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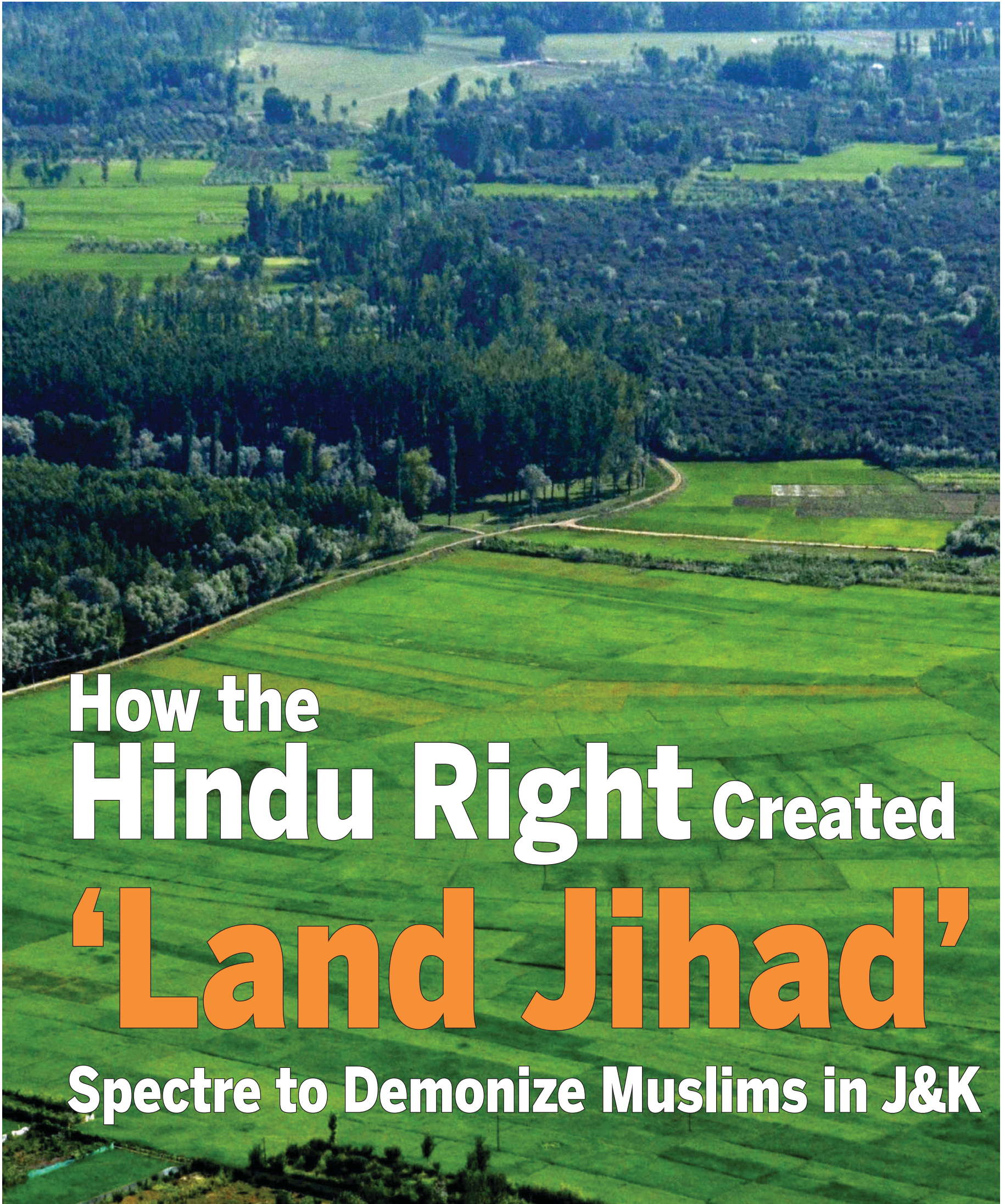
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expression unleashed



How the
Hindu Right Created

‘Land Jihad’

Spectre to Demonize Muslims in J&K

Kashmir's Moribund Economy Needs Quick Redressal

The economic data that is emerging from around the world is grim and points towards a dark future. The recession, it appears as of now, is imminent and it is going to impact all sectors of the society.

Take, for example, the situation in the United Kingdom where inflation surged to a new 40-year high in July on rising food prices, worsening the cost-of-living crisis. The Bank of England has warned that inflation will climb to just over 13 percent this year.

In the United States of America, the inflation jumped to 9.1 percent in June which is the fastest rise there since 1981. The cost of energy in the US has jumped 41.6 percent in the last year while groceries have gone costlier by 12.2 percent.

The current inflation in most countries, including India, is unsustainable and is going to worsen the cost of living.

In India, the wholesale inflation rate has been 15.18 percent in June and 13.93 percent in July. The wholesale inflation rate, which is the indicator of price rise in wholesale markets, has remained in double digits in India since April last year.

Shaktikanta Das, the Governor of Reserve Bank of India, this week stated that the retail inflation in India is "unacceptably and uncomfortably" high. This grim acknowledgment from the top man of India's central bank should be a serious concern and an alarm to prepare for the imminent challenges.

Whatever happens beyond the boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir should be a concern for policymakers as well as for concerned citizens of this region as the economy remains strongly interlinked and interdependent.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the impact of global recession and high inflation within India will have a profound impact and badly dent the cost of living. There are several reasons why this will happen.

Within Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmir valley is landlocked with a narrow passageway of Jawahar Tunnel serving as its surface connection with the other economies. This passageway is prone to blockades during winter months as snow, mudslides and shooting stones frequently cut this connectivity.

The entire import and export structure, thus, depends on this passageway, making the regional economy turbulent and susceptible to sudden and sharp price rises.

The lack of train connectivity with the other regional economies and dependence on truck-based transfer of goods also adds more burden of hefty transportation charges. Also, Kashmir being a tail-end of India's geographic structure has the burden of being a tail-end economy.

With such a difficult geographical reality, that overrides or undercuts in the profits' game, Kashmir is a disaster in waiting, if immediate redressal measures aren't put in place.

The impact of the rising inflation is already prevalent in Kashmir's retail market. The cost of daily use commodities is already registering a remarkable jump, in many cases the prices

Wheat prices jumped from Rs 2400 per quintal last year to Rs 3300 per quintal.

This phenomenal increase in the rate of grains will crumble an entire part of Kashmir's rural economy as the livestock industry contributes 11 percent to the Gross Domestic Product.

The state of affairs vis-a-vis the once-booming construction business in Kashmir is also alarmingly grim and those associated with it suggest a fall in demand of nearly 80 percent owing to the unbearable rise in cost of material. The slowdown of the construction business is an unhealthy trend as it indicates an immobilisation of the flow of money.

The prices of groceries, cooking oil and daily household items are also registering a rise that is not at all sustainable, if the costs continue to rise at the current rate.

With inflation going almost out of control and the global economic situation appearing to be at war with itself, it is time for the administration to increasingly promote, aid and invest in the local market.

There is a large untapped potential in the rural economy that - if it is streamlined, guided and aided - can ease the pressure of rising inflation within Kashmir. The lack of processing units for agricultural and horticultural products, which could add important value addition to the raw product, is an urgent need of the hour.

The administration also needs to go beyond its call of duty and acknowledge the unfolding crisis. It has to liberally invest in the manufacturing industry, promote and aid the private players, and ease and aid the introduction process of new players, so the local raw produce can be utilized and processed into a ready for import end-product.

The PPP, or the Private-Public Partnership, can be an effective model to move forward in this direction. The bureaucratic sluggishness, which can slow this process towards self-reliance, will have to also transform itself.

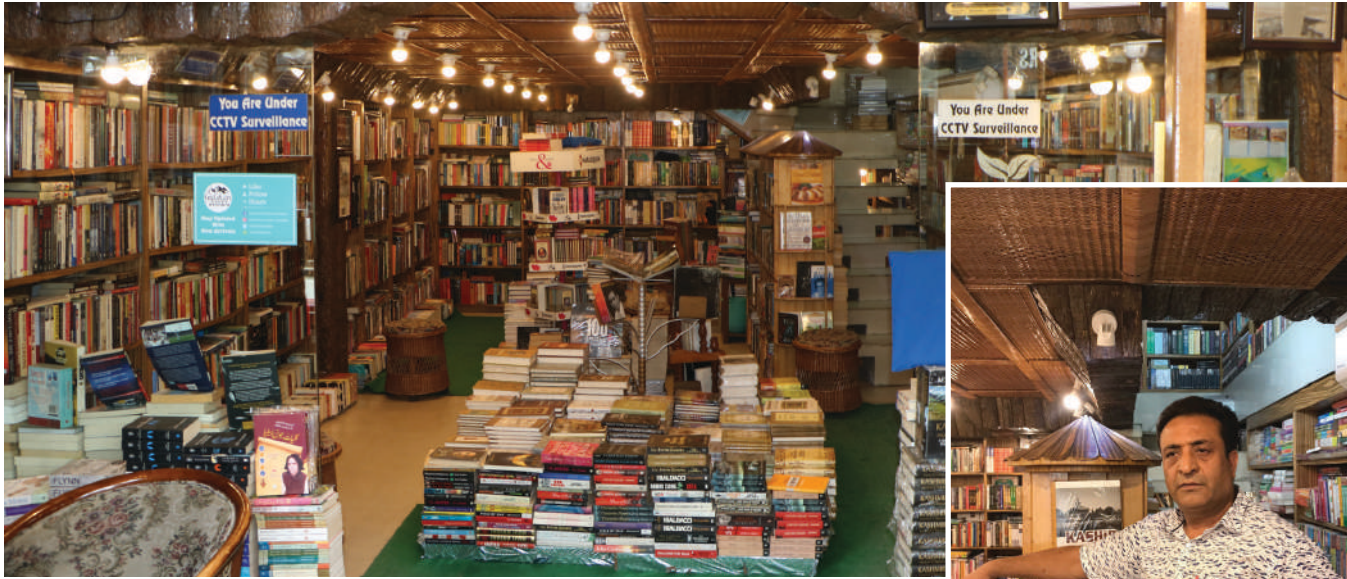
The tailpiece: The economic crisis is real and Kashmir is unprepared to face it. The crisis will not slow its pace, so the need is to hasten the remedial measures. Much time is already lost.

