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Model Millionaire

By the end of twentieth century when a low ranking employee was desperately thinking about the future of his seven sons, he made a modest investment in creating a flower nursery. Operating from a south Kashmir village, they now grow countless varieties of flowers, vegetables and fruits and hire 25 gardeners round the year to implement major projects within and outside Kashmir, reports

SAMREENA NAZIR

On a cold January morning, when most people were reluctant to leave their warm beds, Shabir Ahmad Ganai was busy in his poly house. Wearing a cotton T-shirt and half pent, Shabir was sweating among the numerous yet-to-blossom multi-coloured flower beds and ornamental plants.

The interior of the poly-house was in contrast with the surroundings it was placed in. In Chillaikalan, the harshest part of the Kashmir winter, while snow carpeted everywhere, it was a steady temperature inside this structure enclosed by polycarbonate sheets. Inside, it seemed a summer day.

Ganai lives in Bogund, almost 70 km south of Srinagar, 20 minutes walk from Kulgam. Of the 1500 families living in this village, Ganai, a retired food department employee is the most prominent name. He has been responsible for generating some kind of employment in this belt in the last few years. That is the key reason for his prominence.

Ganai has been a hardworking man throughout his life. At the peak of his career, he would return home from his job and get into work, grow varieties of flowers and plants at home. Fascinated by flowers, he used to decorate his home with flowers. In his village, he was the first to get Catharanthus fencing of his courtyard. The plant remains green throughout the year.

Almost 20 years back, Ganai, a father of seven sons was restless. The future of his sons was the key concern. A low ranking official, he had nothing in hand to invest. After a lot of interactions with his friends, he invested his Rs 27,000 saving inflow cultivation. He started with flower seedlings and plantations in his courtyard. Two of his sons, then in tenth class, also started assisting him. Gradually they were attracted by poultry, fishery and other avenues within the agrarian field. They would often attend training and awareness camps and interactions with the scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra Kulgam.

“He created a small fish pond in almost 2.5 marlas of land, which is popular in the



Variety of flowers available at Ganai house during winters



Fish pond

village,” Hafeeza, his wife, said. “Our courtyard is filled with people, the day the fish are sold.”

The fencing wall of Ganai’s house is painted with watercolours projecting the fishpond location inside. The Iron Gate provides a brief description of the units that the family owns. They are into fishery, horticulture, floriculture and poultry.

The courtyard of the house is divided by a narrow cemented path leading to the doorstep of the two-storied house in one corner of a two kanal plot. In the other corner is a two-storied room, which functions as their office wherefrom Aadil operates. After Ganai’s two elder sons started living separately, it was Aadil who took-over the business. He deals with clients and consignments.

On both sides of the path, the plantation process is done. Ganai’s expect this to be market-ready by middle of March.

In the rare of the house is where Ganai’s success story is. Spread over 15 kanals of land, it seems like a picnic spot. In between, a number of poly-houses where different varieties of flowers, vegetables and ornamental plants are growing, there is a fish pond surrounded by pole lights and decorative fountains in the middle.

The family cultivates off-season vegetables and supplies to various markets. During winters when Srinagar-Jammu national highway usually remains in crisis, the vegetable sellers and people from nearby town keep visiting Ganai’s for the supply.

Off late, Ganai has started experimenting with lemon, orange, kiwi and loquat which they sell to the customers with specific do’s and don’ts. “These plants grow here easily and give a good production because we bring them from Himachal,” Shabir Ahmed said. “Kashmir shares the weather conditions with Himachal. All these plants need is adequate sun-light and warmth. That is why we suggest people wrap them during winters.”

Watching the family sincerely working, various government departments are supportive of their venture. Floriculture Department has allotted them four poly houses for raising pot flowers and ornamental plants. They grow lawn grasses and ornamental plants on a large scale, which have a great demand. For the last few years, the Ganai brothers not only produce the ornamental plants and flowers but also manage the big government and private projects like public parks and the open spaces outside the offices of authorities. Recently a government agency hired them to keep the dividing spaces between the two lanes on the recently made four-way highway. From filling and levelling the area to decorating it with suitable flowers and plants, the whole process is managed by Ganai brothers.

During winters, when the season does not offer work, they move outside to make parks and gardens. Right now, they have more than 45 professional gardeners working with them throughout the year whom they provide more than Rs 25000 monthly.

“We may have done a few hundred large and small projects,” Aadil said. “This year we worked at Minister Colonies, Circuit houses at Kishtawar. We also beautified the campus of Kurukshetra

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University in Haryana. We carry the plants, flowers and lawn grass required from our home in carrier vehicles to wherever we work.”

Guidance about different schemes and supply of critical farm inputs helped them in undertaking integrated farming on scientific lines. The fisheries department has helped them in establishing a fish pond which is perhaps the most successful one in the area. The breeds available in this pond are Grass carp, silver carp, common carp, aquarium fishes and the trout.

