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Why the Return of the KPs to the Valley is Farfetched

KASHMIR
NEWSLINE

Srinagar Smart city

Smart City Mission was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) in which 100 cities were to be selected for Urban renewal and retrofitting to promote cities that provide core infrastructure, give a decent quality of life to their citizens and apply smart solutions to improve services and infrastructure. The main objective is to make life of the citizens comfortable. Some of the town planners argue that a city smart on paper must be smart on the ground also. In Srinagar, there is much room for improvement. The concept of a smart city began at a time when the whole world was facing a serious economic crisis. In 2008 International Business Machine (IBM) commenced work on smarter cities concept. The concept is not limited to information, communication technology and sustainable infrastructure but forms a vital part of building a smart city. It is a technologically modernised urban area. It uses different types of technological platforms such as voice activation methods, automated sensors to collect data, data centres and electronic methods. It is a city that uses technology to solve problems and provide services effectively, efficiently and economically. It deals in improving accessibility, transportation, sustainability and social services besides enabling citizens to voice their thoughts. Its main objective is to ensure easy day-to-day life to its citizens. This smartness depends on various factors, including employment, politics, education and health-care. The core infrastructure elements in a smart city may include adequate electricity & water supply, solid waste management, sanitation, economic and efficient public transport, urban mobility, digitalisation, affordable housing, strong and comprehensive information technology and overall good governance. Amsterdam, the capital of Netherlands, is said to be the first smart city created in 1994. GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) is mentioned to be the first smart city established in 2013 in India. A smart city is expected to have four infrastructural rudders which are as follows.

1) Physical infrastructure: It relates to the basic physical infrastructures required for an economy to function and sustain, such as power grid, sewage and waste disposal, transport network etc. **2) Institutional infrastructure:** It is the basic organisational and physical structures with requisite paraphernalia thereto for running an institution. It includes government systems, financial institutions, education and health institutions and law enforcement. **3) Economic infrastructure:** This

refers to the basic facilities which directly benefit the process of production, manufacture and distribution in an economy, and **4) Social Infrastructure:** It refers to a good social infrastructure necessary for human development through better skills, craftsmanship and education. The main constituents of social infrastructure are health and education. Comprehensive development in smart cities may have some typical features like, a) expanding housing facilities for all, b) promoting mixed land use in area-based development, c) planning for unplanned areas, d) developing & preserving open spaces, e) playgrounds, f) parks, g) reduce urban warming effects, h) promoting eco-balance, i) reduce air pollution /congestion/ resource depletion, j) boost the local economy, k) ensure security, l) promote interactions, m) refer-

Amsterdam is said to be the first smart city created in 1994. GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) is mentioned to be the first smart city established in 2013 in India

bish road network for vehicles, public transport, cyclists, pedestrians and providing services within walking distances to better the quality of life of citizens. In India, the Smart City Mission was launched in June 2015 by the Union Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs which saw four rounds of selection from 2016 to 6/2018 in the country 100 cities for urban renewal and retrofitting to promote decent quality of life among their citizens and apply smart solutions to improve services and infrastructure. These cities were to be established during 2021-22 and 2022-23 as a minimum of five years was given to each for completion.

The Srinagar Smart City Project was approved in the third round of competition held on 4/2017. For this purpose, a company limited by shares was established as Srinagar Smart City Limited and incorporated as a special purpose vehicle on 8-9-2017 under the Companies Act 2013. It is governed by a Board of Directors with

its Chairman, Administrative Secretary Housing & Urban Development Department Jammu & Kashmir. In the case of the State-level High Powered Steering Committee for Smart City Srinagar, it is headed by the Chief Secretary of Jammu & Kashmir. It envisions transforming Srinagar into an eco-friendly, socio-economically vibrant city that utilises its natural & cultural heritage resources creating harmony among and opportunities for its people with cost-effective and citizen-friendly governance. It aims to harness all ways and means through innovative and inclusive solutions to improve the quality of citizens' life. The project consists of two components, viz, Area Based Development, and Pan City Solutions. By its time frame, the project was scheduled to be completed on 4/2022. The area-based development component for city improvement, city renewal and city extension was estimated to cost Rs.2,869.24 crore and the Pan City Solutions covering larger parts of the city Rs.765.03 crore for Srinagar city. Under the area-based component, 76 per cent was to be developed on modern lines, 19 per cent as green field and five per cent area kept for specified purposes. Viewing from the perspective of its typical features, infrastructures and aims & objectives the Smart City Mission appear to focus on a technology-driven, knowledge-based, skill-assisted and harmonious economy where every workable person is engaged in some good productive activity required by a general livable society. With little and short showers various areas of the city get inundated, debunking the claims

of systemic strength and personnel vigilance. The sewage treatment plants, drainage systems and safe drinking water have unchallengeable importance. A dirty city cannot be smart. The drainage system in the summer capital Srinagar is to be planned concerning the lowest gradient in the city so that drainage in comparatively low-lying areas may not flow back to worry the people and drag the public money down the drain. More STPs may be established and those already existing ensured optimal utilisation so that flora and fauna is not affected. The supply of safe drinking water has to be ensured to ward off water-borne diseases. Land transport which fails in area coverage, frequency and time needs correction. The morning and the afternoon hours are mostly dry due to scanty mobility. Most importantly, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation needs to be under heavy check to end, or at least drastically limit, corruption and other malpractices.

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Finding a place in the Modern world

How the closing of mind continues to harm the Muslim world.



FAHEEM GUNDROO

The beginnings of Islam were extraordinary. Its rise even more so. Perhaps, with no parallel in the human history. In 732 CE, its expansionist troops came close to making the entire Europe Muslim. Edward Gibbons had famously stated: "Had the battle of Poitiers been won by the Caliph, and not the Franks, the interpretations of Quran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford and her pulpit might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Muhammad."

If I was a data analyst and I drew a graph of the Islamic civilization since its beginnings in ragged Hijaz, there is an upward steep climb till about 13th century. That was the zenith. The downfall began since and it's been going on. Everything to that count is cause and effect.

Ali Shariati, the Iranian revolutionary and one of the most influential intellectuals of the 20th Century in a very rudimentary fashion explained Islam and sharia: unchanging rules for the unchanging needs, changing rules for the changing needs.

In the 8th Century, a group called the Mutazilites argued for free will over fatalism and quoted Quranic verses showing God's displeasure at an inactive mind. According to one such verse, the worst of creatures for Allah are deaf and dumb, those who won't reason. Some of the most daring thinkers in the Islamic world argued that paths of divinity should be mapped by reason and experience. It is in this age that we see the rise of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Arbi.

Ibn Sina - captivating, peripatetic - set down a famous 'proof' of the existence of God, which travelled into Europe where it survived until Enlightenment.

Convinced of the existence of God, he, however, exempted himself from



some pettier restrictions. He observed five daily prayers not because it was the will of God but because it improved his concentration. The golden age of Islamic civilization was well on its sail. The age created a culture that managed the polar truth of what is called God's last miracle.

Fundamentally, what Mutazilites preached is that all human achievements were glory to God, but the discernment and innovation that went into them were owned by man. To think of it, the dome transported from Romans to mature Islamic civilization. The Arabs of those times did not reject it because it was Christian. Rather, like a civilization sure of its moorings, it accepted changes.

The persecution of Mutazalites started from the 9th Century, however, their legacy endured. They encouraged speculation and even their opponents were forced to recognize Kalam - the discussion of religion on the basis of rational criteria. In the 19th and 20th Centuries, Islam's reformers would often be accused of Mutazalism.

There was never one single reason for the decline of Islamic civilization, though, theologically one could argue.

There were external threats to Muslim creativity. The crusaders, the Mongol invasion were interpreted as God's displeasure. And in the desire to win back God's favor, rationalism paid the price. The single biggest reason for the morass Muslim world finds itself in is being antithetical to the modern progress of science and political liberty.

In the hindsight, this tiny event in the journey of the Islamic theology made all the difference. When Ibn Taymiyyah became the primary jurist of the age, he slapped down reason in all its forms - even as means of examining Islamic teaching. The goal of the believer was not to know God but to obey him, he argued. With regard to man's capacities and free will, Taymiyyah's views were very pessimistic.

