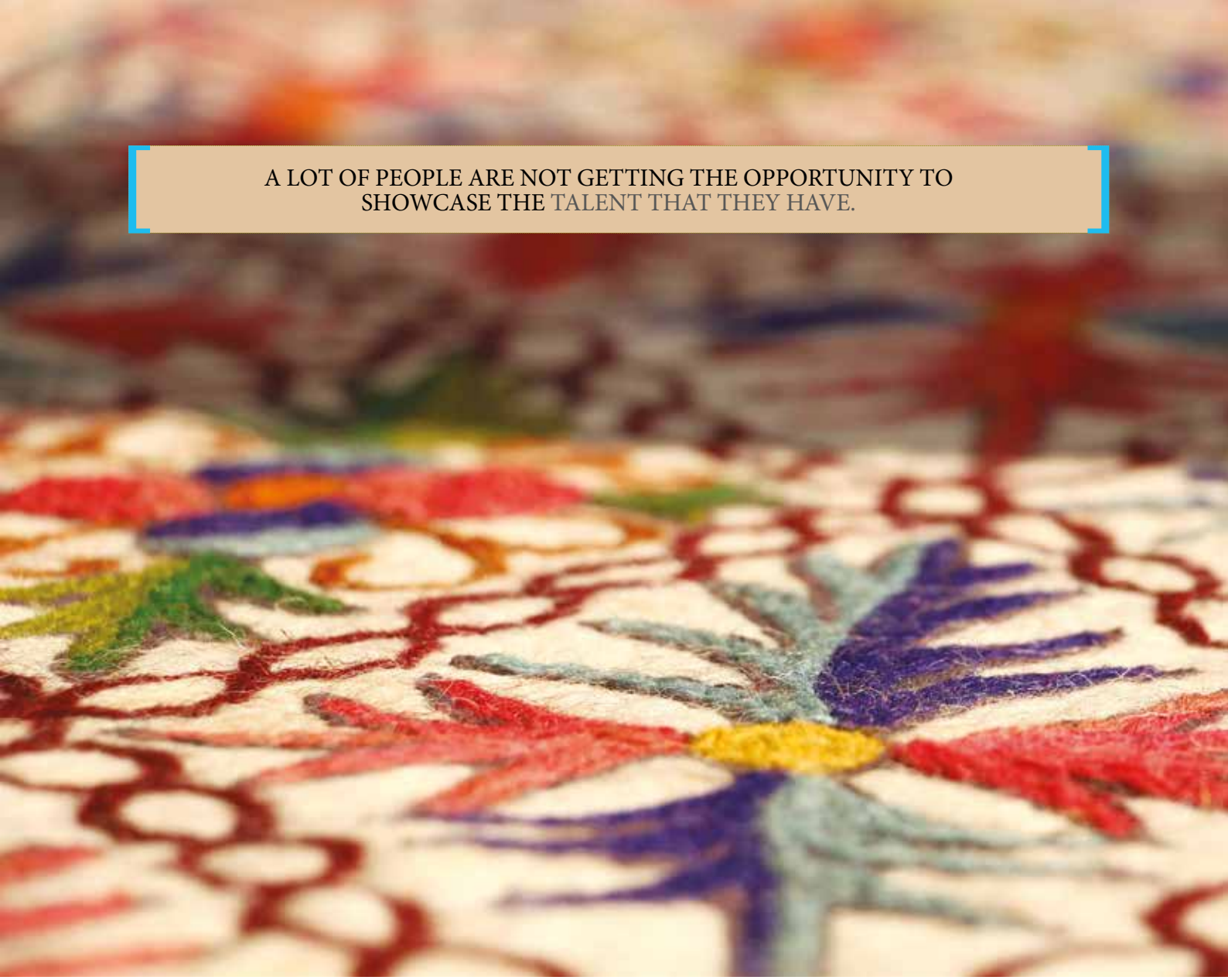
Vegetables that are grown in Dal Lake are nutritious and healthy. Dark green lettuces include Romaine, Arugula and Butter head. These nutrient dense leaves are crisp and slightly bitter and most people use them to make raw salads. Dark lettuces are rich in vitamins A,C and K and eating them regularly will improve our eyesight ,bone health and skin elasticity while helping our blood to clot normally combining these leaves with tomatoes, onions, carrots, and cucumbers to create a colorful healthy salad.

"There has been some debate whether greens are more nutritious fresh or cooked. Both methods of preparing greens can be a healthy choice says Director, Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Dr. AG Ahangar. "He reported that cooking breaks down the cell walls and releases some of the photo chemicals like carotids and folic acid that are present in the plant making and thus making more of them available to out body when consumed," he added.

Floating market is also an important source of supply of nutritious vegetables. Presently even vegetable supply to the old city is dependent on this market. As per vegetable vendors, the vegetable growers from the interior markets of the Dal Lake ferry their produce to the designated place from where it is traded. These vegetables are mostly sold at various spots on the banks of Dal Lake from Boulevard to Northern foreshore road.

The floating market of Srinagar is a place where Kashmiris living within the lake buy their daily fruit and vegetable supplies. The Lake is famous for its houseboats but the floating markets are essential for life to function within the Lake. Floating vegetable market is one of the few such markets in the world. Just as all aspects of life for people living in the Dal Lake are centered on water, so is shopping especially vegetable shopping. Hence this daily floating market is of much importance. This is a sort of wholesale market which comprises of big and small shopkeepers (floating boat shops). They buy vegetables from vegetable growers and then go off in their boats to houseboats and other small villages within the lake and sell vegetables to them. Apparently most of them are grown with and around the Dal Lake.

A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE NOT GETTING THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOWCASE THE TALENT THAT THEY HAVE.



NAMDA MACHINE: AN INNOVATION

Peer Viqar

Reaching its goal, Namda machine was patented after Zufa was award the IGNITE award in 2016.

The millennial innovation is making headlines across the world, invented by a young Kashmiri girl Zufa Iqbal from Lal Bazar, Srinagar. Namda rolling machine can be powered solely by a person operating on hands-free mode.

Zufa Iqbal (18), student of Presentation Convent School Srinagar started working on the project when she was just 16 years old, silencing the critics after her prototype was patented and she was felicitated with the prestigious Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE award in 2016.

"Initially the artisans were skeptical and they said nothing is going to help the dying Namda craft, they had simply given up," explains Zufa

She tried to convince the artisans that the machine will increase the productivity but they were doubtful until one day the machine started to roll with the capability to produce at least 30 Namda carpets a day, in comparison to the manually crafted one carpet a day.

Namda rolling machine is self-sustaining smart work boots using the suspension and different mechanics to massage and roll the wool to and forth making it possible to electrically boost the production from one Namda carpet a day to about 30 in just 12 hours, cost-effective and retaining the highest quality Namda carpets.

Zufa believes that Kashmiris are not less talented than Newton and Einstein, it is just the determination and right exposure to knowledge that will lead →

to great innovations.

Considering the cost of the end product, she suggests making the machine out of plastic to make it cost-effective for the Namda artisans.

The estimated cost per installation is about 1 lakh but if she is successful in implantation the plastic built the cost will be slashed to half.

"My prime objective was to do something for the artisans and the Namda craft which has been dying the slow death, Namda has cultural significance and I dearly eflt for it. I wanted to restore it to its glory, after I saw the sullen faces of the artisans."

What started as a mechanical engineering design project at Kashmir University's Gyaan cell has turned into a National project for restoration of the Namda craft.

Namda rolling machine is still in the pilot stage. Zufa has sustained the machine manufacturing cost on her own without any financial help from the government.

"When I first started to receive recognition and awards for my project, I was very happy but I wasn't sure how to respond then. Now I feel it is not just about me but those numerous innovators who cannot succeed in their project unless the government plays an active role, I think it is timev for governmentfor to take steps and help the innovators of the state." added Zufa

At Gyaan cell, Zufa and her classmates were to pitch their ideas and she was suggested to make something that will help the local populace. "I wanted to do something out of box but there I was influenced that it is not about the innovator but the innovation that does public good" she explains.

By making the Namda rolling machine, the artisans could increase the productivity ten folds easily thus empowering the artisans and thereby avoiding the death of this craft by restoring it past glory, Namda carpets were widely used in Kashmir because of its cultural and traditional significance. Low wages and absence of supporting schemes has forced the artisans to quit the generations old craft.

Zufa's project became a Kickstarter project to enable craftsmen to speed up the Namda carpet production and avoiding the lengthy worrisome process involved in the craft. Modernizing the traditional crafts does not go well always but in case of Namda it is very essential to meet the market demand and design requirements.

The machine takes almost seven to eight minutes to make a simple Namda. The washing and designing process is also finished within 15-20 minutes. Zufa plans to refine her innovation and commercialize it as a cost- and time-efficient machine.

The Recognition at National and International Levels

Reaching its goal, Namda machine was patented after Zufa was award the

IGNITE award in 2016.

A class 12th stedent , Zufa Iqbal was one among 30 people shortlisted out of the 55,000 applicants from 458 districts of the country. The award was presented to her by President Pranab Mukherjee in New Delhi.

"I received a call last year, that I have been selected for the award it was a proud moment, but for me more than the awards are my family, the people of Kashmir and my teachers who always believed in me and gave me so much love for the little I have been able to achieve." said Zufa

Zufa was among the 60 selected candidates for the Japan tour, and she has been part of many projects and conferences across the country.

WALNUTS GROWN IN KASHMIR VALLEY ARE CONSIDERED TO BE OF SUPERIOR QUALITY THAN REST OF THE COUNTRY.

WALNUTS:THE GLORY OF KASHMIR

Hillyregionsareidealforthewalnut production.Northwestern Himalaya including Jammu &Kashmir,Arunachal Pradesh,Uttarakhand and Himachal pradeshare few good examples. Jammu and Kashmir is considered to be the main hub of walnut production in India. Kashmirexamples valley is the leading contributor to the export of walnut from India.

Walnuts grown in Kashmir valley are considered to be of superior quality than rest of the country. In other Himalayan states, walnut has not seen much growth. About 90% of the total walnut demand of the country is being met by Kashmir only.As per records,the total area under walnut is 30,800 hectares and the annual production is 36,000 metric tonnes in the country.Walnut and Other Nut Fruit Growers Association of India (WANGAI), a newly formed body of walnut growers in the country, has chalked out a strategy to increase the production and launch efforts to bring high quality lateral bearing varieties from abroad.

The WANGAI also held a seminar in the month of july in Almora ,where it came out with 12-point recommendations calling for establishing walnut centres of excellence in states like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Arunchal Pradesh. As a part of strategy,a delegation of the WANGAI led by its president K C Pandey met Mehbooba Mufti,the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

."I have requested the honorable chief minister to set up the two centres of excellence in the state that will help the walnut- growers to get the better price as compared to other fruits",Pandey said.

"The productivity of walnut in our country is about 1.2 MT per hectare which is very low as compared to other countries like US, China, France and Mexico where it ranges from 3 to 5 MT per Ha," Pandey said .The WANGAI also called for ensuring availability of high quality lateral bearing varieties of walnut from abroad like Chandler, Howard, lara, fernor and franquette to increase the quality of walnuts in the country.

As far as export of walnut from j&k is concerned it has touched 1.5 billion rupees per annum as of 2016. " 116 crore rupees have been collected as revenue from the export of walnuts" said Akhtar hussain, deputy director of horticulture, j&k .Kashmiri walnut is superior in quality and thus in great demand in export markets and as compared to foreign dry fruits , Kashmiri dry fruit is more in demand. It is sweeter, has more oil and is considered good for health", said Haji bahadur khan, president dry fruit and walnut growers association, J&K . The horticulture department has introduced high yielding varities of plants with gestation period of 4 to 6 years which was earlier 10 years. It will improve the quality of nut and also will promote the concept of uniformity in shape and texture. This has helped Farmers to take up the plantation on a larger scale , increasing production from 89000 metric tonnes in 2013 to 2014, to 109,000 metric tonnes in 2015 to 2016, around 30000 people are associated with the walnut trade in the state. .

Walnuts and walnut trees have tremendous value in Kashmir: religious values; aesthetic values; and many others likewise.Walnut tree is considered sacred for its wood and fruit. 'Doon' is the Kashmiri word for walnut which is an integral part of 'Samgri' (Pooja paraphernalia). Being seasonal fruit (Rituphalam) of Kashmir and available throughout the year, it is offered to 'Kalash' as well as 'Vatuk Nath' on the Herath (Shivratri) festival. 'Kalash Doon' is highly revered and is distributed among the participating people on all religious ceremonies.

Walnuts are also offered to rivers and →

Rahil Hussain

Walnuts and walnut trees have tremendous value in Kashmir.

streams. On the occasion of Navreh, Sonth and Tilashtami, each member of Kashmiri Hindu families offers walnuts to rivers and streams early in the morning. Such is the significance of walnut in Kashmiri ethos that the small container for keeping Tilak is known as 'Katchal Doon'. Four types of tilak ('Tyok' in Kashmiri) namely saffron (Kong Tyok), sandal (Chandan Tyok), vermillion (Seinder Tyok) and ash (Bhasm Tyok) are kept in 'Katchal Doon' like the four units of a walnut shell. Apart from furniture making, its wood is used for making a small table (Bhadra Peeth) on which routine holy bath of 'Thakur Saeb' (Idols of Gods and family deity) is conducted on every morning.Kashmir Walnut Wood Carving has gained popularity over the decades and centuries not only in India but all over the world. It adds to the aesthetic value of Kashmir artistically.

The timber of walnut trees is considered there are several types of walnut wood which belong to family "Juglandaceae" . In kashmir black walnuts and English walnuts are found abundantly to yield either nuts or timber. Timber from black walnuts is more prominent and popular as it's color is more appealing. Furnishers made up of this very timber are highly appreciated through out the world. On the other hand walnuts have higher protein and lower fat content, specially black walnuts. They have very high Omega free fatty acids, making them beneficial to fight cardiac problems. Kashmir valley is proud of growing both the varieties of walnuts and for serving at the Oasis of walnuts for the entire country .

KASHMIR IS LOSING THIS ART AND THERE IS HARDLY ANY WAY OR MEANS TO REVIVE THE LOST TRADITION, LIKE MANY OF OUR DYING TRADITIONS!

THE DYING ART

Aaqib Hyder

This art is lost. I always think of leaving it

Sitting on an old wooden chair outside his shop on the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar, Abdul Gani Kumar haggles with his customer on the price of clay-made items on a daily basis. "I work hard to produce these items. It is my right to earn some profit," says Kumar, who has been working as a potter since early 1960's.

"But if you will not give me some concession, I would not buy it. I will buy a plastic box which costs half than the clay-made box," an unconvinced customer shots replies Kumar. Out of the fear of losing a customer, Kumar sells the box at a low cost. "This is not new to us. We face situations like this often, "Kumar told MEDIA TIMES.

Before the migration of Pandits, umpteen number of earthen items were sold by the potters of Kashmir valley to them. Using clay-made items is considered to be sacred to Pandits. "Using clay-made items is considered an act of sanctity since Earth represents our deities like other elements of nature including fire and water" said Ashok Pawan, a Kashmiri Pandit.

With the migration of Pandits, the potters of Kashmir lost a large customer base but not hope. They tried to bring in innovations to the art like using attractive colours and creating new designs. "Modernisation has brought manychanges. Items made in plastic, steel and aluminium,are being made which our earthen ware has to compete with. We try to make new items to catch up with the present trend. There are many people who prefer our clay pots over anything else" said Kumar.

Tumbaknaer (earthen drum used in marriages), foot scrubber, flower pots, →

small pots and piggy banks are some of the items which are purchased by people in Kashmir valley from potters ,even today.

But Kumar is unhappy with the system and says that the state government has not done anything to protect their craft. "I met several ministers in my life to discuss our grievances. Couple of years back, I met the then chief minister, Omar Abdullah who did not pay any attention to me. He told me to talk to his advisors."

The meeting with CM's advisors, Kumar says, crushed his hopes. He described the tale of his ignored art to them but it was of no use. Nothing conclusive so far has happened, Kumar claims.

Kumar inherited the art of pottery from his father when he left the government job in the state's irrigation department. When Kumar felt that he could not earn a decent living, he decided not to engage his children in his work. crushed

"My father left some land which was insufficient to carry out this laborous work. I could not save any money because 'I live hand to mouth'. Hence I could not extend it. That is why I asked my children to pursue other professions. How can I force my love for the craft on them?" says Kumar with a disappointed face. "I am fed up of this. This art is lost. I always think of leaving it," one of the potter commented

Jammu and Kashmir's noted poet and social activist, Zareef Ahmad Zareef, says Kashmiris were used to pottery items for ages, "Utensils made of clay were commonly used in households.. But nowadays, the culture of Kashmir has changed. The present generation is not ready to take up pottery as a profession. Either they feel ashamed as potters or they are insecure with the meager income the art fetches and that is why this art is dying."

Kashmir is losing this art and there is hardly any way or means to revive the lost tradition, like many of our dying traditions! Even the state's census department has no statistics of potters available with it. The data with the department is classified into two groups: workers and non-workers. "I can only tell you about the number of workers or non-workers. We don't have any particular statistics about the number of potters in the state," joint director of census department, CS Sapru, told MEDIA TIMES. ●

IN DECEMBER 2015, ON WORLD DISABILITY DAY, IFRA WON THE SECOND PRICE IN THE DRAWING COMPETITION THAT WAS HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR.

EDUCATING SPECIALLY ABLED CHIDREN A CHALLENGE

Saba khan

She has suffered; her eyes are filled with dreams and no one can take that away from her. She is focused and has a goal.

As She looked up from the ice-cream sticks with which she was making penholder and, turning to the right, whispered something to her classmate in a room plastered with artwork put together by the students.

Ifra Riyaz, a nine-year-old girl, with green eyes, is a student of Chotay Taray Foundation, a school for children with disabilities. Ifra was born on September 23, 2006, with locomotor disability(disability of the bones and joint muscles that causes stiffness in limbs). She is the youngest girl child in her family.

After giving birth to her child just like any normal mother, Aamina wanted to hold her baby in her arms, but she didn't find her in the hospital room. No one told Aamina that she had given birth to a deformed baby girl. Everyone was in a shock as her other kids were born normal. Finally, it was her husband who broke the news to her in the hospital.

Aamina was married to Riyaz in the summer of 1995. Everything was going well until her husband lost his business. To earn a living he took a taxi on rent, but failed miserably in that as well. The education of their children also suffered immensely as he had little money to spare for it. After some time, the couple separated. Aamina moved in at her father's house, along with the kids. The responsibility of four girls on her shoulders broke her down. She was all alone; she had to go down the road with no one around to look after her girls except her.

In 2013, Aamina got a job at the →

Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), which paid her Rs 4500 per month. No doubt this was a meager amount but enough to fulfill the needs of her family. "Ifra has grown up now, earlier she asked for things that I couldn't provide, her but then she understood that her mother has no means to get her that stuff and now she doesn't ask for anything," said the mother.

With poor family conditions on rise, the education of Ifra was also a hard challenge to face. A few years back when her parents looked around to enroll their child for formal education, they were turned away by many schools because no one wanted a child with a physical deformity.

Her parents evidently were disturbed by the insensitivity of the school authorities to deny their child an admission.

The foundation school lifted their spirits when they agreed to take her in. "Ifra should get a formal education rather than being here, she has no mental disability," says her art teacher Morifat Saba.

But the callous treatment she has received at the hands of various schools hasn't dented her resolve to dream as any nine-year-old would. She wants to grow up to be a doctor. "I want to go to the Spring Field School with my cousin Wafia and become a doctor who puts a needle in kids," she said, giggling with her friend Seerat, who suffers from Down's syndrome.

They both have been friends for years now. While Ifra looks at her with big puzzled eyes, her art teacher says that she gets on well once she opens up.

Ifra was denied admission in several schools. They all denied her the right for she was disabled. She did not ask for this, but she was destined to be born like this. Her parents were left with no choice but to seek the help of a NGO to let their child have some kind of education.

Chotay Taray, foundation also said that they are only NGO in Kashmir who give aid to the disabled childern.