The impact of the rising inflation is already prevalent in Kashmir's retail market. The cost of daily use commodities is already registering a remarkable jump, in many cases the prices have doubled.

have doubled. Take for example maize, which is widely used in the livestock market in Kashmir during winter months.

The maize in Kashmir is mainly imported from markets in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi - the three nearest wholesale bazaars which are at a distance of 500 - 800 kms. The retail cost of maize last year in Kashmir was in the range of Rs 1800-2000 per quintal; this year, the retail prices are upwards of Rs 3500 per quintal.

Book Lovers' Delight



Pic: Qazi Irshad

SAQIB MUGLOO

In the last week of July, as rains splashed over the streets of Srinagar, two young girls braving puddles and showers made their way into one of the oldest and the most frequented book stores of Kashmir: Gulshan Books.

"I can't believe it, after two years of hard work I am finally going to publish my own book," one of the girls exclaimed as others around looked in awe.

The girl, who wished not to be named before the publication of her novel, credited the store, among other reasons, for her forthcoming book. "It comprises 300 pages and is a work of fiction on a subject that I cannot share now," she said.

She further said that she had been shopping at the store for over 10 years. "This has been a go-to place for me since my early teenage days. Despite books being available online, I prefer this shop," she said. "I was introduced to Gulshan Books by my father during school days," she added.

Gulshan Books has a rich history. It was established before the partition of the British-ruled India.

"I am the fourth generation in this trade. Back in the day, the books would be published in Lahore before they were marketed here. My great grandfather Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim had a shop in Pattan in north Kashmir," Sheikh Aijaz said.

Pattan, said Ajaz, was the spot where all the vehicles coming from Muzaffarabad would converge. Later his grandfather shifted the shop from Pattan to Chattabal in Srinagar. In the summer capital, the Sheikhs opened two more shops.

"My father and uncle joined the business back then as we established one more shop in Maharaj Gunj area of downtown in Srinagar," he said. Their publication, at that time, was named Sheikh Mohammad Usman and Sons.

It was in the 1970s that the Gulshan Books division - which started publishing English books - came into being. "Since Gulshan is an identity of Kashmir, so we named it the same. There is no story or incident related to the name of our store," Aijaz revealed. 'Gulshan' is the Urdu word for 'garden' and the reference is apt given that the valley of Kashmir is renowned world over for its

scenic beauty.

It was this shop that catered to the Persian and Urdu loving readers of Kashmir before the partition. "We have published many books in Persian in the past," said Aijaz. "In the 1990s, however, we focused on Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Sufism," he said. The books then published mainly focused on history, tourism, culture and education of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. This despite a raging conflict making headlines across the world. "In the 70s and 80s, we would publish general books like, a book on world economy or history of English literature, or something on the economic botany of India or the world etc. Then we aimed at publishing books about our region, as we thought, for stuff like botany and such, there was a whole world to do it," he explained.

Not only has the house published thousands of books on Kashmir but it has also been a platform for writers who would later earn a name for themselves. "We have published books by Professor Fida Mohammad Hasnain, ZG Mohammad and many others," said Aijaz.

Gulshan Books has also produced dozens of writers in Kashmir thanks to its publication. The store has been a favourite spot for dignitaries who make sure they visit it every now and then. Among those who frequented the store was former governor of Jammu and Kashmir N N Vohra. "Karan Singh would visit the book store whenever he was in Kashmir, so would his son," said Aijaz. Noted historian and writer Ramachandra Guha expressed his admiration for the bookshop in 2015. Writing for Hindustan Times, Guha said: "This is Gulshan, sited on Residency Road in Srinagar. Visiting the store earlier this year, I was both charmed and impressed. It is spacious, and has a great deal of light. The books are tastefully arranged; in the shop-windows, on shelves, and on the floor in the middle of the store, around which one can walk while browsing." In the article 'The enduring charm of independent bookstores', Guha further wrote: "I spent a fulfilling hour-and-a-half at Gulshan, following which I bought a new bag on the street outside, since the suitcase I had brought from Bangalore had no space left."

He further said that the shop had many books on history, religion, and politics in Kashmir, these printed in English



The baton has passed on to Sheikh Ajaz (above) via three generations and his two sons are all set to take the legacy forward.

as well as Urdu. "But it also had a decent selection of more general books. I bought some books on Kashmir, an autobiography of a Delhi publisher, a book on the prison days of the police officer-turned rebel Simranjit Singh Mann—all for myself, as well as a superb illustrated history of modern design (published by Flammarion) for my wife."

Swept off his feet by the book store's charm, Guha concluded with a telling compliment: "Old and favourite bookstores fade away or die. But new ones must arise to take their place. To prospective owners of independent bookstores, may I offer the Gulshan model; a representative selection of the best books on the city and state the store is located in, these printed in English and the vernacular, with this local patriotism complemented by books of quality on India and the world."

Amid much fanfare, the Gulshan book store opened one more branch in 2016. The shop, nestled at Nehru Park of Dal Lake, was unique as it had an enchanting surrounding: a lake, its houseboats and the mighty Zabarwan mountain range.

With over 80,000 books, the shop was a must-visit for bookworms. Soon it made its way into the Limca Book of Records for having more than 80,000 books and being the only library-bookshop located on an island in India. "It was a proud moment for Kashmir," said Aijaz. Former BBC journalist Andrew Whitehead, who has extensively reported on Kashmir, after visiting the bookstore in 2017 wrote on his website that it is "one of the best bookshops not simply in Kashmir (no, there's not a lot of competition) but in South Asia."

And rightly so, as the place was a book lover's delight. Here you would find yourself surrounded by thousands of books amidst the thrill of Dal Lake. The reader had access to a reading-room café, a reader's corner with a view of the lake, moving Shikaras, colourful houseboats, and the city fort. The bookshop had otherwise out-of-print books

Having made it to the Limca Book of Records for having more than 80,000 books and being the only library-bookshop located on an island in India, Gulshan Books is a model bookstore.

on Kashmir, travelogues on Kashmir written by the British travelers, some of them three centuries old. The Dal lake branch was opened after the devastating floods of 2014 that caused losses worth billions of dollars in Kashmir. Gulshan Books was affected too. Aijaz said that the water had reached the first floor of the store. "We suffered losses worth millions, but unfortunately no one in the government helped us. It was God's mercy alone that we were able to resume and open one iconic branch in the middle of Dal Lake," he said.

It was he who had approached the then chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed with the idea of having a bookshop at Nehru Park on Dal Lake. Mufti readily agreed. In 2016, after its inauguration, Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti herself visited the bookstore.

Earlier this year, the shop was closed by the government and the contract was not extended to the bookstore located at the second storey of the Jammu and Kashmir Tourist Corporation building in Nehru Park Island. "We asked them to grant us another few years, but they did not agree. Earlier they had granted us a five-year contract which was extended by one year. But this time they did not," Ajaz said.