Islam followed Christianity, falling victim to superstition that had beset much of medieval Europe. It reached abysmal levels. In 1580, the only scientific observatory remaining in the world of Islam at Galata in Istanbul was razed on the grounds that it encouraged astrology and had angered God into sending the plague and pestilence.

Education was limited to memorizing Quran. The argument was that

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Had the battle of Poitiers been won by the Caliph, and not the Franks, the interpretations of Quran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford and her pulpit might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Muhammad.”

Quran gave everything that was needed for this life and the hereafter. That education offered little or nothing in the way of history, geography or science. Surgery was performed by barbers. In this insular, insecure world, curiosity was non-existent. The argument in banning printing press was that it would make Quran accessible to everyone and only enable ignorant to misinterpret it. Printing was even made a capital crime. The takfiri Ashar'i formulation was deep rooted in Islam now.

The rise of western philosophy and its political liberty was bound to throw a response from the Muslim world. It led to the rise of Muslim brotherhood in Egypt. Hasan al-Bana and Sayyid Qutb set to implement the Shariah of God - freeing people from servitude to other men to bring them into the service of God.

A similar reformist movement was started by Maulana Maududi in the sub-continent. What was supposed to be the catalyst of Islamic resurgence, unfortunately ensured that the dark clouds of ignorance and naïve superiority complex continued to plague the Muslim world.

To that effect the recent developments in the Arab world must be weighed carefully. There is a clear positioning in the Arab world that tilts towards west. Is that because of economics only? Not really! The Arab world is recalibrating its relationship and how Islam fits into the modern world. It is a very progressive stance, keeping man's evolutionary history in mind, of bridging gaps through partnerships and knowledge-sharing. Like any student of Islamic history, the dream of the House of Wisdom returning to Basra and Baghdad.

Faheem Gundroo is an ICT engineer based in Dubai, with interest in travel, history and current affairs.

Fragile Media Economies and Lack of Opportunities in Kashmir

To create a reasonable space with contemporary curricular focus, balanced training options and integrated counselling structures is the need of the hour



MONISA QADRI

During the last decade or so, a paradigm shift has been witnessed in the field of media and journalism and most of it depends on the professional input from media schools. The expansion of media industry and the proliferation of such institutions in both public and private sector, has been somewhat proportional. Even in J&K, at least, four universities and higher educational institutions offer journalism and mass communication at master's level while half a dozen colleges are offering bachelors.

Notwithstanding this expansion, the critical point is that, in Kashmir, we have mostly had journalism sector as the main player within the media landscape and these J-Schools have significantly produced reporters and communicators who handle the news and other operations in the field and continue to do so, parenthetically.

What remains challenging is where we are headed for as in media education apropos of allied (not-so-thriving) media, minimal career prospects, questionable sustainability of local media set-up in terms of economics or simply its overall ecology. Even for gaining practical and hands-on training while studying, a concrete and supportive ecosystem is absent here, which is otherwise an edge for any youngster from any J-School from Delhi or for that matter, any other city. The difference in the media-system is of crucial significance while one is inside the field and also while one is preparing for it. One can say that even if journalism and news

media school spectrum provided for the training of native journalists and editors contributed immensely towards the creation of this human resource pool of indigenous professionals who could advocate beyond polarised and frozen issues, the future inclination among the young trainees seems less inspired. Consequentially, the profession of journalism may not seem as lucrative as it was appearing till some years back.

An interesting dimension of issues within this news industry entails fragile media economies, saturated mainstream news media space, less exposed freelance opportunities, lack of independent media clubbed with an almost always kind of a phenomenon— that of low and uncertain wages.

They say passion is the difference between having a job or having a career and many are indeed passionate about this field, but these layered concerns have of late been a reason for an upsurge in disinterest among the rookies and even seniors, who eventually look for better opportunities. Lesser number of journalism and mass communication degree holders are now opting for active reporting every year and there is a sudden but expected drift towards other fields of mass communication like PR, documentary making, photography and films, which again are toddling. So the core issues concerning lack of media industry, sustainable revenue options, internship and training opportunities will mostly remain the same.

Although, in the mainland India, one has been witnessing a supportive and coherent political economy of the mainstream media as a consequence of concentration in media ownership in India which led to conglomeration or Murdochization of news, that did not quite translate into plurality, as a result, at different levels. Much is being said, or written about the supposedly idealised egalitarian manifestation of this agent of surveillance and 'messiah' of communication, but we see less of it as a truth-teller, sense-maker or watch-

dog. Whether we talk about plurality in terms of representation in the newsroom, or that of voices, or even of issues and content, the true essence of the growth does not reflect participation and inclusivity as one would have liked.