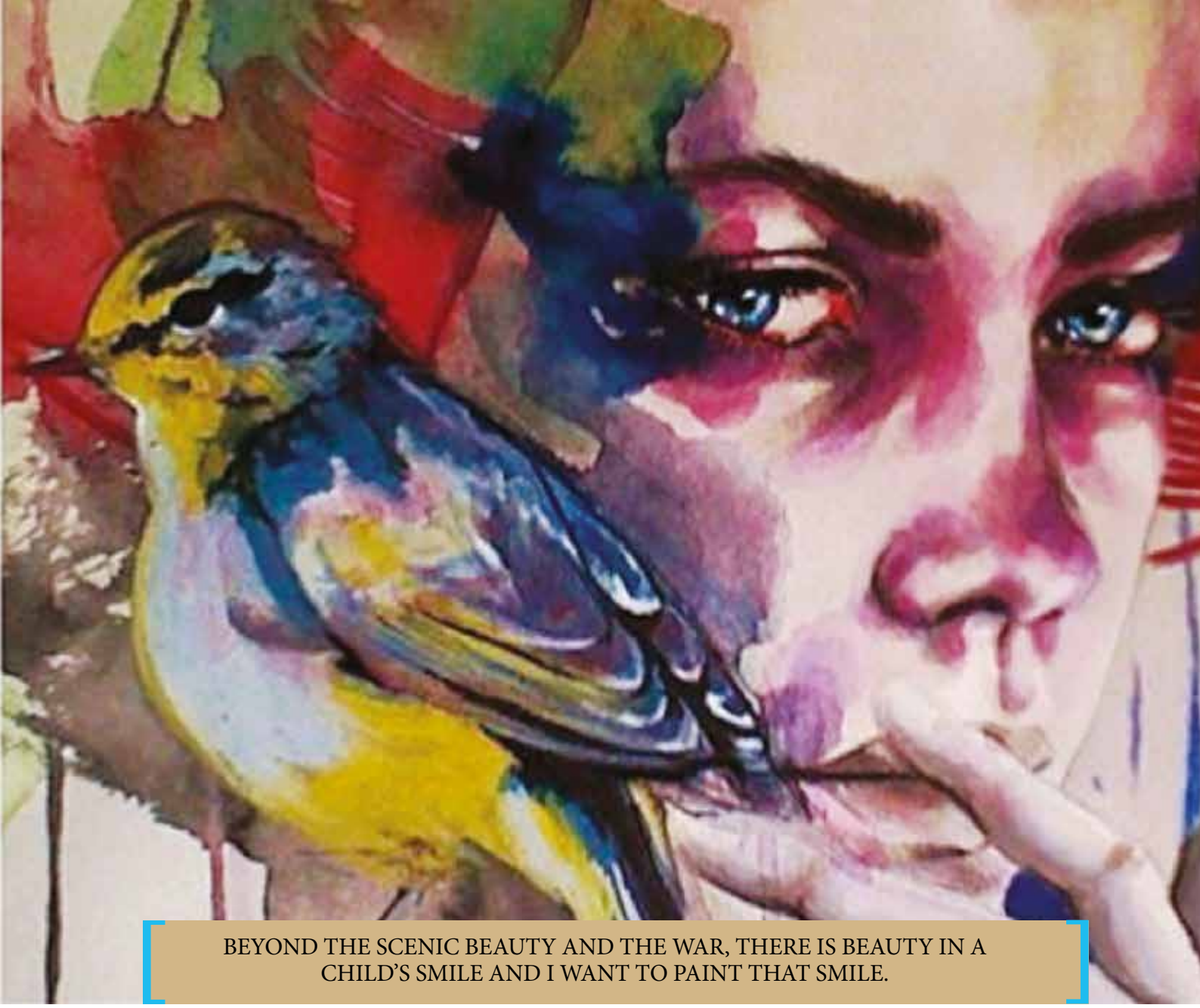
Ifra has not been able to get a level playing field in academics due to her disability. She has suffered; her eyes are filled with dreams and no one can take that away from her. She is focused and has a goal. She likes reading, drawing, and is interested in computers.

"I teach rhymes to my friends at home and here (CTF)," she said in a soft voice and gave a laugh.

Despite her disability she has learned and taught herself how to hold a pencil using her hand. She can now write, draw and build things. In December 2015, on World Disability Day, Ifra won the second price in the drawing competition that was held at the University of Kashmir. It also fetched her cash price of Rs 4000. She also has won a prize in a drawing competition held at Islamia College of Science and Commerce, Hawal.

Ifra got her disability certificate from Composite Regional Centre in 2013 and from the Chief Medical Officer, Srinagar in 2015. Under this, she should be able to avail the schemes and educational scholarships provided by the Social Welfare Department Kashmir. But since no government or private academic institute provides her admission, she can't avail any merit scholarship.

However, she got Rs 400 as a monthly incentive from the social welfare department which recently has been raised to Rs 1000. This meager amount does not suffice the needs of Ifra. She could barely buy any good stuff with this amount. Nonetheless, she continues to dream about a good life that awaits her. ●



BEYOND THE SCENIC BEAUTY AND THE WAR, THERE IS BEAUTY IN A CHILD'S SMILE AND I WANT TO PAINT THAT SMILE.

THE UPCOMING FACE OF KASHMIRI HISTORIOGRAPHY

Sadia Mir

To be very honest whenever I think of something great, I think of colours.

"Beyond the scenic beauty and the war, there is beauty in a child's smile and I want to paint that smile. When people ask me to paint a picture of Kashmir, I would rather paint about the joy I feel when I finally get home and eat some czoch-wor and noon chai. Why not?" says Anjum Khan.

Anjum, now lives in Dubai, but ever since she left Kashmir, she finds herself writing and painting about evenings spent under the Chinar trees and looming mountains. Her paintings may not seem as the stereotypical representation of Kashmir, but in every painting she makes, you see a glimpse of a Kashmiri girl.

"I write about the Dal and the nature that you can only find in Kashmir. My paintings aren't about the trauma, bombs and blood. There is normalcy in Kashmir as well that people don't seem to see." she says.

The art of telling history (historiography) has always been a serious task for the historians, though the recent era has seen a colossal transition with various media of art →

being used to expound the historical narratives. Movies, photography, oral-histories and paintings have been used as different ways to narrate the past. Kashmir may be a hotbed of violence with endless struggle and strife but its paradisiacal environs have inspired some of the most remarkable works of art and poetry – and continue to do so even now. There are several other young women in the Valley, who, entranced by the abundance of natural beauty around them and influenced by a rich, varied artistic heritage, have decided to draw on their creative energies to make their mark.

Ever since she can remember, Maria Shahmiri's world has always been full of colour, light, happiness, compassion and love. At an age when girls like playing with dolls she picked up the pencil to draw the bright blue sky, the golden sun, the pretty flowering buds and the gushing silver waters of the River Jhelum. Shahmiri is all grown up today but her passion for painting nature and people is stronger than ever.

"I developed a keen interest in painting when I was seven or eight years old. Even as a small child I was observant about the things that were happening around me and used to feel a strong urge to illustrate my thoughts on paper," she shares.

The young woman hopes to start her own art institute one day and nurture new talent. "I wish to open an art institute in Kashmir where internationally-known artists can come and share their knowledge and techniques with our students here. The right kind of exposure and opportunities can make a huge difference," says Shahmiri.

While Shahmiri has made a rewarding profession out of her passion there are others like Saba Altaf and Amreen Naqash, who are striking a perfect balance between their education and an abiding love for the arts. Arguably one of the youngest artists in Kashmir, Altaf's paint brush allows her to express herself beyond the limitations of her business management studies.

"Art is my hobby, my passion, everything. I always loved drawing and colouring as a child but I have started working on it seriously since the past two years," she says. Colours inspire her to paint, "To be very honest whenever I think of something great, I think of colours. It may sound abstract but my biggest inspiration are colours themselves."

Naturally, she, too, is drawn to the wonders of nature which, according to her, is every artist's ultimate guide. "Most of my paintings are somehow connected to nature or people. When I think of making something beautiful and peaceful, my heart and mind both look towards nature. To me, people make for the second best subject. Their personal stories fire my imagination and I bring them to life on my canvas," she says.

What kind of reactions do her pieces get?

"Most regular people are unable to understand the vision. But that's okay," she says matter-of-factly, adding, "When people don't understand my art it doesn't demotivate me. Rather, it inspires me to work harder and present something better. The critics give me another story to draw."

Like Altaf, Naqash, a student of pharmacy at the University of Kashmir, expertly straddles the world of academia and art. She has found her creative outlet in calligraphy, a specialised writing technique.

"I don't know when I developed a fondness for calligraphy but I used to love doing my own fonts for my assignments in school. My friends used to compliment me on this unique talent and suggested that I put up pictures of my work on various social networking websites. I started penning my own poems in a special font and sharing it with everyone," says the youngster, whose calligraphy pen is among her most prized possessions.

Unlike Shahmiri, Naqash is not planning to take up calligraphy in a big way because "it's a personal thing". "I like sharing my work and I even write when I receive requests but I don't think calligraphy is very popular in India. It's really difficult to get calligraphy paper here. Often I do it on regular paper but I have to be very careful because there are chances of blotting," she says.

Whether as a passion, hobby or profession, it looks like the Valley girls are serious about pursuing the arts. ●

WHY ARE THEY EVEN CALLED AS SMART PHONES? THERE'S NOTHING THAT'S SMART ABOUT THEM. THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY MY SON FROM ME.

SMART PHONES-NOT SO SMART ANYMORE

Naveed Wani

With the advent of smart phones, mobile phones have got a new meaning. They are not only means of communication but also the source of information.

Though smartphones seem ubiquitous in daily life, they are actually so new that researchers are just beginning to understand what the devices may do to the brain. One can not define what a smart phone is? And if you still got this question, you are living under a cave. These days it has become the most essential instrument for communication.

With the advent of smart phones, mobile phones have got a new meaning. They are not only means of communication but also the source of information and entertainment. Mobile phones' advent may be a blessing to the people but to her, it has proved out to be a murderer.

Forty-year-old Yasmeen lives in the small village of South Kashmir, hails from a middle class family and married off to a business man when she was twenty. She has a son named Naveed. Yasmeen was excited to have a child, like every mother is supposed to be and for years used to cover his face to shed away ill omens which she believed roamed around very often. As it is, she as a caring mother visited every other shrine in the neighborhood and elsewhere as a belief in safeguarding her child from all the ups and downs of the tragedy that life was.

Naveed once fell ill and she left the house at midnight to reach the nearby hospital. After due consultations with the doctors, she finally had to reconcile with herself that she as a mother was over sensitive and Naveed wasn't as ill as she had thought of him to be. She didn't blame herself of the episode that had followed. Motherhood, she thought was like this after all.

As soon as Naveed grew up, Yasmeen was seen more excited, enthusiastic and even younger than before. The way she took care of him was a clear sign that he was the breath to her soul. Yasmeen's husband, Nooruddin was a busy person who always was seen troubled with the math of his business and paid less heed to his family affairs. Yasmeen being a mother took a lot of interest in every family matter and her sole dream was to see her son a successful man and an even better human being. →

Naveed who studies in 10th standard is the class topper and a soft-spoken child. His teachers adore him and have high hopes from him. Everything was going well with the family and Yasmeen being a mother didn't wish for anything more of any sort. Yasmeen had grown very fond of her child and Naveed by himself was attached to her mother until one day he asked for a mobile phone.

As it is, mothers eventually give up to the demands put forth by their children. Yasmeen did the same too. Naveed got a smart phone and entered into the deep realms of the virtual world. As time passed, Naveed got more and more engaged with his smart phone. Yasmeen felt and realized that the bond between the two had started to weaken and her motherhood had started to fade away. The perils of a smart phone and the consequences there in were now clear to her. Naveed hardly attended the family dinners, as he was involved in clicking and swiping off the screen.

"He used to lay the utensils for the dinner and now he doesn't even bother to dine with us" says Yasmeen with a worried look on her face. Yasmeen seems to have accepted the fact that the relationship between them has dwindled a bit. She seems to have lost hope and solely considers the mobile phone responsible for the weakening of their relationship. "Why are they even called as smart phones? There's nothing that's smart about them. They have taken away my son from me and I curse the day I got one for my son" she says, regretfully.

She still hasn't given up though and yearns for the day she will get her son back and have a family dinner with him sitting by her side. "I believe the manufacturers are only worried about their profits and not the futures of the ones using them. We as humans do have our responsibilities but the makers of these smart phones share the greater part of it," says Yasmeena.

GURUDUWARA CHATTISPADSHAHI'S LOCATION IN THE MIDST OF MUSLIM LOCALITY SPEAKS OF KASHMIR'S CENTURIES' OLD SYNCRETIC CULTURE

SYNCRETIC SYMBOL

Pardeep Singh

During 2014 floods syncretic culture was again on display when hundreds of affected families in Srinagar mostly Muslims took refuge at this religious place.

On a scorching Sunday morning in downtown Srinagar, the cobblestone steps came up, colour-marked by the kids with hopscotch rectangles, some packs of old men chattering and some young boys sat hunched over a tattered carom

board. In the midst of eventful city, pilgrims dressed with fine new clothing, most of them wearing colourful turbans with distinct tints are moving towards historical Sikh Pilgrimage site, Gurudwara Chattispadshahi.

Like other Sikh families, Rabinder Kaur family is also entering their holy site. Every Sunday she along with her family travels from Rangreth area located in Srinagar outskirts to this revered place located at Rainawari in order to pay obeisance.

Gurudwara Chattispadshahi (literary sixth King or Guru) situated is situated at the centrally located foothill Hari Prabat in Srinagar, adjacent to historical Khati Darwaza.

Sitting around the sanctum in the main hall of Gurudwara, she spends a couple of hours in devotion.

Kaur says, it is not only about religious obligation, but also about a sense of spirituality. "It is a kind of spiritual dosage for me and my family for the rest of week," she says.

Guruduwara Chattispadshahi's location in the midst of Muslim locality speaks of Kashmir's centuries' old syncretic culture-where people from all faiths have been living in communal harmony. Chattipadshahi is a living testimony to this fact. The shrine has been here from 15th century.

"It is believed that Guru Nanak Ji, the first Sikh Guru visited Hari Prabat in 15 century. During his course of stay, he spread the message of peace and communal harmony. His impact was such that few people there subscribed to his teachings," says a historian Daleep Singh Deepak.

In 1600's, it was after a century of Guru Nanak Ji's visit that sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji visited Kashmir.

"When Guru Hargobind Sahib visited Kashmir, he travelled to almost all parts of Kashmir. It was in 1616," continues Deepak. The historian says that presence of Gurudwaras in Pulwama, Srinagar and Baramulla on the pattern of Chattipadshahi further strengthen this view.

Deepak says that there is another reason Guruji visited Kashmir. "Mata BhaagBhari, devote of Guru Nanak Ji, in Kashmir was longing for a glimpse of his successor, sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib," says Deepak. It was due Mata's devotion that Guru Sahib visited valley, he says.

"On the call of Mata BhaagBhari, that Guru Sahib visited her house, which is now known as Chattispadshahi GurudwaraRainawari," says Deepak and adds that this place assumes more significance since Mata's who was in her old age, his vision was restored by the Guru at the same spot.

Another Sikh scholar Dr. Gopal Singh says that place has veneration for Sikhs, since Mata was cremated by Guru Sahib himself here at this very spot in Rainawari.

When people living around Hari Prabat complained of severe water scarcity to the sixth Guru, says Singh, he ordered to dig a well which still exists in the premises of Gurudawara.

As part of a ritual, every person who pays a visit to the Guruduwara drinks and sprays water on him from the well.

The well assumes significance, says Singh as it is believed that Guru Sahab had himself dug some spades of mud for the well.

There is also an octogenarian Baldev Singh, a sixty two-year-old native of Punjab gave up his promising medical career to serve at Srinagar's Chattipadshahi Gurudwara. From 1985 he is into sewa (serving people).

"Till late 1980s, there was only a dilapidated structure," recalls Harban Singh," recalls Baldev and says that it was during the time when a voluntary group called Karsewaks-who initiated renovation of Guruduwaras across valley headed by Harban Singh that Chattisinghpadshahi Guruduwara at Rainawarai was also renovated.

Besides a considerable presence of devotees on Sundays, four major functions are celebrated here. Birthday of Guru Hargobind Sahib is the major function celebrated here. According to management, around 20,000 people throng the place.

The Gurudwara has also served as a refugee camp for Sikhs who came from Pakistan in 1947. Families who migrated from other part of Kashmir camped in the Gurudwara compound for few weeks, says historian Daleep.

During 2014 floods syncretic culture was again on display when hundreds of affected families in Srinagar mostly Muslims took refuge at this religious place.

"That was the time when I witnessed how this place has been blessed. People irrespective of faiths and diversity stayed here for weeks together. We do not know how the eatables were reaching here. How they were disturbed. Had it been some other place many would have been killed in the stampede," said volunteer Baldev Singh at the Chattipadshahi. ●

THIS IS A BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE STUDENTS WHO DON'T WANT TO PURSUE OR ARE RELUCTANT TO GO OUTSIDE THE STATE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

CLUSTER UNIVERSITIES: A WAY FORWARD

Danish Pathan

With the concept of Cluster University we don't have to lose anything.

The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has been mulling over the creation of 35 new cluster universities across the country by pooling resources of three to five existing government and government-aided colleges under the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) programme. And the cluster University in J&K is one of the 35 projects.

The Cluster University, first of its kind in Kashmir, was introduced by the Jammu and Kashmir Government in 2016. Two cluster universities have been established in the state, one each in Jammu and Srinagar.

The university is cluster of five premier colleges and strategically located in the heart of city. It will run a series of additional and advanced courses.

The Vice-chancellor of the University himself said at many forums that "with the concept of Cluster University we don't have to lose anything." The infrastructure and the faculty of these premier colleges are already in existence; there is no harm in upgrading them and putting it in the shape of a Cluster University, he further added.

The two Cluster Universities have been established in the state under "The Srinagar and Jammu Cluster Universities Act, 2016" and funded through centrally-sponsored Rashtriya Ucchtar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) to run series of additional and novel courses in the existing city colleges, with one of the colleges each in Srinagar and Jammu acting as the lead college.

The Cluster University in Srinagar will comprise of Amar Singh College, SP College, Women's College MA Road, GDC Bemina and the College of Education, Srinagar. In Srinagar, Amar Singh College will be the Lead College.

The process for building requisite infrastructure has been set into motion in the concerned colleges and the admission process has already started for the current academic session.The Cluster University will offer post-graduate and diploma courses in social sciences, liberal arts, humanities, engineering, science, teacher education, languages, entrepreneurship development, management and other job-intensive courses.

"Introduction and development of Cluster Universities in Srinagar and Jammu will not only boost the existing higher education facilities in J&K, but help diversification of the academics with introduction of latest job-intensive courses at the graduate and post-graduate levels," former education minister Nayeem Akther said.

The Cluster University of Srinagar shall be an independent University and shall conduct examinations and award →

degrees following its own rules and regulations. It shall have its own regulatory bodies with Hon'ble Chief Minster as Chancellor and shall be headed by a Vice Chancellor.

The five colleges of Srinagar will break away from Kashmir University. Other colleges will continue to be a part of Kashmir University. The Islamia College, Srinagar is already working as independent college and will not be a part of Cluster University.

The concept of Cluster Universities will provide an opportunity to students to join higher education within the state instead of getting trapped in the hands of unrecognized institutes outside, which becomes problematic for them. The government is committed to making education a round-the-clock affair and starting evening classes, which will help in expanding access to higher education by increasing the gross enrollment ratio.

Pertinently, the number of universities in J&K state has reached to 11. Abrar Hussain, a newly graduated student said,"more the number of universities means more seats."

"The concept of cluster universities is expected to improve the quality of education in universities and colleges and enhance capacity to become dynamic and demand drive. It aims to promote cutting-edge research and to create outstanding conditions for young scholars at universities," he further elaborated.

In state, the mushrooming growth of institutions in the shape of colleges and Universities has emerged in the recent past. If we snip a look at the past, 18 new colleges were established in 2005 and 18 in 2008 in the state to make higher education accessible to the remotest areas.

On being asked about the Cluster University of Srinagar Ali Mohd Pathan a student of Kashmir University replied; "this is a big opportunity for those students who don't want to pursue or are reluctant to go outside the state for higher education."

Innovative steps to higher education is the need of the hour and the University Grants Commission (UGC) has come with new suggestions to cluster colleges in groups to share their resources for better prosperity of the students and teaching community.

The University Grants Commission of India has repeatedly suggested that higher education is not a luxury affair for academia as well as for the policy makers and it has to be pursued earnestly with a lot of application oriented research and development. ●

THERE WAS LOT OF PRESSURE ON ME, BUT SPORTS PERSON HAVE TO FACE CHALLENGES AND COPE UP.

MEET EMERGING THANG TA SENSATION

IRFAN TRAMBOO

If we are focusing on studies, we should also focus on sports.

Zakariya Yaseen, from Bemina (Srinagar) has started playing Thang Ta in 2009 when he was in Class First. This 14 year old boy has been awarded by 'State award for the excellence' in the field of Thang Ta. Zakariya got inspired from his uncle who was football player. "I got inspired from him and started my sports journey", he said. Zakariya has played two international matches in 2013 both held in Korea. He also won two gold and one silver medals in Federation cup and played numerous nationals during initial stage.

Zakariya, practices with his coach and mentor in the Indoor Stadium during evening session. His coach has taught him how to be focused in game and committed with goals. "My coach and sports council has important role in shaping up my skills and in making me disciplined sportsperson. Sports Council always pampers players and provides equipment and support whenever they need" he said.

Focusing on studies and practising Thang Ta at the same time, was challenge for Zakariya. To keep balance and hold on sports and studies, Zakariya has scheduled timetable to keep going things smoothly.

After School hours without any rest, his practising sessions continue till late in the evening. "Self-study and my mother's →

help in studies, keeps me focused on studies", he said. While talking about struggle, he recalls one incident that is still in his mind, "I remember I was playing federation cup, but at the same time my examinations were going on.

There was lot of pressure on me, but sports person have to face challenges and cope up. During the federation cup I had kept with me study material and immediately after playing match, my routine was self-study".

