

NEWSLINE

₹ 10 | Vol: 1 | Issue: 22 | Nov 21 — Nov 27, 2022

expression unleashed

GR8: Batting its Way to T20 World Cup

Kashmir's bat manufacturing industry got a shot in the arm when the UAE batsman Junaid Siddiqui smashed the longest six - a colossal 109 metres - of the just concluded T20 world cup with a bat manufactured in Kashmir,



Give the Artists the Space They Need

Noor Mohammad Shah is the new sensation on the internet and his song *Nazneen* is hitting the right chords. Shah's journey from a nondescript village in Kupwara to becoming one of the most famous internet-age Kashmiri artists is simply amazing.

It is unbelievable for the reason that Shah comes from a generation that isn't much versed with the concept and working of the internet and the social media. As a matter of fact, until February last year, he didn't own a smartphone and had a poor working knowledge of Nokia 1100, the basic non-android phone that he was using.

It isn't for the first time that Shah has become a sensation on the internet. He has had many such trysts with limited fame, including the first video in which he is seated against a car tyre on a barren land, which pioneered his rise. Without the internet, Shah, like many Kashmiri artists, would have been lost under the dust of time.

Shah's rise opens a vista for many Kashmiri artists of old and new generations. Many artists who had been waiting for patrons should now understand that the world has changed in the last few years. Internet is a platform that provides parity to the art, among other things, and can also monetize it—at a pretty handsome rate.

Kashmir's folk arts and artists remained

It is incumbent upon the administration to allow spaces to exist where art and artists can explore their talent. These spaces should be allowed without the interference with the content, for such an attempt would be a great disservice to Kashmiri art and artists. Artists need a space to think, discuss and create content.

observed due to their over-reliance on the government-funded media platforms like Doordarshan and Radio Kashmir, which, understandably, have limited space to accommodate them all. Maybe the best or the well-connected got in, but definitely not all could have made it.

This limited space became a reason that Kashmir's folk art and artists started to look for options that would provide them a live-

to allow spaces to exist where art and artists can explore their talent. These spaces should be allowed without the interference with the content, for such an attempt would be a great disservice to Kashmiri art and artists.

Artists need space to think, discuss and create content. If such spaces are encroached upon by political entities or bureaucracy with their limited knowledge and understanding, then art no longer remains art.

It isn't for the first time that Shah has become a sensation on the internet. He has had many such trysts with limited fame, including the first video in which he is seated against a car tyre on a barren land, which pioneered his rise. Without the internet, Shah, like many Kashmiri artists, would have been lost under the dust of time.

lihood. As the numbers dwindled, so did the competition and urge to create and innovate. All the renditions sounded the same and all the dramas appeared dull and monotonous.

In the fast changing world, while art was driven by innovation, Kashmir's folk landscape started falling apart.

With the introduction of the internet and its deep penetration across the length and breadth of the Kashmir valley, a new talent has emerged that is not dependent on the patronage of a limited few.

From young to old, the internet has given a platform to everyone. From Yawar Abdal to Mohammad Muneem, from Ayaan Sajad of *Bedard* fame to Noor Mohammad Shah, the internet is becoming a host to Kashmiri artists - no matter what their background, age or education is.

Kashmir is a fertile ground for talent. What was needed was a platform.

Kashmir's folk art and artists need to explore the amazing world of internet, which would not only provide them with a platform but also monetize their art and talent.

It is incumbent upon the administration

There is a need to allow such spaces an independent working culture. For too long now, spaces like Tagore Hall and other such platforms have been used as political stages instead of spaces of art.

Such attempts where the governments in the past have attempted to coerce artists to work for political adventurism have miserably failed.

Art thrives when it is true and independent. It falters when it is contained or forced to operate in a suffocating atmosphere.

There have been recent attempts also to politicize the art in Kashmir, whether in the form of patronizing a cinema hall or making rudimentary cinemas in district headquarters. The lessons of the past are simple: art doesn't thrive when it is agenda-driven or politically motivated.

Art and artists, whether it is Kashmiri folk or any other genre, has to be given what it has long been deprived of - a chance to thrive independently. Administrations in the past failed to do so. As for the current administration, it will take some courage and vision to step aside and let it flourish.

Eating Together Binds Families



Eating together is not only a stress buster but it also keeps alive the values that keep a society healthy. Pic: Qazi Irshad

ZIA DARAKHSHAN

Kashmir's cuisine is so central to its culture that no discussion on Kashmir can be thought of without its mention.

It is one of the most invigorating and diverse cuisines of the world. It is rich and diverse in its taste, texture and the numberless delicacies that are a part of it. Even a look at it before you taste it is so satiating. It's a visual treat.

Whether it is an everyday meal prepared with love for the family or a celebration, food has always been a uniting factor for Kashmiris. Whenever you think of Kashmir's food culture, you picture elaborate, expansive dishes. Although *wazwan* is the world renowned seven-course cuisine of Kashmir, *hakh maaz*, *nadir palak*, etc. are among the staples that are a part of any home cooked meal.

Due to Kashmir's traditional pride in eating home cooked meals, generally prepared by the women folk, the restaurant culture or eating out with families took a while to catch up.

Wazwan is generally prepared during family functions, primarily weddings, by chefs known as *waza* in local language.

However, as of late, a trend to dine out at cozy, swanky restaurants that are popping up everywhere has emerged among Kashmiris, especially in Srinagar city, towns and district headquarters.

Till not so long ago, eating out was largely reserved for males of the family and that too was considered a taboo.

Occasionally, it was used for business meetings or socializing with friends and colleagues.

It is important to note that the word restaurant was seldom used here, instead, it was hotel, generally looked down upon by the society.

Bakery and English tea have been a part of Srinagar culture since the British era.

In Srinagar, Ahdoos was the first outlet located at the most westernized part of Polo View, the Residency Road.

My mother told me that his father, my grandfather, would stop by Ahdoos to chat with friends over tea sessions.

He would also buy breads and pastries from there, which my mother says were delicious beyond words.