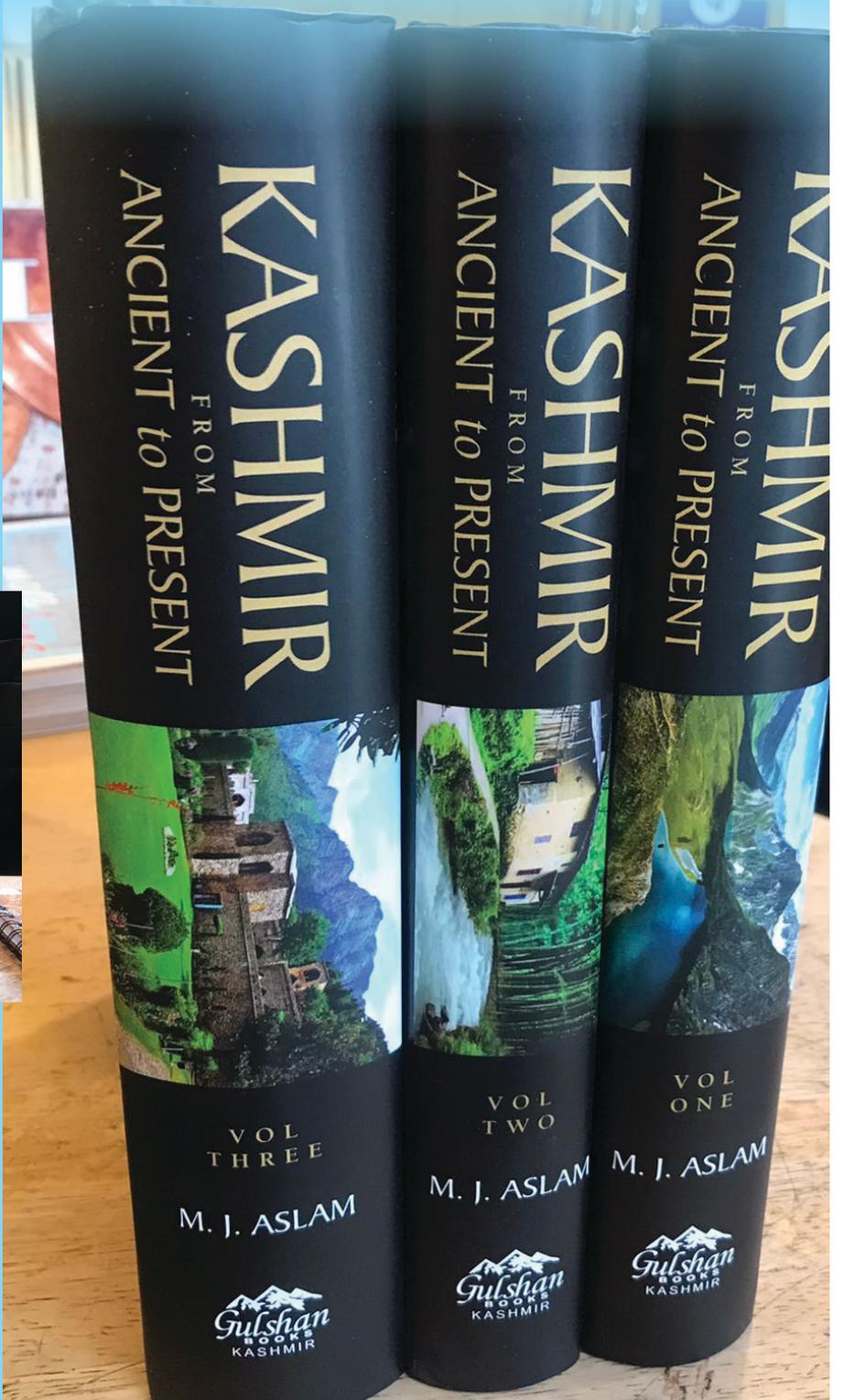
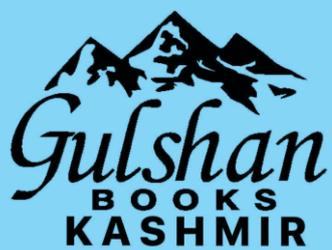
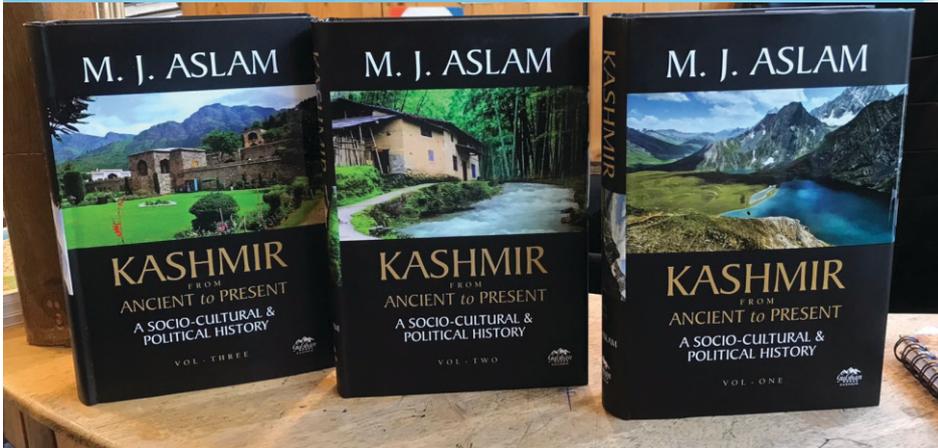
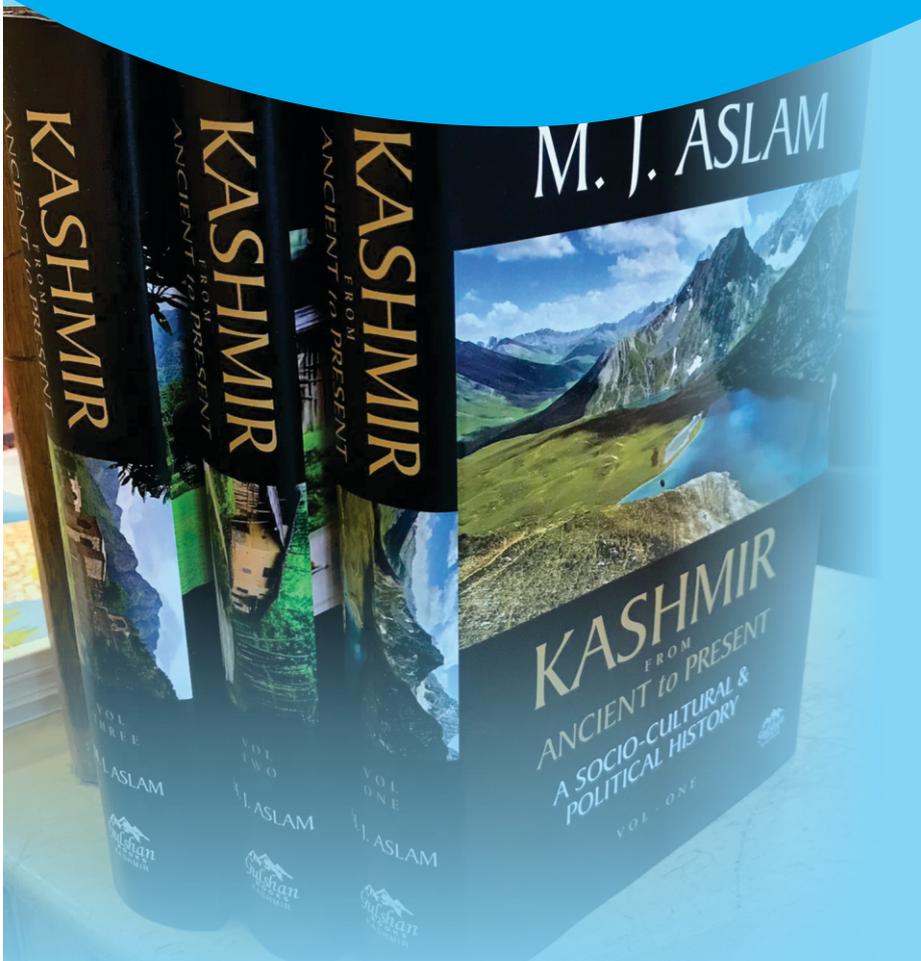
A case of neo-imperialism and content colonisation of the sorts has taken place which has incapacitated the profession of journalism shredding off the traditional ethics. This, in fact, is the era of post-truth. The rampant existence of fake news and disinformation even doesn't hide during a pandemic and one could see how effectively social profiling, misinformation and factually incorrect reports and images were circulated as goes the globally reincarnated consciousness about the trend for fact-checking. This massive infodemic, even during the times of no-pandemic, if not controlled, could take a serious toll on multiple fronts. In this regard also, media education framework along with inputs from global regulatory and even international agencies like UNESCO underscores media literacy as the order of the day. The onus now shifts back to the stakeholders in this arena, which includes the good old educator, the editors, the regulators and above all the budding journalists who in the middle of a popularly media-literate world with citizen social media journalists all around have to bring back the sanity to this field and instil a sense of faith in the nice principles of journalism. A collaborative investment in the pedagogical reforms, academic and intellectual infrastructure with a knack for socially relevant storytelling will do its bit for sure. At least one can keep trying till one finds a way to create a reasonable space with contemporary curricular focus, balanced training options, integrated counselling structures for the upcoming media-persons.

Monisa Qadiri teaches Journalism and Mass communication at IUST Awantipora and has been University's first Media Advisor to VC.

So the core issues concerning lack of media industry, sustainable revenue options, internship and training opportunities will mostly remain the same.

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India's Majoritarian Politics and the Role of Media

Mainstream media's connivance with the Hindu right has drawn widespread condemnation and alarm around the world.



SANJAY KAPOOR

While the hatred of religious supremacists for minorities has never been hidden in India or elsewhere, the manner in which some members of the clergy with godliness exuding from their long beards and flowing saffron robes converged at Haridwar, Uttarakhand, late last year to give a call, bizarrely and wantonly, for genocide of Muslims as a recompense for country's bloodied past where Muslim invaders and rulers allegedly caused untold atrocities and destroyed Hindu temples. This congregation relied on expected historical distortions that deepen hatred for the other by claiming moral and physical superiority.

Except shock and display of horror there was no immediate impact on the ground of the clergy's call to the faithful to participate in a ghoulish genocide. The reaction to a call that brought back chilling memories of massacres at the time of partition or later in Rwanda was restricted to editorial comments. The outraged sought judicial intervention as the administration was limply trying to make light of these toxic remarks. The administration's response was like a rap on the knuckle of the offenders as they merrily went back to their ordinary business of life. Interestingly, the violence of the words did not translate into bloodshed and gore. There were no riots or killings. It seemed that the perpetrators as well as the victims decided to move on. Not really.

What emerged from Haridwar episode is that the interpretation of what constitutes hate speech depends much on the administration.

Many of those who get arrested for hate speech were not those who took part in TV chat shows, but those whose tweets or facebook post were considered toxic. Till the judiciary intervened, Delhi Police had found no evidence of hate speech in the remarks of the anchor of a TV channel. When the local police realized that the courts were unhappy with their reaction, they hastily changed tack. What was the outcome? Nothing really! The nationalist anchor continues to spew hatred, in a matter-of-fact manner, on his eminently unwatchable channel.

In fact the channels have begun to see great merit in providing their platforms to hateful and divisive propaganda to garner not just a certain kind of viewership, but also substantial funds from those who endorse and promote such messaging. Besides, peddling this editorial line they also ensure that these channels are on the right side of the central and state governments.

Late last year, evidence surfaced in Agartala, Tripura, of how the media was forced to tow the government line as it was the only advertiser. The problem for the media gets exacerbated as there are no other companies or businesses that would be interested in advertising in any news outlet. It's only the government that wants to control the media to manage the narrative. In fact the government is not averse to the idea when the media leans entirely for support as it allows them the freedom to control the narrative and its outcomes better.