The sportsperson has to take care of fitness and Zakariya has kept himself fit from the beginning. "We have to take care of our diet, because diet is as important as our practice. I do not eat same as normal person, you cannot eat everything if you are taking sports seriously. To be something in your life, you have to make sacrifices" he said.

Zakariya's goal is to inspire others and be inspiration for others, who really want to do something great in their life. "If we are focusing on studies, we should also focus on sports. We should not make our priority studies only but sports also. If we are giving lot of time to studies, we should also free our time for sports also. There are equal opportunities in both sports and studies" Zakariya said. ●

ZAIN-UL-ABIDIN WAS KNOWN TO BE AN EXCEPTIONALLY PEACEFUL RULER, WAS DESERVINGLY CONFERRED THE SURNAME TITLE OF 'BUDSHAH.

THE GOLDEN YEARS OF BUDSHAH

Shah Tawqeer

Sultan abhorred all killing and bloodshed and would avoid capital punishment wherever possible.

The golden Fifty years of the paradise refers to the period of the Great King, Sultan Gayas Ud Din or Zain Ul Abidin, popularly known as Bud Shah which means The Great King. It is said that the sultan's period was the most peaceful period in Kashmir. After the demise of Sultan Sikandar, his heir, Sultan Alisha became the ruler of Kashmir but after few years she left the kingdom and his brother Shai Khan becomes the ruler of Kashmir in 1420 AD. Shahi Khan was tilled as Sultan Gayas ud din.

He did not take any money from the State Treasury for his personal use but lived on the income from a copper mine in Aishmuqam. In his private life he wore a very simple dress and was a highly religious man, extending equal respect to all religions of the world. He venerated holy saints and fakirs and took instructions both from superior and inferior hermits. He ruled from 50 years.

Zain-ul-Abidin was known to be an exceptionally peaceful ruler, was deservingly conferred the surname title of 'Budshah'. He was known for being spiritually enlightened and highly reputed for the restructuring of the architecture of Kashmir.

The King severely dealt with all corrupt officials to ensure corruption was completely rooted out. He was brutish to all types of crime and most of the known criminals were put behind the bars. Realizing that the unemployment and poverty resulted in commission of crime, he took a number of steps so that suitable employment was guaranteed to all eligible persons in different fields.

Due to long period of lawlessness and insecurity of life and property, the farmers had left most of the land uncultivated. Zain-ul-Abidin's first great reform was the revision of land assessment. He reduced it to a fourth of the total produce in some places and to a seventh in others.

The farmers were further protected from the harassment of revenue officials by enacting a law which prohibited latter from accepting any gifts from them. He also introduced a proper system for registration of documents to prevent fraudulent transactions in property. He also enacted a code of laws for his people, which were engraved on copper plates and displayed in public places and halls of justice.

Sultan abhorred all killing and bloodshed and would avoid capital punishment wherever possible. However, his leniency and mild temper did not encourage any crime in the country because of his complete impartiality as a judge. →

According to Kashmiri Historian and Sanskrit poet, Jonaraja, "Though the King was kind-hearted yet for the sake of his people he would not forgive even his son or minister or a friend if he were guilty. Mir Yahya, a great favourite of the King, while drunk, had killed his wife. Although he was very close to him, yet he was held guilty and executed."

Sultan established one of the greatest libraries in Kashmir at a huge cost which remained in use even 100 years after his death when it was unfortunately destroyed. The king helped students by providing teachers, books, houses, food, and money and he extended limits of learning in all branches."

Towards the end of his reign a very severe famine occurred in Kashmir. This was caused by an early snowfall which destroyed the fully ripe paddy crop. Unfortunately the succeeding winter was also very severe.

A large number of people died. The King made all out efforts to alleviate the suffering of the people. He distributed paddy from his government stores free to the needy people. Fortunately the following year's crop was a bumper one and the sufferings of the people were quickly relieved. However, after the restoration of normal conditions, the king punished all the black marketers and hoarders who had swindled the people during those hard times and the excess money charged from them was returned.

By a royal decree he cancelled all the debts incurred by needy people in their hour of distress from unscrupulous money-lenders. Another

Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin died in 1470. His death was a big loss to Kashmir and even up to this day the people take his name with reverence and gratitude. No tribute The turbulent years of last half a century make one wonder how Kashmir ever produced such an illustrious ruler whose reign shines in the annals of history. Kashmiri's must be pinning for the rise of such a ruler. Will it happen again?

ISLAM IS A RELIGION OF MODERATION, OF BALANCE BETWEEN EXTREMES.

THE OTHER SIDE OF HIJAB

Saba Gul

In Islam Hijab has a deeper meaning which goes beyond covering head.

The word Hijab is an Arabic word which means veil or barrier. Among Muslim women, covering head or wearing headscarves is the most apparent form of hijab. However, in Islam Hijab has a deeper meaning which goes beyond covering head. It involves wearing clothing that is of loose fitting and cloaking womens body with exception of her face, hands and feet.

"And tell the believing women to lower their eyes, and guard their modesty, and that they display not their ornaments except what appears of them. And that they draw their veils over their bosoms and display not their ornaments except to their husbands, their brothers ... And repent to Allah, all of you O believers, that you may succeed." Al-Qur'an 24:31

In the contemporary times a growing trend of donning Hijab could be

seen across the world. Kashmir has also witnessed this change from past few years. Back in the Nineties, situation was quite different as many Militant Outfits used to impose diktats forcing women to abide by the Islamic dress code. In contrary to this the present scenario is quite different as hijab is not donned with force or fear but on one's own will.

Why hijab?

"I really liked the purpose behind the hijab -- a woman covering herself so that a man should know her for her mind, not her body." That purpose can be traced back to the Quran, Islam's holy text, which encourages women to dress modestly, says Faegheh Shirazi, author of "The Veil Unveiled."

Iqra, a student from Women's College MA road says that, "I was fifteen years old when I started wearing hijab. I opted for it on my own will."

Heena shafi working in a Social Welfare Department says that, ''modest clothing and hijab are precautions to prevent social violation. Before I started covering, I thought of myself based on what others thought of me. But after wearing hijab my perception has totally changed. Knowing that Allah finds me beautiful makes me feel beautiful ''.

Dressed in turquoise long kurta and wearing a radiant silk headscarf Yasmeen teaching in a Government High School believes that there is no harm if one donn's a fashionable outfit within the limits of religion. ''I started wearing headscarf during my university days and now it has become a part of my life. I thank Allah as I cannot think of anything better than being a Muslim."

Is Hijab for women and can men dictate women to observe Hijab?

In Islam, men have an obligation to God and to women to observe hijab.

For some reason, a lot of men seem to think they can simply force women to observe hijab. Instead, the Quran and Prophet Muhammad are clear: in Islam, us men are not actually allowed to do that at all. The burden of modesty lies with us.

Unfortunately, hijab also has its adverse effects: you get discriminated against, treated as though you are oppressed, illiterate and fundamentalist. I wear it for Allah and for my own conscience, said Barirah a graduate from Mata sundri college Delhi.

A survey carried out by the sociology department of Kashmir university reveals that 70 percent of women have opted for hijab on their own will and 28 percent chose it after being persuaded by family members and mere 2 percent are compelled.

The study also reveals that 66 percent of women who practice Hijab were employees working in government and non-government sector while 31 percent were students. After interviewing as many as 93 percent of women it was found that they wear hijab for religious reasons while 3.75 percent of women said they have opted for it due to cultural reasons.

Islam is a religion of moderation, of balance between extremes. Therefore, it does not expect women alone to uphold the society's morality and uprightness. Islam asks men and women to mutually strive to create a healthy social environment where children may grow with positive, beautiful, constructive and practical values and concepts. Thus, men are equally required to be modest and to conduct themselves responsibly in every sphere of their lives.

The concept of modesty and hijab in islam is holistic and encompasses both men and women.The ultimate goal is to maintain societal stability and to please Allah. ●

THE INCREASE IN NUMBER OF AFFILIATED CLUBS HAS BEEN AMAZING – FROM JUST 4 CLUBS IN 1964 TO OVER 500 AT PRESENT.

FOOTBALL IN KASHMIR
MARCHING AHEAD SILENTLY

Owing to the conflict between India and Pakistan, with Kashmir sandwiched between them, most of the kids grow up with the rattling sound of guns and bombs. Military and militants are the words and sight they grow up with. With no options, they often end up getting crushed between the two greedy powers. Sports – however good you might be in it; it is tough to make your mark in such a conflict ridden place.

Sports have always been associated with the lives of the people of Kashmir. Whatever may be the circumstances – man made or natural, it is virtually impossible to withhold sports from the people of Kashmir. Even in hard times, they have embraced it and used it as a tool for reconciliation and community building.

But nevertheless, Kashmir has witnessed some good, quality footballers though it didn't live out as a feeder state like Hyderabad of the 50s, 60s or Manipur in recent times. But the passion for the sport never died down and Kashmir found its faces of football - Ishfaq Ahmed and Mehraj-ud din Wadoo and their surge up to the top has changed the face of the game forever in the stiff-torn state.

Jammu and Kashmir Football Association (JKFA), formed in 1964, claims they have witnessed a great change in the youths' attitude towards the game since the last 12 years. The increase in number of affiliated clubs has been amazing – from just 4 clubs in 1964 to over 500 at present.

The romance and glamour associated with this sport is known to all of us. Great players from Kashmir like Late Farooq Ahamd Bhat popularly known as Pele of Kashmir, International footballers like Mohammad Yousuf Dar, Abdul Majeed Kakroo, Shafi Ahmad Nari etc are some glorious examples.

These mighty football figures have a great part of contribution towards football in Kashmir and have placed their name in post 1960s era of Kashmir.

With the advent of 90s, we all saw the downfall of all sectors and football too was its victim. We witnessed 'Dawn of new hope' in 2008 when All India Santosh Trophy tournament was held in Kashmir and with that 'Revival or the beginning of contemporary football' started in Kashmir.

It was a proud moment for the people of the state when India's oldest and reputed football club Mohun Baghan named →

Waseem Ahmad

Football is a low budget game; my father doesn't have to spend much money on it.

Ishfaq Ahmad from Kashmir as their captain. Hence he became first footballer from the state to lead the national-club.

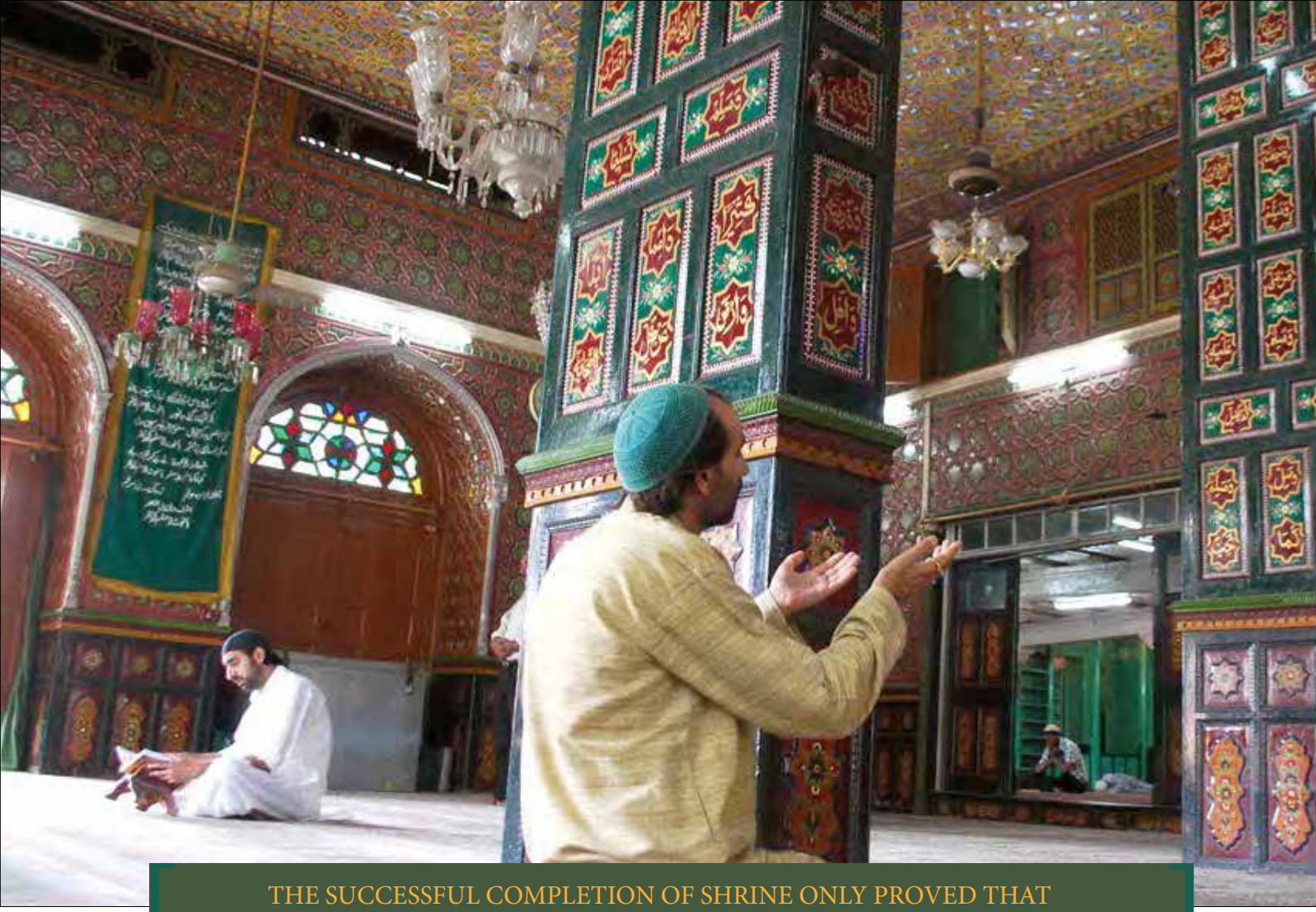
"Football is truly our traditional sport; I am very delightful to see it coming back," says 60 years old football lover while watching a match at the Srinagar Polo Ground. People from every sphere of life enjoy this game whole heartedly and have lauded it time and again. The lively atmospheres at the grounds attract nearly every passer-by.

Huzaif a 14-year-old aspiring footballer while practicing in Eidgah, said, "Football is a low budget game; my father doesn't have to spend much money on it. I just need a pair of boots and a football. He got me that and I am here."

The days of Mohammad Yousuf- the first footballer from Kashmir to represent India in 1977-1978 and the present generation is quite different. Technology has advanced and so have the facilities and prospects. So, despite all the problems, Kashmir has come a long way to stomp their foot as the new hub of emerging footballers. Having said that, there is also no place for complacency. The road ahead is tough and long.

Kashmir got its first football stadium (TRC Stadium) of international standard in Srinagar with an imported synthetic turf laid over the play field which was procured from Italy with an estimated cost of about 4.50 Crores in 2014 and so far it has been very successful for Jammu and Kashmir Football Association (JKFA) as they successfully conducted various tournaments on this ground.

JKFA president, Zameer Ahmad Thakur said that the TRC stadium was made to make Kashmir an all-weather Football state. "We were able to continue our football activities in winters as well, otherwise in the past all football activities were shifted to Jammu in winters. All this happened due to the availability of TRC ground," he said.



THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF SHRINE ONLY PROVED THAT KASHMIRI ARTISTS ARE STILL IN TOUCH WITH THEIR CRAFT

REPLICATING EMOTIONS

Yawar Shafi

We told them how some of the shrines with rich heritage value can be brought under UNESCO's care.

On June 28, 2012, three days after Dastigeer Sahab shrine in Khaniyar went up in flames, leaving entire Kashmir fuming with anger. Under strict curfew, the phone at Intach's Srinagar office began ringing frenetically. In a no-nonsense tone, the man on the other end said, "I am from CM's office, Gear up and start loss assessment of the shrine. We need a detailed proposal". An hour later Intac team was on their way to Dastgeer sahib shrine. "We were given special curfew passes," recalls Hakeem Sameer Hamdani, Project Coordinator Intach.

"We had done intensive documentation of the shrine in 2005-06," said Sameer.

This visuals documentation of motifs, khatamband, art, wood work, papier-mâché, designs etc. helped Intach retain the originality. "The idea was to recreate the old structure as it was," said Sameer. "It was quite a challenging task given the sentiments attached with the shrine."

A few months back, when one of the old devotees, who also took care of the shrine before it was gutted in fire, entered the reconstructed shrine, he couldn't help but say, "They (Intach) have not done anything at all. It (shrine) looks exactly the same!"

In 2005, Intach, a Delhi based non-profit organisation, was tasked to document around eight hundred historically important structures across Kashmir. Dastageer Sahib Shrine was one among them. "Documentation involved video-graphing of heritage structures, images and minute details with regard to structure building," said Sameer.

For Intach, the project was important given the fact that most of the buildings in the list were made of wood, and were currently in dilapidated condition. "These structures were highly prone to catching →

fire," said Sameer.

But what pinched Intach team was how this once beautiful structure was dying for want of attention. "We not only documented the mosque but restored its previous glory."

After Intach's intense restoration work, Aali Masjid was finally thrown open for prayers, something unimaginable a few months back. The next in line for documentation was Khanqah Shah-e-Hamdan, Jamia Masjid Srinagar, Naqashband Sahib Shrine, Makhdoom Sahib Shrine, Dastigeer Sahib Shrine etc.

Also, Zain-u-din Wali's shrine in Aishmuqam and Janbazz Sahib's shrine in Baramulla were documented by Intach. "Once they saw results, tourism department showed interest in our documentation project," said Sameer.

As a "goodwill gesture" tourism department bore transportation expenses of Intach employees. "They gave us Rs 1 lakh," said Sameer. "It was too small but we didn't complain."

The entire documentation process took two years to complete. "By 2007 we were done with our entire list," said Sameer.

A week before Dastegreer Sahib Shrine was gutted, Sameer and his team gave a power-point presentation regarding safety of heritage buildings to then Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ali Mohammad Sagar. The presentation, which took place in the lawn of Shah-e-Hamdan Shrine, was attended by Wakaf men and custodians of important shrines. "We told them how some of the shrines with rich heritage value can be brought under UNESCO's care," said Sameer.

During the presentation, it came to light that there are only three fire extinguishers in Dastageer Sahib Shrine. Interestingly no custodian knew how to operate an extinguisher in case of a fire. "We also highlighted how Dastageer Sahib's electric wiring is in mess," said Sameer.

Dastigeer-Shrine-new-building

After the fire, when Intach shared its plan for reconstruction, people raised objections. Reason: Intach wanted to retain some of the walls that were not damaged and were absolutely safe. However, locals wanted these walls to be destroyed and rebuilt from scratch because they were sprayed with "dirty water" during fire-fighting.

Then there was lack of consensus viz-a-viz what kind of structure should be built now: the one that was already there, or something modern. "Wakaf was interested in rebuilding the Shrine on modern lines," said Sameer.

Their (Wakaf's) idea was to have a shrine with around sixty thousand capacity, huge open space, etc. However, during a meeting with Wakaf members Omar Abdullah made it clear that Shrine will be built on old pattern. One senior Wakaf member told CM that his grandfather late Sheikh Abdullah built Dargah Hazrabal using modern outlook, why not replicate the same?

Omar told him that Hazratbal doesn't look Kashmiri at all in terms of architecture, "I don't want to do the same with Dastegheer Sahib Shrine."

Finally when the work started in September 2012, everybody was keeping his fingers crossed; after all it was no ordinary building. Out of the estimated cost of Rs 16 crore, so far Intach and JKPCC have spent Rs 9 crore.

The reconstruction was done using old plinth as base. "All building material was used keeping in view the carrying capacity of that plinth," said Sameer. "It was very challenging. There was no margin of error whatsoever".

The walls of the shrine had 13 inch thick wooden logs that gave the structure flexibility and strength. "We kept the thickness of the walls same, only difference was they were hollow now. There is no wood," said Sameer. This helped in reducing the usage of wood by sixty per cent compared to old structure. While reconstructing the shrine extra care was taken with regard to electrical fitting.

"Wires are laid in such a way that chances of short circuit are minimal," said Sameer.