For decades, Ahdoos was a favorite meeting place for senior citizens, especially the elite class for long tea parties.

Ahdoos was founded more than a hundred years back in 1913 and remains one of the most frequented restaurants even now, famous for its non-vegetarian food, exquisite tea and king-sized chicken patties. In the turbulent 90s, Ahdoos was a hub of local, national and international journalists.

In the decade following 2000, restaurant business started thriving gradually which has started picking rampantly over the last few years. What we see now is that every corner of the city is becoming a hive of restaurants, cafés, and ice cream shops. My

neighborhood used to be desolate, but now we have over a dozen restaurants in the area. It can be imagined how restaurants will mushroom up in the commercial districts of the city over time. At the time of Covid, home delivery and takeaway services gained a great momentum.

During the last few years, in other districts also, Kashmir has seen a dramatic increase in the number of restaurants and other eating outlets.

Among many middle-class families now, the habit of dining out is picking, it's both leisurely and convenient.

AS for the menu, Kashmiris have a wide variety of options to choose from. Besides the Kashmiri *wazwan* that is served at almost all the restaurants, they also want to sample other cuisines, for which they have several restaurants around the city serving, or claiming to serve, authentic Chinese, Mexican, Lebanese, Indian, and Italian foods.

And it is not just men anymore, women are also frequent visitors to these eateries.

The fact that girls also hang out regularly in restaurants is no longer a stereotype. They walk into a restaurant independently and confidently without having to be escorted by a male.

Rapid urbanization, growing awareness of Western lifestyles, more women joining the workforce, higher disposable income and travelling are some of the factors that contributed to this culture in the valley. Further, TV and the internet widened the horizons of a common Kashmiri, and he became more open to new lifestyles. As he became more accustomed to the concept of convenience, he gained an appreciation for the idea of saving time while having fun as well.

Visiting restaurants improves your social skills and helps you live a healthier lifestyle. Dining out is an excellent way to spend time. It is a recreation and a healthy shift from a daily routine.

While eating out is fun, the traditional *dastarkhwan* around which a family gathers over lunch or dinner is irreplaceable.

On *dastarkhwan* or family dining table, elders of the family initiate conversations that range from serious to light ones while enjoying meals and the proximity of the loved ones.

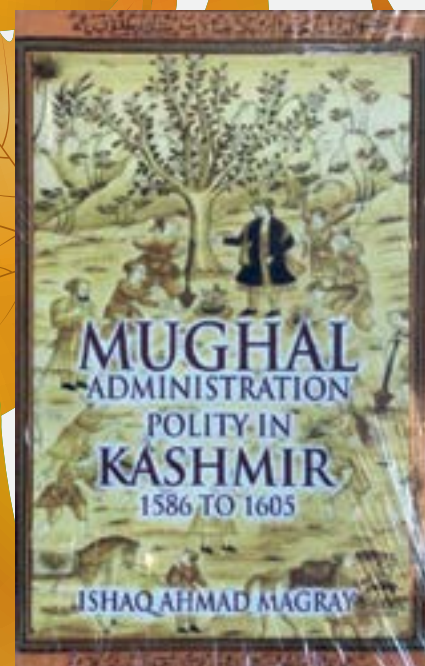
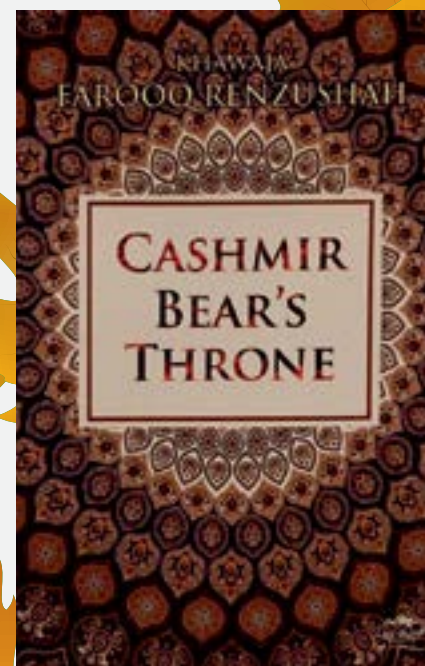
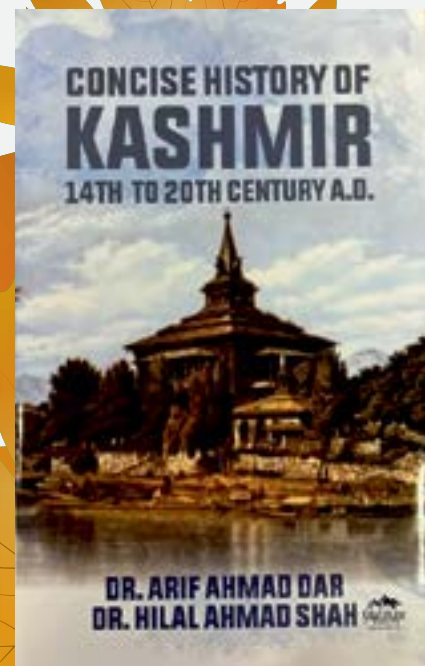
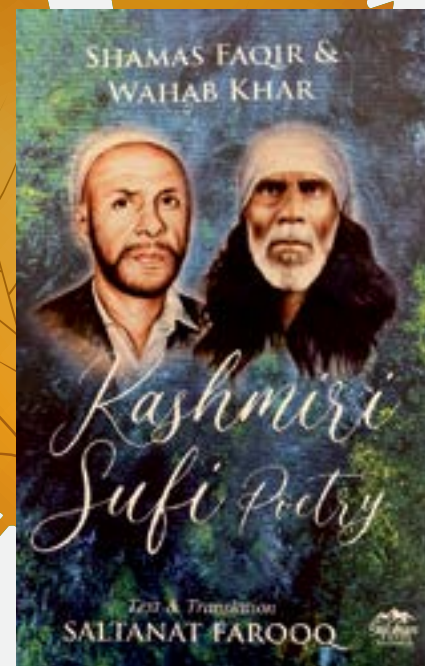
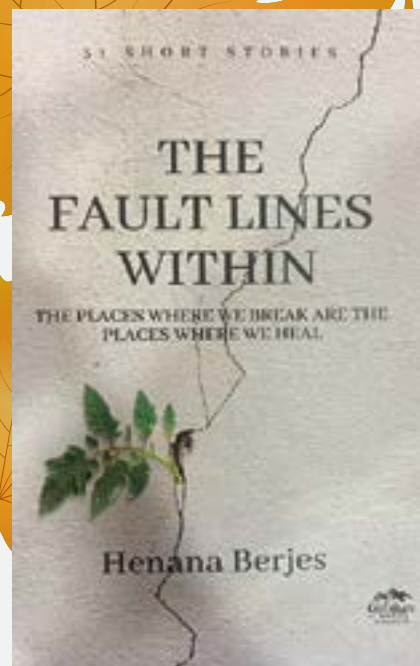
Family matters are addressed, resolutions sought and the head of the family acts as a guide and mentor in this position. Much of that has been lost now as lifestyle is becoming busier and cut throat.