In fact the government is not averse to the idea when the to control the narrative and its outcomes better. media leans entirely for support as it allows them the freedom

From this sense, the violence that was triggered after the hateful remarks of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson, Nupur Sharma, has to be viewed differently. It took place in some cities of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal - many days after the TV outburst of the BJP spokesperson. The geographical dispersal of violence does not allow an easy explanation. Interestingly, despite the outrage by the West Asian countries to the remarks by the BJP leader on The Prophet, other news channels and newspapers friendly to the ruling ideology did not really criticize Sharma. They quickly moved, as if on cue, on to the violent protests and how the brick-batters were causing immense harm to public infrastructure. Thereafter, the attention of channels and others was captured by the decision of the Uttar Pradesh Police to demolish the house of the alleged chief conspirator in the city of Prayagraj. The howl of protests over the arbitrary and unjust decision was followed by appreciation and admiration from the followers of this aggressive majoritarian politics.

It is obvious that the biggest losers of this entire engagement that began with a seemingly mindless fracas on TV panel discussion were the Muslims. Not only did they suffer in comparison of the majority community, but also had the mortification of seeing some of their houses bulldozed in full public view. Their helplessness exacerbated by the fact that no one really stopped this manifest illegality when it was unfolding. In fact, use of bulldozers was celebrated in Uttar Pradesh and then replicated in other states of the country. Ideally, media should be the platform for expression of outrage when something so blatantly wrong takes place, but nothing like this happened. Instead, the TV news channels were seeing wisdom in what the state government was doing. Also, they were providing legitimacy to what was considered legally and morally reprehensible by presenting only one-sided news: For instance, stone pelting shown by only one side. Such camerawork by TV channels has been finessed in Israel and US and has done its bit feeding islamophobia and accentuating the impression of unreasonableness of the protestors. What is always obfuscated is the reason that triggered the violence.

Unlike the occasion when the Supreme Court stayed further demolition by bulldozers in Delhi's Jehangirpuri after the riots, the SC chose another route after Nupur Sharma episode. This time around, SC bench said that the demolition should not be seen as an act of retaliation. How was the SC order read by the followers of the majoritarian narrative? Based on the TV news, they believed that courts had endorsed UP Chief Minister Yogi's bulldozing ways. Such a narrow interpretation was facilitated by, firstly, how the television media spun around the judgment and, secondly, how it allowed millions of Whatsapp groups in this majoritarian eco-system to disseminate this message.

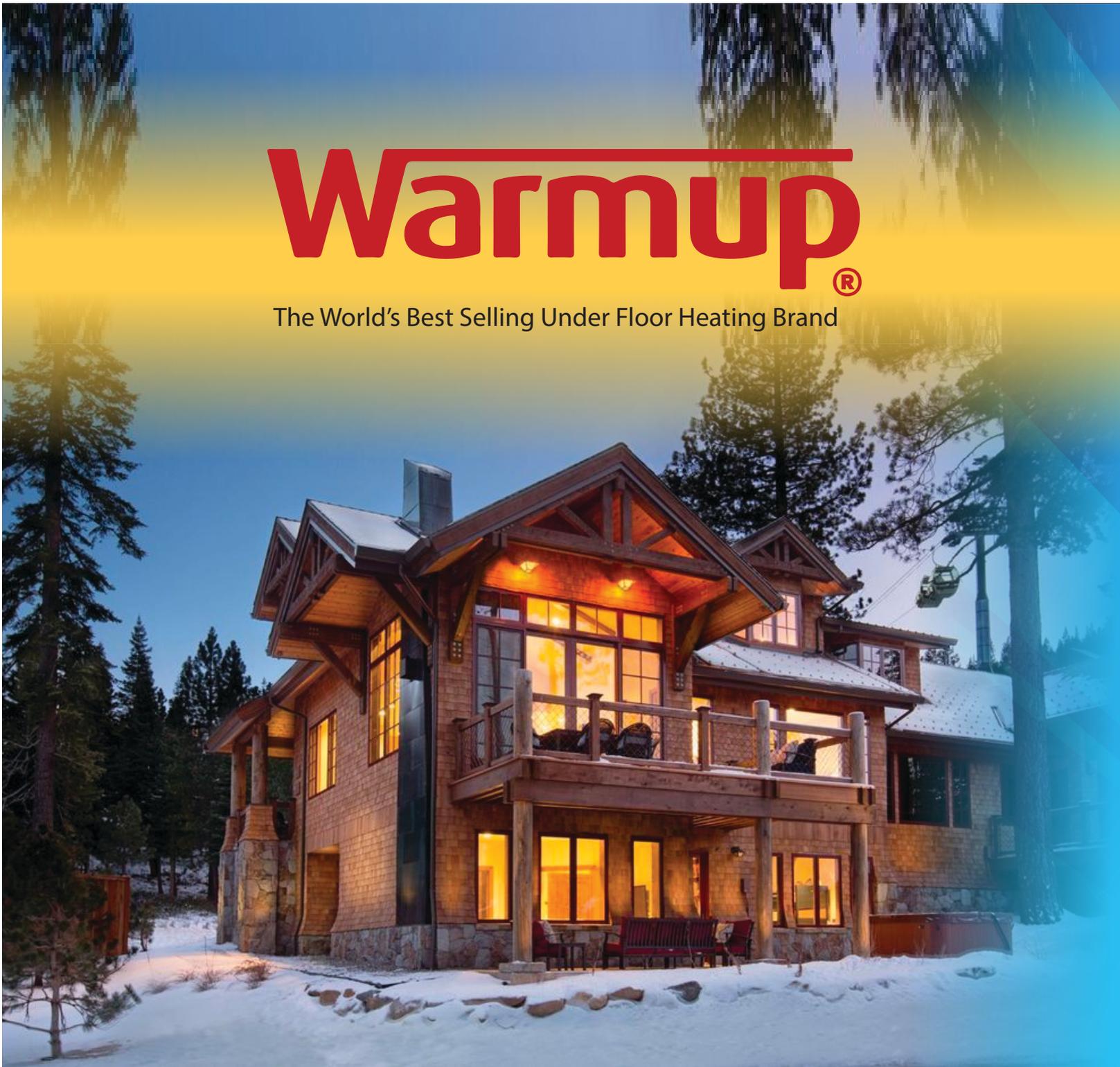
It is due to this skewed messaging that the man on the street maintains unreserved skepticism about the TV media and how it distorts news in favor of those who are divisive and bent on provoking a communal riot. However, the big message is that despite all the hate news that the channels may spout, those who are in a position to benefit from it usually trigger violence. The disadvantaged seldom gain from it and know the harm that may visit them if they are seen to be the initiator.

The same template in different forms plays out everywhere. Media, whose independence is so critical in a democracy, is threatened by issues of viability and ends up following the official diktat even if it means hurting the interests of its common readers and viewers.

Sanjay Kapoor is a Delhi-based senior political analyst and editor of Hardnews magazine.

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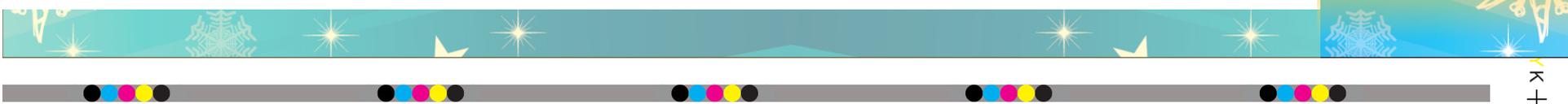
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Why the Return of the KPs to the Valley is Farfetched



More than three decades after their exodus, the return of Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) remains a mirage for a host of reasons including the weaponization of the KP misery by the rightwing to further its communal agenda.

AMIT BAMZAI

Asomber-looking septuagenarian Muslim neighbour looking mindlessly into nothingness surrounding him, with a pair of pink sandals resting next to him. These sandals are all that was found next to the body of Rajni Bala when she was murdered near Govt. High School, Gopalpara in South Kashmir's Kulgam district. Bala hailed from Jammu's Samba district and was posted as a teacher in Kulgam.