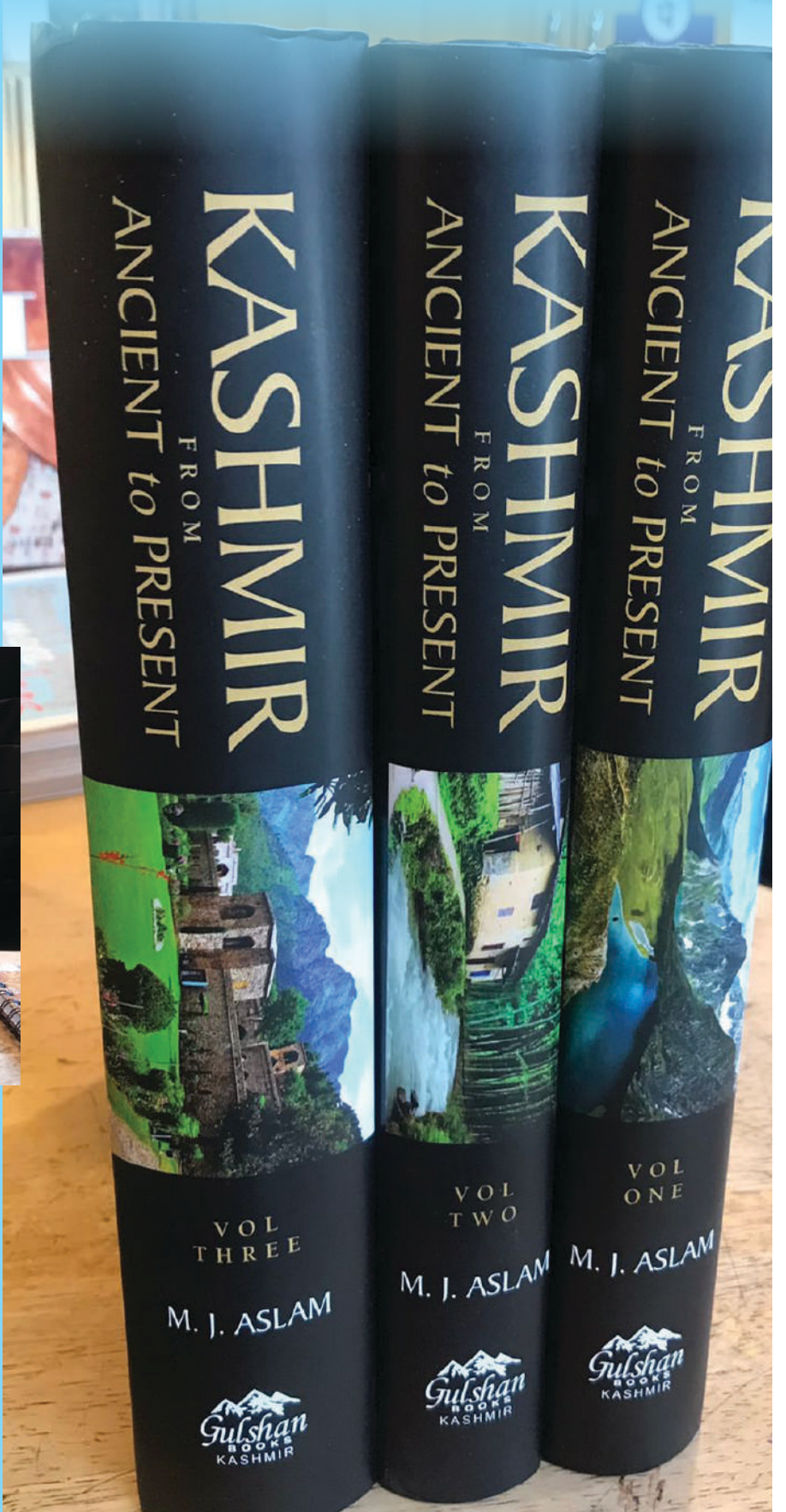
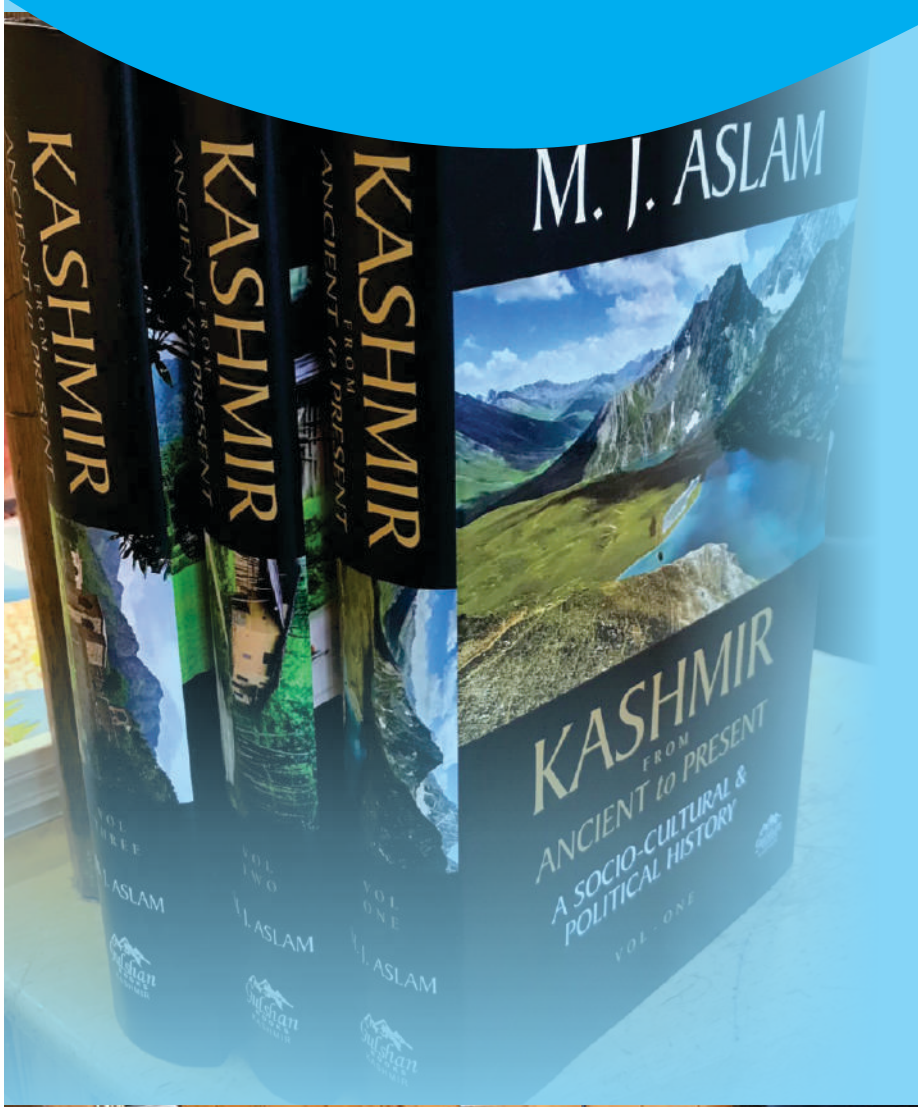
While there are many challenges that the publication has faced, it continues to flourish as was evident in the opening of one more shop at the Srinagar airport. Gulshan Books has a branch in Ladakh as well. Ladakh was a part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and is now an independent union territory.

"We overcame floods, then the (challenge of) online market and we will overcome the closure of the Nehru Park store too," said a determined Ajaz.

And to make inroads into the online marketing, he said the publication is planning to venture into PDF formatting of books. The proverbial sky is the limit for this exemplary chain of bookstores.

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The Beautiful Surprises that a Challenging Trek Throws

Yinderser is a trekker's paradise that every alpine explorer would appreciate.



SHAHNAWAZ KHANDAY

On a sultry July afternoon, I sat with my friends and colleagues in the canteen of our workplace flirting with the idea of visiting Yinderser- a rarely explored alpine tarn located high up in the Astanmarg meadow of Pir Panjals in Kulgam district. I had been 'visiting' this place for some months, albeit on Google Earth, trying to find the easiest, shortest but not entirely unchallenging trail. And it was not long before we found ourselves packing up for a day trip to this relatively lesser known and still lesser explored Yindersar/Indersar alpine lake on July 28, 2020.

Yindersar is an alpine lake located atop Astanmarg - an expansive meadow at an altitude of 12800 ft.

Contrary to what I had surmised from the Google Earth, the trek proved to be an exceptionally arduous one. The first portion of the trek, from Aherbal to Kongwattan (7 kms approx.), as always, was completed playfully. We set off for Kongwattan at around 7:20 am from Gurwattan, Aherbal and reached Kongwattan at around 9 am. Once we were at the far end of Kongwattan meadow, where the trail head of Astanmarg is located, the climb started to get difficult with each step we took. Astanmarg rises quite sharply and suddenly several thousand feet (nearly 5000 ft.) from Kongwattan.

There is no proper trail to the top of the mountain from Kongwattan side. As such we were forced to trek up the nullah that offers a relatively easy way to reach the top of Astanmarg. We had some friends who were on their maiden trip to such high altitude locations. They had to face such a hard climb on their first trip but, kudos to their determination, they climbed on and on recuperating with frequent rests after every few minutes though! The rocks in the nullah provided the footholds for us as we inched higher and higher. We might have climbed some 1500 feet fathoming an end to the torture of pushing up against the gravity when suddenly we found ourselves looking at a steeper ridge. We had to take a detour of a couple of miles eastward to reach the top from a less steep shoulder with less scree. It consumed another two precious hours and drained more energy. Still we lumbered on. The group heaved a sigh a relief on reaching the top of As-



tanmarg at around 1:45 pm. But wait, it wasn't the top. It wasn't long before we realized that the point we had arrived at was only a plain that rested below another shoulder - which indeed wasn't apparently as steep as the one we had just overcome with great difficulty.

We decided to take lunch and give our bodies the much-needed rest. While having lunch, I could see that most of the co-trekkers were in no mood to go further as the difficult terrain had taken a toll on their resolve and all they wanted to do was doze off. After lunch, and some of us saying our afternoon prayers, it took a lot of cajoling and coaxing to convince two of my friends, Nayeem and Bilal, to get up and get going. Notwithstanding my persuasions, four of our co-trekkers decided to call it a day then and there, and rightly so, as we later realized the destination was still faraway.

It was from there that Nayeem, Bilal and I, summoning our last ounce of energy, decided that there was no going back without seeing Yindersar. It took us a good two hours, climbing shoulder after shoulder, moderate ones though, to finally find ourselves in a meadow which overlooks Kongwattan and Sekijan meadows to the north, a savage rock wall to the southwest with majestic Kousarnag located behind it and mighty

peaks of Bramsakli to its southeast. It was here that I, aided by a Google Earth screen recording, sensed that we were not far away from Yindersar. Trekking up the final shoulder to the west of the meadow, we savoured the first glimpse of Yindersar at around 4:40 pm, visible through a blanket of clouds which grew darker within seconds as we had to take out our rain gear.

It was raining heavily even before we could get to the banks of Yindersar. We nevertheless got nearer and touched the shores of the lake whose serene waters soothed our eyes and souls. As often happens in mountains, the clouds took only a few minutes to go away and allowed us to lose ourselves to the mysterious beauty of the tarn. We clicked some photos and shot some videos as souvenirs. The inexpressible joy and satisfaction of reaching the destination after braving all the odds cannot be articulated enough. Mindful of the length and difficulty of the trail down the mountain and unpredictable nature of the weather at such altitudes, we beat a hasty retreat at around 5:20 pm. On our way back, we chose to climb down via a nullah to the northwest of Astanmarg which would take us to the Kousarnag trail culminating at Sekijan. The trail overlooks the Sekijan-Mahinag trail offering some unprecedented and fasci-

The inexpressible joy and satisfaction of reaching the destination after braving all the odds cannot be articulated enough. Mindful of the length and difficulty of the trail down the mountain and the unpredictable nature of the weather at such altitudes, we beat a hasty retreat at around 5:20 pm.

nating viewpoints of Mahinag.

We were chased by a Bakerwal dog on a steep ridge. Our hiking poles came in handy to ward off the animal who relentlessly charged at us for quite some distance. We had to do a fair bit of rock climbing/ descending sans any equipment to get down to the base of the mountain and set ourselves on the proper trail. After spending an hour or so, literally on the edge, we found ourselves, much to our relief, close to the track which leads to Kongwattan. In an hour or so from here we almost ran to Kongwattan and onwards to Aharbal where we reunited with our friends at a wayside tea stall. It was truly one of the most arduous treks I have personally undertaken thus far. It threw up challenges and sprung beautiful surprises all through the trail.