Regular family gatherings create a positive atmosphere and healthy relationships. It is also a great stress buster.

Our families were not only kept intact by this practice, when it was an integral part of our lifestyle, but love and sharing were promoted as well, which in turn enhanced family dynamics. The result was a sense of peace and prosperity for each of us, less stress and a constant appreciation of the values that keep a society healthy.

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Right on the Money

How to be a Socially Responsible Investor



SAJJAD BAZAZ

There are investors who don't look at sin stocks for more profits, but always resort to the practice of investing money in the stocks of companies and funds that have positive social impacts.

It's really important for an investor to know that investing in the stock market has its own social values. There are financial products that lack social value. Your basic goal as an investor may be to multiply your money by investing in the stock of different companies, but wittingly or unwittingly, you may be contributing to the promotion of products that have an adverse impact on human welfare.

Investors have a habit of making money in the stock market by investing in the stocks of the companies that guarantee good returns. Even as they look at every parameter of a company before investing in its stock, the nature of the business and its impact on human welfare misses their attention. This is an aspect which the investors need to focus on before parking their money in a company.

In the local (J&K) context, the investment scenario in sin products merits a mention. Not many want to lend support to the promotion of a company that deals in alcohol or tobacco. But, unwittingly, the investment in these stocks has made them one of the promoters of these products. Usually, investments in companies manufacturing sin products get attention as they excite investors. This titillating effect makes an investor overlook the legitimacy aspect of investments in these products.

Investment experts are of the opinion that investing in 'sin products' simply pushes an investor into the act of sin. It punctures their moral consciousness and diminishes their social value.

Usually, most of the investors don't show social and moral character while parking money in the share market. They don't bother to have a look at the end use of their money in the company in which they are investing. In other words, 'investments should benefit society' principle is missing in their investment policy. We have a series of stocks of companies in the markets that are considered immoral or unethical and encouraging negative trends and behaviours in a society. The most surprising part is that all this happens under the given legal framework.

Sin Stocks

In market parlance, the stocks of the companies either directly involved in or associated with activities widely considered to be unethical or immoral are called 'sin stocks'. These kinds of

stocks are perceived as making money from exploiting human weaknesses and frailties.

The Investopedia defines a sin stock as: «Stock from a company that is associated with (or is directly involved in) activities considered unethical or immoral.»

The problem with ethics and morality, however, is that there is no universally accepted definition of what is or what is not ethical or moral. But, there are some sectors of the economy that are generally considered sinful, such as gambling, alcohol, tobacco, and defense industries.

So, the most common sin stocks include companies that deal in tobacco, alcohol, gambling and other products considered inappropriate to the social well-being of a society. Even stocks of companies manufacturing weapons and other military equipment bearing capacity to eliminate humans are also put in the category of 'sin stocks'.

However, the list of 'sin stocks' can be stretched depending upon the response of investors. Sin stocks can mean different things to different investors.

What Lures an Investor?

A general outlook describes these stocks as cheaper than the other income-producing stocks of multinationals in the market. This gives the investors a reason to invest in these companies. Many describe these stocks as consumer staple stocks and in this backdrop hold a view that no matter

what the economic outlook, investing in them is always profitable.

Notably, Journal of Financial Economics, while quoting an international survey, has revealed that sin stocks outperform over time. A report says that investors have gained 2 to 3 percentage points more per year investing in sin stocks than in the companies of comparable size in other sectors.

Many sin stocks also pay high dividends, increasing an investor's overall return. That's one reason why some funds have put a higher proportion of their assets into these sectors.

Responsible Investing

Socially responsible investing is just the opposite of investment in stocks. It is fast becoming popular among investors. There are investors who don't look at sin stocks for more profits, but always resort to the practice of investing money in the stocks of companies and funds that have positive social impacts. For them, the nature of business of a company matters and they park their money in companies and mutual funds with good social value.

As pointed out by experts, in socially responsible investing, you, as an investor, cannot necessarily achieve social impact and financial gain simultaneously. Investment in socially responsible companies doesn't mean a good return on investment. In fact, they strongly believe that the promise of a good return is far from an assurance that the nature of the company involved is socially con-

scious. So, it depends upon your own investing principles. If your conscience isn't your guide, then you will invest in 'sin stock' to make bigger profits. But if you are a socially and ethically responsible investor, you will definitely choose investing in the stocks of ethical and socially responsible companies.

Sin Tax

In the above given explanations, a sin tax is a form of excise duty which is levied on products and services that are deemed harmful to individuals or society. Since these goods such as tobacco, alcohol, etc. generate a hefty amount of revenue, governments tend to favour sin taxes to generate revenue. It's also said that the high rate of sin tax is actually an attempt at discouraging the activity that creates a harmful impact on the society.

Here is a fact enlisting the origin of the sin tax. Adam Smith, author of The Wealth of Nations, is said to be the person who gave the concept of a sin tax in 1776. Smith believed that cigarettes, sugar and rum should be taxed, as these goods are not essential products for life but are widely consumed. The sin tax was first implemented on tobacco products.