Over the last five to six weeks, gunmen executed more than five individuals across the length and breadth of Kashmir which included Revenue official Rahul Bhat, artist Amreen Bhat, Police official Saifullah Qadri and EDB manager Vijay Kumar.

These recent killings of selected individuals have caused a sense of fear among individuals from the minority community working in the Valley. The sheer audacity and strategic execution of these targets has indicated sleeper cells, possibly run by Pakistani handlers. This is what former R&AW (Research and Analysis wing) Chief and New Delhi's premier pointsman on Kashmir during Vajpayee regime, AS Dulat, made of the grisly events.

In an interview to Karan Thapar for The Wire, Dulat said that the planning and the precise execution of these murders not only has a Pakistani connection but could also be supported by a deeply entrenched network of OGWs (overground workers). He further implies that a largely silent rage over the dilution of the special status provided to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir could also be a cause for this growing sentiment of antipathy towards the minorities in Kashmir.

Demographic change: genuine threat or a bogeyman?

The removal of article 370 has fanned the apprehension of a systematic demographic change in Kashmir.

The calls to resist attempts at demographic alteration have arisen intermittently in Kashmir in the last three decades. These concerns are further accentuated by loud demands from mainland India in favour of the settlement of non-Muslims from various parts of India in Kashmir via different policies, assuming it would scotch the anti-India sentiment in Kashmir or at least render the secessionist lobby a minority. Such extreme demands have also come from senior politicians like Subramaniam Swamy, who suggested in a conference hosted by Panun Kashmir - a rightwing Pandit organisation that claims to espouse the cause of KP's - that retired soldiers, and police personnel can be settled in Kashmir as a policy to challenge the secessionist supremacy. Needless to say, such comments have alarmed Kashmiri Muslims. More than a decade ago, I spoke with a staunch Hurriyat supporter who told me that there will be many policies leading to settlements of non-Muslims in Kashmir. His apprehensions were echoed by noted political scientist and bitter critic of the Hindu right Pratap Bhanu Mehta when he wrote: "Political violence in India is intimately tied to a demographic imagination [...] In Kashmir, the fear of altering demography after the abrogation of Article 370 has been palpably real"

It is imperative to note that the presence of the Union

gov't of India's personnel in Kashmir is temporary in nature and doesn't alter the results of elections in any form. However, several instances of malfunctioning in elections have rendered their outcomes meaningless in the eyes of the Kashmiris who believe that the chief ministers in J&K aren't elected in Srinagar but rather selected in New Delhi.

Former JKLF Chief Yasin Malik who has recently been convicted in a money laundering case and Late SAS Geelani termed the appointment of Kashmiri Pandit employees in Kashmir via Prime Minister's relief package as a precursor to demographic alteration in Kashmir. It led to a gradual building of a sense of fear and resentment among Kashmiri Muslims. PM package employees who had already accepted their jobs, that came with certain caveats, with a lot of trepidation. One of the conditions being that the beneficiaries can't seek transfer once they're posted in Kashmir. In the wake of recent killings of Pandits and a couple of Hindus from Jammu who were posted in Kashmir, these caveats have become the biggest hurdle in instilling a sense of security amongst the Pandit employees who have been asking to be transferred to safer areas in Jammu and other districts. Although the presence of a couple of thousand Hindu employees may pose very little or no immediate threat to the Muslim majority in Kashmir, blatant calls of Muslim genocide and other forms of violence coming from Hindutva echo-chambers doesn't help in assuaging such fears.

Under such circumstances, statements of Yasin Malik and Late Geelani only add fuel to the fire. Add to that Pakistan vehemently bringing up the issue on multiple forums and the demography fears only grow stronger.

Did the separatist leadership have a role in maintaining peace and security?

On August 5, 2019 Immediately after placing the Presidential Order 2019 before the Rajya Sabha, Home Minister [Amit Shah](#) moved a resolution recommending that the president issue an order under Article 370(3) rendering all clauses of Article 370 inoperative. It further led to the dissolution of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir out of which two Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and UT of Ladakh were carved. Some of my friends who worked for the mainstream parties in the state felt their party leadership was undermined. They were expecting a deluge of protest against the resolution. None of that happened. Home Minister Amit Shah, in one stroke, rendered a host of pro-India Leaders redundant in Kashmir. What was feared for a while by political analysts came out to be true. Kashmiris had little faith in the claims made by the likes of NC and PDP about the intent of the rule of Indian democracy in the Valley.

In a way the removal of article 370 was a vindication of the stand that Hurriyat and other separatist groups maintained, For decades they have espoused that there is no real democracy on the ground in Kashmir. Yasin Malik, for-



There were widespread protests across Kashmir by Kashmiri Pandit employees and their families living in guarded enclosures against recent killings. **Pics: Qazi Irshad**



mer chief of JKLF and a self-proclaimed Gandhian has for long remained a known face of the separatist movement in Kashmir. Almost all previous gov'ts from Narsimha Rao to Manmohan Singh have flirted with the idea of bringing Malik and other separatist leaders to the so-called mainstream politics in Kashmir. However, Malik, Geelani et al maintained that the resolution of the conflict in J&K can't be found within the confines of the Indian constitution.

While most of the militants who picked up arms during the fag end of the 80's or during the beginning of 90's were eliminated; Yasin Malik not only survived but became a larger than life Kashmiri figure around the well with his newly acquired Gandhian credentials doing his image a world of good and giving him a huge platform in the national and international media. Malik was even a member of a panel that met the former Prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. The photographs of Yasin shaking hands with Dr. Singh keep haunting the Congress party till today with its nemesis, the BJP, making most

of such images.

In May this year, NIA court handed Malik a lifer for receiving funds to spark unrest in the valley. In its charge sheet, the NIA claimed that Malik received money through a Pakistani diplomat posted in New Delhi.

While Malik has always maintained a public stance of welcoming Kashmiri Pandits back to the valley, he bitterly opposed the gov't. of India's idea to settle them in guarded settler colonies.

Yasin Malik and other separatists were considered valuable allies to con-

trol and also sometimes divert the sentiment on the streets of Srinagar by the Indian state. However, during Modi's second term as prime minister powered by a thumping win in the 2019 polls, Yasin and other separatist leaders were rendered useless on that count. In fact, making a total departure from New Delhi's earlier policies on Kashmir, the Centre went hammer and tongs after the separatist through investigative and law enforcement agencies.

Most of the Kashmiris I talked to while writing this essay referred to the absence of this force as a major reason for the recent upheaval in the Vale.

Why is the PM's employment package suffocating Pandits?

During the reign of UPA gov't. in 2008, PM Manmohan Singh announced an employment package for educated and yet unemployed Pandit youth. It led to the appointment of several thousand Kashmiri Pandits who were bound to serve in various districts of the Kashmir valley. This number has now risen to 4500. This employment package was a part of the relief and rehabilitation program launched by the gov't. of India to resettle Kashmiri Pandits back in the Valley who had left during the eruption of militancy in Kashmir.

This employment package has however become a cause of massive unrest in the wake of the recent targeted killing of Hindu minorities in the Kashmir valley. According to the binding rules of this employment package, employees can only be posted in their home districts and are ineligible for transfers to

Such extreme demands have also come from senior politicians like Subramaniam Swamy, who suggested in a conference hosted by Panun Kashmir that retired soldiers, and police personnel can be settled in Kashmir as a policy to challenge the secessionist supremacy.

any other place. In the wake of resigning from these jobs, Pandit employees become ineligible for any other gov't jobs in Jammu and Kashmir. Due to such precondition, late Rahul Bhat was posted in Tehsil office of the village Chadoora in Budgam district. It was during the office hours when he was gunned down inside his office. Later, speaking to media personnel, his wife claimed that Rahul was feeling insecure in this remote location and had repeatedly asked the local administration to transfer him to safer district headquarters.

The brutal killing of Rahul caused the PM package employees to resign en masse and according to various news reports around 350 Pandit employees submitted their resignations to LG Manoj Sinha. The nature of the murder of Rahul Bhat had indicated the involvement of local Kashmiri employees in his office. A concern shared by Dulat in his interview with Thapar.