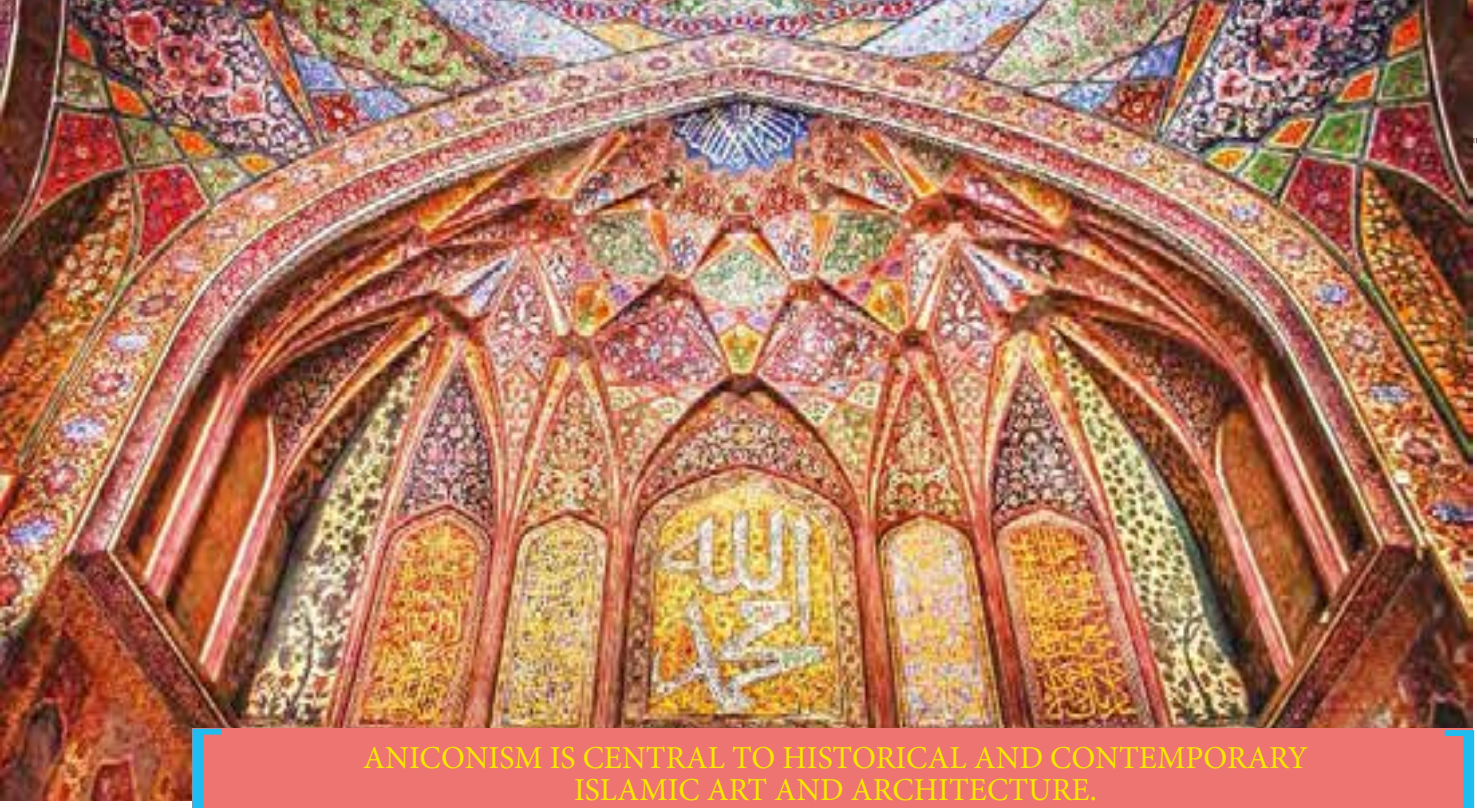
Ask Sameer what was the most challenging part of the reconstruction, and he quickly says: interior work. "If you remember old shrine had very intricate mix of Khatambandh, papier-mâché, wood carving, calligraphy work etc.," said Sameer. "To replicate that was very tough."

This part was done using old photographs, documents, videos etc. "We would compare samples with old documents before going ahead," recalls Sameer.

Besides, videos provided by Tariq Bhat of Associate Media, proved vital in understanding the motifs.

"The successful completion of shrine only proved that Kashmiri artists are still in touch with their craft," feels Sameer. "All designs are from the old shrine."

As of now work is stalled due to lack of funds, but Sameer and his colleagues are not worried, as most of the work is done already. "Challenging part is already over. Now just finishing touch is left." ●



ANICONISM IS CENTRAL TO HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE.

REPRESENTATION OF ANICONISM IN ISLAMIC ART

Mujeeb Ul Feroz

The great majority of visual Islamic Art and Architecture is devoid of the depiction of realistic human and animal figures.

Islam is unique in that it is the world's largest purely monotheistic religion wherein Muslims are told to believe in and worship One God. The body of historical Islamic art strives to glorify The Creator–"God" in English, "Allah" in Arabic. The love and worship of One God manifests itself in artworks, decorative and architectural elements, songs (known as "nasheeds" in Arabic) and the written word (as in the long Urdu poems called 'Hamd/Nazm'). The great majority of visual Islamic Art and Architecture is devoid of the depiction of realistic human and animal figures. But why is this? Why and how does Islam promote aniconism?

According to Sheikh Mohamed bin Jamil Zino in his book 'Islamic Guidelines for Individual and Social Reform', the main concern of Islam is to call mankind to the worship of Allah alone discarding all other deities. That means anyone and anything ascribed as a partner to Allah – be it a saint, a dead pious man, idols, statues, or photos – is discarded. This call of Islamic monotheism has been the religion in all senses of the word since the creation of man. Muslims believe that monotheism has been the message of all the prophets of Allah at all times. Allah says: "And verily we have sent among every Ummah [community, nation] a Messenger [proclaiming]: "worship Allah [alone] and avoid Taghut' [false deities, i.e. do not worship Taghut besides Allah]" [Quran, 16:36].

Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, was inspired by Allah to smash the idols housed in the kaaba. Ancient pilgrims would come from miles to visit the false deities harbored there, not unlike the pilgrimages many art enthusiasts might make to view a painting or other art object: for example, the Mona Lisa, today. Though modern visitors to the Mona Lisa may not think she has any special powers to heal their ailments or solve their troubles (as ancient pilgrims to the kaaba would have thought of their "gods and idols") they do find Leonardo Da Vinci's small portrait worthy to visit and would probably mourn her destruction if something were to happen to the small canvas painting.

The concept of abandoning false deities, pagan gods, and the Christian trinity was further expounded upon by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, after receiving his first revelations from Allah in 610 CE. The rules and restrictions for art-making come from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as we find in the respected hadith collections of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, narrated from Abu Talhah, may Allah be pleased with him, we read that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said; "The angels do not enter a house in which there is an image." We are to understand from the further explanations of his companions that Prophet Muhammad, peace be →

upon him, meant the images of creatures that have souls.

So here artists are warned against painting, drawing or sculpting people or animals that appear too life-like. The challenge for the Muslim artist for the last roughly 1400 years has thus been: how to create a symbolic piece of art without representing animals or humans and without tempting the worship of icons and partners to Allah by including figures in our art?

Many artists practicing these principles turn to geometric designs, architectural elements, calligraphy, and non-photorealistic forms. Historical and contemporary Islamic artists employ geometrical designs in their work, for graphic effect, or for their meditative qualities.

In Islamic artworks we also see extensive use of tessellations which are repeating, and sometimes interlocking geometric designs. Muslim mathematicians made this type of artwork possible by developing algebra and trigonometry. Most traditional mosques use some element of tessellation in their design, construction, or decoration.

Muslim artists employ the above techniques, and others, to create their geometric foundational grids and patterns. These fundamental methods, in addition to ornamental and functional calligraphy, enable Muslim artists to avoid figurative representations and employ sacred geometry to represent the Divine as they understand Him. In this way they keep away from prohibited actions and to prove their obedience to Allah and His Messenger Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Aniconism is central to historical and contemporary Islamic Art and Architecture and will remain so as long as Muslims are educated about the core precepts of their religion. ●

A POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM THE COACH STARTED A NEW CHAPTER IN SOLIHA,S LIFE AND GAVE KASHMIR A STAR IN RUGBY.

CROSSING HIGH HURDLES FOR A FREE RUN ON THE RUGBY FIELD

Moulding herself into a player of international standard in a game that demands top notch fitness and skill level, soliha has become a shining light in the Rugby circles of the valley. For a Kashmiri girl, earning an Indian camp isn't mean achievement by any stretch of imagination.

Early opposition at home for pursuing a physical sport, the struggle to find the like-minded girls to form a team, →

Sajida Yousuf

Most of the girls prefer cricket and football as their support. I choose rugby because it is different and suits me

training under the shadow of terror and, of course, the snide remarks of the sceptics have been some of the hurdles that soliha has crossed before she reached the capital to participate in an All-India event organised to pick probable for the national team.

Soliha defied parent's opposition putting hard yards in practice to improve her skills in a game that is hardly followed by the Kashmiris. The nature of the game demands high fitness levels and intense practice for it is basically a physical contact support.

The strongly built frame of soliha fits well to the requirements of the support. "Most of the girls prefer cricket and football as their support. I choose rugby because it is different and suits me" says soliha who regular in gyms.

From playing on Srinagar's dodgy fields that need to be mine-sweeped regularly to the smooth lawns and sporting environment of Delhi University, it was a welcome change for the young rugger.

Soliha also inspired her younger sister Sajidah to take up the rugby. "With two rugby-playing daughters, my mother is worried at times, since most if the time we are travelling. But she has been our pillar of strength. She has always said that what a boy can do, a girl a girl can do better," she says.

Perhaps that explains her preference for what has been considered a men's sport and her sister's boyish appearance.

Soliha was just three when her father died after he was caught in cross firing during February in 1995. "Me and my mother support each other . She calls me 10 times a day and I call back as much ,"she says.

Her first bout with the game was more of an accident than by choice. Soliha bunked her classes in Green Valley School and made her way to the school playground where a rugby coach had come to teach the game to the kids.

"At that time, I did not know about rugby. Seeing other kids, I started playing too. Somehow coach was impressed," says soliha. A positive feedback from the coach started a new chapter in soliha,s life and gave Kashmir a star in rugby.

The passion and love for the game started to grow by the day and soliha was selected by the coach for his team. With the time, soliha honed her skills under various coaches and put lot of hard-work to improve her fitness. It didn't take her long to make it to the state team. She captained her side in her maiden National level appearance.

Her consistent performances earned a call for an International Rugby Board (IRB) level tournament but as the fate had it she had to pull out thanks to a leg injury.

Soliha didn't lose the hope, though. The Kashmiri girl kept practising hard, and got selected for a six-month preparatory camp for 27-member Indian Women's Rugby team for five nation rugby tournament held in Pune.

Soliha,s call up to the training camp coincided with her getting through AIEEE. But soliha didn't compromised on rugby .The love for the game and opportunity to rub shoulders with some quality players forced her skip the counselling required before an admission in engineering colleges." I preferred camp over engineering because I thought it was my best chance to make it big in the game," says soliha. The Indian selectors impressed by her skill and fitness choose soliha for Indian team : a historic moment making her the only girl from the valley to represent India in a global event. Soliha felt her selection for the Indian team came as a boost for rugby players – girls in specific – of Kashmir.

The chance encounter with the sport turned out to be a long association. Today soliha is pursuing her M.tech from Delhi and is certified level 1 coach and a Rugby development Officer (RDO) for the state. Despite the tough job of spreading rugby in the valley by going into the different schools and colleges, soliha doesn't grumble about the degree of difficulty. ●

EVERYONE IS BUSY IN THEIR OWN LIVES, AND IN THIS DIGITAL ERA WE DON'T FIND TIME TO LISTEN TO THE QUIVERING LIPS OF THOSE WHO WANT THEIR MISERIES TO BE HEARD AT LEAST.

SILENT LIPS AND THEIR UNSAID WORDS

Shaheen Shafique

.....wrinkles were because of her wretched life, and not her age.....

Have been listening it from my childhood that poverty is the worst kind of misery, which leads an existing person to its near extinction. The statement was proven true, when I met a woman namely Haleem, approximately in her 40's looking at me---as if trying to question about something serious and grave. She was a poor lady as evident from her torn grey Korab Pheran embroidered with fine design which we call as Tille in Kashmiri. The Pheran was full of stains, but those stains were speaking something more, that could not be understood well, not even through spoken words. Her head was covered with Light Grey, Woollen Stole. Her hair was uncombed--- some white hair could be easily seen in front---resting on her wrinkled forehead. Those wrinkles were because of her wretched life, and not her age. She was putting on a torn slipper in her feet. I couldn't see her feet, they were covered with a pair of black socks.

I could see her eyes, full of tears and her face full of despair. Her old father (young and smart once), lying on the death bed, her beautiful mother mentally disabled (A Mother who has lost her three sons, before her eyes). A sister in her early 30's is still unmarried, because there is no source of income to run the household chores, and to manage the marriage expenditure is something like a dream coming true.

It was all of a sudden when I got a chance to meet her nearby my area where I reside, by foot, it would just take half an hour to reach their residence.

A small verandah led me inside a small room which was full of dark, because there was no light at that time. Finally, I put off my shoes, and stepped in. I couldn't see anything, except the Dark surrounding every corner of this room. This room had a door attached to it leading to the other room. This room was also filled with dark. I turned on the flashlight of my mobile, and saw an old man lying on the floor, →

battling for his life. I wasn't able to talk to him, except for I asked him, Tohi kya chu naav? (What's your name?) He in his inaudible voice replied, Ghulam Mohammed Shawla. I was numb and shattered for a while, I got goosebumps in my body because of something wet touching my feet. When that unknown voice (known for now) replied with a worried tone, Yi chu sreh khasaan assi….(It's something that comes from the plinth of this room).....

I was trying to get to some point. What to say, and how to say! I wasn't able to do anything except sighing. I wanted to leave the place as soon as possible. I wanted to scream, I wanted to cry. I couldn't see the appearance of those rooms, but could see that they were full of lessons to learn.

I was beset by several thoughts. I began to raise questions in my own mind, that does poverty kills you, or makes you a living dead? These questions are there which nobody likes to answer. Everyone is busy in their own lives, and in this digital era we don't find time to listen to the quivering lips of those who want their miseries to be heard at least. If we can't help them by money, but we can definitely help them by listening to them.

When a rich is having feast in every meal of the day, a poor struggles within himself, how to manage a single meal!

If a single rich person would pay attention to a single poor person, there would be no poverty. This woman is surrounded by so many well off neighbours, but do they care about them? Or they just laugh at their poor condition?

I believe that things are destined, and you meet certain people for some firm reason. Nothing in this world happens "just".

As belonging to a middle class family, I still have a lot of options to go for. But what about those who are not left with any, other than just surviving for the heck of it!

I was trying hard to absorb, what I had seen. I could reach to a conclusion with a question------Every home isn't an example of happiness--- there are people in our society who sleep on the wet floor, keep looking for someone to listen to them patiently. They want to be heard and they want to be taken care of. Now, who's going to take their care? Who's going to listen to their unsaid miseries? ●

EDUCATING STUDENTS IS A NOBLE JOB AND SHOULD BE PRACTICED WITH UTMOST DEDICATION, SINCERITY AND MORALITY.

COACHING CENTRES: THE NEW AGE SCAMMERS

Pirzada Shakir

The trend of attracting students to different coaching centres by trickery has been prevalent in Kashmir since a long time.

In the race to compete in grades & skills, tuition centres have been positively appreciated by the parents and the students but in order to attract more students, illegal and deceit means are being adopted by faculty and heads of coaching centres in Kashmir.

The trend of attracting students to different coaching centres by trickery has been prevalent in Kashmir since a long time. Sky touching fees and dues are charged by these coaching centres, most of them not even registered. Last year, Government issued an order for coaching centres making it mandatory for them to get registered but most of them flouted the orders and continue to function without a registration certificate.

"Most of the coaching centres are running unauthorized and charge fee as per their sweet will," said Hamid Khan, a worried father. "Owing to it, we as parents are compelled to pay exorbitant charges and that too without any accountability," he added.

"By making fake promising advertisements and hoardings they just want to turn our wards into business clients" said Rafiq Ahmed a resident of Parrypora, Srinagar

Recently, a very stinky act of some coaching centres operating from uptown area of Srinagar's Parraypora hamlet was exposed by a local tabloid and then development stories were carried by various local dailies. Hoardings and full page advertisements were given by these coaching centres congratulating their NEET qualified students.→

An advertisement given by a coaching institute namely 'HOPE CLASSES 'with the tagline "Gateway for medical and engineering', contained photographs of 30 students who according to them have qualified NEET-2017 entrance examination for MBBS and another list of 30 students who have qualified JEE-2017 entrance examination for Engineering.

On examining the list, it was found that the image featured for one of the students in the list named as Mohd Yaquob who as per them has qualified MBBS examination, was of one of the victims of the December 2014 Peshawar Army school terror attack that consumed the lives of about 140 students and shook the entire world. Another student, Irfan Ahmad featured in the list is actually Shahveer Jafry, a Pakistani YouTube sensation.

Talking to Private School Association's Chairman G N Var about the issue, he said, "It has obviously breached the trust of public. No coaching centre will be allowed to malign the name of private coaching centres in the Valley." "We have called a meeting where we will be taking strong action against the coaching centres. If required, we might also close such coaching centres," Var said.

Another coaching centre running in Parraypora, named as VIPS-T (Valley Institute of professional studies) featured images of three students, namely Shaheera, Aarifa Mumtaz and Aasif Ahmad Malik, in their congratulation note who were already featured in the list of qualifiers carried out by Hope Classes. However VIPS-T authorities made their point that they were students of their institute in 2016 and didn't opt for HOPE classes or any other institute in 2017

Meanwhile while talking to Director School Education, Dr. Ghulam Nabi Itoo regarding the issue, he said, "We are making guidelines and rules regarding the fee structure of coaching centres and categorization of coaching centres in the valley so that parents and students are not mislead and deceived."

When the news about the fake pictures carried by HOPE Classes was circulated, it received heavy criticism on social media. HOPE Classes, then came with corrigendum and said that it was mistakenly done by the designer. To what extent it is true, God knows better. But as responsible citizens, they should not have taken to such a practice. Educating students is a noble job and should be practiced with utmost dedication, sincerity and morality.

Talking about the responsibilities of authorities, shouldn't they book such doers under relevant sections of law for cheating parents, students and people? Yes they should, so that it becomes an example for everyone who takes to such condemnable practices. Government also needs to categorize coaching centres on the basis of their standard and quality of education being given by them and should frame fee structure accordingly so that parents and students are not exploited in any manner. ●

PEOPLE HAVE BECOME MORE MATERIALISTIC, SELF CENTRIC, PSEUDO-RELIGIOUS AND PSEUDO-PERFECT AND THIS HAS BEEN A MAJOR CAUSE FOR EXPENDITURE OF SOCIAL EVILS.

REGRESSIVE DOGMA AND STEREOTYPES STILL PLAGUING COMMON VALUES

BINT UL HUDA

The weddings in the valley were full of simplicity but the scenario has changed.

Social evils in our valley have become a serious concern in the present day world. It is gradually affecting the roots of our culture and in blocking its rapid growth on the global chart. People today are becoming more materialistic leaving behind the facts and essence of society, culture, and religion.

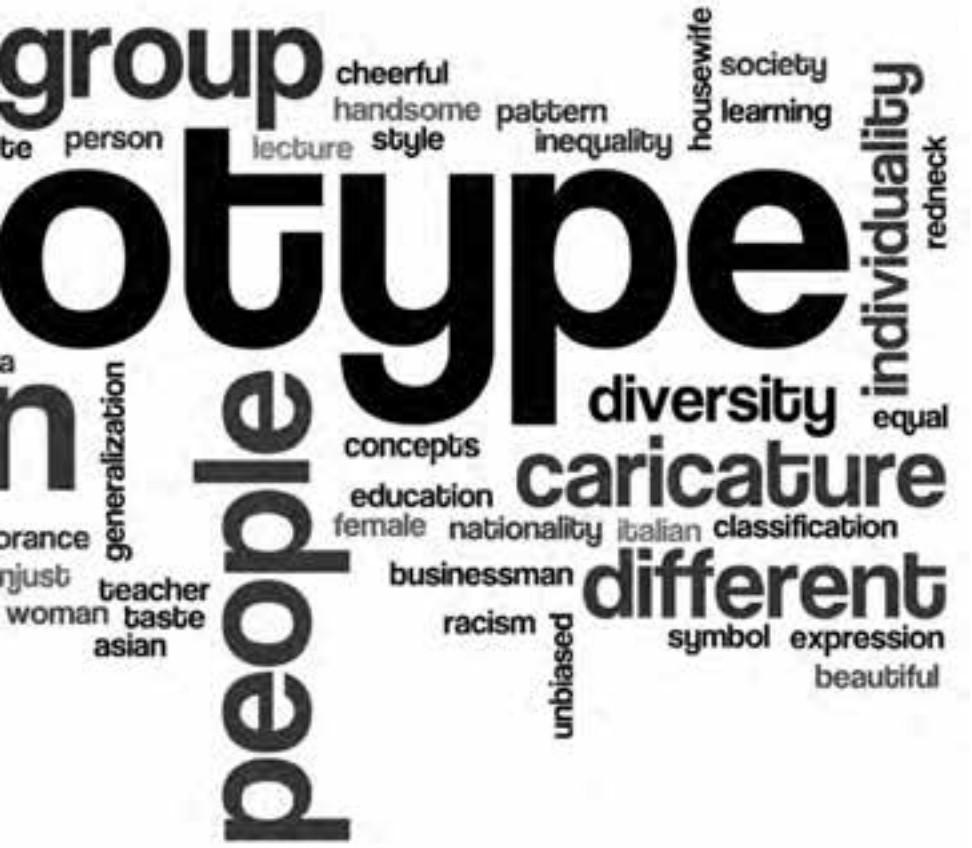
The people in the valley are inundated by multiple social evils leaving huge population frustrated, perplexed, restless, uncomfortable, and worrisome. The multi-dimensional social evils in the form of dowry, suicides, molestation, and extravagance in marriages, drug addiction and moral degradation have plagued the society. And the greatest of the tragedies is that youth who have the responsibility of taking forward society and legacy are getting distracted by various forms of social evils.