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

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GR8

Batting its Way to T20 World Cup

Kashmir's bat manufacturing industry got a shot in the arm when the UAE batsman Junaid Siddiqui smashed the longest six - a colossal 109 metres - of the just concluded T20 world cup with a bat manufactured in Kashmir,

JASPREET KAUR

31-year-old Fawzul Kabear is a young entrepreneur from Kashmir. He has made his mark in the international market for his GR8 willow bat industry, whose bats are being used by many of the top national and international cricket teams.

The Beginnings

Kabeer's story has been one of hard work. It took his one and a half years of unrelenting efforts to finally get his cricket bats made of Kashmiri willow approved by the International Cricket Council (ICC), the world governing body of cricket.

Kabeer and I had been Facebook friends and finally met in 2020 in Srinagar over lunch and a late evening barbeque meal at Iqbal's located in the famous barbeque market at Khayam. While I learnt of his hard work over the years, I also discovered he's an amazing singer.

Kabeer has done his Master's in Business Administration from the Islamic University at Awantipora and is pursuing his PhD in strategic management. His life was a struggle after the death of his father Abdul Kabear Dar who set up the GR8 sports manufacturing unit at Sangam, Anantnag (South Kashmir) in 1974.

After the death of their father in 2014, Kabeer and his brother Ni-yaz-ul-Kabeer toured cricket playing nations including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Gulf countries but couldn't secure any orders. The response from everywhere was that the Kashmir willow cricket bats come nowhere close to those used in the international matches, that is English willow, in terms of quality and is good for amateurs only or, as he puts it, "gully cricket."

He soon learnt the technicalities. A bat has to be designed with size, balance, and weight in mind. Kabeer explains: "Crafting a bat is not just about the raw material but understanding of the game, the player and the pitch. An opener's bat is not the same as the one used by a middle-order batter. A slower pitch requires a different bat than the one used on a bouncer track. Everything about the bat - the size, the handle, the thickness and the width - has to meet the international standards."

He started manufacturing bats with the knowledge and information gathered from his travels and getting expert workers from other states. Besides Kashmir, cricket bats are made in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The willow, of course, is sourced from Jammu and Kashmir. Raw material from Kashmir is sold to manufacturers in Jalandhar in Punjab and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh who sell the finished product in their own name.

In order for the bat to be accepted

worldwide, it became important for it to be launched from a prominent platform. And no platform could be bigger than the 2022 ICC Men's T20 World Cup. "Once you get the approval from the ICC, any international player can use your products," says Kabeer. To get the products registered by the ICC, "we had to submit all our manufacturing details to meet their standards."

Kabeer's firm couldn't afford Indian cricketers for the promotion as they were seeking huge sums. Negotiations with teams resulted in the Oman team using GR8 bats in the T20 World Cup 2021. Naseem Khushi and Bilal Khan of Oman used these bats during the T20 World Cup match against Bangladesh at the Dubai Cricket Stadium.

He is proud that four players from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) cricket team used bats and protective gear manufactured at his factory during a UAE-Namibia ICC T20 Cricket World Cup 2022 match played in the Victoria state of Australia, in October. The GR8 bat earned a special owner when UAE's Junaid Siddiqui hit the longest six of the just concluded T20 world cup. Siddiqui's 109-metre monster came against Sri Lanka when he deposited Dushmantha Chameera deep into the crowd.

Kabeer's hard work of 10 years has yielded excellent response from countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Oman, Bahrain and Scotland. Kabeer says the demand for Kashmiri bats has increased in the international markets. His firm has already sent con-

signments to around one dozen countries and many orders are in the queue, including a huge order from 150 Dubai schools and cricket academies.

Kabeer says that "with the help of contemporary technology, we have taken this to a new level where we employ Computer Monitored Compression (CMC) to deliver precision, accuracy and compression to the bat and ours is the only company in the world that uses this technology." It's a trade secret that Kabeer chooses not to elaborate on.

Cricketing legends Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Saurav Ganguly, Yuraj Singha and Virender Sehwag have previously used Kashmir willow bats, but this is the first time that the bats manufactured in Kashmir are being used by international cricket players in a mega event like a T20 world cup.

Kabeer is ecstatic to see his bats in action at one of the world's biggest cricket tournaments. His bats are the only ones, among over 2.5 million produced in Kashmir annually, that have passed the ICC standards.

Some 35 international players would also be playing with his factory bats, which are reasonably priced between INR 1,500 and 8,000, as compared to English willow bats that can cost up to INR 125,000.

Kashmir Willows vs English Willow

Though the willow was believed to have existed in Kashmir centuries ago, a



Before his GR8 bat was approved by the ICC, Fawzul Kabear had tirelessly toured the cricket playing nations around the world to promote his product.

Pic: Jaspreet Kaur

large-scale effort to plant it in the region was carried out during the 19th century on the advice of the British author Walter R. Lawrence and J.C. McDonell, who was then the head of the forest department of the state.

It is generally believed that the willow used in making bats in Kashmir was brought in by the British in the 1820s. The species (*Salix alba* var. *caerulea*) is identical to English willow.

When the British brought with them cricket, there was a need to manufacture the bats locally, instead of depending on imports from England. According to a research conducted by the faculty of forestry at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST), Kashmir, that demand was met by Allah Baksh, a native of Sialkot (now in Pakistan). He set up the first unit at Sangam-Halamulla. It was the only facility at that time and it produced more hockey sticks than cricket bats.

A study on sports goods titled 'Indian Sports Goods Industry: Strategies for Tapping the Export Potential' conducted by the Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank) says that the Kashmir willow bat is one such product which holds significance as it is made from some of the best quality wood (willow) in the world.

The general perception thus far had been that the English willow bats were a lot better than those made from the Kashmir willow. Until 1980, there were around 30 units operating in this region. However, in the years following India's world cup triumph in 1983,

there was an exponential rise in the demand for bats across India.