Kashmir Files

On 11th March 2022, The Kashmir files, a Hindi film was released across cinema halls in India. It is a fictional account based on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in 1990. The critical reception of the film was mixed, with the cinematography and acting thought to be compelling, but the storyline attracting criticism for attempting to recast established history and propagating Islamophobia. Supporters have praised the film for showing what they say is an overlooked aspect of Kashmir's history.

This film received unprecedented support from the Modi govt. with a special mention by the prime minister himself. However; the former chief minister of the state Farooq Abdullah had very critical view of the film and the intent of its makers. He called the film an attempt to malign the Kashmiri Muslims and create a divide in the country due to several scenes depicting gory details of the murder of Pandits in Kashmir. He made a special mention of the scene in which a Pandit is killed and rice soaked in his blood is fed to his surviving wife. He referred to it as an outright lie and said it is not possible that a Muslim would do this to his Pandit brother in Kashmir. Farooq's utterances notwithstanding, it was widely reported that B.K Ganjoo a former employee of the BSNL was killed in the same fashion, and his unfortunate wife was made to undergo this inhuman act. This story was, however, refuted by his surviving brother, SK Ganjoo.



Irrespective of its merit, it is widely being felt that Kashmir Files is being weaponized by the right-wing in India to propagate their prejudice and hatred towards minorities. The deeply dividing discourse around the film and the capitalizing on the trauma of Pandits to score political goals has become a worrying reality. People chanting anti-Muslim slogans inside and outside theatres and calling for revenge after watching the movie went viral on social media.

Although to claim that the murder of Rahul Bhat and later Rajni Bala was triggered by the aroused sentiment due to the film is downright wrong and preposterous. Individuals from the minorities were being targeted and killed in a planned manner for more than two years before the film was released. The murder of M.L Bindroo and later of Sikh school Principal Supinder Kour were incidents that happened before the release of the movie.

In both the cases a little-known militant group took responsibility, accusing both the victims of promoting Indian agenda in Kashmir and propagating anti-Islamic activities. It would be intellectual dishonesty to disregard the void that is being created between

the two prominent communities in Kashmir. Especially with the nature of the recent killings, the involvement of ordinary Kashmiris in executing these target killings has created a blinding fear amongst the minuscule minority in Kashmir reminding them of the troubled times of 90 and 91. This gash that has opened now will take a herculean effort to be sewed again.

Hindutva and its Impact

For decades now, the KP issue has become a favourite horse to be flogged in India for the right wing. The ascent of militant right in India has coincided with coming to power for the nationalist, right wing politics in major countries like Turkey, Britain, Brazil etc.

However, in case of Indian politics, the curious case of KPs and reminder of their suffering became an excellent electoral plank to garner majoritarian sentiments. I have witnessed numerous occasions when in the coastal areas of Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan the non-Muslim community has been reminded of what happened to Pandits.

It is no secret that, for years, J&K has remained a lab for Hindutva and nationalist politics where experiments are conducted to be used across rest of the country. Unfortunately, the brunt of its adverse effect has been borne by Pandits in the Valley as well where they had to face resistance and reprisal. Pandits have in the past been chided sometimes as 'Jan Sanghis', an allusion to the parent organisation of BJP, the Jan Sangh. They have been known to be loyal voters of BJP and, therefore, instant targets for the separatist lobby. As the direct control of BJP rule gets stronger in the valley; Pandit organizations like Panun Kashmir have urged the Indian state to carry out the necessary purge in the valley to make it more Indian.

It is a fallacious claim that Kashmiri Pandits are en masse a BJP vote bank or out and out Hindutava supporters. One of the reasons, perhaps, why the KP's continue to suffer is that they are a minuscule minority and have a negligible bearing on the electoral politics. That they have been so central to the majoritarian politics underscores the genius and focus of the Hindu right to use them as an electoral weapon not only to make electoral gains but also to keep live their divisive politics of keeping aloof and otherising the Muslims or any other idea that challenges their idea of India which is Akhand Bharat or the Greater India which, in the imagination of the Hindutva followers, is expansion of India beyond its borders, going as far off as Afghanistan, borne of myths and alternate history that the Sangh Parivar peddles with total disregard for historical data or the thumb rules that the historians are supposed to go by.

Like many other ethnic groups, Kashmiri Pandits too belong to a scattered political spectrum rather than a monolith. It is in place to mention that during the Sheikh Abdullah agitation, and even afterwards, most of the communist leaders in Kashmir were Pandits. Even some of them like late Raghunath Vaishnavi and Sampat Prakash wrote liberally about their sympathies for this protracted struggle for a separate state in Kashmir.

As the valley inches towards an eerie peace and the Pandit employees are being moved to high-security offices while their families remain virtually locked inside govt. enclosures like in Haal, Pulwama, their safety remains precariously edged on a precipice. It is now to be seen if the gov't, powers that be and the Kashmiri society, in general, will stand up and help each other to move out of these murky waters.

A largely silent rage over the dilution of the special status provided to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir could also be a cause for this growing sentiment of antipathy towards the minorities in Kashmir

Why This Alpine Lake Trek Stands Out

The ethereal trekking expedition to Mawarnag is to be experienced to be believed.



SHAHNAWAZ KHANDAY

I expected it to be a routine weekend trek to yet another Alpine Lake. It turned out to be unlike all other trekking expeditions I had undertaken. Mawarnag expedition left all of us in the team - including many seasoned trekkers - spellbound and pleasantly surprised. Starting immediately after morning prayers, our team comprising some from Shopian and others from Srinagar, reached Ahlan Gadol in the Breng Valley of Kulkarnag by 8 am. After parking our vehicles right in the forests of Upper Ahlan amid barely paved and bouldered hill road amidst pine and fir forests, the thirteen of us set off for our destination high up in the Lower Himalayas of South Eastern Kashmir.

The trail for most part turned out to be moderate but grew steeper and hence tougher towards the last leg which was rocky and slippery as Ahlan Nullah flows down from the ridges of Mawarnag and surrounding peaks. We tread on boulders, crossed swift waters of Ahlan Nullah, rested and sprinted through lush green meadows of Gaderwani, Girad, Alifbraed and Inderwal, weathering the rocky final patch with surreally beautiful snow clad Mawarnag peaks towering above them and finally at around 1:30 soaked in- breathlessly with our hearts skipping beats for a while- the indescribable beauty of lower Mawarnag Lake. The serene turquoise waters of the lake are just out of this world. Delicate Wild flowers, pink and yellow, on the banks of the lake and on the far end of a small island of sorts that fuses into the lake waters is a sight to watch. We simply couldn't take our eyes off the lake and the snow clad peaks in its backdrop. Lower Mawarnag Lake or Mawarnag-I is more or less an oval shaped alpine lake approximately 0.75 kms in length and 0.5 kms or

may be more at its widest with babbling brooks flowing from the Upper Mawarnag or Mawarnag-II and glacial melt from the peaks above entering it from three sides, North, South and East. The Southern banks of the Lake are strewn with boulders which we negotiated to ascend to the Upper Mawarnag some hundred metres further ahead of Lower Mawarnag. We had to walk on snow and marshy land to reach the Upper Mawarnag lake tucked away in the eastern bowl of the foothills of peaks rising above 4500 meters with a lot of snow still there, huge chunks of which were breaking and flowing into the Upper Mawarnag lake. The lake is apparently almost the Lower Mawarnag lake size, may be a notch too deeper and with ice and snow still floating on it.

Hypnotized by the beauty of the lake and the surrounding snow-clad mountains for a good one hour, the team members decided to descend back to Lower Mawarnag to spend some time there and to have lunch carried in back-

packs left on the western banks of the lake. The eyes of the team members were caught by a captivating sight. To their right we saw an islet awash with little beautiful pink flowers. We decided to go there and spend some time. Lunch could wait for another thirty forty minutes! The islet is just out of this world, small patch of heaven with little flowers swaying with breeze emanating from all the four sides of what rightly could be called the Mawarnag Bowl. What made this islet so breathtakingly appealing was how it just gelled with the blue waters of the lake, so much so that many of us just sat on its edges, drowning our feet in the glacial waters of Lower Mawarnag. Overwhelmed by the divine allure of the islet, the lake and all that surrounded it, the team spontaneously fell on its knees in prayer to thank the Creator for giving it the opportunity to witness all the grandeur and magnificence firsthand in its pristine form. No one wanted to leave the islet. No one could for quite a few minutes,

even though all were hungry. It took some effort to convince the members that it was getting really late and that the lunch was waiting on the far end of the lake. Back on the western banks, we finally unpacked our tiffins at around 4 pm. Done with the meals, the team, as if in trance, kept watching and soaking in the charms of the lake and the surrounding peaks. It was with great effort that we got on our feet again at around 4:45 pm and walked back, with a heavy heart from the Mawarnag heights. We boarded our vehicles at around 6:40 or thereabouts.