The weddings in the valley were full of simplicity but the scenario has changed and now our weddings have become lavish and over exaggerated. Families spend lot of money on meals, forget about other expenses. It is not only about demanding the dowry; most of the time brides family willingly send expensive things worth lacs with the bride for her in-laws family. Seldom do people care about the poor who can't afford such expensive weddings.

Psychiatrist Dr Imtiyaz, Senior Consultant Department of Health Kashmir said that "the present political scenario has resulted in increase in stress level among younger generation of valley; this in turn has caused increase in neuropsychiatric ailments in youth".

"Other social evils have added fumes to fire and according to a survey nearly 30 to 40 per cent of total population are suffering from mental ailments" he further added.

The National Crime Bureau Records of India suggests that the rate of suicide in Jammu and Kashmir is much →



higher than many other states in India. The staggering figures reveal that Kashmir has a higher suicide rate at 2.1 percent than the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (1.7) and Bihar (0.7).

And, the graph on the rise dangerously blemishes our social and cultural integrity. If we analyze the above figures, it is easy to find out that the major reason for increased suicide rates in Kashmir is in conflict conditions post-1989.

Late Bashir Ahmad Dabla, Former Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir, wrote in his book that 62 percent of the suicides in the Valley involved women while men comprised 38 percent. The reason is very obvious, due to the ongoing turmoil in Kashmir; women have been the silent sufferers.

Alongside that, there are other reasons too that have added more salt to the wounds of our people. One of them is growing unemployment in Kashmir. More than three lakh educated youth have registered them in the employment exchange. But, unofficial reports confirm that around 25 lakh youth who have the capability and skills are jobless.

Jahangir Ali, perusing PhD Scholar said that "people have become more materialistic, self centric, pseudo-religious and pseudo-perfect and this has been a major cause for expenditure of social evils.

Another alarming issue is eve teasing in our public transport which women often complains about. This is something which needs to be taken head on.

In most cases, a woman agrees to abort her female fetus, when she succumbs to family pressures. Her life is made hell through the illogical demands of in-laws for a male child. Among the states, it is Jammu and Kashmir which is in the top list with unrestrained corruption.

Corruption also leads to poverty, unemployment, and delay in works. It has become a socially accepted crime. Begging mafia is on an enormous peak in social set-up nowadays. It has posed a serious threat to the socio-economic, political and cultural diversity of the society. It is a menace of destitute and disgrace that is well-organized group controlled mafia. The innocence of people has somehow faded away due to which the anti-social incidents happen after every now and then. No religion or sect of any religion has ever approved any evil.

All the religions stress upon mankind to fight against evils. But unfortunately, what we see presently is a sheer deviation from our religious scriptures. To combat the menace of grave social evils listed above we, there is an urgent need to create a peaceful atmosphere where everyone lives in peace with one another. We have to strike a strong chord of unity and harmony irrespective of creed, caste, color, and status to create an evil free society.

We all young, elders irrespective of caste, creed, and religion will have to unite and protect the Kashmir's unique culture which is typically based on innocence and hospitability. Government authorities, civil-society and other bodies should put their efforts in place to end this social evil.

The eradication of social ills from the society which was our social and religious obligations has remained confined to some NGOs and religious bodies while a common man is not paying heed towards it. It is the high time for everyone in general and for the intellectuals, in particular, to wake up to the occasion and change the face of the society and contribute to its betterment. ●

MY STORY CAN BE AN INSPIRATION FOR A NUMBER OF PEOPLE. I BELIEVE THERE IS NO POINT IN KEEPING IT SECRET WHEN IT CAN HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE,"

BUS CONDUCTOR DEFIES HIS EGO TO BE KNOWN AS DR BHATT

Life – they say – is not a bed of roses. Some are born with a silver spoons. Others don't have immediate access to the spoon, but can afford what they need. For others, life is very difficult, one wonders if they would overcome it.

Lot of things are easy to say. You can talk about your future and what you want to achieve in life – if you're comfortable and can eat what and when you want. But what can you say when your resources are that limited that you struggle to survive? What can you say (or do) about the future when you're not even certain of the present? The story of Mohammad Lateef Bhat teaches us how to get away with hardships by never quitting.

Mohammad Lateef Bhat, a resident of Turka Batpora, Baramulla, worked as a bus conductor and a cook to fund his doctorate studies and to provide for his family. Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, father of Lateef, worked hard to feed the family of nine people. He owned two *Kanal*s of land but that was never enough to meet the needs of his family.

Bhat quit his school for three years due to financial constraints, till his brother was old enough to work as a labourer and support him to resume his studies.

After completing his school, he chose the subject of his choice—literature. Right from his schooling days, Bhat had an attraction towards literature. He was specifically intrigued by urdu literature.

"However, to pay for my education, I had to work part-time, as a bus conductor after college," he said.

He graduated from the Government Degree College Baramulla in 2007, and subsequently appeared for the entrance examination for the University of Kashmir.

"I qualified and was happy, but I could not join the University because I didn't have money to pay the admission fee. Finally, I opted for distance mode to be able to work and study simultaneously," he said.

As the days passed, the requirements grew and he was left out of options. He needed a job desperately and finally got one. Bhat said he worked as a daily-wage employee at the Royal Spring Golf Club here until the then-Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University, Dr Reyaz Punjabi, spotted him and promised a job.

"I was posted as a caretaker at the guest house in Kashmir University on contractual basis and was promised a permanent job after two years," he said.

Bhat went on to complete his Post-graduation in Urdu. Then, he took admission in part-time Ph. D in Magadh University in Bihar.

"I secured third rank among the six selected candidates in 2012. At least 1800 candidates had appeared in the entrance," he said, adding that he had to both do his research and work in Kashmir University.

"I worked for 24 hours in the guest house, as a result of which I was able to get leave to do my research," he said.

Professor Hussainul Haque, supervisor of Lateef, supported him greatly and used to encourage him during this course.

Bhat was finally awarded his Doctorate for his work on 'Urdu Poetry in Jammu Kashmir' in 2016.

The National Council for Promoting Urdu Language, NCPUL, Ministry of HRD, has recommended his work to be published for the every Urdu literature library across the globe through *'Bazme Sadaf International Publishers'*.

Ayadullah Dar

My work never hurts my ego. I hope that one day I will get the position I deserve

It is a big recognition of my work. I feel proud, he says.

In May 2017, he was granted a permanent job, but his designation remained the same, afourth class employee. Bhat is married now and has a daughter. The entire family depends solely on him .

"My work never hurts my ego. I hope that one day I will get the position I deserve," he said.

"One should never be shy to do menial jobs. Work is important. Financial problems are never permanent and they should not become a hindrance in achieving our goals."

Your background doesn't matter. Your country doesn't matter. I strongly believe you will never succeed until you say and live by the saying, "My country and background will never be an excuse for my failure." You should also know that everything starts from the mind. The best way to nurture your great dreams is to keep yourself updated, and be surrounded with positive people.

"My story can be an inspiration for a number of people. I believe there is no point in keeping it secret when it can have a major impact on the lives of hundreds or thousands of people," Lateef adds. ●

AROUND 20 FILMS IN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES LIKE FEATURE FICTION FILMS, FEATURE LENGTH DOCUMENTARY FILMS, SHORT FICTION FILMS, SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILMS, SHORT ANIMATION FILMS AND EXPERIMENTAL FILMS WERE PART OF THE FESTIVAL.

Idrees Bukhtiyar

Such festivals will provide an avenue to local youth to tell their stories at a larger level.

KWFF: REVIVING FILM CULTURE IN VALLEY

The unrivalled hopes and work for reviving the film culture in the valley is vibrant and operational.

The second edition Kashmir World Film Festival (KWFF) that began on 1st November and concluded on 5th November 2017 witnessed a massive rush of students, visitors and film lovers.

Organized by Actors Creative Theatre (ACT), a non-profit organization based in Srinagar, the festival screened the first black and white Kashmiri feature film 'Manez Raat' on its first day.

"We screened this film to make people know about their lost culture," said Mushtaaque Ali Ahmad Khan, the festival director.

The five day festival was inaugurated by minister for Public Works Naeem Akhtar at Tagore Hall, Srinagar. The minster while welcoming this initiative said that such festival will provide an avenue to local youth to tell their stories at a larger level.

"We have huge potential in Kashmir, but the only thing is that we don't →

have avenues. Such festivals provide a platform for local youth to interact with masters in the field and learn a lot," Akthar said.

However, only one film was screened on the first day of the festival due to some cultural activities that were scheduled to be held at inauguration time.

On second day of the festival, two short films by the Convergent Journalism pass-out students of Central University of Kashmir (CUK) were screened.

The films include Kotar Baaz by M Dawood and Ibrahim Moosa another one Saaz by Aseya Rahim and Haziq Qadri.

While talking to Media Times, the directors of film Kotar Baaz said such film festival are best platforms to depict their talent.

"We must welcome such initiatives taken by our own people to highlight our talent," said M Dawood, the director of the film.

Ibrahim Moosa, another director said: "Such platforms are necessary to present the talent of those works who doesn't get screened at big places. Such festival must go on"

Besides their films, the other films that were screened on the day include Khawaja Sira by Anuradha Saupin, Bicycle Thieves by Vittorio De Mantuori, Dreaming Tajmahal by Nirmal Chander and Kerala Paradiso by Bijoy Lona.

On third day, Kashmir World Film Festival gave a chance to the local filmmakers to portray their talent.

"The films screened in the festival include Ancient Architecture by Mushtaq A Bala, The Lake Town by Sana Irshad Matto, Children of Conflict by Majid Imtiyaz and Bangaar Bazaar by Muqeet Ul Amin," said Zubair Reshi, an organizer.

Other than these films, an English film Citizen Kane by Orson Welles was also screened on the same day.

The fourth day of the festival was specially kept for children of the different schools of the valley.

"We screened films like Eid Mubarak by K A Abbas, Children of Heaven by Majid Majidi, Chhoo Lenge Akash by Virendra Saini and Jawaab Ayega by Ismat Chugtai & Shahid Latif," said Khan.

"My aim of screening the films for the children was to create a habit of watching films in them who otherwise remain glued to their mobile phones," he added.

On the concluding day of the festival, three films were screened for the audience that includes Kashmir Forever by Prabhat Mukherji, Reet by Pankaj Khajuria and Lzadol by Motup Chospa. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Abid Rashid Shah was the chief guest on the occasion.

The films that won the awards in the festival include Kerala Paradiso by Bijoy Lona, Bangaar Bazar by Muqeet Ul Amin while as Sanaa Irshad Matto's The Lake Town won the best film award.

Director of film The Lake Town, Sanna Irshad Mattoo said that there should be theatres in the valley. "It is not bad to have cinemas as watching film on big screens has a different feel," she said.

Besides the festival, five-day workshop on 'Introduction to Cinema' was also being conducted in the first half of the day for the students and film lovers by renowned personalities of the bollywood.

"Celebrities like Rajit Kap00r, Muzzamil Ibrahim, Saeed Akthar Mirza, Govind Nilhani, Aruna Raje Patil, Anwar Jamal, Imam Siddique and others interacted with the students and shared with their experiences of working in film industry," said Khan who is also the Chairman of ACT.

Students of various colleges and universities have expressed gratitude over organizing such festivals and workshop.

"Such activities make us learn new things and help us to realize where we stand," said Ganai Taiba, a Journalism student from Government College Baramulla.

Saeed Akhtar Mirza, an eminent filmmaker and one of the guests at the festival says, "It is very important that local stories should come out that need to be told to the world that what basically is Kashmir"

Around 20 films in different categories like feature fiction films, feature length documentary films, short fiction films, short documentary films, short animation films and experimental films were part of the festival.

When asked about the aim of holding festival in the valley, Khan said: "I want to restore the film culture in the valley and want people to watch world class films that are not available to us"

"Their unbelievable love and support is prompting me to hold this festival again and again," he concluded. ●

LANDSLIDES ARE HIGHLY DAMAGING GEOLOGICAL HAZARDS KILLING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE GLOBE.

NATURAL CLIMATES IN J&K; CAUSES AND MITIGATION

Shahjhan Mughal

"Geologically, the whole of the Himalayan region is young in origin ranging from Precambrian to the recent Eocene period."

Landslide involves horizontal and phony movement of rocks, soils or both of these mechanisms vis-a-vis vegetation and sometimes houses/buildings under the influence of gravity. It is defined as the ''phenomenon of an earth mass from its underlying stationary part of sloppy land by a definite plane and moves downwards and upwards by its own weight due to its natural steady situation being broken by some natural events and human activities.'' Simply, landslide is the mass movement of soil/rock from any sloppy land or area. It is in fact, the perceptive gravitational transfer of material down slope.

The Jammu and Kashmir, being one of the northwestern Himalayan states, is prone to landslides along the major highways besides vulnerable to earthquakes, floods and droughts.

Jammu and Kashmir National Highway stretches across 296 kms from Jammu linking India with the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This road onwards from Kashmir has broader ramifications connecting Kargil, Leh and Ladakh regions of the State. There is no denying fact that the route from Jammu to Udhampur, is negotiable despite mountainous area. →

However, from Udhampur to Jawahar Tunnel, the road becomes highly hazardous during winters. During winter season, landslides become frequent occurrence due to heavy snowfall.

Causes of landslides

Some of the geological factors are the kind of the soil, rain/snowfall, scarce vegetative cover, widening of the roads of National Highways, frequent movement of the vehicles, are the major contributors in bringing about the landslides.

Geologically, the whole of the Himalayan region is young in origin ranging from Precambrian to the recent Eocene period. Most of the area of Jammu and Kashmir Himalayas affected by the landslides lies in the Lesser Himalayas, which is influenced by deformation involving folding, faulting and over-thrusting-tectonic features characteristic of Orogenic origin. Geological sequence of the area is if middle Pleistocene to recent Siwaliks with main boundary fault-Murees, Murees thrust, as well as upper Paleozoic having Eocene group of rocks of the Autochthonous zone, Panjal thrust, Dogra slates and lower Paleozoic Salkhalas.

Muree formations along with Dogra slates in Batote to Banihal are prone to landslides. Landslides occurring from 144 to 145 km of the National Highway are due to presence of crumpled slates on the surface having no proper drainage and toe erosion. Rocks of Salkhala series between Batote and Banihal are also vulnerable to landslides.

Extreme rainfall and heavy snowfall: Extreme incessant rains at many places, sometimes showing no signs of receding, is another cause creating landslides. During the winter season, rainfall accompanied with heavy snow further aggravates this situation. As for example, in the light of the continuous rains and snowfall on 17th January, 2006 normal life got badly affected. The Srinagar-Jammu National Highway remained closed for a number of days to occurrence of heavy landslides.

Loss of vegetation cover: With the increased human population, many of the people have converted most of the woodlands into arable land slopes. Such slopes are not even fit for cultivation as top soil of these sloppy lands had already lost through water erosion. Cultivation on such lands does not yield good crops. Owing to looming human population, man has also misused an axe to eke out his living when forest covert went diminishing year after year. Reckless cutting of the trees along the National Highway has resulted in heavy landslides. Deforestation or cutting of trees is seen as a major reason for the landslides in various parts of the Kashmir valley as well as those of Poonch, Rajouri and Bhadu Billawar, etc.

mining and quarrying as well as making of roads, railways tracks, buildings and dams, cause the

Blasting: The blasting of the rocks during loosening of rocks and serious fissures in the hills which as a result increase landslides.

Quarries and mines: Landslides occurring from 144 to 145 km of the National Highway and from Batote to Banihal and Kishtwar are owing to limestone and slate quarries.

"Landslides are highly damaging geological hazards killing millions of people across the globe. Landslide wearable spots should be identified along the whole stretch in a scientific way so as to design the required action plans to mitigation to stop the occurrence of landslides", said DR SARAH QAZI Inspire faculty, department of Earth science.

Control measures/ solutions

"A stitch in time saves nine holds good for stopping the menace of landslides." There are a number of methods to check landslides; a few among them are as follows:

* Cultivation on steep slopes beyond 15 per cent should be totally banned strictly under certain law.

* All the badly eroded areas along the National Highway are required to be afforested on a large-scale. A forestation will protect the slopes from soil erosion as the roots of the forest trees bind the soil in place. While afforesting fast growing, deep rooted, hardy plants/trees should be planted at a close spacing to cover the slopes in 3-4 years, Robinia, Kahu, species of Acacia (wherever possible to grow) and soil binding grass such as Ailanthus species should be grown.

* Biotic pressure including that caused by nomads requires to be kept at bay.

* Construction of retaining walls should be preferred. ●

SURVIVAL COMES FIRST, THE ARTIST INSIDE ME CAN WAIT FOR SOME TIME

INNOVATION AND SCULPTURING

At the time when traditional 'wooden spinning-wheels' are apparently becoming a passé in Kashmir, a stone carver from Srinagar's Pantha Chowk has created buzz by carving-out a spinning-wheel out of stone. Nisar Reshi, 38, is the master sculptor whose brainchild is now drawing many people to his archaic shop.

Nisar is among many stone carvers in this area who survives on stone carving. This part of Srinagar houses nearly two thousand families associated with the art of stone carving. Just behind the residential houses here, scores of workers can be seen busy in loading trucks with stones from the nearby hillocks.

In one of the dusty shops here, Nisar and his father are surrounded by many people. The crowd has assembled to have a glimpse of stony spinning-wheel. It was three months ago when Nisar got an idea to carve something 'unique' out of the stone, though his romance with stones dates back to the time when he was a kid. He always designs novel objects, and attractive figures out of the stones. "I thought, let me try to make something that would create an instant attraction for people," Nisar, a stone-carver, says that It took him merely twenty days to create, what he claims, the first such spinning-wheel in Kashmir.

As soon as he displayed his 'innovative design' of spinning-wheel made of stone, locals as well as tourists started making rounds to his shop to have a look. The rush is still visible in his shop, where his aged father Ghulam Rasool Reshi, warmly host the visitors. This elder in Reshi family was himself carving stones until a brain hemorrhage few years ago rendered him too fragile to lift hammer in his hand. The health ailment has also affected his speaking ability, he could barely talk and when he does, only broken Kashmiri words come out of his mouth.

"Stone carving is our ancestral trade activity," Ghulam Rasool Reshi says gingerly. "There are thousands of people associated with this craft, but only some of them possessing the artistic skills to be called master craftsmen. My son is 'master craftsman' who has surpassed not only me, but his grandfather and great grandfather in terms of artistic skills."

Creating 'fascinating' masterpieces out of stone is nothing new for the Reshi family, they have done it in past as well. The stone fish—from whose mouth water runs—placed at Chesmashahi, a tourist spot in Srinagar has been carved by Ghulam Mohammad alias Vouste Moma, one of the workers of Nisar's father. Besides, the name of Allah carved on stone in another tourist spot, Badam wari in old city is the 'master piece' by one of the workers of Nisar.

Besides a number of families, here in Pantha chowk area, associated with this craft, there are many stone-carving artists within the Srinagar's old city also. They are making mostly gravestones and residential name-plates. In the largest cemetery of Srinagar - Malkhah, a community called Aakhoons, have been carving tombstones from →

Shaheena Raheem

Creating 'fascinating' masterpieces out of stone is nothing new for the Reshi family, they have done it in past as well.

many centuries. Also, some craftsmen near Safa Kadal area in old city are associated with this craft, but Pantha chowk area is considered to be the epicenter and market of stone- carving.

"I found lack of creativity in the contemporary work of artists here which is hampering the overall sustainability of this craft" says Nisar. His creativity and proficiency in the skill can be gauged from the fact that he can make any figure out of the stone. "I recently made a cricket bat and a ball," claimed Nisar, elder sibling among the four sons of Reshi. While one of Nisar's brothers was killed in a bomb blast during early phase of militancy in Kashmir, the other two brothers are practicing their ancestral craft.

Nisar might have an ability to produce anything out of the stone, but artist like him is apparently facing the wrath of survival. He seldom pays attention to the artist residing in him. "Survival comes first, the artist inside me can wait for some time," he says. "This trade feeds my entire family, so primarily my motive remains to generate sufficient income by sticking to routine for running expenses of my family. This daily routine often leaves little time for me to do innovations in my work."

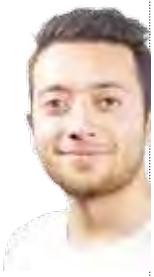
His shop displays number of stone items, from stone grinders to the polished stones, but stony spinning-wheel remains an apparent crowd puller. Three such spinning-wheels have been showcased there. One is miniature sized, second one is large one, and last one is has been designed for art patrons. All of these carry three different price-tags. While, design based spinning-wheel can be availed at Rs 70, 000/-, the large one has been slated at Rs 50,000/-. The miniature one tops the cost at around Rs 90,000/- due to its artistic intricacies. "So far, eight to ten pieces of these spinning-wheels have been sold" said Reshi.

In this locality of stone-carvers, the daily income ranges from Rs 300 to 400. Most of them are also chiseling and preparing stones for the basement of houses, roadside, and other structures to generate more income.