The bats made from Kashmir willow are a little darker in colour as compared to the English willow. Its colour can be described as a lighter shade of brown. On the other hand, the bats made from the English willow are a shade or two lighter than their Kashmiri counterpart or almost white. As compared to the English willow, which is 1100 grams, the Kashmir willow bat is heavier in weight at 1220 grams. The bats made from Kashmir willow are known to have a much higher density as compared to their English counterparts. In fact, the English willow bats are known to break easily.

In terms of structure, the English willow is much softer than the Kashmiri one. Kashmiri willow is known to be quite hard. Since English willow is softer, it is more prone to breakage and, hence, less durable. The English willow requires more maintenance than the Kashmir willow. Due to lack of oiling or proper storage, the bats will break or get damaged. Players who wish to slog and play cross-batted shots tend to break English willow bats more often. The Kashmir willow bats are also a lot more affordable than the English Willow bats. Kabeer is quite optimistic that Kashmiri bats will globally emerge as an alternative to the English willow.

Kashmir Bat Industry

About 40 kms south of Srinagar city, the National Highway is dotted with cricket bat factories and shops on both sides. Lines of shops display neat stacks of willow wood along the highway. Behind the shops are small manufacturing units, where the local willow is made into cricket bats that find their way to different states of India and cricket-playing nations around the world.

The 7-kilometer stretch of the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway is one of the two places in the world that produce professional bats made of willow—the other being England. Australia and South Africa also make bats but import the wood from England. In South Asia, bats are also made in Pakistan with the wood coming from Sialkot and Rawalakot.

The Department of Industries and Commerce, Kashmir has declared the area from Jawbehra-Sangam an industrial zone (500 meters on either side of the highway) for cricket bat manufacturing units. At present, there are more than 400 cricket bat manufacturing units. Nearly 100 families along the stretch and one lakh people, both locals and non-locals, who work with them, make it India's largest cricket-bat-manufacturing belt. The sector has an annual turnover of around INR 100 crores. However, most people in this trade export only clefts to manufacturers in the



A bat has to be designed keeping in mind the international standards with respect to its height, thickness, width, handle and other factors. Pic: Jaspreet Kaur

neighbouring states that are still the largest producers in India.

The willow wood is sourced in bulk, predominantly from Anantnag and Pulwama districts. There are 7 villages—Bijbehara, Charsoo, Hallamulla, Sangam, Pujteng, Mirzapoor and Sethar—in South Kashmir where cricket bats are manufactured, employing local workers. Sethar and Sangam have been notified as an industrial cluster for cricket bat manufacturing. Manufacturing units of Anantnag and Pulwama have also been given government registration certificates, which would enable them to avail all benefits from the government, aimed at strengthening the industry.

The government is also keen towards the promotion of the Kashmir willow cricket bat industry internationally. In order to revive Kashmir's cricket bat manufacturing and other wood-based industry, a team of Union Ministry of Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises officials had also visited the valley. Common Facility Centre (CFC), Sethar was established at an estimated cost of INR 4.61 crores with plant and machinery installed by the Technology Development Centre (PPDC), Meerut.

Set up during the tenure of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as the chief minister, the objective of this CFC is to facilitate seasoning of willow clefts and providing all the facilities to the cricket bat unit holders under one roof. This will enable the unit holders to use modern techniques in the production of world class cricket bats.

The government is creating awareness and providing support to the cricket bat manufacturers for GI tagging through field officers. The Directorate of Industries and Commerce has taken up the issue of granting logo and GI tagging with the Director, Craft Development Institute (CDI), Srinagar.

Under the World Bank-funded Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP), Faculty of Forestry SKUAST Kashmir has been engaged for the identification and propagation of the best quality willow being used for the manufacturing of cricket bats. In SKUAST Kashmir, superior quality willow saplings were distributed among beneficiaries associated with Sethar cricket bat cluster.

It is expected that, with the use of superior willow, the quality of cricket bats being manufactured in the Kashmir valley would be comparable to those manufactured in the rest of the world, thereby increasing their demand exponentially.

Manufacturing Process

Willow wood is cut into blocks called clefts and left in stacks to season under the sun for up to six months. These can be seen all along the Srinagar-Jammu

highway. Once ready to use, the wood is chiselled, hammered and polished by the workers into the finished product. Depending on the available resources, a factory can produce anywhere between 30 and 250 bats a day.

Kabeer, who is also spokesperson of the cricket bat manufacturing association of Kashmir, says that in international cricket, the wide use of English willow is mainly because willow clefts of Kashmir were smuggled out of the valley and Meerut and Jalandhar based dealers had hijacked the bat supply of Kashmir.

Realizing that the raw material was being used unsustainably and sold at cheaper rates outside the valley, the government of J&K imposed a ban on the export of raw clefts in 1998. Entrepreneurs like Kabeer have revived the bat manufacturing industry of Kashmir.

Industry Challenges

The challenges to the cricket bat manufacturing industry include the political landscape of Kashmir, power outages, pandemic and extinction of the willow trees. Continuous dependency on gensets considerably increases the manufacturing costs. According to a report, during the past three years, the cricket bat industry in Kashmir has incurred a loss of more than INR 1,000 crores.

Kashmir's dwindling willow plantations are impacting the region's famed bat industry and risking the supply of cricket bats in India, where the sport is hugely followed. Over the years, farmers in the region have been planting poplars in place of willows. The faster-growing poplar tree is preferred by the booming plywood industry.

Most of the existing plantations are on private land and are being cultivated by individual farmers rather than through a collective effort. It takes 15-20 years for a willow tree to mature and yield the maximum number of clefts. These days, high-density willow trees are also planted which get ready within 7-8 years. The Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST) has also identified four promising clones of willow.

However, there is no government policy of afforestation after the willow trees have been felled. Strict forest laws, like those in Canada, are required. The laws in Canada protect the forests and ensure that sustainable forest management practices are followed across the country. This means that consumers can be confident that the forest and wood products they buy from Canada were obtained legally and harvested under a system of sustainable forest management. Canada has committed to planting two billion trees by 2030, above and beyond the replanting legally mandated after harvesting, to reduce GHG emissions, make communities greener, improve human wellbeing and support biodiversity.