Looking at their interest and dedication, SKUAST-Kashmir provided them poultry birds, which after separating from family is specifically owned by Gowher. Due to huge demand of Vanaraja and Kurolier, the two species evolved in Kashmir over the years, Gowher was approached by the Poultry Development Department for the supply of more birds.

They have already bagged the gold medal from the SKUAST-K. “We have received numerous awards and memento’s but in 2016, jubilations were all around when we received a gold medal in India’s national institute for agriculture research, PUSA institute,” Aadil said. “That really encouraged us to work harder.

We also received a silver medal from the same institute in 2018.”

Now, the Ganai brothers are often invited as mentors and trainers for imparting training to rural youth by KVK, Kulgam. On average, the family’s monthly turnover is around Rs seven lakhs excluding the projects which they manage in and outside the valley.

After retirement now, Ganie gives only directions to his sons according to his skills and experience. “I feel proud seeing my small effort exploring this much,” Ganai said. “I started it so that my sons could earn a livelihood, but now they are inspiring others to love their roots.” *Kashmir Life*

17 years on, Aishmuqam shopping complex awaits completion

BABA NADEEM

Even after 17 years since the work was started on it, the shopping complex in Aishmuqam area of south Kashmir’s Anantnag district waits to be completed, the residents claimed.

People of Aishmuqam and adjacent areas while ruing the delay, said that Pahalgam development has failed to complete the construction of the shopping complex from the past 17 years.

“The construction of the commercial shopping complex was started by the Pahalgam development authority in the year 2003 with much enthusiasm, however despite the passage of 17 years the project is awaiting completion,” said locals.

“PDC hasn’t only failed to complete the construction of a shopping complex but they have also failed to maintain it as well,” they alleged.

“The shopkeepers at Aishmuqam who got dislocated were asked to deposit subsidized cost of Rs 50,000 for each shop and even 20 shopkeepers among them have the deposited contributory amount,” said a shopkeeper.



“The shopkeepers at Aishmuqam who got dislocated were asked to deposit subsidized cost of Rs 50,000 for each shop and even 20 shopkeepers among them have the deposited contributory amount”

He said that the condition of a shopping complex in Aishmuqam is deteriorating day by day and most of the shops are without shutters and roof, as a result, of the rains and snow over these years have deteriorated the condition of the shopping complex.

“Residents of Aishmuqam village have started using these shops for dumping cow dung from several years,” he added.

Locals, however, alleged that the shopping complex was facing official apathy and a huge amount was wasted for nothing.

“We have serious objections over the design of this shopping complex, our only demand is that the middle row of the shopping complex be demolished so that the complex gets enough parking facility”, locals told Kashmir Life, adding that a vast amount of Rs 2 crore was spent on the construction of shopping complex.

When contacted, an official from Pahalgam Development Authority (PDA), said that the work on the shopping complex at Aishmuqam was stopped in 2008 after local residents raised objections.

He said that redesigning of shopping complex needs 1.50 crore and the government hasn’t yet approved the proposal. *Kashmir Life*

Kashmiri *Delh*icacies

IRAM NAAZ/ SUBIA LATIEF

Kashmiri cuisine is a blend of authentic ingredients, spices and tradition, surprisingly they can be found far from the valley — at relatively unknown places within the capital

Aghar Firdaus bar roo-e -zameen ast, hameen ast-o hameen ast-o hameen ast”
-Amir Khusrau

The famous couplet translates to, “If there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this”. It was famously used by poet Amir Khusrau to describe the eternal and breathtaking beauty of Kashmir. Indeed Kashmir is majestic and a delight to all who love to explore the beauty of nature. The Valley famed for its handicrafts, embroidery and carpets also hosts another hidden gem: its mouth-watering cuisine, which speaks volume of its rich culture and tradition.

Finding authentic Kashmiri food outside the Valley is an uphill task. The spices and the ingredients used in Kashmiri cuisine are native to the Valley and give the food its traditional taste. Local spices like chillies, cockscomb, turmeric and saffron give it authentic flavours.

The preparation of food in the Valley is regarded an art and food is an important part of the locals’ lives. Multi-course meals traditionally comprise 36 courses which includes of meat-based dishes.

For people looking for a taste of Kashmiri cuisine outside the Valley there are many options in the capital. For that authentic experience head over to-

J&K Kashmir House, Chanakyapuri

J&K house is famous for its authentic Kashmiri delicacies and is a must-try for anyone who likes spicy food. The menu changes twice a day. Some of the best offerings on the menu include the mutton gushtaba, mutton rista, mutton roganjosh, mutton yakhni (a thin yogurt-based curry with mutton balls), mutton tabakhmaz, mutton kebab, and mutton shami kebab.