"I am not done yet," says Nisar, when asked about his next stone design. "The artist inside me will always create novelty on stones." ●

SPS IS STILL NOWHERE TO COMPLETE EVEN AS ITS COST HAS DOUBLED FROM ESTIMATED 17 CRORES

LONESOME LIBRARIES



Sheikh Adnan

Libraries have always been at the heart of the communities they serve.

Libraries have always been at the heart of the communities they serve. They are accessible and safe spaces, providing access to huge resources of information and knowledge.

But today, public libraries are at a turning point. The way we access and consume information has changed dramatically in the 21st century, and this presents major challenges and opportunities for public library systems across the world.

Naila Ashraf a 23-year old PG student from Srinagar has been paying frequent visits to a public library in her locality, Soura, to borrow books for reading. Hailing from a middle-class family, Naila finds it difficult to buy her desired books other than her academic ones that are highly expensive.

The books and other resources, Naila says, she has been looking for, are no more available at the library and whatever else is there is either "too old or holds less relevance" in today's tech-driven world.

"Thousands of books come in the market every year and they hardly make a place in shelves of our library," says Naila, who now borrows books from her friend.

One of the two female staffers at the library, while admitting the less number of people visiting the library, said" that people particularly students come here to borrow books but they don't find their desired ones and leave empty handed.

As per the library records, from last more than four years only 2 to 3 persons have been visiting the library on daily basis and on many occasions except two female staff members, no one has bothered to enter the premises of the library.

The block library Soura is not the only one library struggling to emerge as a hub of intellectual thought but majority of the →

libraries are in the same state of affairs

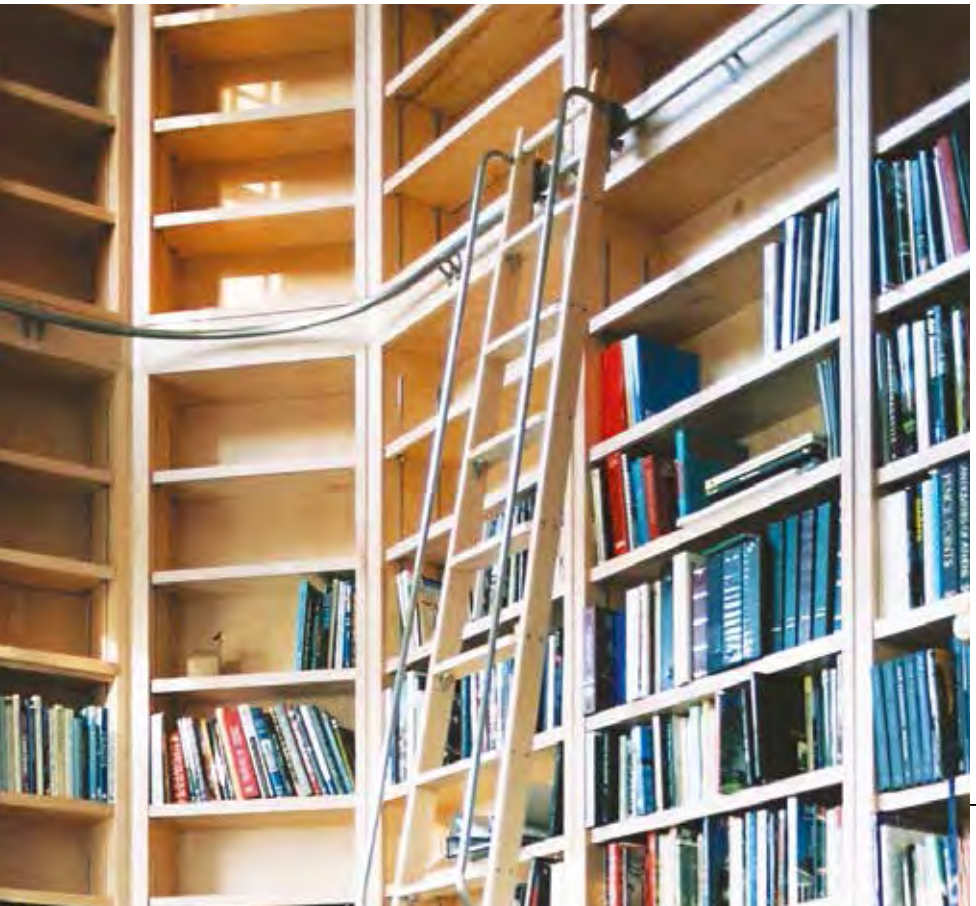
The one thing that was common in all the public libraries in Srinagar was the dearth of library visitors and the visible official apathy by Libraries department.

From housed in rented accommodation to dilapidated old-fashioned structures, the libraries according to people have been witnessing acute shortage of availability of latest study material and above all the sheer carelessness by the department of Libraries & Research.

Shezan Javeed, a vivid book lover from Nowhatta says the ambience and atmosphere at most of the government libraries is "boring", and is the main reason students discontinue visiting libraries.

"Every time you pay a visit to some public library, you get disappointment in return because you find the content and resources is no longer available in the library. Rather than wasting so much of time, one would prefer to buy books from the market," says Shezan, who on several occasions visited her block library in Nawhatta.

The seriousness of libraries department can be understood by the fact that even after a 13year hiatus, SPS is still nowhere to complete even as its cost has doubled from estimated 17 crores in 2004 to around 34 crores in 2017. "It is was expected to be completed in July 2017," a construction official said.



Struggling to have its own accommodation, the City Centre library in Karan Nagar is operating from the building owned by the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC)

An official of Libraries department, on the condition of anonymity told MERC times that more than 70 per cent of government libraries in Jammu and Kashmir are operating in rented accommodations, as "little is being done by the department to build the infrastructure".

The official data says that more than a hundred out of 136 libraries existing in various districts of the state are housed in rented buildings. "Around 68 out of 79 libraries in Kashmir Valley are functioning from rented buildings," said the official.

He says that earlier department used to organize book exhibitions where different publishers would come with books from varied sections.

"The aim of these exhibitions was to select news books that department could acquire and supply to every library. But, unfortunately, because of laziness of department officials that activity exists no more," said the official.

Director department of Libraries and Information, Mukhtar-ul-Aziz, told MERC that annual exipenditure on each libarary has been increased to 12 lakh rupees and the department is taking new initiatives to rejuvenate the public libraries in J&K.

"From the last few years, we have undertaken several projects where rented libraries are being shifted to our own newly constructed buildings. The only reason our libraries are operating from renting buildings are non-availability of land and if anywhere we find it, the owner demands a hefty amount which becomes difficult for the department to pay," he said.

To attract more and more visitors, Aziz said that department is supplying a new comprehensive study material for competitive exams which has been compiled by IIT toppers.

"From the feedback we are receiving from the people, especially youth, we are supplying the new study material as per their needs and demands. We have prepared special notes related to completive exams like KAS, IAS and other exams so that these libraries become a valuable asset for the society," he said, adding, "we are also considering to provide internet facilities at all the libraries in near future. ●

KASHMIR OFFERS A RICH AND DIVERSE STREET FOOD MENU AND SOME OF THE HOT FAVOURITES ARE MONJE GUIL , MONJE GAADE, TELLE KARRE, BUSRAKH....

SAVING OUR FOOD CULTURE

It is a matter of fact that language, clothing and food are some of the main indicators of a culture of any region. Kashmiri food for rest of the globe is mostly about Wazwan which is surely an understatement and the other overlooked dimension of our food which is dying a slow death is our Kashmiri Street Food. The reasons for the downfall of Kashmiri street food can be attributed to a number of things ranging from low cash inflows to presence of American and Arabian type of street food. Although in recent times we have adopted the likes of Pizzas and Shawarmas at a very fast pace but unfortunately on a faster pace we have disowned our local street food items. In the process we will slog down our culture. If rest of the world has pierced in the markets of Kashmir and they →

Peer Furqan

..... our food which is dying a slow deth is our kashmiri street food

are selling us Burgers, Pizzas and Shawarmas why can't we show the world that we too have a huge and diverse street food menu that will make your taste buds go crazy the very first experience.

"Kashmir offers a rich and diverse street food menu and some of the hot favourites are Monje Guil , Monje Gaade, Telle Karre, Busrakh, Paratha, Makai waetch, Channe Chabeel, Kashur Aanchar, Gaier, Masale, Harisa, Seekh Tujji and Kulfi. The list is surely not an exhaustive one and the number and type of street food items available in Kashmir is quite large. In good old days these items used to sell like hot cake in and around the city but in last decade, the emergence of fast food chains and coffee shops have made the vendors of Kashmiri street food shrunk around shrines and some parts of old city. The new generations identify more with Arabian and American type of street food like shawarmas and Burgers than our heritage foods. Although there are few items like Seekh Tuuj, Harisa which have withstood the test of time but a good number of other street foods have lost its custom and charm.

Although, the set of mind created by huge advertising and promotions by foreign food companies do play an important role in luring youngsters and diverting the customer flow, however, there are a number of essential factors responsible for the eroding sales of our street food. Be it the shabby looking shops, unhygienic preparations, poor presentation & packaging, no branding and poor quality control, every minute value adding process plays an important role in creating a positive customer image. It's not only about the product; it's about the atmosphere, the experience and the physical evidence that compliments the product.

"In old times people used to enjoy street food and relish its delicacy. Particularly, street foods like; Monje Guil, Monje Gaade, and Masal Tchout were the common scenes on streets, now, the introduction of unrefined junk foods have entirely replaced these foods in the streets, said Arif Nazir, student of Kashmir University.

Fortunately, Kashmir is a tourist destination and we witness a large number of people (markets) from different parts of the world every year. All we need to do is to create a proper FOOD STREET, wherein the best of the preparations can be showcased and presented and all the street foods will be available under one roof. It can be positioned and marketed as a tourist food destination and can be a very profitable revenue & employment generating model. The important factors that need to be addressed before planning such a venture are: need to maintain proper hygiene, maintain quality standards, price control, presentable packaging. Creating such a street will not only save our culture but it will also generate employment and Kashmir will offer a menu which is beyond Wazwan. ●

WITH THE CHANGE IN TIME, PEOPLE NOW ARE ADAPTING THE CHANGES IN SERVING AGE-OLD PRACTICES OF WAZWAN INTO BUFFET - A KIND OF MCDONALIZED SERVICE

THE BUFFET: KASHMIR TOWARDS MCDONALIZED SOCIETY

Soon with the arrival of spring, stage is all set of wedding in Kashmir till the onset of next winter. But the way Wazwan is served in Kashmir, it is a kind of unique experience when Saalar the invitees all sit together on a typical copper bowl called Traem, regardless of color and race, not only sends the message of love and affection across, but reflects the rich cultural heritage and hospitality Kashmir is known for. It is not only the top of the shelve mutton, spices, and rice but also the ultimate culinary skills of Waza the chef.

Wazwan indeed is a proper fusion of all the ingredients, including traditional way of serving, makes it so grand, and without doubt one of the world's tastiest affairs. All activities in the whole process from cooking to serving are a unique blend of traditional values and emotions associated with it. In Wazwan the food that is cooked overnight by the Vasta Waza—the Headchef, his team of Wazas—Junior Chefs, and helpers, additional dishes include cheese, mushrooms, spinach and, apricot and not to forget the serving of hot Pulao, made of special quality basmati rice, is also served to the guests and definitely a treat for many. Usually, Chutnies are at least six to eight in number, salad and curd that are served to the guests during the entire course of the Wazwan. In addition to bottles of mineral water, cold drinks have also become a part of the Wazwan, and these are served in willow wicker baskets, also containing disposable glasses, napkins, tissue papers, chewing-gum and washing soap.

Traditionally, the meal begins with washing of hands in a portable copper washbasin called the Tash-te-Nari, which is taken around by attendants who happen to be relatives, neighbours and friends. Then Wazwan, with the initial course of carefully cooked rice with two large chicken, two deep-fried ribs or Tabak Maaz, two Kebabs, a large single piece of mutton or Dani Phol, and small pieces of lamb viscera cooked with thick gravy called Methi Maaz is presented on a copper plate called Traem to a group of four where they share the meal. Then the Waza, wearing newly tailored white clothes, brings in other dishes on eafter the other and serves them one after other to each Tream, and a response he gets many a time "Wasta – Rass qatra" meaning the guests ask for gravy which is very tasty. After the guests are done with the entire course, again Tash-te-Nari, does another round, to help guests wash their hands.

However, with the change in time, people now are adapting the changes in serving age-old practices of Wazwan into buffet - a kind of Mcdonalized →

B.M Hussain

The buffet is new to us though, against our culture, but given the fast changing lifestyle, people don't have enough time to wait for hours for the sake of Wazwan.

service where the invitees or guests are supposed to eat or drink at their will, and without any time limitation. This new practices however, is rapidly making deep inroads into our culture. People in posh areas are seen in organizing buffet marriages. "The buffet is new to us though, against our culture, but given the fast changing lifestyle, people don't have enough time to wait for hours for

the sake of Wazwan. Besides a semblance of seriousness is created while serving against the Hulla Ghulla in Trame Wazwan," said Nazir Ahmed Mir, resident of Nigee, Hazratbal.

There is no denying the fact that charm of sharing the same Traem by four people is dying by the self serving buffets. "I appreciate the buffet culture as Trami has the potential to contribute animosity if one gets unequal share of dishes," alleges a young man at a wedding venue. The emotional values and personal touch associated with our hospitality style is being replaced with professional catering. However, ground reports suggest that people are seen skipping the much-cherished Wazwan meal, given the paucity of time and with the changing nature of their jobs.

"The buffet is a welcome step indeed that not only saves our time but have it with ease without having any time frame. The guests can taste dishes of their own choice as well", said Gulzar Tramboo, a Govt employee.

We are heading towards the time where the dimension of our unique hospitality and traditional way of serving the Wazwan will vanish and the Wazwan will be confined to the buffet platters that brings up the big question: is it the high time for the champions of heritage to wake up and analyze the consequences of so called buffet culture. The answer is big a no, as every society is subject to change with the forces of modernizations and Kashmir is not any exception.

People particularly the youths tend to focus imbibe western values given the fact we live in a globalised world, "what is the harm in practicing the buffet, though alien to our culture- when already our much acclaimed social, cultural and religious heritage, both tangible and intangible values have lost their sheen and relevance, be it costumes, festivals, language, food etc," said a visibly emotional B.Sc student at S.P College Srinagar.

"Let's realize the fact that there is a huge cultural difference when it comes to the culture of buffet, but if the new practices, nevertheless alien to our culture, offers alternative to ward off our social, as well as moral ills of our already beleaguered Kashmiri society, then there is no harm in adopting the buffet as a new practice, and it has a valid justification in our religion," argues Moulana Mufti Bashir Ahmad Basheer.

Bottom line is: buffet culture is swiftly getting social acceptability in our society, but the problems associated with the buffet as 'status symbol' what social scientists have apprehended that new social classes terminology will emerge---one those serving age old Trami Wazwan will be looked down upon as serving 'Gareeb Battee,' and the second class which would embrace the buffet would be reffered to be serving 'Khoj'e Battee," is a serious concern that needs to be looked into.

Change is a must, but it should not come at the cost of humanity, amid the mad race of constructing the buffet as sole indicator of 'social status,' and the very essence of our culture heritage. ●

TOWN SQUARE HAS MORE THAN 20 SHOPS ALONG WITH THE OFFICE OF RELIANCE COMMUNICATION ON ITS TOP FLOOR.

MALLS PROVE LUCRATIVE

Muneem Farooq

With the introduction of these malls, some educated youth get settled and are earning good.

2009, Eight years ago, Sheikh Ghulam Rasool , a businessman was not sure about the idea of investing money in constructing a shopping complex. But today his idea has given birth to a new flourishing business.

Reclining in a moving chair at his four –storey Town –square complex, Rasool says," Those who have come up with shopping malls were inspired by the success of his initiative."

" It was a challenging decision and I was not sure about the outcome of the investment," the 65-year old businessman said.

Amid the dilemma, Rasool decided to go ahead with this idea expecting some possible losses in the process. Today we find dozens of complexes dotting the length and breadth of Srinagar city.

Malls in Jammu and Kashmir give a unique shopping experience with their offering of various traditional and modern goods. The malls are hugely spacious and were constructed keeping in mind the preferences and requirements of the modern shopping enthusiast.

Most of these malls offer a combination of traditional and contemporary items in everything ranging from garments, electronics, fashion accessories, artifacts, footwear and household items. →

Constructed by noted businessmen ,several malls including Town square ,Sara city centre ,HMD mall and Aksa mall have emerged as popular shopping destinations over the last five years .These malls are occupied by cafes ,hotels,offices,and franchises of various national and international brands.

Town square has more than 20 shops along with the office of Reliance communication on its top floor. It has been revealed that franchise owners have paid 40 lakh rupees to Ghulam Rasool for securing a shop in Town square complex. They also pay him rent every month.

''Before signing the contract with the owner, we were told not to reveal these details with anybody .it is secret between them and us (shopkeepers),'' says one of the franchise owners wishing anonymity.

Noted hotelier Mushtaq chaya, who came up with Sara city centre says, 'the mall concept does not belong to Kashmir, still people embraced it here.''

The decision for Chaya was not tough because he believes it as a single time investment with maximum profit. He is also of the view that this is a business with more potential which will provide job security to his future generations. Malls have a unique feature of providing everything at one place which saves time, money and energy. Contractor turned business man and owner of Aksa Mall Arshid Shabnam has more than 50 shops and a hotel in his mall but his policy for providing hotel on rent is different.

''we provide hotel on contract basis for one year in order to provide chance for others. Those who want to review contracts are welcome after alternative years,'', said shabnam .

A recent survey conducted by Jammu and Kashmir government revealed that there are nearly one million educated Jobless youth in Kashmir valley and are forced to leave the valley in search for jobs. With the introduction of these malls, some educated youth get settled and are earning good.

In last half decade more than 500 youth have been adjusted in these malls, Manager of Aksa mall Qaiser Banday said.

"After finishing my Masters degree in Business management I went to Delhi to seek a job but came back within one year because of some domestic issue. After returning I got frustrated and was looking for job here and there but could not find it unless I saw an advertisement ," says 31 year old Banday .Today Banday is earning enough to feed his family.

Females are also working in the malls and are quite satisfied with the work and the salary they get.

"Earlier I was working in a private school for 3000 rupees but since I joined this mall, my financial condition has improved.'' Said a female receptionist wishing not to be named.

Javid Parsa, an entrepreneur is satisfied with his sales and is hopeful that the money he has invested will be recovered soon .He runs a café which sees a huge rush of customers.

Another franchise owner at Aksa Mall sells branded products of children.

''People coming from elite classes usually visit malls and I am targeting only them .I would not say sales are good but they will grow definitely,'' he said.

.....A MAN WHO STILL REMEMBERS HIS DECEASED WIFE AND CHERISHES THE MEMORIES ASSOCIATED WITH HER BUT FEELS DEJECTED DUE TO THE APATHETIC BEHAVIOR OF HIS CHILDREN .

OLD AGE AND SOCIETAL APATHY

Sitting in the corner looking through the window pane, watching the little boys playing outside his home made him jubilant. After many years he was happy and smiling. This is about an Old Man who has lost his wife years ago but still feels her absence. In these times where Love seems a very farfetched idea, there is a man who still remembers his deceased wife and cherishes the memories associated with her but feels dejected due to the apathetic behavior of his children .

Anwar Ahmed , 70 years old, with fragile demeanor, dark brown hair and prominent nose lives in the outskirts of Anantnag. Anwar Ahmed , an academician , now retired has lived a productive and happy life.

His wife ,Aisha was a noble lady and a devoted partner. After 50 years of togetherness her death left him dejected. It was after her death, Anwar Ahmed realized his life is not worth living without her. Her existence made him vivacious but now she is gone and his lonliness is eating him up.

He knew his children wouldn't tolerate his anger, his mood swings and his lifestyle. It was she who used to tolerate his wrath and always welcomed it with a smile. She is gone but her memories didn't let him to forget her.

Old Man who is tired now, tired from the fabricated rituals of his society, tired from the unaffectionate behavior of his children and tired from holding his breath. He feels his life is nothing but a burden for his children and even for his own being.

How it feels when your life partner leaves you alone with the people who do not want to be with you. Alone he passes his days and nights. Sleep is the only thing in his life which gives him some peace.

Once an avid reader he is not even capable of holding a book. He is praying for his death.

The same Old Man who used to preach the lessons of life was failing at his own. Why is he regretting every moment of his life? Is he regretting because he is missing his wife, or his children have snubbed him or he is a perplexed Old Man.

There are so many questions still longing for an answer. Old age is a period of life where a person feels jaded and apathetic. It is the most →

Hassina khan

.....She is gone but her memories didn't let him to forget her.

fragile period where a person is caught I the whirlpool of life and death. But in Anwar's case it is different. He is not scared of death. He is scared of solitude. His children have abandoned him.

Those children for whom he had devoted his entire life. Unfortunate was he feeling after observing the unaffectionate behavior from his children. He has been sitting in his room for hours, nobody calls to have food.