"Our repeated pleas to the government to plant willow trees on state land have fallen on deaf ears. The extinction of willow is due within 5-6 years if rapid plantation drives are not immediately launched in the region," laments Kabeer.

In England, the willow is being cultivated for the sole purpose of bat manufacturing. But here, it is also used as fuel. Kabeer believes that the government needs to provide one billion willow saplings to boost the production of bats and also have stringent laws in place.

Based in New Delhi, Jaspreet Kaur is an architect, urban designer and trustee of the Lymewoods and Span Foundation.

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Tabassum Govil passed away on November 18 after suffering back-to-back heart attacks.



FAROOQ SHAH

In the 1951 Nitin Bose-directed Deedar, seven-year-old Baby Tabassum, who would later go on to become India's most prominent talk show presenter of the 70s and the 80s, lip-synced Lata Mangeshkar to perfection on Naushad's timeless composition *bachpan ke din bhula na dena*.

Tabassum Govil aka Baby Tabassum or Tabassum Naz, breathed her last on November 18 after she suffered back-to-back heart attacks.

In April last year, several media portals and social media sites had shared news of her death after she tested positive for COVID-19 while she was shooting for her YouTube show *Tabassum Talkies*.

Incidentally it was the day of Friday when she herself had cleared the air on the death rumours and tweeted about the same. She finally died on a Friday.

"Aapki shubhkamnaon ki wajah se main bilkul theek hoon, tandurust hoon aur apne parivaar ke saath hoon. Ye jo rumour phail rahi hai mere baare mein woh bilkul ghalat hai, aur main yeh dua karti hoon ke aap sab bhi apne ghar mein safe rahein," the actress had tweeted last years after the rumours of her death.

Tabassum was born of an interfaith marriage. Her father, Ayodhyanath Sachdev, was a freedom fighter and mother Asghari Begum, who besides being a freedom fighter was a journalist and an author.

She was given the name Tabassum by her father who respected his wife's faith and Kiran Bala by her mother keeping her father's religious sentiments in mind, and thus she came to be known as Tabasum Kiran Bala before her marriage.

Tabassum was married to Vijay Govil, elder brother of television actor, Arun Govil, who played Lord Ram in the Ramanand Sagar epic *Ramayana* for Doordarshan.

She made her film debut as a child actor in 1947 with Nargis, followed that year by *Mera Suhaag* and *Manjhdhar*, and then *Bari Behen* in 1949. *Swarg*, a 1990 release, was her last movie.

Tabassum started her television career as the host of *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan*—India's first talk show, which ran on Doordarshan from 1972 to 1993 featuring interviews with actors, TV artistes and other film personalities.

As the popularity of *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan* soared to a point where celebrities would queue up outside the Doordarshan office to get a chance to appear on it, her show became a benchmark for television anchoring.

"When the show first started, some artists would act snobby about appearing on it, but as it gained popularity, the biggest names would line up at the Doordarshan office for a slot. As with social media now, it quickly became a rage then," Tabassum once spoke about the show.

Throughout the 21-year period, film stars graced the show and chatted with Tabassum about their personal and professional lives.

Abhi Toh Main Jawaan Hoon, a TV show on TV Asia USA and Canada themed on the Golden Era of Hindi Cinema, was the subject of her ongoing work as a television interviewer. She had just floated her own YouTube channel, *Tabassum Talkies*, that featured poetry, comedy, interviews with celebrities, and life

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Tabassum was also inspired to write several joke books and edit *Grihalaxmi*, a Hindi women's magazine, by the rich literary atmosphere that she enjoyed at home. In her demise, the Indian entertainment industry has severed a connection between the past and present that could never be knotted again.

sketches of the legends of the yesteryear. "Adab, Namaskar...main hoon aapki apni Tabassum, aur aap dekh rahain hain Tabassum Talkies..." the veteran host would greet the viewers on her YouTube Channel.

Deeply pained by the fall in the calibre of filmmaking, song writing, and music production, and to make her talk shows qualitatively more enlightening, Tabassum would pose challenging questions to her subjects eliciting responses that would make her viewers long for the erstwhile glory of the Indian cinema.

The simplicity of her set, her deep familiarity with the celebrity being interviewed, and the richness of the language that she spoke with were what distinguished her programs from today's pretentious talk shows.

Apart from her TV and film commitments, Tabassum was also inspired to write several joke books and edit *Grihalaxmi*, a Hindi women's magazine, by the rich literary atmosphere that she enjoyed at home.

In her demise, the Indian entertainment industry has severed a connection between the past and present that could never be knotted again.

Farooq Shah is a senior journalist based in Kashmir.

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Man in the Making

Pakistan's Shadab Khan is a three-in-one cricketer.



BILAL AHSAN DAR



Pakistan lost to England in the final of the T20 World cup 2022, having qualified by the skin of their teeth and some luck after the Proteas lived up to their chokers tag as they lost to an associate side, Netherlands.

Before making it to the final of the blockbuster event, Pakistan was on the brink of exit before the knockout round. But for one team member, Shadab Khan, it was a tournament to remember as he excelled in all the departments - bowling batting and fielding.

Born on 4 October 1998, Khan is a bowling all-rounder, a right-arm leg-break bowler who is a fluent stroke player and an athletic fielder.

Graduating from club cricket to district level and then making it to Pakistan A, Shadab featured in a junior world cup in Bangladesh in 2016 and finished as the joint top wicket-taker for his team with 11 wickets. A year later, he was picked up as an emerging player in the PSL by Islamabad United. With an impressive PSL outing under his belt, he was picked by Mickey Arthur, the then Pakistan head coach, into the national side in 2017.

"When we got Shadab into the team, he was incredibly exciting as a cricketer. He was athletic and a three-in-one cricketer," said Arthur in a recent interview with AFP. "He is a match winner for Pakistan. The difference I have seen is that he has come from a boy to a man," Arthur added alluding to Shadab's recent success.