Shahnawaz Khanday is assistant professor with J&K's Department of Higher Education and an avid trekker who also loves to read and travel.

Beware of Cybercriminals

Ignorance about the risks in digital transactions is playing a major role in the surge in digital frauds.



SAJJAD BAZAZ

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the way people now take care of their health. Today we observe a dramatic change in their behavior to thwart another onslaught of the virus. To put it simply, people are observing healthcare precautions such as use of face masks, social distancing and frequent hand-washing to neutralize the impact of the virus.

However, there is another viral danger which has already enveloped the people at large scale and they need to combat it too. Despite being an extreme health emergency, the Covid-19 adversely impacted the global economy never seen before in the past one century. The pandemic-induced lockdowns forced people to remain indoors for months together and brought down the engine of economic activities to a grinding halt. Among other things, it prevented physical financial transactions and forced people to bank upon digital transactions. We saw millions of consumers first time boarding the online digital platforms to conduct their routine financial transactions. Of course, this transition of consumers from physical to digital medium falls in line with the country's objective of Digital India mission, but at the same time, it has provided a green pasture to cyber criminals to graze upon and commit financial frauds. In fact, this is the reason for a massive surge in cybercrimes where gullible consumers have been defrauded through various modes such as malicious website domains, phishing, vishing, malware attacks etc.

In other words, identity theft, hacks, the data breaches, SIM swaps, vishing/phishing links, lottery, etc., including fake loan websites and digital apps are part of our new normal.

Cybercrime is nothing new. But the intensity and virulence of cybercrime during the past two years should be a wake-up call for all of us. While we go to great lengths to protect our physical health from the Corona virus, we can't afford to neglect digital health by ignoring the risks and dangers of today's threats.

To be precise, cybercrime is an invisible virus and has not only flourished but is also spreading rapidly amid chaos and uncertainty unleashed by the two years of pandemic. Notably, ignorance about the risks in digital transactions is playing a major role in the surge in digital frauds. So, the problem is that too few people are aware of just how vulnerable they are to its spread. And that is so alarming.

Since, Covid-induced lockdowns pushed the volume of digital transactions to unprecedented heights, which, of course, improved the ease of doing financial transactions, the cyber criminals simultaneously worked (and continue to work) to find new ways to swindle the gullible bank customers of their monies. Fraudsters have been innovating new mechanisms to not only

commit financial frauds but also get the gullible public entangled into the legal trap, mostly unwittingly, as part of the crime.

Some time back, three Indian students in Singapore were sentenced to prison for participating in a transnational money mule syndicate that was perpetrating 'tech support scams'. The trio, according to media reports quoting Singapore police officials, received cash in their bank accounts on behalf of the fraudsters. Later they used to transfer the amount to the fraudsters. Precisely, they were involved in a money laundering scheme in which participants were allowed access to their bank accounts to receive cash. They had allowed their bank accounts to be used against 2% commission of the monies received.

It's not only in foreign transactions that money mules operate, the menace is rampant within the country where account holders are getting money deposited in their accounts through unknown persons (fraudsters). Later the account holders are approached by the fraudsters to seek withdrawal of the money. In majority of such cases, the account holders are not paid any commission, but are threatened of consequences, even police action for money laundering, if the account holder refuses to han-

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dover the money.

The unprecedented exponential growth of digital transactions during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a blessing for the cyber criminals. Millions of new users, who were not having even an iota of understanding about the world of internet, boarded the digital platforms to conduct electronic transactions. The fraudsters left no stone unturned to defraud these newbies.

Today we witness a massive surge in cyber frauds. A report by Deloitte India says banking frauds in India are set to increase in the next two years. Deloitte India conducted the study through compliance officers and senior management of 70 banks of all types and 78 per cent of the banks believe that banking fraud will increase in the next two years.

The rising cyber frauds in the banking sector, whether due to customers' own negligence or banks' carelessness, has a direct bearing on the reputation of the banks. Notably, a fraud committed through a bank account immediately hits the customer's confidence and this

invokes not only reputational risk but also operational risk and business risk for the banks.

Since banks cannot afford to stop their customers from using digital channels for conducting their financial transactions, the only way for them is to put in place a sound cyber security system so that fraudsters are unable to penetrate into the customers' accounts.

In other words, the banks and financial institutions have a prime responsibility of creating appropriate tailor-made defence mechanisms against acts of cybercrime. An expert in the fight against cybercrime stresses the need for business organizations like banks to conduct regular threat analyses and position its defences accordingly. The reports can be used to build increased awareness about risk factors not only among the staff but also among the public.

However, at the same time, the bank customers have to understand that the safety of digital transactions lies in their own hands. Before boarding the digital platform and conducting electronic transactions, they need to understand the security aspect of such transactions. The basic rule for them is not to share their account details such as password, PIN etc. with any person, even with

their bank officials. A bank never asks its customers to share PIN or password.

Meanwhile, in view of the growing menace of cyber criminals, the RBI's booklet BE(A)WARE has highlighted the common modus operandi used by fraudsters and precautions to be taken while carrying out various financial transactions. The booklet among other things elaborates on safeguards against commonly used fraudulent techniques, such as, SIM swaps, vishing/phishing links, lottery, etc., including fake loan websites and digital apps.

One of the interesting techniques of committing frauds is money mules.

A money mule is someone who transfers or moves illegally acquired money on behalf of someone else. Actually, the cyber criminals use the bank account of account holders to transfer ill-gotten money to remain unidentified. In other words, these gullible account holders are money mules which help the criminals to remain untraced for the crime victims and criminals, as it becomes harder for police or any in-

vestigating agency to accurately trace the money trails. A person can become a money mule willingly against some profit. However, it has been observed that most of the money mules are unaware about the crime till the fraudsters get trapped.

So think, if you are moving money at the behest of some other person, you may be serving as a money mule.

The modus operandi adopted by the cyber criminals to take money mules on board in their criminal acts is explained thus:

1. Fraudsters contact customers via emails, social media, etc., and convince them to receive money into their bank accounts (money mule), in exchange for attractive commissions.
2. The money mule is then directed to transfer the money to another money mule's account, starting a chain that ultimately results in the money getting transferred to the fraudster's account.
3. Alternatively, the fraudster may direct the money mule to withdraw cash and hand it over to someone.
4. When such frauds are reported, the money mule becomes the target of police investigation for money laundering.

How can a bank account holder protect himself? The basic thing is not to share the details of your bank account, especially to a stranger. There is every possibility that you may be lured to share the account details, but don't succumb to the greed.

Following precautions, listed by the apex bank in its recent booklet, need to be noted if you don't want to get trapped as a money mule:

1. Do not allow others to use your account to receive or transfer money for a fee / payment.
2. Do not respond to emails asking for your bank account details.
3. Do not get carried away by attractive offers / commissions and give consent to receive unauthorised money or withdraw cash and give it out for a handsome fee.

Remember, It is illegal to be a money mule and it warrants punishment. Even if you aren't aware of being used as a money mule, you would be held responsible for a crime.

Sajjad Bazaz heads Internal Communication & Knowledge management Department of Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd. The views expressed are his own and, not the institution he works for.

How the Hindu Right Created 'Land Jihad' Spectre to Demonize Muslims in J&K

The inside story of how a scam involving political leaders and government officials was packaged as 'land jihad'.

STAFF REPORTER

On April 5, 2022, a posse of some influential businessmen from Srinagar visited New Delhi as the emissaries of 'Naya Kashmir'. With the Lieutenant Governor's office, Raj Bhavan, inviting capitalists from Dubai to invest in Kashmir, this select group of natives - apparently unnerved by the tightening noose - had mellowed down their terms and conditions. After all, they had started sensing they were living in BJP's 'Naya Kashmir' that came into being on August 5, 2019 after the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A and the downgrading of the state into two union territories.

The delegation gifted Prime Minister Narendra Modi a Kashmiri shawl.

The group led by prominent businessman and hotelier, Mushtaq Chaya, took up the issues of land lease, tourism and, most importantly, the Roshni Act, with the Prime Minister.

"Sir," read the memorandum submitted by Chaya to the Prime Minister, "in Jammu and Kashmir under the J&K Vesting of Ownership Act, 2001 & SRO 64 issued on 5th March, 2007, popularly known as Roshni, the legal occupants of the land on lease were asked to deposit the cost of the land evaluated by the Government Authorities. Despite depositing the cost and transfer of proprietary rights in most of the cases, the Hon'ble High Court of UT of J&K and Ladakh has cancelled this Act altogether. The matter is now subjudice in the Hon'ble High Court & Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. This has adversely affected the business of the legal occupants who have already raised business establishments on this land. This is a long standing issue and we request your goodself to constitute a high level Committee headed by a retired High Court/or Supreme Court Judge who would identify the genuine cases for regularization as is in vogue in the entire country."

The footnote of the memorandum states: "Sir, we are highly thankful for

the efforts you are taking to bring a new wave of development in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and we are with you."

But barely two and half months later, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raided the residence of one of the delegates in Srinagar.

The investigators conducted searches on the premises of prominent businessman Showkat Chowdhary of Hat-trick food chain after registering a case against him and some others over the Roshni land allocation scam.

On June 15, 2022, four days before the raid, a case was registered against Chowdhary and retired IAS officers Mehboob Iqbal, a former Kashmir Divisional Commissioner, and Sheikh Ejaz Iqbal, a former Srinagar Deputy Commissioner.

The CBI said that Chowdhary had been declared unauthorised occupant of a plot under the Roshni Act and was given the ownership of eight marlas of land for Rs 14.40 lakh in violation of the provisions of the Act.