The kebabs here are delicate and succulent with the perfect measure of the spices. They are prepared by frying them perfectly in a light garnish of onions and green chillies. Mutton yakhni is another beautifully crafted delicacy, it has the wonderful aroma of a mix of cardamoms, cloves and cinnamon. The curry is thick and flavourful and tastes amazing with plain steamed rice.

Also the mutton tabakhmaz (fried lamb ribs) with milk, ghee and a mélange of spices is a must-try if you are a fan of Wazwan cuisine. It’s one of the most popular snacks of Kashmir.

Taking about dessert, the one that towers above the rest is phirni, a pudding made by boiling milk and sugar with rice, saffron and cardamom. The richness of the dessert is sure to leave you wanting more.

Ahad Sons food restaurant, Uday Park, New Delhi

Ahad Sons occupies the smallest of spaces behind a Mother Dairy booth in the Uday Park neighbourhood. A glimpse of the menu leaves you with rich promises of dishes from the paradisiacal state. Delicacies that you must try include the Gushtaba (pounded mutton balls cooked in curd gravy), Tabakh maaz (lamb ribs) and the Alobukhar korma (a chicken gravy dish cooked with dried plums and spiced with kashmiri

masalas).

Samavar, Greater Kailash, New Delhi

It is a nice, cosy-restaurant with a homely ambience where you can spend a relaxing evening. It offers authentic Kashmiri Mughlai dishes that are cooked to perfection and designed to delight the taste buds. Recommended dishes include Rogan Josh (a lamb curry made with spices like fennel seeds and dry ginger) with walnut chutney (soaked walnuts with green chillies, some black cumin seeds, yogurt and salt) and Kahmiri pulao with dry fruits — a delicious rice preparation where rice is cooked in milk and loaded with dry fruits and fruits.

The menu also includes Nadurchurma (a crunchy snack from the Valley made of lotus stems), plain haakh (haakh, a dish of greens cooked with mustard oil, hing and dried red chillies) it is an important element of Kashmiri cuisine and is cooked in almost every household in the region, chuck wangun (khattay baingan) these are the foods that form the backbone of daily food in Kashmir. If Roganjosh is the star of the special occasion dishes, these are the stars of everyday meals.



Kashmir’s cuisine is unique not just in terms of spices — in particular fennel, hing, cardamom, and Kashmiri red chillies — but also in the way it is prepared. Nowadays the cuisine is catching on in being in different parts of the country – it is not only in Kashmir that the stem of the lotus flower is eaten in a variety of preparations. Now many high-end hotels and restaurants in Delhi serve these to their guests especially Kashmiris looking to quench satisfy their craving for home-cooked food.. You really don’t need to be a Kashmiri to eat and enjoy this cuisine.

So we think we had a great experience in exploring authentic Kashmiri food in Delhi and we were surprised to see the same atmosphere, taste and the simplicity that is the khasiyat (specialty) of our home.

So if you have not yet tried Kashmiri food, we suggest you to go for it because you are missing out a delicious experience. And if you are a Kashmiri, well, sorry for making you drool. *The Patriot*

6 years after floods, bridge awaits reconstruction

SAMREENA NAZIR

The Nallah Bringi bridge, which is the main connecting link between Sadoora village in south Kashmir with Anantnag town, awaits reconstruction since the past six years, after it was damaged in 2014.

The bridge was damaged in 2014 floods, following which public movement and traffic on it was stopped. In the meantime, the government build a suspension bridge over the river but it collapses every year when the water level of the river raises.

The locals of the area said that non-availability of the bridge is giving tough time to them as they have to take a long route to reach the main town Anantnag.

Mohammad Tanveer, a local resident, said that they have to face immense hardships due to the non-completion of the bridge as they have to cover a long distance to reach Anantnag.

“Every spring this temporary bridge gets collapsed, isolating the village from the neighbouring areas,” he said.



This bridge is a project of world bank through JFTR. We have already submitted a number of designs but there were some queries on which we worked and submitted again, but our designs are still under review”

“The bridge used to be a valuable asset for us as it connects dozens of villages with the main town. The bridge was damaged in 2014, we are still waiting for its construction. Authorities and Politicians often come and survey the bridge site but are not taking any concrete step to complete the construction of it,” Adil Ahmad, a local resident said.

An official from Roads and Buildings (R&B) department Qazigund said the funds for the project are to be released from the world bank. The design and construction work has been assigned to Khanday Infra Structure Private Limited, once the agency will come up with designs, the funds will be released accordingly from the world bank for the project.

“This bridge is a project of world bank through JFTR. We have already submitted a number of designs but there were some queries on which we worked and submitted again, but our designs are still under review. We will start the work once our submitted designs will get approved,” an official from Khanday Construction Company, said. *Kashmir Life*





DYING ART OF PAPIERMACHIE

Dwindling economic utility of the art is forcing artisans in Kashmir villages to give up on it, reports **SAMREENA NAZIR**

On a snowy afternoon of January, facing towards the only window of the room, surrounded with broken cups holding variety of colors, Fayaz Ahmad Jan, 45, is keenly moving brushes over an elephant made of paper pulp. Spending most of his time in a room where every item around is decorated with alluring colors, his puffy eyes with dark circles reflect his dedication towards the art of Papiermachie. He has been practicing the art since 30 years.