All were of the opinion that Mawarnag Trek was unlike all their previous treks. The forests, the meadows, the entire trail was different. The entire trail above the tree line is dotted with wild flowers of different hues and colours. One minute it was like as if we were in the woods of Pahalgam, another minute in the meadows of Sonamarg and yet another minute somewhere in the high hills of Gulmarg to be finally somewhere in the lap of legendary Nandansar and Kotorisar in the Heerpora Wildlife Sanctuary. The entire trail is so enchanting and mesmerising. Another refreshing and joyful thing we noticed was the trail, and the lakes are not littered with plastic bottles, cans and other hazardous non-biodegradable stuff. We could guess that these are rarely trekked parts and that is why and how the pristine glory of the mountains and tarns is still intact. One could only wish and pray the ethereal beauty remains unsullied for times to come.

Shahnawaz Khanday is a college teacher and an avid trekker who also loves to travel and read.



Mawarnag is less-treked and has maintained its pristine glory in full measure. Pic: Shahnawaz Khanday

Team India's Next Big Thing

India's wicketkeeper batsman has taken the cricket world by storm with a Gilchrist-like blistering approach to decimate oppositions.



BILAL AHSAN DAR

Indian wicketkeeper batsman Rishabh Pant is the hottest property of Indian cricket these days. An emerging superstar is fascinating everyone in the cricket world with his flamboyance and talent complemented with some phenomenal performances and game changing innings. The 24-year old dasher made his T20I debut in January 2017 and his ODI and Test debut in 2018. He was quick to make his mark in the international cricket and was named the ICC Men's Emerging Cricketer of the year at the 2018 ICC Awards. In February 2021, Pant was named the Men's Player of the Month in the first edition of the ICC Player of the Month awards.

Gone are the days when wicketkeepers were chosen in Test sides primarily because of their wicket keeping abilities. Wicket keeping is a strenuous fielding position in the game of cricket because of its very high physical, mental and psychological demands. Therefore teams would ideally choose someone who was a specialist based on the wicket-keeping skills for this position. For example, Allan Knott played 95 Tests for England through 60s, 70s and 80s and averaged just 31 over a long career.

In the 1990s, teams started fielding wicket keepers who were talented batsmen as well. The trend began largely with Adam Gilchrist, who was Australia's wicket keeper in Tests and ODI's with some extraordinary talent with the willow in his hands. Arjuna Ranatunga, the 1996 world cup-winning captain of Sri Lanka promoted his wicketkeeper batsman Romesh Kaluwitharana as opener to partner the destructive Sanath Jayasurya. Kaluwitharana played a crucial role in Sri Lanka's winning campaign being an aggressive batsman upfront in the power play. The partnership gave some blistering starts to the Sri Lankans which helped them use the fielding restrictions to the fullest and drastically improved their win ratio.

Other keeper- batsmen who followed Gilchrist's example and were fully integrated into their national sides as top wicketkeeper batsmen are Andy Flower of Zimbabwe, Mark Boucher of South Africa, Moin Khan and Kam-

ran Akmal of Pakistan, the classic Kumar Sangakara of Sri Lanka, Mahinder Singh Dhoni of India, Brendon McCullum of New Zealand and many others.

Currently the cricket world has some notable names in the wicketkeeper batsman category who contribute as much with the bat as any top order batsman. These include Quinton De Cock, Jos Butler, Jhony Bairstow, Mohammad Rizwan and this emerging star Rishabh Pant.

After the retirement of MS Dhoni, many believed it would be difficult for India to fill the void left by MS as he was instrumental in winning many matches and trophies for India over the years not only by his calm captaincy but with the bat as well. Though India has a strong bench strength and specialist wicketkeeper batsmen like KL Rahul or Sanju Samson have already announced themselves, Rishabh Pant has taken over all of them in the race, especially in Test cricket where many cricket experts already he is the best wicket keeper batsman in Test format India ever had. This is vindicated by the fact that Pant recently became the first Indian wicketkeeper to climb onto the No.6 spot in the ICC Test rankings.

It is the first time when a wicket keeper batsman from India has joined batters like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in the top ten.

Apart from this, with his glove work, Pant has already broken the record of MS Dhoni, becoming fastest wicketkeeper to 100 dismissals in Test cricket.

In December 2018, during the first Test against Australia, Pant took 11 catches, the most by a wicketkeeper for India in a Test. In January 2019, during the fourth Test against Australia, Pant became the first wicketkeeper for India to score a century in a test match in Australia. He played a big role in India's 2018 Border Gavaskar trophy triumph where he scored 350 runs in 4 matches at an average of 58.33. He played with responsibility and also with a healthy strike rate. In the Sydney test, he scored an unbeaten 159 off 189 balls, an innings studded with 15 fours and a six, thus announcing himself to the cricket world.

Playing a home series against England, he was second highest run getter in the series behind Rohit Sharma. His confidence was widely praised by the experts. Former England captain and batting legend David Gower, while praising him, said: "Pant has extreme confidence."

The telling example of his confidence was reverse sweeping Jimmy Anderson off the new ball in Ahmedabad.

Another impressive feat was in the Cape Town, where he scored a 100 from 139 balls and seemed to be batting on a different pitch altogether. The second highest score was Virat Kohli's 29 of 143 balls. With that ton, he became the only Indian keeper to have scored test centuries in India, Australia, England and South Africa.

As part of ups and downs, Pant also had a tough phase in 2019-20. His per-

formances were comparatively poor in the season and the rise of KL Rahul meant Pant slipped down the pecking order. A dismal show in the 2020 IPL season didn't help either. He could only amass 343 runs with just one fifty plus score.

During this time, he was heavily criticized by the fans and media. Critical comparisons with MS Dhoni were often made.

But in the year 2021, Pant hit a purple patch. First he scored a match saving 97 at the SCG, then he played best cricket of his life at the Gabba and moved to 13th place in the Test rankings. He continued his love affair with the Australians. His scores of 97 and an unbeaten 89 at the Gabba to chase the target of 328 and helping his team to win another series in Australia depicted a more mature Rishabh Pant.

Quite recently in March 2022, Pant became only the 2nd wicketkeeper batsman to win player of the series award in Tests. Adam Gilchrist is the only other who has attained the feat. Pant had a fabulous outing in the 2-match Test series against Sri Lanka scoring 185 runs in 3 innings with a strike rate of 120. That's unbelievably awesome!

In the ongoing rescheduled Test in England, Pant once again underscored his genius when he, with good support from Jadeja lifted India to 416 from 98/5 in the first innings with a blistering 146 off 111 balls.

His aggressive counter attacking style of batting is a big bonus to the Indian team, as witnessed many times already. He manages to blitz his way to the fifties and hundreds to put his team in the driver's seat, more often than not from a tricky situation.

Despite having relatively less success in the limited overs, it's only a matter of time when he should deliver across formats in his own Pant style of batting.

There are people who are drawing comparisons with Dhoni, but many believe, it is not a fair comparison, and Dhoni's shoes are too big to get in there and it is too early to compare Pant with MS and only time will tell in terms of overall success.

Many observers see more of Gilchrist in Pant – taking the attack to the opposition on his own terms. A left hander, who comes out and changes the game within one session and all of a sudden takes it away from the opposition.

The bottom line is that Rishabh Pant is a player of rare abilities and reach. A blend of brimming talent and fearless approach. His journey in the international cricket might be new, but he looks very promising and the next big thing in the world cricket.

Bilal Ahsan Dar is a blogger and a cricket buff.



Many observers see more of Gilchrist in Pant – taking the attack to the opposition on his own terms. A left hander, who comes out and changes the game within one session and all of a sudden takes it away from the opposition.

The Alchemy of Bliss

Intelligence throws up sordid truths that the innocent common man, smug in his mundane, pathetically mediocre existence is gloriously oblivious to.

“Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know,” pronounced Ernest Hemingway. Have you seen a brilliant scientist looking radiant and chirpy? Not often enough! Or a reputed poet, grinning from ear to ear? There is an air of laden sombreness, like a pall of gloom hovering over their whole being; almost like an extended aura, that has become a part of their mysterious persona. Intellectuals and the creme-de-la-creme of society have an acquired solemnity which borders on mournfulness. The voice is heavy with the weight of pompous sheaves of knowledge and dejection drips from every pore. Perhaps, they know so much more than the rest of the world that they acquire a superior, scornful countenance and a sarcastic disdain for the lesser mortals.

Maybe, the sorrow is merely genuine misery at the lot of humankind? Well, who said glumness and gloominess were bad? Intelligence throws up sordid truths that the innocent common man, smug in his mundane, pathetically mediocre existence is gloriously oblivious to.

Alas, a lugubrious and doleful countenance, is often the hallmark of a brilliant mind. A perspicacious, sharp-witted person has the depression of numerous births, embossed in deep, bloody gashes on his visage.

The pessimists feel you are born wet, naked and hungry, then things get worse. Sometimes you get a splinter in your thigh, sliding down a rainbow. For most of us, life is a foreign language, which we often mispronounce. Louis Adamic's grandfather told him that life is like licking honey off a thorn. For all these dismal creatures, I beseech you to see the wondrous creation that you are. You are an astoundingly accurate, bewildering jigsaw of nerves, skin and veins, infused with the powerful, immortal soul. We are venerable; we are the world. We are indeed staggeringly stun-

ning. Let's measure out our life with Eliot's proverbial coffee spoons. Let our *alaap* boomerang on the walls of our whole being.

An improvised, unaccompanied earth shattering prelude to the divine music of the Anhad Nad.

*gham aur khushi men farq na mrh-soos ho jahan
main dil ko us mqam par lata chala gaya*
~Sahir Ludhianvi

I say, chaps, you needn't be cavorting over the moon and aping a dog with two tails but it doesn't take rocket science to get to the seventh heaven or to float on cloud nine. How about taking yourself lightly and laughing full throatically with a rumbling roar?

The Scarlet Pimpernel

She slipped on
her dancing shoes
And her flared skirt
vivid with vivacity
She twirled on tiptoe
and pirouetted till eternity
She threw back her head
And laughed uproariously
She was the daughter of joy
The sister of happiness
And the mother of ecstasy
She was "Satisfaction"
That elusive "scarlet pimpernel"
Of a woman!

I often wonder at the ear to ear grin that the cobbler round the corner sports with a 'Miller of the Dee' kind of blitheness, even though he sits under a faded black umbrella, stitched and patched in various places to ward off the scorching sun or the merciless monsoons. Surrounded by mounds of bedraggled shoes and sandals that need mending, he looks like the king of his shabby domain. There are

no sighs at his meagre earnings and no snarls at the mongrel who nuzzles at his customer's ankles.

Acceptance and thankfulness are the first firm steps to welcome that truant happiness into our beings.

Exuberance is often on a skate board
Whizzing past at breakneck speed
Over the knolls and above the troughs
It ties skis on its restless feet to zoom
down Alpine peaks
With daisies of buttery cream
Exultation lies in wait behind mossy
rocks
Offering confetti from arboreal showers
Of cornflower blue and scarlet poppies

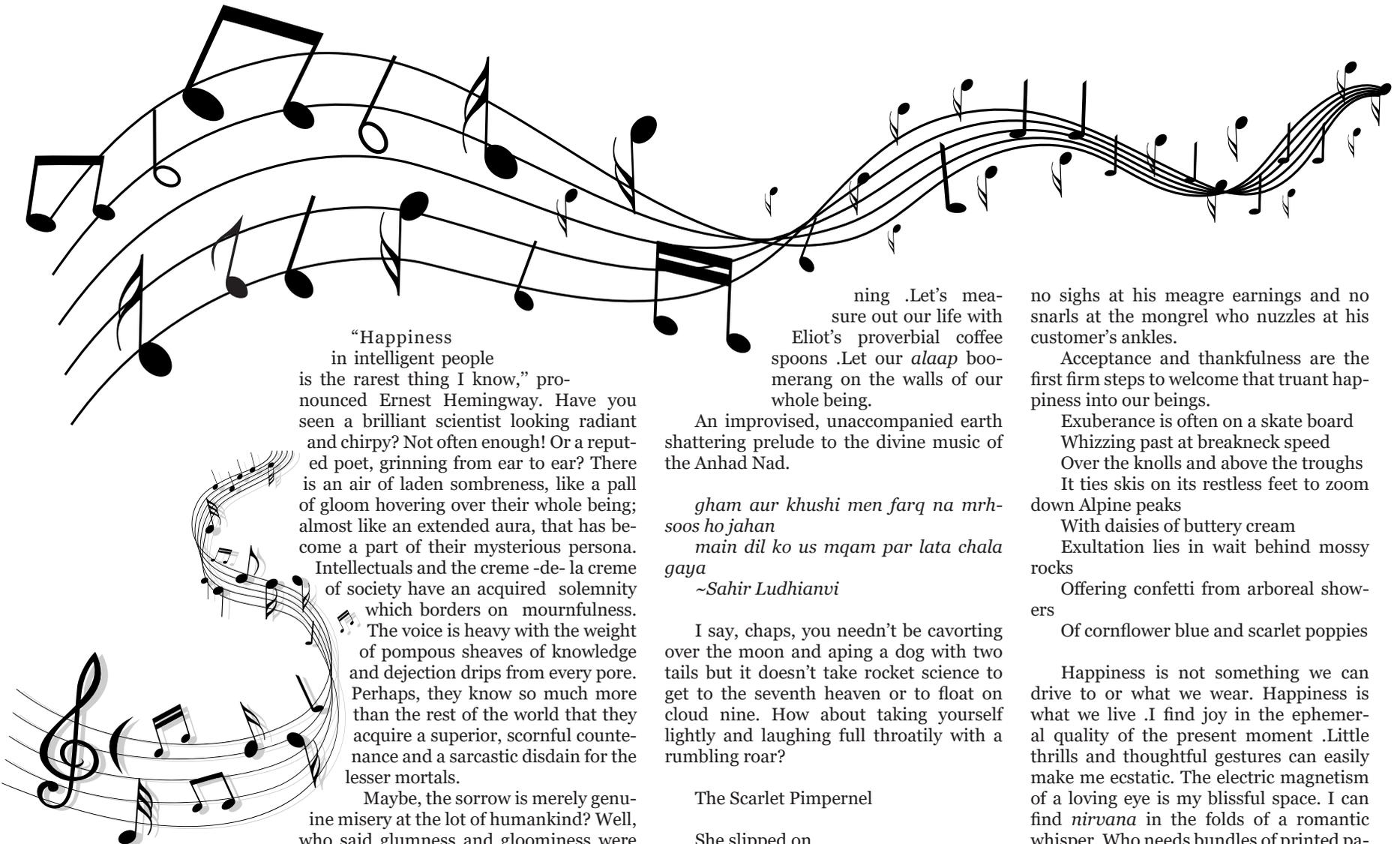
Happiness is not something we can drive to or what we wear. Happiness is what we live. I find joy in the ephemeral quality of the present moment. Little thrills and thoughtful gestures can easily make me ecstatic. The electric magnetism of a loving eye is my blissful space. I can find *nirvana* in the folds of a romantic whisper. Who needs bundles of printed paper money to achieve fulfillment! Ask the snug bug in the rug or the pig in the mud about satisfaction.

The strains of popular Punjabi folk songs goad us towards embracing joyousness:

*aakh ni nanaane tere veer nu,
kadde taan bhaira hasseye kare*
(o sister in law ask your brother to laugh sometimes at least) whereas (my pearly teeth don't stop guffawing, even though it arouses suspicion)

*chitte dandd hassno nahi rehnde ,te
loki bhaire shakk karde
sab se chhupa ke gham ,jo woh mu-
skura diya
uski hans ne toh aaj mujhko rula diya.*

Lily Swarn is an internationally acclaimed poet, author and columnist who has won over fifty national and international awards and whose works have been translated into seventeen languages.



LILY SWARN

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