It is alleged that the land measuring four kanals in the Estate Nursing Garh, Tehsil Srinagar, was leased out to one Mehboob Beigh and Mumtaaz Afzal Beigh in 1977 by the Jammu and Kashmir government and the lease agreement was coming to an end in 2020.

But the duo had handed over eight marlas out of total four kanals of land to Chowdhary by virtue of irrevocable Power of Attorney in 2001. "Chowdhary later applied for conferment of ownership rights under the Roshni Act vide application dated February 24, 2004," the FIR reads.

Between the shawl diplomacy and the Srinagar raid, not many understood a new twist in the tale: Chaudhary who had sought PM's intervention in Roshni ended up in the CBI net himself.

Those having a nose for statecraft argue that CBI's Srinagar raid wasn't abrupt. They call a Jammu-based judicial campaigner as a sparkplug behind the high-profile case.

Interestingly, a week before Chow-

dhary would be grilled by the central investigative agency, Advocate Sheikh Shakeel Ahmed's Right to Information (RTI) had exposed the CBI's soft-pedaling on the probe.

Shakeel's RTI revealed that the CBI had registered only 18 FIRs since October 2020 when it overtook the investigations and filed charge-sheets in just two cases.

But it wasn't the first time that the Jammu-based advocate had stirred up something like this. fiance

In August 2021, his RTI exposé had rattled the Bhartiya Janta Party's state wing. Shakeel's advocacy named former deputy chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir and senior BJP leader Kavinder Gupta as an illegal occupant of state land from 2010 till 2017.

Notably, Gupta was at the forefront of raising the 'land jihad' bogey over the Roshni scheme. In fact, ahead of DDC polls in November 2020, he described the government action on the Roshni Act as a 'surgical strike' against the corrupt who "usurped priceless chunks of state land at dirt-cheap rates."

Rubbishing the 'land jihad' theory, noted political analyst from Jammu, Zafar Chaudhary described the campaign as a decade-old delusional drama to demonize Muslims. "It's a farcical claim, which was even turned down by the list of beneficiaries published on government websites," he said.

"Less than 3 percent Muslims were beneficiaries in Jammu, which itself pricks the balloon of this so-called

land jihad."

Interestingly, only six Muslim names from Jammu district have figured on the list of the beneficiaries that has more than 125 non-Muslim names on it.

Clearly, BJP's 'land-jihad' bogey in J&K has backfired with its own members accused of encroaching upon the state land. Among the big guns on the list are late Shiv Charan Gupta, Anil Gupta (son of Chaman Lal Gupta, a former BJP state president and minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee government), father of Ranbir Singh Pathania, among others.

"Since several beneficiaries are from BJP itself, the party is now quietly shifting its position on the Roshni scheme," Imran Nabi Dar, NC spokesperson, said.

BJP's sudden U-turn is a move to save the skin of its own people, said Harsh Dev Singh, a veteran Jammu leader. "BJP even encroached upon army land for its personal benefits," Singh said. "A big bungalow of a top BJP leader on Jammu's security land is a testimony to the fact."

But despite such glaring facts, a rightwing mouthpiece like Zee News continues to run segments on 'land jihad' in Jammu.

Despite ample evidence and the judgment, the BJP is adamantly stuck to the 'land jihad' theory.

"No one is satisfied with the judgment," said Sunil Sethi, JK BJP's spokesperson. "Our political stand is clear. People who were in legal possession of the state land can't be clubbed with the encroachers."

The Roshni Act was introduced



Rubbishing the 'land jihad' theory, noted political analyst from Jammu, Zafar Chaudhary described the campaign as a decade-old delusional drama to demonize Muslims.



Pic: Qazi Irshad

by Dr. Farooq Abdullah government in 2001 to sell the state land at market price to illegal encroachers and use the revenue to generate hydroelectric power in J&K. Hence the name Roshni – light.

The total land regularized under Roshni Act was 3,33,392 kanals in Kashmir division, while it was 5,71,210 kanals in Jammu division.

The Act was later amended in 2005 by the then chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, who made it convenient for the land occupying farmers, who had to just pay a nominal fee of Rs 100 per kanal, for getting documentation in their favour.

The senior Congress leader called it a revolutionary act after the Land to the Tiller Act. “But the fact remains,” says Guftar Ahmed, a political activist from Jammu, “the scheme was misused in the name of poor and needy. Farmers received very small landholding under this scheme.”

So who benefitted from what Azad referred to as “revolutionary act?”

“Of course, the privileged and powerful class,” says comrade Mohammed Yousuf Tarigami of CPI (M). “I have a serious objection against powerful people who have occupied big chunks of land and are using it for commercial purposes. How can large landholdings held by influential people be compared to a small portion of land owned by the impoverished?”

But despite the scheme exploited by the powerful, the campaign was mainly launched to target a particular community. In the face of this vicious campaign, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report serves as an eye-opener.

“Instead of Rs 25,000 crore revenue generation target set by the government,” the 2014 CAG report said, “only Rs 76 crore was collected between 2007 and 2013.”

Investigations into the land scam found that land in Gulmarg had been given to ineligible beneficiaries who did not come up to the criteria set for the land transfer.

In 2018, J & K’s controversial Governor, Satya Pal Malik, repealed the Roshni Act and cancelled all the pending applications seeking transfer of ownership of state land to its occupants.

Then, in October 2020, the J&K High Court set aside the Act “ab initio” cancelling all actions taken under its provision since its inception and ordered a CBI probe.

“In the instant case,” the court observed, “there are allegations of ministers, legislators, bureaucrats, high-ranking government and police officials having encroached upon public lands and having caused orders passed under the Roshni Act in their favour.”

Even after this court verdict, Advocate Shakeel said, some people are accusing Muslim community of ‘land jihad’.

The advocate read out the 547 names identified by the Accountant General of J&K as illegal beneficiaries of the annulled Act.

Among them, he said, are Kashmiri Pandits, Hindus and Sikhs. “Interestingly,” the advocate informs, “people claim Jammu’s demography was being changed under some design, when the majority of applicants belonged to Hindu and Sikh community.”

But these facts hardly matter for the IkkJutt Jammu – a rightwing outfit campaigning for separate statehood for Jammu and further division of Kashmir, one part for Pandits and another for Muslims.

Among the rank-holders and think-tanks of this body are professors, spewing venom against Muslims and their faith. They are popularising the ‘land jihad’ narrative through their growing rightwing social media presence.

“Before this vocal tribe, people never heard words such as land jihad in Jammu’s pluralistic society,” Advocate Shakeel said. “They are playing this communal politics to become heroes. Otherwise, an encroacher is an encroacher, they don’t have any religion.”

But much before the present day discourse and demonization of the Muslim community, the rightwing campaign had started in Jammu. It took off in 2011—the year when a rightwing study circle had commissioned Kashmir study.

That year, Prof. SK Bhalla, then Principal Government Degree College, Mendhar, filed a writ petition against some police officers, politicians and bureaucrats in Jammu for the alleged land grabbing. The academic wanted a special probe to punish the guilty.

The campaign, however, fizzled out during the Omar Abdullah government, before it reared its head again in March 2014.

This time around, a young law student from Kathua replaced Bhalla. He filed a Public Interest Litigation before the J&K High Court against the Roshni Act.

“In the writ petition,” the HC observed, “several serious matters including the unauthorized occupation of a large chunk of land by encroachers have been noticed in several orders.”

In the years to come, this courtroom campaign against some historic schemes and government decisions would make Ankur Sharma a new poster boy of the rightwing activism in Jammu.

This campaign, interestingly, came with a sweeping coronation change in Delhi and the rise of the vocal BJP support in the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir. This was also the time when the Kashmir-based politics had started losing its teeth and ground, while the rightwing forces were increasingly invoking the vision of Jan Sangh fountainhead Syama Prasad Mukherjee, who died in Prime Minister Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah’s prison on June 23, 1953.

“Ankur Sharma was certain about his campaign,” says Arun Mehta, a Jammu-based political observer. “With the rise of BJP in the Centre, he was trying to be the vocal rightwing activist in Jammu. Playing by the Sangh rulebook and

When the Act was passed, some parties in Jammu tried to communalize it by calling it ‘land-jihad’, but when the list came out, it consisted names of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Even in the HC judgment, there is no mention that more land was given to Muslims.

belief, he popularized the notion of land jihad in the name of Roshni scheme.”

But was it a ‘land jihad’?

“Our allegation that state land was given to Muslims to change the demography of Jammu has been substantiated by the records produced before the High Court,” Ankur Sharma said.

“Around 90 percent of the beneficiaries given land in Jammu under the Roshni Act were likely to be Muslims. So, clearly, the scheme was aimed at bringing about a demographic change in the Hindu-majority Jammu by triggering a land jihad.”

However, a prominent Muslim BJP state member says Sharma’s claims and campaign are grossly misleading.

“It’s not a land jihad but a scam involving political leaders and government officials,” said Chowdhary Mushtaq Inqilabi, State Vice President BJP Tribal unit Jammu and Kashmir.

“There are several Hindus also involved in the scam, including former DGP Kuldeep Khoda, former ministers Raman Bhalla, Tara Chand, Surinder Singh Shingari, among others. Some people have vested interests and some who want to emerge through this are calling this land jihad.”

Even the 64-page HC judgment on the Roshni Act, said Advocate Shakeel, is against the land mafia and it doesn’t allude to anything that Sharma claims.

“But then people will still play communal politics over it despite the fact that Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs equally benefitted from the act,” he said.

In fact, the word jihad is misfit in Jammu’s multicultural society, said Dr. Mulkhraj Bhamagi, a social activist from Jammu. “This campaign is an act to polarize the people of J&K,” he said. “People are trying to build their vote bank by using such narrative.”

At the end of the day, there will be an impact on poor people having small landholdings under the Act, believes Altaf Husnain Janjua, executive editor of the Urdu daily Udaan.