"This art was passed down from our ancestors to us, who had learned it from, a famous papiermachie artist, Mohammad Yousuf Naqash, of Alamgir bazaar Srinagar," says Jan of Shahoo village in Kulgam.

Before nineties, every individual in Jan's locality was associated with paper-machie and this craft was the only source of income for the villagers. Jan as a kid would be attracted towards colors, he used to observe his uncle's fingers while decorating the items with different colors and designs.

Soon Jan earned the mastery over the art, left his school and joined the village's common workshop. "I spent my childhood surrounded by colors, artists and papiermachie items. Men from the village would do papiermachie while women used to support them by making a paste of paper for making a crude shape of a thing which was later decorated by the artists," says Jan.

A little distance from Jan's house, a three storey mud building stands witness to the art of papiermachie in the village. The building used to be a common center for the papiermachie workers of the village, where they would jointly work throughout the year.

The center was more like an office for the crafts men, where they used to spend six hours a day and experiment new ideas and designs. "Years before, there used to be a crowd of papiermachie workers in the building. Every individual associated with papiermachie would attend the center," says Jan. "The center would keep the village artists linked with one another and would produce items like jewellery boxes, soap cases, flower vase and other items ordered by

people".

After 2000, the art lost its centrality in the village and so did the workshop. Apart from paper-machie, the artists would make paper pulp for items in the village. The rubbing sound of piston and mortar, for crushing paper pulp by women would buzz through the village.

"When the village work shop produced items, we were unable to supply it. There is no market for such items in the villages so we were dependent on middlemen who had contacts with businessmen of Srinagar," says Jan. "As we used to make paper pulp on our own, the middlemen earned less from our stock so they would refuse to take our items. As a result, the young workers shifted to other professions while others turned their homes into workshops where they work in groups", Says Mohammad Yusuf Meer, one of the best artists in the village: "Till last year I used to have a dozen of workers at my house but gradually all of them left, probably because of less wages they earned.

To compete with his friends from well-off families during school time, Mir, then a primary student would work with the overtime workers at the workshop after returning from school. It was the time, when the government employees of the village used to leave their jobs and learn papiermachie.

Although, papiermachie demands a lot of patience and focus but people used to enjoy it till the time it satisfied their needs. "We used to earn a healthy amount, in fact, this craft was preferred over government jobs My brother, who is now posted in Jammu as Sub-Inspector of police left his job for seven months to work in the common center of village where he earned more than his government job," says Meer.

For few years, Meer's earnings were satisfactory like other workers in the village. Almost every worker received loan from Khadi and Village Industries Department to expand their business. "Everything was going smooth till the villagers became dependent on orders from middlemen who cornered the major

portion of profit," says Meer.

The artists receive the paper pulp from the middle men, work on it on lesser wages, and then supply it back to them, The middlemen then send it to the one who has export license.

"The middlemen receive the items from us at low rates and then sell it on expensive rates in the market," says Meer, who is an electrician and a part-time papiermachie artist. "I remember, once a middleman took a 33 inch flower vase from me for Rs four thousand which he later sold for Rs 42 thousand".

Pointing towards a fish shaped soap case, Meer says: "This took me one and half day and I would earn a meager seventy rupees for it.

"This art is actually city centered as it flourishes in Srinagar because it is a tourist destination," says Meer. "We don't teach this art to anyone anymore in the village even if they insist because we don't want to ruin their future as ours, I practice it out of compulsion now because I can't learn new things now." *Kashmir Life*



The center would keep the village artists linked with one another and would produce items like jewellery boxes, soap cases, flower vase and other items ordered by people"

‘Education is in bad shape’

IRAM NAAZ/ SUBIA LATIEF

Ashok Agarwal, former AAP member, who has been leading the fight for children's right to education, claims – astonishingly enough – that enrollment is going down in MCD-run schools and schools are being closed down in large numbers

A lawyer at the Supreme Court and Delhi High Court, Ashok Agarwal has found time apart from his professional practice to work for children's rights for the last 12 years. He is known for his vigorous effort to make good schooling and healthcare accessible to the under privileged, particularly those from deprived sections of society.

Coming from a trade union background, Ashok closely observed the inhuman working conditions of workers which motivated him to fight for their fundamental rights through the power of Public Interest Litigations (PILs). Later his focus shifted to children of school-going age.

Why did you leave the Aam Aadmi Party?