Khan made his One Day International (ODI) debut for Pakistan against

the West Indies on 7 April 2017. He made his Test debut for Pakistan, also against the West Indies, on 30 April 2017. He was a part of Pakistan's 2017 Champions Trophy winning squad. In September 2017, he was named as PCB's Emerging Player of the Year. He made his Twenty20 International (T20I) debut for Pakistan against the West Indies on 26 March 2017, recording the most economical figures for a bowler completing their four overs on debut.

It took Khan just eight deliveries to make a mark and set the stage on fire in his very first appearance at the highest level. He returned with figures of 3-7 against the West Indies on his T20I debut. What stood out was his additional bonus of being a livewire on field and, yes, he could bat as well.

Khan's finest moment in his emergence was at the Champions Trophy in 2017. In the final match of the tournament he trapped the dangerous Yuvraj Singh LBW. English umpire Richard Kettleborough wasn't impressed but the youngster displayed immense confidence and convinced his skipper to take a review and the umpire had to reverse his decision.

In the T20 World Cup 2022, after the last-ball defeats against India and Zimbabwe, Khan pulled his team back from the brink of exit with three wickets against the Netherlands for their first win. He then turned up with a fiery 22-ball 52 and bowling figures of 2-16 during his man-of-the-match performance against South Africa.

At 24, Khan is already the team's vice-captain, apart from captaining sides in the Pakistan Super League and Caribbean Premier League. With Babar Azam's captaincy tactics coming under heavy criticism, many believe Khan could be a candidate to take over, at least in the T20 format.

"He brings invaluable energy to the team," captain Babar Azam said after Khan produced an exceptional piece of fielding to run out opener Devon Conway in the semifinal against the Black Caps.

Since 2020, he's one of the three players in all T20's to have scored over 1000 runs and taken 100 wickets. Samit Patel and Jason Holder are the other two. He's the only player alongside Mohammad Nabi to have at least 10 scores of 30+ at a strike rate above 150 as well as at least 10 innings where he has

bowled his full quota of four overs and conceded less than six runs per over.

Scalping the wicket of Harry Brook in the final against England, Shadab Khan moved past Shahid Afridi as the leading wicket taker for Pakistan in the T20Is with a tally of 98 wickets. Earlier this year in February, Khan became the leading wicket taking spinner in the history of PSL.

After a steep initial rise, Khan had a bad patch in his career from 2019 to 2021. His bowling form deteriorated as he focused more on his batting. He expressed his desire to bat higher up the order and had some useful performances with the bat in PSL, but his economy rate with the ball in his hand hovered around a very expensive 8.7 rpo and an average of around 36, which was more than double of his average in 2017 and 2018. Also, his name became synonymous with injuries and he missed quite a few important tours of his national team. But he made a strong comeback to become an indispensable part of his side and reclaim the vice-captaincy.

He was the standout bowler for Pakistan in the T20 World Cup 2022. In five matches, the leggie picked up 10 wickets at an economy rate of 6.22. His best figures 3/22 came against the Netherlands at Perth. With a 20-ball half century, he racked up the second fastest fifty by a Pakistani batter in the history of T20 world cups. He was nominated for player of the tournament as well.

At 24, Khan is already the team's vice-captain, apart from captaining sides in the Pakistan Super League and Caribbean Premier League.

With Babar Azam's captaincy tactics coming under heavy criticism, many believe Khan could be a candidate to take over, at least in the T20 format. Shadab's tactical flexibility and game awareness as captain was appreciated by many when he captained Islamabad United in the PSL. Shadab is also being credited with giving useful suggestions to his captain.

Bilal Ahsan Dar is a blogger and cricket buff.

In the T20 World Cup 2022, after the last-ball defeats against India and Zimbabwe, Khan pulled his team back from the brink of exit with three wickets against the Netherlands for their first win. He then turned up with a fiery 22-ball 52 and bowling figures of 2-16 during his man-of-the-match performance against South Africa.

Book review: Vodka by the Volga

The book is a tribute to the great Russian writers.



MAHUA SEN

When silence dominates the night and the wind sings a berceuse, you want to snuggle inside your pashmina duvet and get marooned into a colonnaded garden of poems that take you to an exotic realm and gift a cosy comfort to your soul.

Vodka by the Volga does exactly that!

The much-awaited book by two eminent writers Dr Ampat Koshy and Dr Santosh Bakaya, Vodka by the Volga is sure to create a space in the memory chamber of your hippocampus.

The book is a wonderful tribute to the great Russian writers.

One can feel stimulus in the sinew and curve of each poem.

The cascade and cadence of words and imagery have left fragments of their being in my mind. While reading, I was lost in the maze of portmanteau of words and thoughts created by India's two stalwarts of English poetry.

Santosh Bakaya's poetry teaches us to look deeper and tempts us to find the enigmatic wisdom in the grubby highs and lows of life. She wraps us in a flannel coverlet of her beautiful words, nudging us to recce the unknown terrain of our inner self, places we didn't know existed. And we marvel at the way her words engulf us, gifting us a novel experience with each poem. The more you read her, the more you yearn for it like the waves yearning to touch the lips of the coast.

Dr Koshy, through his superlative poetry, evokes hypnotic animism that you would want to preserve in your glass jar of imagination. The way he weaves imagery and the enigmatic way he arranges the iconography of his words to catalyse our sepulchred thoughts and emotions, is the most transcendental attire of creativity.

The reference of Pushkin's The tales of Belkin, Eugene Onegin, George Orwell's allegorical novel Animal Farm (The song Beast of England rang in my ears) etc. made me walk down the memory lane.

My personal favourites are:

A Nonchalance So Blue
Receding memories, scream for attention
those buried secrets creep stealthily,

roam all over my mindscape, grinning triumphantly
I cull impassioned words from hidden anguish
and, miraculously, constellations of poems are born, unbidden.

The glamour of that exuberant clamour overpowers me and
the notes of the night stammer on, hammer on

Santosh Bakaya

I was compelled to revisit this evocative poem. I love the sense of flow in it. The poem plays in a loop in my mind, long after reading it, just like my favourite song. Under the carapace of resilience lurks a sensitive soul that reflects in these verses.