“This bogey of land jihad is nothing new,” Janjua said. “When the Act was passed, some parties in Jammu tried to communalize it by calling it ‘land-jihad’, but when the list came out, it consisted names of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Even in the HC judgment, there is no mention that more land was given to Muslims.”



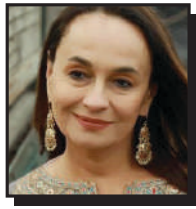
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The Reluctant 'Urban Poor'

What is it about our culture today that makes us unable to admit that we are who we are?



SONI RAZDAN

An actor at the BEEB (slang for BBC) was chatting with me while I was on one of my walk-on-part episodes. "If you have gotten a place at Guildhall", he said, "on no account must you give it up. Write to all the charities you can find to get a grant. Do anything, part time jobs, anything, but do not give up that place."

A chap after my own heart! That was all the advice I ever needed. I found the names of some three hundred organizations that gave grants and so on to deserving candidates. After writing to about fifty and getting, not surprisingly, negative replies, I gave that up. Why would anyone want to fund my selfish dream of being an actress anyway? After all I wasn't exactly going to save any lives.

So, one step at a time. I worked as an auxiliary nurse in the local hospital during my holidays, because the pay was great! My job was to do things like empty bedpans and clean the toilets and the floors, a lot of floors! I did it all with a smile on my face, because each floor I cleaned took me closer to my drama school. I made friends with the patients in the geriatric ward where I was stationed. I remember one woman lying there. She was beautiful. White with black hair, and always had her makeup done. I still remember the colour of her lipstick - a lovely deep pink. She wasn't very old either I would imagine. Perhaps not even fifty. But she couldn't move much because she was suffering from muscular sclerosis. She would lie there with an expression on her face that I, to this day, cannot forget. It was both accepting of her fate and saddened by it at the same time.

One day I went to work and she wasn't there. That made me cry. She had passed away the previous night.

Well, I managed to make enough money for my first term fees - probably 300 pounds. I can't remember too clearly now.

I also managed to secure a room at the Indian Students Hostel on Guilford Street near Russell Square. But I had no funds to pay for that - twelve pounds a week, including dinner and breakfast. Even for those days, that was a cheap

deal. Or, for my food and transport and daily expenses. What to do now?

A very good friend of mine offered to drive down with me to London and help me look for a weekend job as an auxiliary nurse so that would then pay for my week's rent and food. We did that then. Slept in his car while we did so.

Advertisements

I remember it was a weekend. We drove around from hospital to hospital. No one wanted an auxiliary nurse for the weekend. Dispirited and disheartened, and completely at a loss for what to do, we were parked outside a hospital in Knightsbridge or somewhere in that area. It was Sunday evening and the streets were empty and depressing as they usually are on a Sunday evening in London. We were debating whether or not to bother going in. Having nothing to lose, we decided that this would be the last one we tried. And one would have to find some other kind of job. That's all!

Well... After meeting with the head matron, she hired me on the spot, starting next Saturday. And voila! Just like that I was in business again.

Let me tell you, the Indian Students Hostel was no picnic. I entered the bowls of the earth if that was possible. A crumbling edifice crawling with rats the size of cats. I kid you not! The interior was shabby and dismal. The furniture belonged to another era and should have been burned for firewood. But it was a

haven for many Indian Students in those days including myself. And we all became such good friends that thankfully we are all still in touch today. One of our 'inmates' was Kaushik Basu, who is the current Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank among other things. Alka, his wife, was also living there whilst studying. And many more such eminent personalities that managed to survive the hostel.

We had many a memorable evening watching TV together. All birthdays were celebrated with us cooking our fave *ghar ka khana* dishes in a kitchen that was the size of a broom cupboard and looked even worse. But we had the most amazing fun and were bonded in a home away from home. The only part I could not handle really was the rats that scraped and gnawed away through my walls at night, keeping me awake. My skin would crawl and I would lie awake listening to the sounds of them dancing around in my room. And the next day I would be at the local hardware shop buying putty to block up the holes that they came through. It was an endless losing battle, I have to say.

So I started at my drama school, the hostel and the hospital all at the same time.

Drama school was terribly exciting, full of young hopefuls like me who had big dreams and stars in their eyes. It was also full of incredible talent, and that was what made it really special. The

Guildhall School of Music and Drama is an institution by itself and in those days was in a lovely little lane off the embankment in the Blackfriars area, in a huge old stone building whose very walls made one think of a London long gone, but yet present in so many of the wonderful buildings that they have preserved so well. I couldn't say the same for my hostel unfortunately. That came to its rightful end too, and I escaped within an inch of my life, but more about that later!

The first weekend of my hospital duty arrived. I had just finished serving the patients their afternoon tea, when my eyes fell upon the Daily Mail. In it was a photograph of the lovely Olivia Hussey, the star of a recently made film *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by the maverick Franco Zeffirelli. The small piece stated that she was slated to play Mary in Franco's production of *Jesus of Nazareth*, which was going to be shooting soon. Hmm, lucky girl, I thought, and carried on dutifully with my teacups and biscuit operations.

It was the following Wednesday, though I do not remember the date. Nor the year even. It was my third day at Guildhall. We students had assembled in the theatre in the school for some announcements or some prize giving, the details now have been erased from memory. When all that was over, suddenly I froze because the student on the stage was making an announcement.

Home Away from Home

"Will first year student Soni Razdan please go to the office immediately," he boomed. "There awaits some news that might make her a star of stage and screen." Or something to that effect!

I nearly fell off my chair. What on earth was going on? Anyway, I rushed to the office with nervous anticipation. They were waiting for me.

They told me that Franco Zeffirelli wanted to see me. He was at such and such address, and I was to go there immediately. And they were even happy to let me go out of the school, a rule that was absolutely not to be broken. My God! How did Zeffirelli even know I existed? And why on earth did he want to see me of all people? (*to be continued*)

Born to Kashmiri Pandit father and British-German mother, Soni Razdan is an actor who has worked in notable films like Saransh, Raazi, No Fathers in Kashmir, Daddy and Page 3.

One of the inmates was Kaushik Basu, who is the current Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank among other things. Alka, his wife, was also living there whilst studying. And many more such eminent personalities that managed to survive the hostel.

Crimson Spring is a Powerful Piece of Fiction

In the deftly woven imagery, the author paints with potent words the horrifying atrocity that unleashed in the Jallianwalla Bagh more than a hundred years ago.



LILY SWARN

On April 13, 1919, around twenty five thousand unarmed Indians had gathered in Jallianwalla Bagh, Amritsar. There were several children amidst the crowd listening to speakers denounce the inequities of the Rowlatt Act, which had been imposed on the country by the British. Many of them were relaxing and catching up with friends. Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer entered the Bagh with a detachment of soldiers a bit after 5 in the evening. Without warning the crowd to disperse, Dyer ordered his troops to open fire. Hundreds died and hundreds more were injured as, at least, 1650 rounds were fired.

In his latest book, set against the epic backdrop of India's freedom struggle, World War - I and the Ghadar Movement, former diplomat and author Navtej Sarna has vividly brought alive the brutal killing of the ill-fated humans.

Sporting a sky blue turban, Sarna was in Chandigarh's UT Guest House for the release of *Crimson Spring*. Having served multiple diplomatic assignments for India - Ambassador to the United States and Israel, High Commissioner to the UK, Secretary, Government of India and Foreign Office Spokesperson - Sarna's illustrious literary works include two novels: *The Exile* and *We Weren't Lovers Like That*. This in addition to his works of non-fiction and voluminous translations.

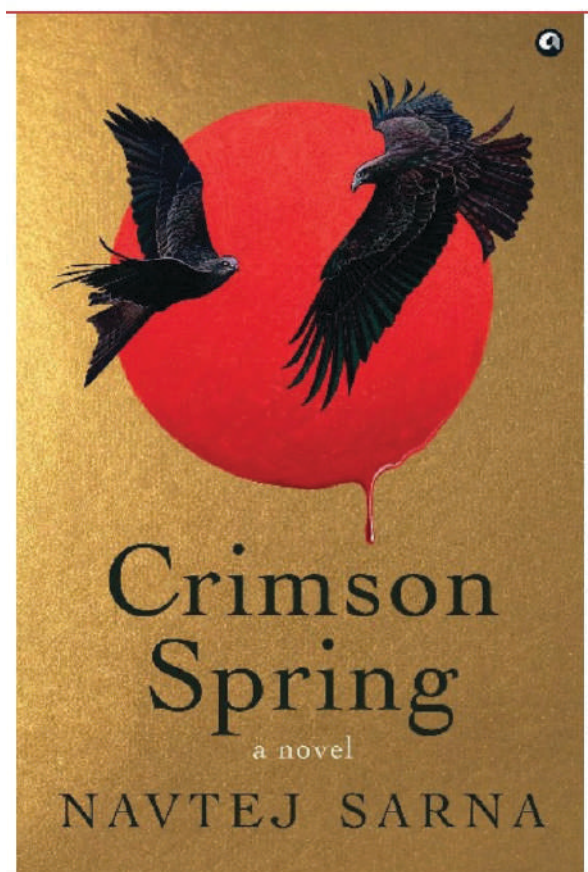
In the deftly woven *Crimson Spring*, Sarna paints with potent words the horrifying atrocity that unleashed in the Jallianwalla Bagh over a hundred years ago. The book begins by a quote from I L Peretz: "A people's memory is history; and as a man without memory, so a people without a history cannot grow wiser, better."

The author has created nine life-like characters in this historical fiction - ordinary people, powerful officials, the guilty and the innocent, Indians and Britons. That day their lives changed forever. *Crimson Spring* is a book that won't leave a reader unshaken or unmoved. The characters of Gurnam Singh Gambhir and Maya Devi are inspired by real life people who gave testimony to the Congress committee.

Maya Devi is based on Rattan Devi who spent the night in the Bagh warding off dogs with a stick. Her account is enough to shake up any one.