I joined AAP in 2013 and on 14 March 2014, I left because I found that they are nothing more than an NGO whose main aim is to build themselves. So I found that I cannot work with them. In my resignation letter, I wrote that the party did not consider positive inputs of workers and the atmosphere was not conducive for growth. Many party members allege that I left the party because I didn't get a ticket to contest the Lok Sabha elections and that I was disappointed. But the truth is I left because they don't mean what they say.

What are your views on the school education system in India?

We can divide the education system into three sections: private schools, economically weaker sections (EWS) who under RTE go to private schools and the government system. My estimate is that nearly 20 crore children are of schoolgoing age, out of which 13 crore attend school, including mushrooming unrecognised schools and play schools. No less than 7-8 crore children are still left out of this system, out of them two crore are disabled and completely ignored. Of these, less than 1% are in but 50% of them are not taken care of, which is a very serious issue. This then, is the worst category among the children. Besides all these, if we look around there are almost three crore migrant labourers who travel with families, almost all of them are illiterate as they don't get the opportunity to go to school. Among them, almost one crore of the children travelling with them are left out of school.

Child labour, though outlawed, is still prevalent: children work in fields and as helpers in middle class families. These number around 5-6 crore in the country. Also the number of kids dropping out from school, especially girls who take on the job of caring for their siblings is high, which is an

alarming and serious figure.

In private schools, the condition is such that only 20 percent of them can be considered schools, otherwise 80 percent of the private schools are more or less the same as the government schools or even worse than them. There are more than nine lakh government schools in India but the whole system is dysfunctional. What I mean is that with the passage of time, despite efforts towards improvement, the education system is getting worse.

There was a time when there were no private schools and I myself have studied in a government school but the condition was not as bad as it is today. Currently the condition in India is such that enrollment has drastically gone down. If we talk about just Delhi, for the last four years enrollment has gone down to the tune of four lakh students – three lakh from municipal corporations and one lakh from government schools. Basically government schools are shutting down, in Delhi almost 300 of the MCD-run schools have been closed.

Additionally, more than 20 lakh children aged 3-18 years who should be in school are not receiving any formal education. So it is becoming a trend that government run schools are being closed down and if this trend continues, if they are not given attention then in the coming years they will all be shut down.

My perception is that nothing is happening at country or at the state level to tackle this problem, school education is getting worse day by day and whenever government schools shut down, the children of impoverished classes suffer. Government schools are the only hope for the masses.

When did you first raise the issue of arbitrary fee hike?

In 1997 I filed my first PIL on education in the High Court, which raised the issue of arbitrary fee hike by unaided recognised private schools in the national capital. I felt satisfied when in 1998 the court ordered 531 private schools to return excess fees to parents. Alongside, government-run schools were upgraded to the level of Kendriya Vidyalayas. Regulation of fee structures in private schools was done by law to curb commercialisation and exploitation.

What was your contribution for the educational rights of specially-abled children?

I have not contributed anything but the issue of specially-abled children is very close to my heart because I have seen how they are living in misery. In India there are 2 crore children of which less than 1% are in school. I filed a PIL in Delhi High Court under the name Taare Zameen Par in which I highlighted the fact that thousands of students with disabilities and particularly those suffering from blindness, hearing impairment and mental disorders, studying in 1,000 Delhi government and 1,800 MCD-run schools are without trained teachers including teachers qualified in sign language and / or Braille.

I also highlighted the fact that the students with disabilities do not get a barrier free environment in these schools. I further highlighted the fact that special books and equipment needed for the education of students with special needs is also not being provided to them by the schools. Then the court recommended the Delhi government to form a committee to identify these children and ensure that their needs are adequately met for their bright future..

What is your most memorable case?

I remember the two major victories of my career that were considered to be impossible wins. They include the admission of children belonging to weaker sections to unaided private schools built on public land to the extent of 20%, and the free treatment of EWS patients in 47 identified private hospitals to the extent of 10% IPD and 25% OPD strength.

Over the years, children have benefited a lot and the judgements pronounced by the courts have played a significant role in framing the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

What was the main purpose of these PILs?

The purpose of these PILs is to wake up the authorities and bring a change in the unjust and discriminatory system.

Do you think the government is interested in the education of children from the impoverished masses?

I don't see any change in the government's response in all these years. The system is designed in a way that the poor have no place. The authorities are insensitive to the needs of poor children so we people are their only hope. However, I'm determined to continue to fight for their rights till my last breath.

What do you expect that the upcoming government should do in the education sector?

I don't expect anything from the government, same things will go on, maybe a little worse. Because the issue of education is buried deep under the ground and no one seems to be interested in, whether it's the government or the Municipal Corporations. *The Patriot*



A lawyer who feeds the protesters at Shaheen Bagh



Advocate D.S. Bindra

ADIL HAMID

One of those who is trying to ensure that food is available to the protesters against the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi is D.S. Bindra, an advocate who practises at the Karkardooma courts complex. Such has been his passion that he even sold one of his flats in Delhi to raise money for the langar, or community kitchen, there.