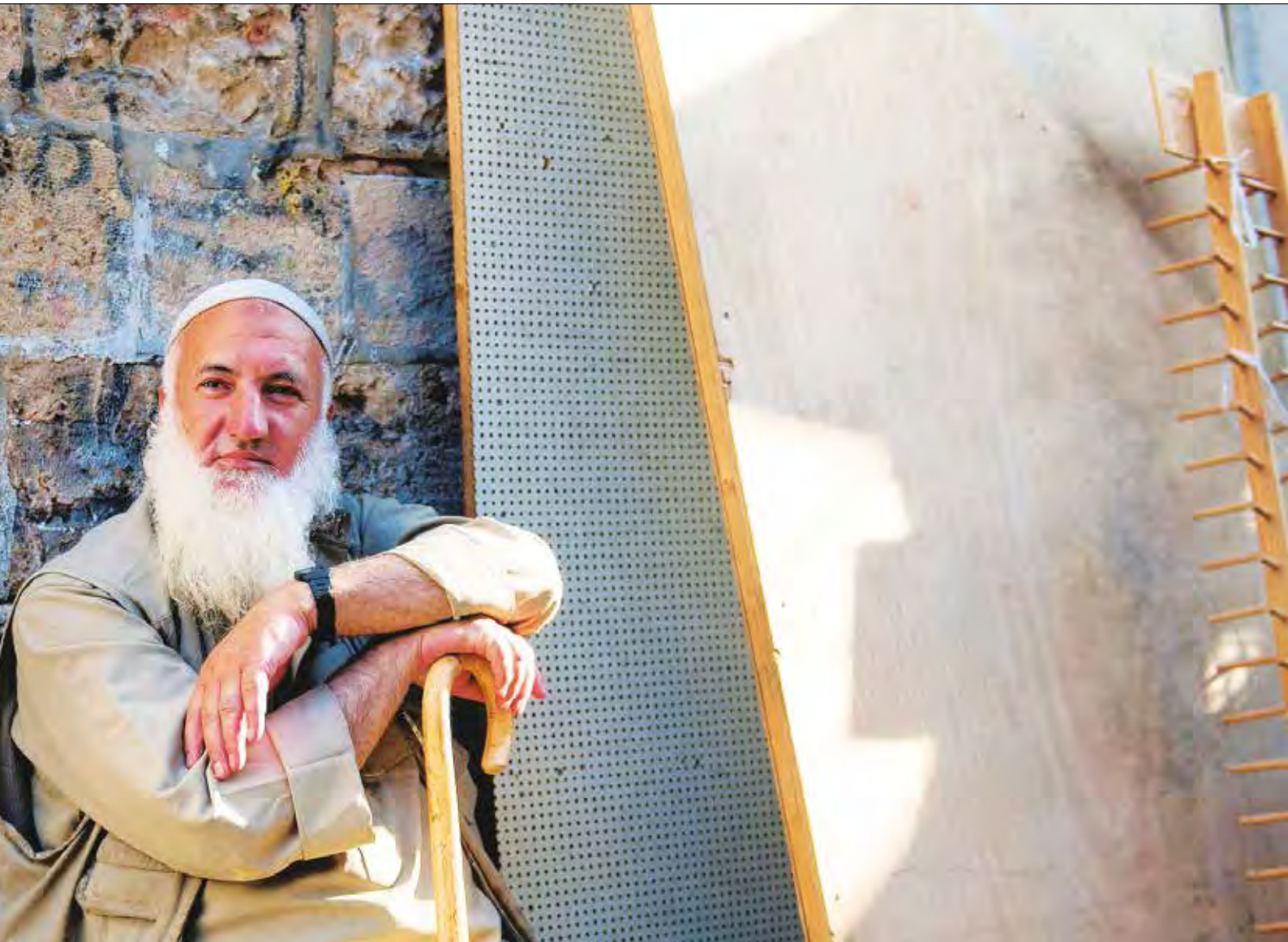
He cannot gather the courage to ask for food from his daughters-in-law. He is controlling his appetite. In this age where food is the most important aspect for survival, he at this age is controlling his hunger.

This is the 'modern' society where there is no existence of parents . Those parents who raise us, feed us, educate us, and love us are no longer part of our developed world. When I met this Old man, he lifted his face at me but didn't utter a word. I sat next to him, he kept gazing at me with surprise.

What i could have expected from an intelligent Old Man. He could not respond. I could see tears in his eyes. He had always been a man at the centre of things, a dedicated teacher and a caring father. Yet his children left him in the midst of nowhere. He is such a wonderful storyteller.

A father who has built his home is feeling homeless. Every parent wants his/her children to look after him/her but our modern society have ceased to accommodate parents.

Are they selfish? Every other day our newspapers carry news regarding parents being beaten up, abused even forcefully thrown out of the house. Is this modern society we are aspiring for? Old age accompanies health problems, uneasiness, person tends to lose control over one's body. This age requires more care more love and more respect but we as a society have failed them. People should realize that parents are a boon and we should care for. ●



DHOBIS ARE TRADITIONAL LAUNDRY WORKERS WHO WASH SHAWLS BY HAND AND DRY THEM IN THE SUN, A PROFESSION WHICH HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE IN KASHMIR FOR GENERATIONS.

THE PROCESS OF TRADITIONAL DRY CLEANING IN KASHMIR

Auqib Salam

Whenever a shawl, a dress, a Pheran etc, is sent for the dry cleaning, it ends up at one of the few places in Kashmir where dry cleaning is still an art.

The slowly dying traditional art of dry cleaning in Kashmir still thrives beyond the confines of climates along the bustling bridges spread across the Srinagar city. The entire process functions very much like its contemporary machine-based equivalents, being the predecessor and the bearer of the legacy.

Dhobis are traditional laundry workers who wash Shawls by hand and dry them in the sun, a profession which has been in existence in Kashmir for generations.

They wash shawls and clothes on the banks of the River Jhelum at many places across Srinagar city. Whenever a shawl, a dress, a Pheran etc, is sent for the dry cleaning, it ends up at one of the few places in Kashmir where dry cleaning is still an art. The raw fabric that comes out of the cloth-mills ends up a finished product, and shining in our homes after a rigorous washing, and ironing process.

After wee hours of dawn, the men who still carry on this generations-long legacy of hand-based dry cleaning, march towards the steps of the banks adjacent to Aali Kadal, cleaning hundreds of clothes by the day, ready to be sent into the markets for our consumption.

The raw cloth is first rinsed with hot water which is stored in a cylindrical furnace. This works very much like the Kashmiri Samovar, with burning coal keeping the liquid hot throughout this entire ordeal.

The cloth is then repeatedly rinsed in the waters of the flowing river from time to time. During this process, the fabric is folded, squeezed, and beaten on the ground with a clean wet jute bag cushioning the impact, cherishing the delicacy of the thread.

Followed with another rinse with cold water, the clothes are then placed in huge stone or plastic buckets, mixed with bleach and detergent, and then stomped on with feet for a good minutes long duration. To make sure there are no stains left in the otherwise perfect cloth, they are then carefully and individually scrutinised for stains that might be left. These are then brushed off with more detergent and warm water. →

Just like the modern washing machines spin and remove the excess water in the cloth, these Dhobis have a manual-mechanic cauldron which they spin, removing the water out of the clothes through an outlet.

The clothes are then dried on the overhanging railings of the Safa Kadal before being sent to the ironing house.

This fabric is passed through a giant roller which is hot enough to remove the residual water in the form of steam.

From here, the clothes are then folded and sent into the markets, ready to be sold.

One of the dry cleaners Ashfaq Ahmad said, "We are very distressed because of the emergence of modern day dry cleaning shops in the market. The impact on us is huge but there are still some people who come to us. We have our routine customers who always prefer traditional dry cleaners no matter what because traditional means has always been more effective than the machinery ones".

Another dry cleaner, Farooq Ganai said, "It feels pleasure to work on the footsteps of my father. He too was from this profession and I am taking this field of traditional dry cleaning forward".

He further added that he is one of the oldest workers in this business. "I have been working here for the last 29 years. My family is happy with my job so am I. I feel totally satisfied".

There is very little to like about dry cleaning. when a garment has a 'not for machine wash!" label, it generally means it will be worn once and left at the back of the cupboard, but now dry cleaning is the option.

It is clear that people really understand what the dry cleaning process actually involves.

TWO PSYCHOLOGISTS HAS OPENED KASHMIR'S FIRST PSYCHOLOGY CENTRE NAMELY 'BELIEVE' AT RAMZANA HOSPITAL, SRINAGAR.

BULLYING "THE SCARS REMAIN FOREVER"

Shahbaz Qutub

Bullying is wrong it needs to be stopped every third child in school is bullied

Why we protect only children's body not their mind? Brain is also a part of body, when you scream, yell or bully a child, you are scarring a part of their body. That is physical abuse and shows its impact later.

Being bullied is not a childhood or teenage right of passage. It is not something which toughens the recipient for his/her life ahead. it is not something that needs to get over or suffered in silence. Bullying is wrong it needs to be stopped.

Bullying results in a vicious cycle. According to statistics two third of bullying victims become bullies themselves. Bullies are six times likely to be in jail by age 24.

Study shows that ,every third child in school is bullied .31 incidents of bulliying are reported everyday in India .The daily average, as recorded by the Department

of Education, could be higher since many victims of bullying may be reluctant to report the assaults.School authorities and parents need training in responding to the problem, including spotting victims who are scared to complain.

Social media has became another major platform of bullying from last few years. The increase in access to Internet had let a huge increase in cyber bullying. Every persons faces this kind of bullying in his daily life on any platform of social media .cyber bullying includes: posting negative comments on photos, posting abusive post on users wall, using pictures and videos to make fun of each other, using social media to stalk and hacking an account. According to a survey by Ditchling The Liberia, 47%of young people who took the survey has received nasty profile comments and 62%has been sent nasty messages via social media.Another survey National Bullying Survey states that, 91%of people who reported bullying said that no action was taken that left them disbelieved and vulnerable .parents, teachers and school administrators need training particularly in dealing with bullying through social media, which has driven students in other countries to commit suicide.

According to statistics,children who bully others in school are generally victims of bullying at home. The environment at home tends to carry on to school and the child does not know how to deal with the pent up anger. Children have become very sensitive these days. The survey also says that one in every third child felt that they are always compared to others. One in every fourth child lied about his/ her grades to parents. Child's dishonesty to the unintentional pressure that parents put on them.Parents should refrain from getting involved in daily academics, they may aska tutor to handle it. This would give time for the parent to focus on building a relationship with the child.

Some parents are also to be blamed. They teach their children to be on the top and never bring complaints home, settle it then and there etc. Some children also go to karate classes and they want to try out some kicks and punches. Some children are the offspring of politicians or bullies.

With a mission to provide mental and emotional health counseling and treatment, two psychologists has opened Kashmir's first psychology centre namely 'BELIEVE' at Ramzan Hospital, Srinagar. Akriti Hussain, 34, holding a degree in Psychological Medicine from Cardiff University, UK and Zoya Mir, 26, Gold Medalist in Clinical Psychology from Amity University provide diagnostic and therapeutic services for social, behavioral and emotional issues covering all age groups but with special focus on children. This centre's concept is based on the framework of digging into the solutions to the problems peculiarly from the patient's perspective leading to an early and successful recovery, claims Zoya Mir.

Talking about the conception of the 'BELIEVE', Hussain said, "I had a chance to interact with a lot of mothers when I enrolled my daughter in a pre-primary school. It just so happened that one of the mothers told me that she goes to Delhi for the treatment of her child at "Children First", a psychology centre where I did my training first."

When Hussain spoke to people working at 'Children First', a renowned centre known for this kind of treatment, she was amazed to know that a lot of clients were coming from Kashmir and staying there for assessment, training and treatment.

"That is when the idea came to me that I should bring the service here since it's so inconvenient to pick up your bags, settle elsewhere for three to six months and pay heavy bills," says Hussain.

However, new to Kashmir, Akriti – basically a Delhite married here – wanted to team up with someone, who has similar experience, for opening such a centre. "That's how I was put to Zoya (Mir), a clinical psychologist, who was working on similar lines. We clicked in the first place and hence have been able to launch this care centre," she said.

What makes them stand out of the crowd is the fact that they have obtained the International Certificate of Practitioner in 'Solution Focused Brief Therapy' a course held at the psychology centre, Children First in New Delhi. "It is a goal-oriented therapy introduced in the valley for the first time. This therapy focuses on solutions rather than on problems encouraging those in treatment to look forward and use their own strengths to overcome difficulties rather than targeting the issues," said Mir.

Together they are putting an effort to escape taboos attached to psychological treatment at a place, where seeking counseling for mental illness is perceived as a predicament and hence avoided altogether. They aim at exterminating this social stigma that amounts to be the main hindrance in help seeking therefore reducing the likelihood of recuperation. ●

THE PEOPLE ARE VERY FOND OF CELEBRATING FESTIVALS AND IT CONSTITUTES A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF CULTURE OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR.

KASHMIR AND ITS BEAUTIFUL CULTURE

Syed Mohammad Burhan

The Jammu and Kashmir culture is a thorough combination of customs and traditions.

The Jammu and Kashmir culture is a thorough combination of customs and traditions. Apart from its demographical variations, specific cultural diversions of its elements are what make the culture of Jammu and Kashmir remarkable. Music, dance, cuisine, lifestyle, festivals all theseonly highlight the diversities prevalent in these provinces. Unity is restored when a common thread of cultural tradition binds them together thus making it a part of Jammu and Kashmir as a whole. Culture of Jammu and Kashmir is therefore an interesting reflection of color, zest, harmony and concord which makes Jammu and Kashmir to stand apart with its distinct features of age old tradition and deep ethnicity. Innovative dance forms and melodious numbers composed are the treasures of performing art forms of this region. Rouf is a conventional dance performed by the women of the Kashmir region. Rouf is performed mainly during Ramadan and Eids. The Dumhal is an illustrious dance form of Kashmir The men of the Wattal region are expert in performing it. A special theatrical art form has been created intermingling both marriage song and dance. It is a part of marriage celebration, which is observed at the time period followed after the departure of men of the groom`s residence along with the couple. Surma , a Dogri dance , expresses the frustration of newly married bride whose groom has gone in the war.

Secretary Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages Aziz Hajini said we at JKAACL foster and coordinate activities in the spheres of letters and languages, visual and plastic arts, music, dance and drama and of culture in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and promote through them all the cultural unity of the State, and of the State with the other states of the country.

He further said we promote interfaith unity and celebrate diversity of our state.He said that the Academy holds many programs on various occasions across regions to promote our culture.

The Jammu and Kashmir culture has a plenteous tradition of folk music. Rabab is popular folk music of Kashmir. Musical instruments include Nagara, Dukra and Sitar. Hafiz Nagma is grounded on the classical musicof Kashmir- the Sofiyiana Kalam. The danseuse is called `Hafiza`. →

The salient instrument employed in Hafiz Nagma is called Santoor. It is the famous musical instrument of one hundred strings beat with sticks.

Songs of Habba Khatun too are composed depicting the sadness of the famous Kashmiri princess of the same name. She was sad as she had been separated from her beloved husband Yousuf king. The uniqueness of Bakhan songs of the region is that it is hummed without the aid of any musical instrument . These songs are composed in the form of poems. The beat is unpredictable and is influenced by intonation in musical note. Hand movements of the musicians suggest various `note` fluctuations.

In Dogra Pahari area of Jammu valley Geetru is performed at the time of festivals like rural weddings and other social festivals . It mingles both dance and singing formats. Both men and women take part in this performing art format, which continues for 24 hours.

The people are very fond of celebrating festivals and it constitutes a significant element of culture of Jammu and Kashmir. The masked dance festivals of Ladakh enthrall the tourists .

Not only the major Indian festivals are celebrated in typical traditional fervency, few festivals of the locales are observed in high esteem and also in style and joy. In Uttar Behni area of Jammu valley, Chaitre Chaudash is famous.

Celebrated in the month of March or April, this festival is named following the epitomology of Hindi language. where it signifies the fact that hither Devak River runs toward the northern part. Bahu Mela is a significant festival observed at the premises of Kali temple in Jammu`s Bahu Fort . Generally it is celebrated twice a year in the month of either March /April or September /October.In Purmandal city of Jammu valley, Purmandal Mela is celebrated in the month of February or March to signify the occasion of wedding of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati. Dressed in colorful attires the people visit the places like Panjbhaktar Temple, Peer Khoh and the Ranbireshwar Temple.In Jhiri village of Jammu valley , Baba Jitu is an annual fair organized by the supporters in the honor of Baba Jitu , a rebel peasant who sacrificed his life rather than to accept barbarities of the local proprietors .

Apart from these festivals, the culture of Jammu and Kashmir incorporates all the other important festivals of India. Typical Sikh festival namely Baisakhi is celebrated in the 13th day of April month. For the Sikh communities of Kashmir it holds a special importance and it marks the heralding of New Year . Lohri festival of Punjab is a time of welcoming spring in the region of Jammu valley, celebrated at one day before Makar Sankranti. In Jammu households it is observed with rituals like `havans` and `yagnas`. As a part of the festivals the boys move from door to door requesting gifts from newly married couples. `Chajja` dance is also presented on this occasion.

Cuisine is a salient element, which denotes the typical culture of Jammu and Kashmir . The traditional green tea with spices and almond known as Kawa, is consumed duringpoise winters of Kashmir. Rice constitutes the staple food of Kashmir. Thanks to the contribution of skilled cooks from Smarkhand, a mouthwatering banquet called Wazwan has been popularized in Kashmir. It includes thirty-six meal made from mutton and these are really very tasty. All the Kashmiris love non-vegetarian meals especially those prepared from meat and lamb. However, polao is a common dish for Kashmiri veggies. These are namely meat balls and red gravy (Rista), Minced lamb patties(Shami kabab), Lamb koftas (Kashmiri Gustaba), spicy lamb steaks(Pasande kabob). Also spices,curd and condiments are common ingredients ofKashmiri cuisine. Mustard oil is used as cookingmedium. The odour of costly kesar or saffron increases the craving of locales for classy foods. However, different religious communities of Kashmir maintained unique style of cooking meal. Muslims desist asafetida (hing) and curds and Kashmiri Pandits abstain from using onions and garlic in their meals. Phirni is a sweet delicacy of Jammu and Kashmir.

LifestyleThe culture of Kashmir nicely incorporates within its domain the lifestyle of the people of this region. Kashmir is a place of beautiful mosques and the Hazratbal Mosque is frequently visited by several pilgrims . To add to it the spectacular celestial-like natural beauty of the region has drawn the tourists to this region , Thus a tourism industry has expanded in leaps and bounds over the years . Hotels of Jammu and Kashmir are noted for their first-class cordial reception. Most of these are in floating houseboats , providing a splendid experience forthe tourists. The California group of Houseboats in Srinagar fall in this category of spectacular hotels. Arts and crafts of Jammu Kashmir is very classy. Woven carpets, silk carpets, rugs, woolen shawls, pottery and kurtas are nicely embroidered . Well -decorated traditional boats are made of wooden and they are called Shikaras. ●

FUSSPOTS IN THE ANIMAL AND PLANT KINGDOMS, THOSE THAT INSIST ON THEIR PERSONAL LITTLE ECOLOGICAL NICHES AND VERY PRIVATE LIFESTYLES ARE SURELY DOOMED — BECAUSE WERE RUNNING RAMPANT EVERYWHERE.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Athar Shah

We rely on birds and it is the need of the our to protect them and take serious measures towards their betterment

Parents of fussy, birds and beasties and even plants, will do well to insist that their progeny, not be picky about what they like to eat or where they like to live. Fusspots in the animal and plant kingdoms, those that insist on their personal little ecological niches and very private lifestyles are surely doomed — because were running rampant everywhere. Those creatures that have taken a more free approach to life and who eat everything thats put before them, and live anywhere, thrive.

As incase of flies and cockroaches, they're global and as long as we produce guck and goo theyre pretty much immortal, even better off than us. By contrast, take the fig wasp — a complete disaster-in-the making — for both itself and the great Ficus family of trees. Every species of fig tree has its own personalised species of fig wasp that pollinates it (and there are around 1,000 species of figs). Your everyday all-purpose bee or wasp wont do, nor will any other cousin fig wasp. If Armageddon overtakes the fig wasp that pollinates the great banyan tree — eventually Armageddon will overtake the banyan too. "They are tge special jewel in the crown of mother natur, they reflect the health of our environment. we depen on these special creatures" said DR.Mohammad Asif a professional biologist and a zoologist.

On the other hand Birds too, cant afford to be fussy. Gulls and egrets which had a reputation of being lovers of aquatic fare now seem to prefer hanging about garbage dumps, scavenging from tins and are going great guns. Out of the goodness of our hearts — actually, to get into the good books of the gods — we aid and abet by scattering namkeen, dana, bread and rotis for them, changing their dietary mode. In upscale New York and London, mighty peregrine falcons maintain penthouse eyries, from where they pick off the widespread blue rock doves (good riddance!), used to the hustle and bustle of the city beneath. In Delhi, black kites dodge the tangled spaghetti of electric cables and dive into the mayhem of Daryaganj gullies to snack on road-kill or spilled popcorn. Crows, of course, will eat virtually anything, anywhere.