At the book release, Sarna mentioned that he relied a lot on the Hunter Committee and the Congress Punjab Enquiry. Perhaps that's why these characters seem very believable as does that of Kirpal Singh. Their stories are lovingly sketched and one is moved by an urge to read the transcripts that helped create these characters. The character of Sergeant Nicholas Williams is based on Williams J. Anderson, Dyer's personal Bodyguard.

The intriguing character of Shaheed Udham



Singh is dexterously fleshed out. He is remembered for assassinating Michael O'Dwyer, the former lieutenant governor of the Punjab in India, on 13 March 1940.

At the book release, Sarna told us that he visited the place in England where Udham Singh was buried. The intricate tapestry of the book shows up the traits of both Dyer and O Dwyer.

Since the massacre took place on Baisakhi day, Sarna has acquainted the reader with the celebration of the harvest festival complete with the cattle fair, the brightly decorated stalls of ornaments, *mithai* and sherbet.

Sarna also discussed with the audience the powerful *mahants* who had taken charge of gurdwaras and the land around as fiefdoms during that era.

Souls of communities hold on to years of turbulence and their cascading effects are far reaching. *Crimson Spring* doesn't merely record a tragic event in history. It chronicles the life and times of the common man too.

Stunningly gripping imagery takes this book to another level altogether: "The sun went down in an ocean of blood and the night that enveloped Jallianwalla Bagh was death itself, visiting each shadow, teasing out and trapping each escaping life. The stray dogs, too, were soon out, sniffing blood and then warm, unresisting flesh. Kirpal felt his vision darken again and again. He needed water. But he carried on, willing himself on, encouraged by the presence of some others who had appeared. Two men were carrying a *charpai* on which they were moving the wounded two or three at a time. A young boy of thirteen or fourteen with a small saffron turban on his head was pouring water into outstretched hands from a huge leather *mushki*, almost as big as himself, on his back. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere and the

Grief runs like mercury in veins even as history unfolds itself alongside the horrors of one of the greatest crimes against humanity brought out in this work of extraordinary power.

mouthful of water that he gave Kirpal revived him like *amrit*." A compelling style of writing that makes one want to read on.

Regarding the facelift and sprucing up of Jallianwalla Bagh, Sarna admitted that "we have lost the sombreness of the memorial." He talked about Auschwitz where thousands of Jews were killed in concentration camps. Folks shouldn't be snacking and taking selfies at a place where the memory of the tragedy should be raising goose flesh.

On being questioned about when and how he thought about writing this book, Sarna said that he had initially begun the jotting and scribbling of the book around a decade ago.

"I had been interested in the Punjab of the 20th century for a long time," said Sarna. A few years prior to the centenary of the massacre, "I decided to write a large novel, not in size but scope, enveloping the emerging historical trends before and after the Jallianwalla Bagh carnage."

Which genre was fun to write - historical or fiction? "You could write any imaginary thing in fiction but you mustn't meddle with historical happenings," said Sarna, smilingly.

He rued the fact that he saw a photograph of Udham Singh in a museum once, except that it wasn't Udham Singh.

A historical nugget that Navtej Sarna shared with the audience was that, though, Edward Harry Dyer, the man responsible for the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre is known as General Dyer, he was actually a colonel who was a temporary Brigadier General at the time of the massacre.

With this book Sarna has succeeded in rattling us out of complacency in the tragic face of occurrences like this. Grief runs like mercury in veins even as history unfolds itself alongside the horrors of one of the greatest crimes against humanity brought out in this work of extraordinary power.

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.

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Asia Cup 22 Overview

Six teams from Asia are going to wrestle for the coveted trophy.



BILAL AHSAN DAR

The T20I Asia Cup 2022 begins on August 27 in the United Arab Emirates with Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) serving as the hosts. The grand finale is scheduled to take place on September 11. The highlight of the tournament would be the August 28 marquee duel between India and Pakistan. If the two sides don't meet again in the finals, that is.

Five teams, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are direct qualifiers for the main event. For the sixth slot, a qualifier tournament is scheduled from 20 - 26 August. Teams from UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuwait are competing for the lone spot.

The teams have been divided into two groups of three each. India and Pakistan will be joined by the qualifying team in Group A. Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are comprising Group B.

Pakistan and India are, of course, the favorites to lift the trophy. However, one can never write off the gritty Sri Lanka, which is a five-time Asia Cup winner. Afghanistan and Bangladesh are the dark horses.

India

The world no.1 T20I team India are also the defending champions and head into the tournament as the most successful side, having won the title seven times.

Blessed with great batting depth, sometimes it becomes difficult for the selectors to decide who to pick and who to drop. A change in guard after the T20I world cup last year saw Rohit Sharma replace Virat Kohli as the captain. The team has shown exceptional results under him. The formula is to go bang-bang from the word go and never let the strike rate plummet even if wickets keep falling. The captain himself takes the charge and players like KL Rahul, Surya Kumar Yadav, Deepak Hooda, Rishab Pant and Hardik Pandya are pretty capable of carrying on the momentum from ball one. It's a pretty formidable lineup with Jadeja coming in at 7 or 8 and fully capable of clearing the fence regularly. Despite Jasprit Bumrah's absence due to injury, the bowling department looks good. Bhuvneshwar Kumar leads the attack and is well supported by some impressive youngsters like Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan. Spin department is well established. Chahal, Jadeja have plenty of experience under their belt and capable

of using the UAE conditions very well.

The return of KL Rahul to the team is a big boost, though Kohli's form is still an issue.

Pakistan

Pakistan has been playing some really good cricket in recent times. This team has remained pretty consistent in contrast to Pakistan's long-held 'unpredictable' tag. Led by the impressive Babar Azam, this team played remarkably well in the T20I world cup last year. The team looks very balanced and some exciting young players alongside the likes of Babar, Rizwan, and Fakhar make them a hard side to beat. However the absence of the likes of Hafeez and Malik makes the middle order look a bit vulnerable. It would be interesting to see how the likes of Khushdil Shah, Asif Ali and Agha Salman who have been impressive so far in their short careers do in the high octane games. Allrounders like Shadab Khan and Mohammad Nawaz give the team a balance and options. Bowling has always been Pakistan's strength and this time too bowling department looked very solid and without any apparent weak links. However at the eleventh hour, Pakistan

experienced. The overall balance of the team is very good, making them strong contenders to win the tournament, despite Afridi's absence.

Sri Lanka

The five-time Asia Cup winners and the second most successful side behind India, Sri Lanka are going through a transitional phase. They have time and again showcased their incredible fighting spirit in desperate times and possess some world-class players in their ranks who can trouble the best of the sides on their day.

The team might appear an inexperienced side on paper, but some of the young players have already made a mark at the highest level. Pathum Nissanka and Danushka Gunathilaka will open the innings. Nissanka has been their in-form player throughout 2022 in the shortest format. He has scored 326 runs in 11 T20Is played so far. He, along with Gunathilaka, will be crucial for Sri Lanka as they will be tasked to provide them with quick-fire starts. Both the openers are in good touch. At 3, Kusal Mendis perfect for Sri Lanka. Mendis has been in great touch. Asalanka at 4 is known for his power-hitting abili-

The team is young and exciting, but the lack of experience in all the departments can hamper the performance in crunch games.

Afghanistan

At the moment, one of the emerging cricketing nations is Afghanistan. It goes without saying that they are eager to establish themselves as a formidable side. In major cricket leagues around the world, a number of Afghan players are steadily developing themselves. Majority of them have already achieved elite cricket status. Players like Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, Najeebullah Zadran and others can win a T20 game on individual brilliance. The team can easily go to the super-four stage and from there on surprise any team on their day. Afghanistan's batting is decent for a T20 format; they play aggressively and have some clean hitters in the side. Zazai should be expected to give them an aggressive start in the powerplay with opening partner Gurbaz. Spin bowling with Rashid, Mujeeb and Nabi is their strength and probably the best spin attack of all teams in the tournament. With UAE normally a spin-friendly venue, one should not be surprised to see Afghanistan doing pretty well in the tournament.

Bangladesh

After the recent disgraceful performance against Zimbabwe, Bangladesh cricket doesn't look in good shape. To set the things in order, BCB announced some serious changes. Shakibul Hassan, despite having some disciplinary issue recently but also being the best player in the side, leads Bangladesh. The Asia Cup squad also marks the return of Mushfiqur Rahim, Sabbir Rahman, Ebadat Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin. Litton Das misses out due to injury.

Senior Pros like Shakibul Hassan and Mushfiqur Rahim will again be the trump cards. It is also reported that Rahim is set to assume the role of an opener, probably because of the absence of Litton Das and since Bangladesh play their league matches against Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, who normally open their bowling with a spinner and Rahim being the best player of spin in the team is to counter the impact. Players like Mahmudullah and Sabbir Rehman will also need to rise to the occasion. In the bowling department Bangladesh has Mustafiz leading the fast bowling attack. Known for his effective off cutters and slower deliveries, he will be supported by the experienced Saifudin and Taskin Ahmad. Like any other subcontinent side, Bangladesh also has some quality spin bowlers in Mehdi Hassan Miraz and the captain himself. Allrounders like Afif hussain and Mehmadullah give team a depth in both batting as well as bowling departments.

To sum up, the team looks pretty balanced and with change in the guard one would expect Bangladesh to come out of the disappointment of Zimbabwe.



suffered a major setback, when Shaheen Shah Afridi was ruled out of the tournament because of a thigh injury. Which means Haris Rauf is the pack leader now, with support from young Naseem Shah and Mohammad Wasim. The trio still makes up a formidable pace force.

Pakistan has an advantage of playing in the UAE conditions more than any other side in the tournament for having had this venue as their home ground for many years in recent times; however one minus factor is, they haven't played that much of T20I cricket after the T20I world cup last year. One might feel their preparation isn't as up to the mark as that of the other teams.