Talking to this correspondent, Bindra said he started the langar to serve people and humanity. He said his children suggested that the money set aside for donation to the gurdwara be used for such work. His wife and son also run the langars at Mustafabad and Khureji, the other locations in Delhi where protests have been happening for over a month. Bindra said the women of Shaheen Bagh “are not mere human beings, they are brave and courageous lionesses”. Bindra takes care to provide different types of food every day, including dal-chawal, poori-aloo, subzi, kheer, and also tea.

Bindra said once Sikh farmers from different places in Punjab came to participate in the ongoing protest, he thought of starting the langar, which, he says, will continue until the protesters remain there.

Bindra says he wants to highlight the fraternity that exists between Sikhs and Muslims. His act is to turn the slogan of “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai apas may hai bhai bhai” [we are all one] into a reality. Bindra says the police and the local administration have tried to disrupt the langar, and one day they took away all the utensils. Still, he made sure the langar continued, though at a modest level. The food is prepared in the parking area in the vicinity of the protest site and then distributed. The cause, he believes, is for the wider humanity. *Frontline*



The VPN route to the digital universe in J&K

ADIL HAMID

Starved of social media for more than 200 days, Kashmiri youth have devised an innovative way to get past the digital siege and connect with the world using the VPN. It allows users to access the Internet through proxy servers, thus hiding their location. Stories of isolation from the beleaguered State are flooding social media, alerting the local police too. The latest incident was a photograph of the ailing separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, which was doing the rounds on social media. On February 17, an FIR was filed in this connection under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Information Technology Act, the first such FIR since the Internet blockade came into effect in the newly created Union territory.

Now, Internet access has been restored partially; one can access 329 sites which are “whitelisted” by the government. There is no access to social media even now, and that is where the VPN has become a favourite route for the youth and a source of tension between civilians and security personnel. Security personnel allegedly check the phones of youth for VPN applications and if such applications are found the youth are allegedly beaten up. A 17-year-old boy from district Kulgam, who did not want to be named, told this reporter that though he has a smart phone, he carries only a basic device when he goes out. “It is just to avoid the attention of the forces. They stop people and check their phones, and many have been beaten up by security personnel when they found VPN applications installed in their phones,” he says. Another boy, from the Pombai area of Kulgam district, who also has a smart phone but does not carry it in public spaces, said, “Who dares go to the army camp to collect his phone.”

The government does not tire of telling the world that there is complete normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir, but the residents have a different story to tell. *Frontline*



It is just to avoid the attention of the forces. They stop people and check their phones, and many have been beaten up by security personnel when they found VPN applications installed in their phones”

Life after Lockdown

The curfew in the Valley made life difficult for those living there, especially for students

IRAM NAAZ

On August 4, 2019, the common masses in the Kashmir Valley were in a state of confusion as rumours of scrapping Article 370 were being shared through various social media platforms. The next day I woke up and was surprised to see a curfew-like situation and communication blackout in the whole Valley.

It was not a normal situation for me because the rumours that I heard before the abrogation of the Article 370 were turning out to be true. After the communication blackout, I was completely disconnected from the world. This is one of the worst shutdowns I have seen in the region. My life shattered in that very moment. I was so frustrated as I was not even allowed to step outside because of the curfew. I spend almost three months inside my home like a prisoner. I had no idea what was going to happen next. It was a war like situation.

During these four months, the education sector was hit in the Valley causing irreversible loss to students. The schools and universities remained closed since August 4, all exams were cancelled, hostels were vacated, even non-local students were evacuated from NIT Srinagar. Colleges and schools were under the control of BSF. The government did attempt to reopen the institutions after one week, but attendance remained poor as parents feared their children's safety. This break in education for me was unpredictable, and



filled with fear and trauma.

My semester exams were about to begin from September. But were cancelled because of this situation. As a result, I will not get my degree on time and one more year will be required for its completion. I almost missed 450 classes in this year because of the hartals (strikes).

Two months after the lockdown, postpaid mobile services were resumed and I was finally able to connect to my peers but nothing much changed. I was still behind the doors of my home. Then in November, University classes resumed but not properly. I was informed that my exams are starting from December. But my parents were not in favour of this decision as they feared about my safety. Somehow, I managed to

appear for the exams but faced many difficulties as there was no transport available, and the toughest part was that I could not access the internet to gather notes for my preparation. This was the worst experience I have ever been through, which I will never forget.