Another favourite of mine is:

The White Nights
Do not listen to lies
We do not love to win or gain,
Or write for success
But for loss

Failure is our heat and light
Let me kiss your black eyes
My pen dipped in black ink
No ruse, but spells & magic
Ampat Koshy

What a beautiful poem! There are no words for the eloquence Dr Ampat Koshy espouses through his verses. The words flow like a cascade dancing in terpsichorean steps on the bosom of a mountain and glides down with panache to embrace the brook.

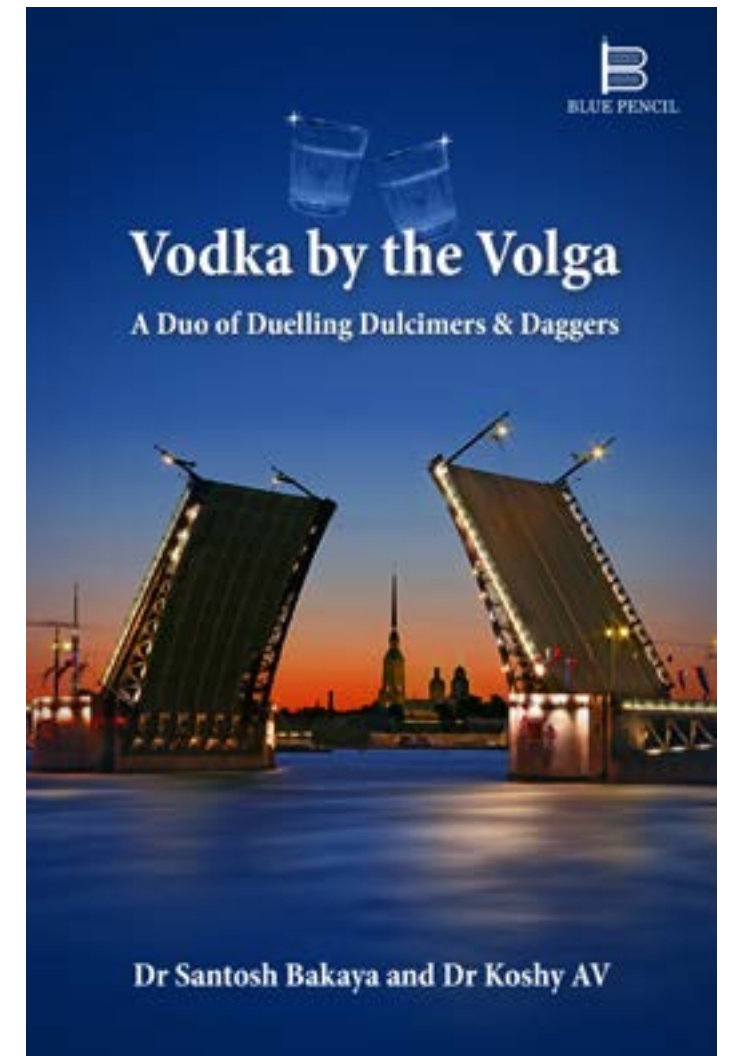
Santosh Bakaya refers to the poem 'The Gypsies' by Pushkin in her poem 'On Dark Nights'

Have you read The Gypsies?
What a narrative poem! you gushed
I looked askance as you went headlong
into a vibrant description of the gypsy camp
throbbing between the wheels of carriages,
where a flame burns –and a family cooks around it
It burns, it still does as my mind recalls
a tame bear, lying uncaged
It was then that I knew what a Russophile you were
I love the analogy of tame bear morphing into a grizzly bear.

And how memory initially peeps from the door like a tame bear but eventually metamorphoses into a grizzly bear that shakes raindrops from its mane, overwhelming the poet and making her insomniac.

I'm insanely fascinated by Santosh Bakaya's play of words and the poetic extravaganza that she offers through her verses.

Take a close look at these lines from The Wilderness:
There was a time, when we walked the wilderness,
with Lorca in my rucksack, Neruda in my hands,
Pushkin on your mind, and Pushkin on your lips



What a time it was, what a time!
Your eyes bound to the antics of a butterfly,
vain and bloated, moving around with a swagger,
flaunting the golden rays of the sun shimmering on its wings

This poem is so vivid that I could see the reels flashing in front of my mind's eyes as I read the lines. It forces us to keep the door of our observation ajar. Beautiful, illustrative manifestation of words in this piece of art.

In the poem 'Dedicated to Lermontov', Dr Koshy writes:

...while the lightning flashed
the rose in my heart was withering
and on your cheeks pale and wilting, grey glazed
I rained my kisses
while your breath misted faint
on your bedewed upper lip.
Your bosom rose and fell ever less.
Nothing was left of me after you died.
On the cliff's edge, later, while I duelled, I felt
if I fell
I would cry...

If only you hadn't died that night
untimely rose plucked from my grasp
Bela- you who were my heart's only delight!

This poem is inspired by the first chapter, Bela, from Lermontov's 'A Hero of our Time' and we are reminded of Perochin, the lover, and Kazbich, the slayer of Bela. The poem has beautifully brought out the anguish and the agony of Pechorin on Bela's death.

I'm sure 'the Poet of the Caucasus' must be blessing Dr Koshy from up above, for this heart-wrenchingly beautiful poem, depicting the nuances of the characters so intensely. Such a beautifully emotive piece!

What makes this book special is the note by Dr Santosh and the afterword by Dr Koshy. I loved to peek into their personal experiences on how they were introduced to the doorway to Russian literature.

Each and every poem in this collection will nudge you to slow down, peruse, completely marooned in the magical ocean of verses by these two stalwarts of poetry.

The poems are grouted with silence, eloquence, epiphany, and insight that galvanises your imagination.

Mahua Sen is an award-winning poet.

The cascade and cadence of words and imagery have left fragments of their being in my mind. While reading, I was lost in the maze of portmanteau of words and thoughts created by India's two stalwarts of English poetry.

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