To summarize, the team has a strong bowling attack and a couple of spinners in Shadab and Nawaz. However, in batting, they will heavily rely on the top three: Babar, Rizwan and Fakhar. Middle order is bit fragile and inexpe-

rienced, especially in the last 5 overs. He has been Sri Lanka's 3rd highest run-getter in T20Is this year so far. At 6 and 7, Sri Lanka has got two young and rising all-rounders. Captain Dasun Shanaka walks in at 6. Shanaka, after becoming captain in the white ball formats, has been impressive. From the number 6 position, Shanaka has managed to score 300 plus runs this year in T20Is. He has got the highest batting average among all the Lankan batsmen, scoring at a very high average of 44 this year.

Sri Lanka has always been blessed with some incredibly talented spinners and Maheesh Theekshana is the continuation of that legacy. Chamika Karunaratne will be responsible for leading the pace attack alongside Dushmantha Chameera. Chameera is a lanky fast bowler who can bowl quick, touching 140, and has an effective yorker as well.

Pakistan Visits and the Kashmir Issue - V

Series of excerpts from Not Just Cricket by Pradeep Magazine.

The common opinion among many elderly people was that because India is so big and powerful, it behaves like a bully. Their wish was that it should instead be like an ‘elder brother’ and take care of its weak, estranged ‘younger brother’.

Kashmir: At Home without a Home

It was around that period I started visiting Srinagar more often, finding any pretext, sporting or otherwise, to get my office to send me there for reporting. I was trying to renew my connection with my homeland to make sense of the tragic loss of my roots.

My holiday visits to Kashmir had stopped after 1989 and our family home was abandoned soon after. In this attempt to reconnect with the land of my birth, I was neither bitter nor thirsting for revenge. The same could not be said for many of my relatives, some of whom had left the Valley in the dead of night, fearing for their lives. They had seen several among their community, even their own relatives, killed; when a call for Azadi was made from the loudspeakers of the mosques, a wave of terror would sweep over the Hindus. I heard many stories of Muslim neighbours urging Hindu residents to not leave, though the terror of the militants was such that they could not assure their safety either. In many cases, fleeing Hindus had left their house keys with their neighbours, who had assured them that they would watch over anything left behind. For every story of a hostile neighbourhood there were multiple accounts of friendship and support. It was the killings by the militants that forced the Hindu Kashmiris to flee their homes. What I find interesting is that younger people seem to have more hatred against the Muslims.

There is a strong belief among them that Kashmiri Pandits were butchered on the streets of Srinagar and the locals had joined in these attacks. It is not that older people have a lot of sympathy for Kashmiri Muslims or that they do not blame them for forcing them out, but their level of hatred is far lower. Given a chance they would still want to return to Kashmir and try to recreate the old world where they lived happily side-by-side with Muslims even if they were the ‘other’. My own early childhood impressions from the late fifties and early sixties are more of friendly individual interactions with an underlying tension between the two communities.

During peaceful times, Pandits too saw India as an alien land where the more adventurous would aspire to go for better economic opportunities. Only at the time of crisis did India become a protector that could save us from annihilation. In 1989, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed of Kashmir had been just sworn in as the country’s first Muslim home minister when his daughter Rubaiya was kidnapped by militants. The Indian government released arrested militants in return for her release. Kashmir erupted and thousands poured onto the streets

shouting Azadi slogans.

M. Ishaq Khan, a professor at Kashmir University, had written a book called Kashmir’s Transition to Islam, published in 2002. In the book, he concludes that the majority of Hindus who converted to Islam did so under the influence of Sufism, which had taken root in the eighth century and spread throughout Kashmir by the fourteenth century. Khan argues that the lure of equality for all, regardless of caste or religion, is what attracted the majority of lower-caste Hindus in Kashmir to Islam. He also acknowledges the coercive and even brutal role played by Sultan Sikandar Shah Miri, known as Butshikan (idol-breaker), in the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century in converting Hindus to Islam, but not to the extent that is widely believed and documented.

Khan’s book presents a more benign face of Muslim influence in Kashmir, represented through the Sufi saints whose call for justice, equality and love attracted many Kashmiris. Though no one denies the role these saints played in spreading Islam in Kashmir (and also in the rest of India), many contest the claims that they played a greater role than the sword and brute force in mass Hindu conversions.

I am not a historian, but what had always fascinated me was the fact that Kashmiri Hindus in the Valley comprised only Brahmin Pandits. I remember being told at home and outside that we are the only community in India which does not believe in the caste system and that is the reason why there are no lower castes in our small community, an assertion that glossed over the fact that all the lower castes had converted to Islam.

I was to become aware much later in life that during Ashoka’s time, Kashmir was almost entirely a Buddhist land. How Hinduism and later Islam literally purged the Valley of Buddhism was not the subject of popular folklore in our homes in Kashmir. Instead, we heard the tales of the reign of terror unleashed by Miri as he forcibly converted Hindus to Islam. We were often told that during those terrible days only a few Brahmin families had refused to convert, and all the surviving Hindus in Kashmir were their progeny. In the oral narration of

our history, the lower castes did not exist. Among the historical examples given by Khan is a revered Sufi saint of Kashmir called Nund Rishi, also known as Sheikh Nur-uddin Wali.

Nund Rishi was a follower of another revered Sufi saint of Kashmir by the name of Lal Ded, a Shaivite mystic saint whose *vakh* (verses) were part of everyday life discourse at our homes when I was a child. Poet Ranjit Hoskote, in the introduction to his translation of Lal Ded’s poems in exquisite, simple English prose, I, Lalla, writes: ‘Vitality, given that Kashmir is now almost completely Muslim region, it is instructive to recall that Lalla is regarded as a foundational figure by the Rishi order of Kashmiri Sufism, which was initiated by Nund Rishi or Sheikh Nur-ud-din Wali (1379–1442), seen by many as her spiritual son and heir.’

Lal Ded was also revered by Muslims, while Hindus claim Nund Rishi as one of their own. Nund Rishi’s tomb is at the famous shrine of Charar-e-Sharif. In 1989, when Kashmiris realized that Azadi could be a reality, they came out on the streets in thousands and planned a march to the Charar-e-Sharif Dargah to thank their patron saint for grant-

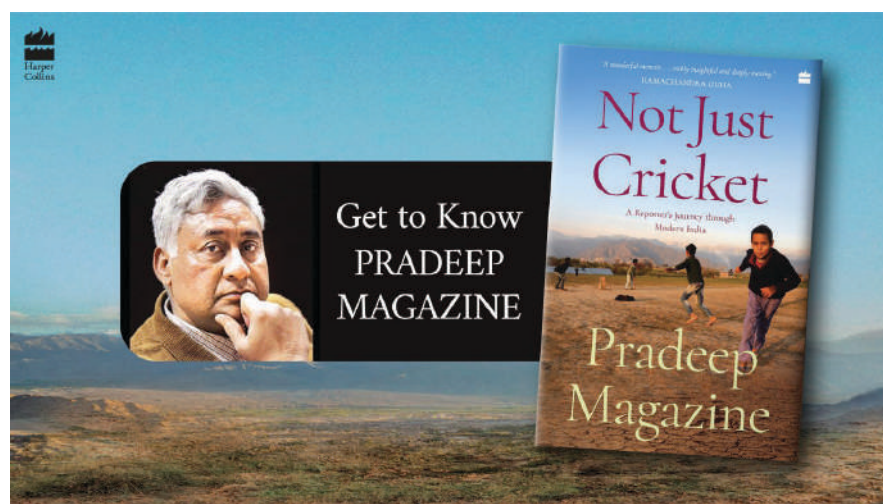
ing ‘deliverance’ from Indian rule. The shrine was razed to the ground in 1995 during a gun battle between Indian security forces and militants who had taken shelter there. It was rebuilt later and I visited the shrine on my trip to Srinagar in 2004. On that trip I also made an appointment with the professor and met him at his home.

I still remember I was nervous as this was only my second visit to a Kashmiri Muslim family. The first had been with my brother and mother to a well-known Muslim business family of Srinagar in the seventies. In the typical Kashmiri tradition of hospitality, they had served us kebabs, which my mother was reluctant to eat, fearing they would be made of beef. After much persuasion and assurance that it was not beef, she did eat them, though I am not sure that she was convinced. It was not that she thought her hosts were lying, but her mind had been conditioned to believe that any meat that Muslims cooked had to be beef.

Khan’s welcoming smile, and the Kashmiri *kahwa* and *takhtech* (tea and sweet bread) he served, put me at ease. In his narration of events, it became clear that the brutal phase of militancy of the early nineties had been terrible for all Kashmiris. He said that the militants started killing anyone who did not cave in to their demands, which was not the Azadi people had hoped for. ‘Most of them came from the lower strata, Wattals and Jamadars (scavengers) and they [the militants] would demand money, even women, from the locals,’ said the professor, ‘and that turned people against them.’ Khan also felt that the exodus of the Pandit community—which was the backbone of bureaucracy, banking and education in the state—led to a collapse of administration and created a lot of problems for the people.

According to him, these were some of the factors that made militancy and the gun culture unacceptable to the common Kashmiri. They were the sufferers now and hankered for respite, which was a reason for the relative peace prevailing at that time in the Valley. Khan told me that there had been a time in the nineties when hardly any shop would open, the streets would be deserted and no one would dare venture out after 4 p.m. Fear, whether of security forces or militants, had turned Srinagar into a ghost town. A cousin of mine, Vijay Bakaya, had served as the principal secretary to the chief minister of Kashmir and later become the chief secretary of the state. He was the divisional commissioner at the time of the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley, and responsible for all the arrangements made in Jammu for the fleeing migrants. Being a Kashmiri Pandit himself, Bakaya was the link between the Pandits and the controversial J&K governor Jagmohan at the time when Pandits were being targeted by militants.

I was neither bitter nor thirsting for revenge. The same could not be said for many of my relatives, some of whom had left the Valley in the dead of night, fearing for their lives.



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