Also, because of the internet gag, me and my friends were not able to do internship in Kashmir and have to come to Delhi to do so. Moreover, even today, the situation is same in Kashmir: no education, no internet and no life! *The Patriot*



It was not a normal situation for me because the rumours that I heard before the abrogation of the Article 370 were turning out to be true. After the communication blackout”



Kangri weaving: The art of keeping people warm

HASHIM MUNEER KHAN

Kangri or Kanger is earthenware encased in a wicker basket filled with small pieces of burning charcoal that Kashmiri people use to keep themselves warm in harsh winter. Kangri is like a moveable heater and kept in Pheran, a traditional woolen cloak worn by the Kashmiri people to fight the bitter cold climatic conditions. It is believed that Kashmiris learned the use of Kangri from the Italians who visited Kashmir during Mughal rule.

Manufacturing a Kangri requires labour, skills and craftsmanship. Men and women collect twigs from deciduous shrubs that are scrapped and peeled and go through a process of soaking, drying, dyeing and finally woven around bowl-shaped earthenware.

“Earlier, Kangri was made only from earthenware and would heat up, as a result, the people stopped using it,” says 80-year-old Asha Banoo of Verinag. “Nowadays, such earthenware Kangris are used during several religious and cultural rituals like burning Isband (Peganum hermalla) in it.”

Kangris come in a variety of designs and sizes, from small sizes for children to preferable size for old people. The most common type of Kangri has a broad base and wide-mouthed pot which costs around 150-200 rupees, the middle-class Kangri is made of finely weaved wicker that costs around 500-700 rupees and the high-class Kangri is called Charar Kangri, a slim decorated pot with minute wickerwork is the most expensive Kangri and costs 1500-2000 rupees. Charar Kangri is usually

bought to decorate homes. Some Kashmiris gift them to non-local friends to promote and symbolize Kashmiri culture. Some Kangri are customized and polished in such a way that it symbolizes a piece of art.

Walter R. Lawrence, the British settlement commissioner in Kashmir wrote in his book “what Laila was on Majnoo’s bosom, so is Kangri to a Kashmiri. But this art imported from Italy and perfected in Kashmir may not survive for too long.”

Reyaz Ahmad, 40, a resident of south Kashmir’s Verinag says that he is not interested in modern alternatives like room heaters, gas heaters and believes that they are harmful and dangerous. “Due to unscheduled power cuts during winters, Kashmiris prefer Kangris to keep themselves warm.”

The skill of Kangri weaving offers employment to a good number of people in Kashmir. The families engaged in the skill of making Kangris are spread across Kashmir. Ghulam Rasool Shaksaz, 63, of Kanil Pora Verinag Anantnag is weaving Kangris since his childhood. “It takes me 2-4 hours to weave a Kangri and with this pace, I am able to make 2-3 Kangris per day.”

Shaksaz says that most of the Kangri weavers are switching to other jobs as the profession is not fetching them enough income. *Kashmir Images*



NO MAN’S LAND: After the communication blackout in the Valley, those living there were cut off from the world. PHOTO: GETTY



Earlier, Kangri was made only from earthenware and would heat up, as a result, the people stopped using it”

The modern day genius in Kashmiri, Urdu literature

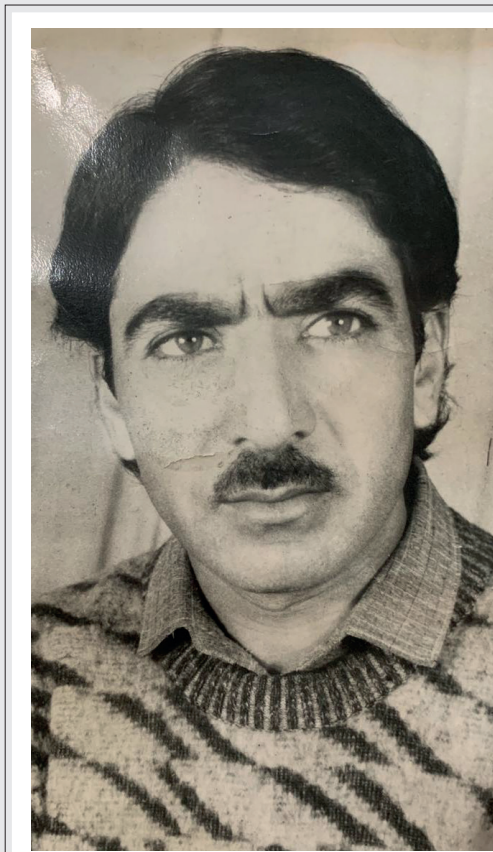
MARIYA YOUNIS/ HASHIM MUNEEER KHAN

Basheer Asrar, one of the most prominent and acclaimed modern Kashmiri writers who died on Sunday 3rd January 2021 due to cardiac arrest at his residence Bakshiabad Anantnag at the age of 68 will be remembered forever for his literary contributions and for the uniqueness of his work. "A great figure in the world of Kashmiri literature, Asrar's passing away leaves a void that cannot be filled again," said writer, poet and author Farooq Ahmad Shahmeeri. Asrar was the pen name he chose. Born at a beautiful place called Malaknag in the district Anantnag, he dwelled and grew in a literary family with his father being a poet and Asrar, in his early age was sent to Gh. Mohd Khan, who was a headmaster by profession and who brought up and nourished him under his guidance for about eight years. His creative talent was nurtured here and from his early age Asrar developed a passion and spirit to express his treasure of emotions and sentiments through literary works of poetry.