Its the same with mammals: Rats, mice and bandicoots will nibble everything from hard disks and blue cheese to vital cables in airplanes and thrive (except when the plane crashes). In the West, foxes and raccoons →

party in the streets at night, raiding garbage bins. Bears pose a problem when they decide to patronise McDonalds instead of making their own burgers. The exploding population of macaques in Delhi now expect to be served four-course meals three times a day (Fruit — papaya, mango, bananas — rotis or rice, gram, pakoras, peanuts, almonds, bread, and, of course, jalebis). Get real — who eats bitter leaves and raw shoots anymore? In Mumbai, the leopards of the Borivali National Park have developed a taste for dogs and even children, and are moving into the suburbs — as indeed they are around Delhi. Elephants too have widened their range and now actively seek out the good life, which includes gallons of country liquor — and the destructive consequences thereof. Cows and buffaloes, alas, often get it all wrong when they snack on plastic bags. " We rely on birds and it is the need of the our to protect them and take serious measures towards their betterment and safeguard for if they adapt to this it can cause a serious change in the entire mechanism of the natures smooth cycle and we are the first ones who will suffer" said saqib aziz itoo an ecologist.

THE RECREATION AND ATTRACTION WILL GET ENHANCED TO THE TRAIN SERVICE WHEN THE FORMULATED PLAN TO INTRODUCE VISTA DOME TRAINS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED.

THE "METRO" OF KASHMIR

Syed Bilal

Even though the line is being built through a mountainous region, a ruling gradient of 1% has been set to provide a safe, smooth and reliable journey.

The alignment for the Kashmir Railway presents one of the greatest railway engineering challenges ever faced, with the only contest coming from the China-Tibet rail route which crosses permanently frozen ground and climbs to more than 5,000m above sea level. While the temperatures of the Kashmir Railway area are not as severe as China, it does still experience extreme winters with heavy snowfalls. However, making the route even more complex is the requirement to pass through the Himalayan foothills.

The route includes many bridges, viaducts and tunnels – the lower section of the railway crosses a total of 158 bridges and passes through 20 tunnels. Even though the line is being built through a mountainous region, a ruling gradient of 1% has been set to provide a safe, smooth and reliable journey. It is being built to the Indian standard gauge of 1,676mm gauge, laid on concrete sleepers with continuous welded rail and with a minimum curve radius of 676m. Maximum line speed is 100km/h (60mph).

The Kashmir line will connect with the Indian Railways railhead at Jammu, where a 60km access route has been built to Udhampur. The main sections of the route are between Udhampur and Qazigund – 75% in tunnels and the responsibility of Konkan Railway Construction Corporation, however the work on Banihal to Udhampur is in progress – with the Qazigund-Baramulla section constructed by Indian Railways. Rolling stock for the new route will be from the existing national fleet. Both passenger and freight trains will use the new railway into and out of Kashmir. Passenger services will be provided by diesel multiple units. The service will at first be provided on a 45km section of the Qazigund-Baramulla section, running initially between Rajwansher and Anwantipora. Freight services conveying grain and petroleum products will run in between the ten to 12 passenger's services that are planned to operate daily.

An eight-coach DEMU will run on the Qazigund-Baramulla section of line. The coaches were transported to the valley by using specially modified road trailers and each coach will carry 90 passengers. It will run twice a day in both directions. The train has been fixed with a snow cutter system for clearing snow on the track. The temperature in coaches can also be maintained at 20°C during winter.

As currently work is going on the section between Jammu and Banihal, thus making this another separate leg of the journey. When complete, this will be a part of the greater Kashmir railway which will connect Jammu to Baramulla, or rather the plains to the Valley. The journey promises a refreshing ride through the Kashmir Valley, Weaving through the snowcapped peaks at a distance and the Chinar trees all around. The best part of taking this journey is during the winters when the surroundings are filled with snow. There is only the option of an unreserved DEMU train currently on this route.

Three-aspect color light signaling is being installed on the route to maintain train safety. GSM-R equipment may be installed in the future to improve the quality of the system. There has also been mention of the Konkan Railway Corporation's ACD (Anti-Collision Device) being supplied for equipment on the line. However, security for the line has been a major concern, with the regions the line passes through continuing to face terrorist challenges. Due to proximity with the Line of Control between Pakistan Administered Kashmir and Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir, these challenges aggravate Plans for close circuit cameras at all major bridges, tunnels and railway stations have been made. Lighting is provided on all major bridges and inside tunnels. Additionally, security arrangements to protect the infrastructure are being discussed.

The recreation and attraction will get enhanced to the train service when the formulated plan to introduce Vista dome Trains will be implemented. Aiming to provide a delightful travelling experience to the picturesque Kashmir Valley here, the Railways on Thursday announced a Vista dome train which would also serve Kashmiri Wazwan cuisine to tourists.

"Tourists need to enjoy the beauty of the Valley," Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu said. He said Kashmiri cuisine would make it to the catering list of the railways.

"The chief minister and I have talked about how to increase tourism by virtue of Railways. So, we will soon start a Vista dome train because I do not think there is any other place in the whole world like Kashmir," he said. "We have placed an order with our coach factories for the Vista dome train." Vista dome trains have glass roofs and walls so that tourists can take in the view.

WITH THE INCREASING MECHANIZATION OF THE SPINNING PROCESS AND LACK OF GOOD WAGES, THE SPINNERS ARE FAST DISAPPEARING FROM THE PRODUCTION SCENE.

CROWNING GLORY: *YUNDER* IN KASHMIR

The spinning wheels and the power behind them were the symbols of ancient and poetic simplicity of Kashmiri life. Hand spinning and weaving was the basic, universal and elegant occupation of the women especially. Economically one of the paying occupations, it kept more than 80% women bust at the wheel.

Rafiqa, a 40 year old with slightly furrowed forehead with her two daughters sits in the kitchen of her single storey house, for she finds that place comfortable to sit in as she could look her kitchen chores too along with spinning work which she does. Rafiqa lifts tufts of pashmina from an earthen pot and simultaneously rotates her spinning wheel to produce yarn. The thin yarn winds itself around two bobbins. In order to make it thick, she combines the two threads on a wooden hand reeler, then doubles and twists it by placing the reeler on the spinning wheel.

"I learnt this from my mother, it requires hard work and patience to complete," Rafiqa said with a smile. Rafiqa has 11 year old son, for whom she is working as she wants him to be a doctor. Both the daughters of Rafiqa are school dropouts, with no other bread earner in house both the sisters have started spinning to help her mother financially some 3 years before.

On an average they spin 10 grams of raw pashmina in a week. Out of these 10 grams, they make around 130 knots. For every single knot they make, they earn one rupee, which means their earnings are mostly Rs 130 per week. "The more threads you make, the more you earn," says Rafiqa. "But each thread should measure nine inches," she says."The artisans are not getting enough wages, if we work from morning to evening we earn rupees 100 a day, which is not sufficient to support a family, Rafiqa said, "with the introduction of machine work, which is all over in market today has affected the hand spinning work, which left a worse effect on artisans, she further added.

The increasing mechanization of the handicrafts process and lack of good wages, the artisans are disappearing fast. And the next generation too is less inclined to take up spinning or weaving because "it pays so little". As such, spinning work is on the brink of extinction today, owais Bhat, a trader from Batmaloo. He says, "Today fewer people are engaged in spinning and weaving, which was once the main occupation in Kashmir, "The traditional handicrafts of Kashmir that used to feed the region's economy and provide livelihoods to thousands →

Qulsoom

The more threads you make, the more you earn,"

of people are on a constant decline with the proliferation of machine-made products in the market." Bhat further added.

Over the past several years, the pashmina handicrafts industry has suffered a serious setback as fake and machine-made products are finding their way into the market in bulk and are sold in the name of pashmina, leaving the hardworking craftsmen high and dry." said Ubaid sheikh, one among the affected traders.

"It's challenging to make the people like us self-reliant as we belong to a low socio-economic background, we are not qualified or skilled but spinning helped us in building up our economic stability , said one among the daughters of Rafiqa. "our mother trained us and said us to be focused." she added." Together with my mother and sister, we are working hard to run our family, we all have a dream to see my brother as a doctor and for which we will work more hard so that our miseries and poverty will end". She said.

Shazia, another spinner said, "It's my fifth year in the business, it gives me happiness of being self reliant, even though the wages are not enough but being independent for me is somewhat extraordinary. As a result of sitting hunched over her work for so many hours a day, she suffers from a slipped disc and deteriorating vision. "I was once given glasses last year, but I never wore them as I felt they interfered with my ability to get up close as I work. "I have severe headache and backache after working throughout the day. But, well, one has to work to pay for lifes expenses," she added ●

AFTER WORKING OUT A PLAN, THE ENGINEERS SAT DOWN AND GAVE THE BRIDGE A NEW LOOK.

Syed Jesarat

Measuring 15.5 metre each, Zero bridge connects Dal Gate to posh Raj Bagh via Radio Kashmir and Nawa-ie-Subh complex.

THE SAGA OF VERBAL RACISM

The German poet Christian Morgenstern once said, "All seagulls look as though their name was Emma". Although Morgenstern is known for his unsound contribution, but there was an element of truth in the above composition.

We all have a "Name", not just we human beings but things, animals, places and God's as well. Names are how we as people are identified. Usually we all have two names, the first and the last name. Our names are a story in itself, it may talk about our country, religion, ancestors or our occupations.

It all starts from our family. The place where we get the title of recognistaion. →

People do not feel comfortable without naming a person, a thing, a situation or event. It feels awkward for them keeping things & situations nameless. In traditional sections of society, the baby is usually given a name with a religious ceremony. Since naming a baby is no ordinary matter, it is carried out with care & consultations. In different religions, the ritual is performed variously

Apart from the main name of the person, another name is frequently prefixed especially by close relatives and members of the group of which he/she is a part. Its called 'The Nickname" and is most vividly used almost everywhere. A substitute for your proper name. A name that distorts your identity attacks your sentiments or simply mocks you. But people don't take it seriously maybe it's because they heedlessly believe what Shakespeare once said "What's in the name"?

Coming to our land Kashmir, the saga of calling people by nicknames is an old age thing. A norm that has remained unchanged and persistent from centuries. In our society people are either criticized by their nick names or the names are mispronounced which is not a very good impression for a child, the reason for this concern is that people generally resent the mispronunciation of their name because mispronunciation amounts to a distortion of their identity.

The sense of personal identity and uniqueness that a name gives us is at the heart of why names interest us and why they are important to us as individuals and to our society as a whole. In spite of this importance though, most people know very little about the effects they have on us and on our children in everyday life. In a very real sense, we are consumers of names, and we have a need and full right to know about psychological, magical, legal, religious and ethnic aspects of our name.

But unfortunately, in contemporary times some people don't spare a time to come out from their hustle and bustle, they hardly care about things. What's wrong is that they don't think rationally when it comes to name their child. Parents in Kashmir usually give a name to their child without having any proper consideration of how it will affect the psyche of their child in future. In some areas they often repeat naming there ward with the old titles used by the circles since ages. The same names which have a synonym of over dozen of nicknames.

Strangely but Kashmir is a very interesting place to scrutinize when it comes to pronunciation of names. Like a simple girl who is named beautifully 'Fatimah', a name believed to be sacred by Muslims is called, no doubt out of love token, as "Phaaate-aai". 'Rihanna', turns into "Ranii", Fakhar an esteemed name that means "Pride" turns into "Fakeero" (A Beggar) thus distorting & maligning the identity of a person.

The norm of calling people by nicknames has become such a celebrated ritual that we don't even consider it to be harmful in our society. From our elders to our youngsters we are all obsessed by calling people with Nicknames, hardly realizing how badly it can affect child's self-esteem negatively. Physiologists say that having a bad nickname can have a strong mental effect on the children, In a research conducted in 2015 at Azerbaijan it was revealed that 40% of the students suffer of mental trauma in their lives because of the nickname bullying at schools.

Child when enters in society, he/she is generally unaware by how many names he would be known by. It is very difficult for him/her in a initial phase and it turns out to be psychological effect for his later phase. They (children) remain in dilemma who they really are? Until they are sound enough. A child feels upset when he/she is called differently say Nadur, Watul, Crow etc. This a kind of racism that remains unnoticed and veiled like the unmarked graves of Kashmir. ●

IT IS SURVIVING ON 'BITS AND PIECES'. EXPERTS CITE SALARY AS THE MAIN REASON BEHIND ITS DECLINE. THEY BELIEVE PLAYERS GET PEANUTS AS COMPARED TO CRICKETERS.

BROKEN STICK

HAS HOCKEY LOST ITS SHEEN IN KASHMIR? ABID RASHID BABA ARGUES

The importance of our so called National game can be gauged from the fact that every year

We celebrate our National Sports day on the birth Anniversary of Major Dhyan Chand- India's hockey wizard on August 29. India produced her army of hockey stalwarts from a small dusky village in Jalandhar called Sansarpur. This hamlet produced veterans of the game. Few decades back, Hockey was considered to be our pride. But has the charm gone is an uncomfortable question which many refuse to answer. Ask the sports analysts, they respond in affirmation. Its golden era is no more. It is surviving on 'bits and pieces'. Experts cite salary as the main reason behind its decline. They believe players get peanuts as compared to cricketers.

Frenzy and passion for cricket replaced its 'national prestige '. What are the reasons for its decline? Has its status gone from bad to worse? With volley of queries in my mind, I travelled to a hilly hamlet in Baramulla district in the northern part of Kashmir. Singhpora's Nom de Plume is Kashmir's Sansarpur.

To know its rosy past but dismal present, I tossed my first question to one of the hockey Icons who has represented Kashmir on International arena.

Ajpal Singh, 80, is the oldest player who is ready to play even now.

"If my children allow me, I can play even now," Ajpal says, "If not at defence, at least on forward level."After a while he turns nostalgic. "We have rich history in hockey," Ajpal, who is also coach, organizer and former vice president SSC [Singhpora Sports Club] recalls. Ajpal claims to have learnt the pros and cons of hockey during 1945-47. SSC is the brainchild of Singh.

"After coming back from school, our playground would be jam packed in the afternoons. Everybody would rush towards the ground, this crowd would boost our morale and with the passage of time almost everybody learned the nuances of the sport."

Singhpora is also called as 'Nursery of J&K Sports.' Singhpora's maximum population is dominated by Sikh community where residents have contributed a lot to Hockey over the years. The players from this village used to play with the hockey made up of wood, now the game has been reformed.

Jaswant Singh chipped in when asked about the differences technology has made. "Earlier there were more strict rules, now they have been amended to make it more open to score more goals."

In 1976, they invited Indian hockey icon Milikha Singh, popularly known as Flying Sikh who then stressed upon the club culture among the hockey lovers. But what lead to the disintegration of clubs? I asked.

"Non-seriousness towards the game." Ajpal bluntly retorted. He explained further, "People would donate money and other eatables during the festival of Singapore sports club, now do you think people would do so. He posed a question which perhaps has an answer in negation.

Commenting on the declining status of hockey S.P.Singh cites the lackadaisical approach of State Sports Council towards the game as the main reason. "Tell me what they are doing for the upliftment of the game which was once our national pride? Singh asks.

Singh says that earlier sportspersons would be given job opportunities which is not the case now, 'we tell our children that we have got government jobs because of this game ,you should also learn it but they get disinterested because of government apathy towards the sport". →

Abid Rashid

Hockey was considered to be our pride. But has the charm gone is an uncomfortable question which many refuse to answer.

These senior players with international experience say that club culture has helped a lot to promote hockey in this region, Rainawari Club, RTC Club, Khalsa Club played an important role for the welfare of this sport, we would organize other events like martial Arts, kabbadi, kho-kho , volleyball, song competition to attract the huge gatherings."

Jaswant Singh, 76, cites negligence of parents and media as another reason for its decline. "Now everybody is engrossed in the cut-throat competition and in turn we lose health we get nothing out of this made rat race." He was quick to blame media for not covering the sport properly.

Ok! Tell me why have you people neglected this sport? Why don't you profile hockey players who have done wonders in this sport? Why have you neglected those players of hockey who made state proud? Jaswant says that children don't practice now because parents don't allow them."

He believes that it is a complete wastage of time; they are genuine in their approach because future is rather bleak! Jaswant stressed. When asked are you contended with the hockey being played in Kashmir nowadays. S.P.Singh reacted, How come? I wonder! Is it being played anywhere? What is there to watch now?

Recalling the good old days when every college would have its own hockey team S.P.Singh says that children would make their seniors as ideals and would toil hard to make carrier out of this sport."

As it is getting dark outside, I try to wind up the discussion with one million dollar question.

Can Kashmir hockey be revived?

"Hopefully." Says Baldev Singh, a winner of 1986 All India Indira Gold cup who has nine nationals to his credit. He reasons, " Government must help us financially, parents should encourage their wards, concerned department should provide jobs to those players who have made a mark in this sport, to create their own niche players should work hard and above all, Hockey Association which is in deep slumber somewhere should pull their socks and get ready for it revival. Otherwise it will die a silent death." ●

AS ISLAM BEGAN TO SPREAD ACROSS THE VALLEY, THE CALLIGRAPHERS BEGAN TO ENJOY A HIGH DEGREE OF ROYAL PATRONAGE ESPECIALLY DURING THE REIGN THE SULTAN ZAIN-UL-ABIDIN(BUDSHAH).

CALLIGRAPHY IN KASHMIR BREATHING ITS LAST

Mudasir Majeed

With the passage of time ,after the end of mughal reign over Kashmir ,calligraphy ,like all other arts and crafts of Kashmir ,began to fade away

The advent of calligraphy in kashmir is directly related to arrival of Amir-e-kabir mir Sayed Ali Hamdani(RA) in kashmirn. The followers of Shah-e-Hamdan include Persian calligraphs as well and their art, soon commenced to flourish in Kashmir.

As Islam began to spread across the valley, the calligraphers began to enjoy a high degree of royal patronage especially during the reign the Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin(Budshah). When Mughals established there suzerainty over Kashmir, the fame of kashmiri master calligraphists reached to corridors of imperial durbar,so that a number of kashmiri calligraphists were a permanent addition to the circle of royal artisans patronized by successive Mughal emperors.

Mohammad Hussain kashmiri was the greatest of these kashmiri calligraphers. He was a master of Nastaliq style whose genius was deemed to be at par with the greatest Persian masters. He was highly regarded and venerated by the Mughal Emperor Akbar and later by Jahangir as well. This was the beauty of his art that he was given a place among the famed Navratnas of Akbar, who also bestowed on Mohammad Hussain kashmiri the title of Zarrin Qalam. Even Abu Fazl addresses him as jadoo Raqam(magical calligrapher) in his mangnum opus Ain-i-Abari. A significant number of works of this kashmiri stalwart have disappeared over time and only their reference in other works can be found but there are still some master pieces available which he has contributed along with other artists, such as The Gulshan Album →

which is kept at Tehran's Golistan museum, Masnavi-Molvai(national library Tehran), Gulistan of saadi Shirazi(royal Asiatic society London), Divan-e-Hassan Sajzi(khudabaksh library Patna), besides dozens of works in museum and libraries all over india.

With the passage of time ,after the end of mughal reign over Kashmir ,calligraphy ,like all other arts and crafts of Kashmir ,began to fade away .In modern times it survived to some extent in the hands of commercial sign painters ,but the invasion of computer generated billboards and advertising publications dealt a final blow .

But gradually few master calligraphers of Kashmir are dying away in their forgetting existence and with them we are losing a part of our heritage that is not only beautiful but aesthetically profound.

Nadia,a Kashmiri calligrapher ,learned this glorious Art on YouTube and now she is an active calligrapher of the valley"I learned calligraphy with the help of YouTube and started it with acrylic colours on my kitchen tilies ….I learnta a very important technique of how to put the kalam down, stop with some pressure and slowly bring it up,using just only the tip…It's a traditional method ,there's no other way of doing it…it gives me a spiritual peace and freshness"said Nadia.

Sameer,a postgraduate student from Kashmir University, while praising the Art said "There is something spiritual in Islamic calligraphy art because whenever Ido it,I feel like I am communicating with Almighty Allah and this Art takes me to a different peaceful world…it redefines our perceptions about the world, but what saddens me is that it is on the verge of loosing it's existence".

Attempts have been made to save this fading heritage, but they have been half-hearted or ill conceived. As the J and K academy of art, culture and languages did start a three years course of Calligraphy diploma but it did not make any difference.

Nadia ,for the rescue of calligraphy suggested that "calligraph as an art has to be inoculated at an early stage ,means the target has to be children …attempts should be therefore made to integrate calligraphy in the routine curricula wherein it is not proected as an additional burden."

Nadia also added that our private schools already have dedicated art/painting/drawing classes, similarly efforts must be made to introduce calligraphy as a part of this set-up and a similar framework can be wored out in government schools as well .Instead of a rigid course/diploma, flexible calligraphy capsules of shorter duration ought to be formulated which could be taught at school level.

Promising students subsequently can avail the expert guidance of J and K Academy of art, culture and languages out of their own volition and demand .And the rest of students who do not show specific aptitude towards calligraphy may still benefit in terms of better handwriting and better appreciation of arts.

Even Kashmir University organized a few day festival 'Payam Ramadan 2017', in which calligraphy was given major preference.

Nadia further said that we owe it to our future generations to pass on our culture dower,who knows some of them may again rise to become our next Zarin Qalam and Jaddo Raqam. ●

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