Deemed as one of the most gifted poets and authors who has done a splendid and extraordinary work in the fields of Kashmiri and Urdu literature, Asrar was associated with literature since 1967. He has written his autobiography in the form of a poetry collection that contains about 700 verses which were later published in one of his poetry books named as 'Karvan-e-Sukhan'. It uncovers all the facets of his life and the challenges that he faced during his childhood, while growing and also in his adult life. Having seen poverty right from his childhood, he did face difficulties while pursuing his passion but he never felt despaired or disdained at the events of life. A man who believed in high thinking and simple living, he courageously faced all the hardships and hindrances that came his way and continued his literary journey to establish himself as a poet of repute and respect. He enriched the Kashmiri and Urdu language by the beautiful works that he produced.

In 1967, a magazine 'Swarg Mounue Watan' (paradise- my land) was being published by the J&K Cultural Academy (Shaheedgang, Srinagar) in which the first poem of Basheer Asrar titled 'Baji Watth' was published and it became so famous that it left a profound effect on the life of Basheer Asrar and made him more convinced about the choices that he had made. And after the first success, he never looked back and went on writing steadily without showing any sign of tiredness. In those days he used to write 'Hayaat' as his pen name.

While his poetry was full of colours and variety, he had to work hard to earn a decent living. "I always looked upto him and he guided me at every stage of my life and whenever



I needed him he was there for me," said Dr. Mujeeb Liyakat (Asst. professor DJMC Islamic University Awantipora).

"He had tremendous knowledge in the field of poetry and his writings would change people's perspective on life. He was, and will be my inspiration forever," he added.

Besides being a poet, he also had the knowledge of Unani medicine (Hakeem) as patients from distant places having any sort of ailment would come here for the consultation as well as the treatment.

Basically a Sufi poet, he definitely carved a special place for himself in the world of literature. The Sufi-poetry is the main objective in his life. His love for the Sufi poetry is reflected in his poems and his overall work though his poems have different variety and variations including humour, revolutionary ideas, sentimental tones, parody and patriotism etc.

His poems are often played on the Radio Kashmir and Doordharshan Kendra. His work for the Kashmiri as well as the Urdu literature is unparalleled which is not only a complex job but nearly a dream come true for a poor person that he was. He was distinguished critic and a man of letters and always encouraged the new comers in the field of poetry and always remains accessible to them for their guidance.

In 1985, he formed an organization named as 'The District Cultural Association Anantnag' which is still considered to be one of the best forums for new comers as well as senior literary figures. Besides this he is also the founder of the 'Bazm-e- Khadim'. He has written and published about 14 booklets and 16 books. These include Mizraab, Sona- Warq, Siyasat, Noorey Noor, Loul, Machher, Aala Maal, Karvan-e-Sukhan, Aabshaar, Satsung, Shaan and others. He has also compiled many books related to the late/deceased

poets. These include Kulyat Hassan Misger, Kulyat Qadiri, Kulyat Rasool Nowshehri, Kulyat Bulgar, Kulyat Salaam Mandho. And also the books related to the presently active poets which include Adnan, Ghash, Shehlath, Wuzin, Zitin and others.

In market, his poetry is available in the form of cassettes/ CD's in every music shop. One of his cassettes has recently been introduced in the market which added to his fame. This cassette consists of one of his most touching songs.

From 1986 to 1991, he used to publish a weekly newspaper 'The Anantnag Times' and also had been its editor, printer and publisher. The newspaper is still being published but on certain special events.

Besides his achievements in literature, he also wrote extensively about Kashmiri grammar/dictionary- the work is yet to be published. *Kashmir Images*

Karan Johar to make a biopic of Sourav Ganguly, says reports

TAVEELA ZAHOR

It's not the first time Bollywood is doing films on famous sportspersons, they introduce such characters in films who are famous and has done a huge name, so films which are based on their real-life and struggles and journey, this time it is the one and only former Indian cricketer Sourav Ganguly with this now the Director and producer Karan Johar is making a film on Sourav Ganguly who is a legend cricketer from team India.

Sourav Ganguly is known as Dada, as he is a legend cricketer and has given a lot to the Cricket world. Now fans shall see how Bollywood would portray his life. but the director himself has not made this official announcement so fans of Bollywood and cricket have to wait till the news gets out.

Reports said, Karan Johar and Dada met on a coffee and discuss the project and they are looking for the lead actor who would be playing the role of Saurav Ganguly, during his conversation with media he told he likes Hrithik Roshan so much, there no any proper official announcement regarding this movie till now. *NEWSX*



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