

THE KASHMIR

WAJAHAT FAROOQ BHAT

**If Silence Is Apolitical
Why Is It Selective?**



CONNECT

VOLUME 2

EDITION 10

02 FEBRUARY, 2023

SURE?

If Article 370 tinkered with, there would be no one in Kashmir to hold the Tricolour



Strategy & National Security, Not Politics

**Why Taking Cognisance Of The
New Kashmir Is Important For India**



THE KASHMIR
CONNECT

PRAISE FOR OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM BY THE KASHMIR CONNECT

I am happy and also humbled to acknowledge the appreciation that The Kashmir Connect has received from various quarters. Responsible and respected individuals at top positions in the police, the army and the other security forces have shared their appreciation for the assessment and analysis they find in the pages of The Kashmir Connect. Their appreciation is so welcome, and deeply humbling. I thank them all.

The magazine reaches out every week to a wide gamut of readers across the region and the country. Every week, our endeavour is to reach out to more and more readers. We all are interconnected. All across India, our fellow Indians want to know about everything that impacts Kashmir. Internationally too, there is sizable interest in the Valley.

At times, some readers share their response in an articulate manner, and they are specific about what they like about the magazine. I am happy to share with you all the response posted by Dr Bimal Misri, Principal Scientist, (Retd) ICAR-IGFR, (Institute of Grasslands & Fodder Research) Jhansi.

Dr Mistri's feedback was in response to Edition 9 of The Kashmir Connect, which focused



Dr Bimal Mistri



Dr Suren Tikoo

on the emerging challenges in Chenab Valley, and on the urgent need to initiate damage control exercises. Here is what he wrote:

"From the contents of this publication this seems to be a rational publication. The future terror threats from Chenab Valley have very rightly been enumerated. It is a welcome change to read seemingly right assessments of the looming threats of terrorism in parts of J and K. Let's hope Kashmir Connect continues with this objective journalism."

The magazine was shared with Dr Mistri by Dr Suren Tikoo, Co Founder & Director Research - Breeding & Development at Tierra Seed Science Pvt Ltd. Dr Tikoo is a highly successful and popular agricultural scientist engaged in vegetable breeding, research & development in both the public and the private sector since 1971. With Dr Mistri's note, Dr Tikoo wrote, "I concur with him".

I thank our various readers for their appreciation. May the Almighty bless us always to continue to publish our magazine with a deep sense of honesty and responsibility. God bless.

GAYATRI MOHAN

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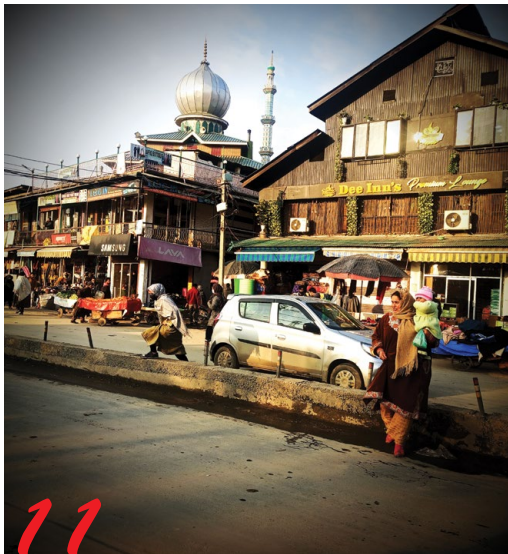
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FROM THE DESK OF THE DEPUTY EDITOR

ABIDA WAR



KUPWARA WINTER CARNIVAL 2023

OUR DISTRICT IS BUZZING WITH YOUTHFUL ENERGY

**Staff Correspondent
cum Staff Photographer**
AL MUNEEB LONE

Staff Correspondents
CHASWEEDA ASLAM
DR SUMI SAIDULLAH
MISBA YOUSUF

(Deputy Editor Ms Abida War
has an honorary position
with The Kashmir Connect)

It is such a refreshing, wonderful feeling that Kupwara, a frontier district in Kashmir, is buzzing with youthful zest because of the Winter Carnival organized here by the district administration. The three-day event was organized from Jan 29 to Jan 31.

The carnival is the first of its kind in our district. I must admit that it has been possible due to the vision of our worthy Deputy Commissioner Dr Doifode Sagar Dattatray, IAS. The carnival celebrates the peace and calm that Kupwara enjoys now.



DC Dr Dattatray has initiated many educational and developmental projects that make us proud. The Zimedari project for schools addresses key areas like academics, basic infrastructure, human resource development, co-curricular activities, social and emotional learning. It is leading to a visible difference in school education in the district. Dr Dattatray has also started projects for competitive skill enhancement among the civil service aspirants from Kupwara.

Such Initiatives Hold Great Promise For Region

Addressing the youth is one of the most important facets of development initiatives in any region. Positive engagement ensures that our young generation does not feel a vacuum. Their youthful energy is channelized in a constructive manner. This shall lead to peace and prosperity at grassroots

In a conversation with The Kashmir Connect regarding his vision for Kupwara, Dr Dattatray said that ensuring employment and engagement for the youth is one of the most vital tools to address the problem of drug consumption and other youth-related challenges in the region



level. This is one of the major solutions for the challenges we face like radicalization, indoctrination of youth, drug consumption etc.

All this may seem easy, but it actually comes with great commitment and focus. Kupwara was among the worst affected districts by the curse of terrorism which was inflicted upon us by Pakistan. We have to acknowledge that to build trust among the youth in a border district like Kupwara is a hugely challenging task in itself. Making the youth feel included in the government schemes and initiatives requires constant commitment and focus on the part of the district administration.

In a conversation with The Kashmir Connect regarding his vision for Kupwara, Dr Dattatray said that ensuring employment and engagement for the youth is one of the most vital tools to address the problem of drug consumption and other youth-related challenges in the region.

Tourism is one of the most important sectors of Kashmir's economy. Dr Dattatray said that higher involvement of the youth in this sector will motivate them to explore the natural abundance of Kashmir and offer a range of options to the tourists. These many steps initiated by the district administration will help us reach our targets of youth engagement and employment.

Huge Turnout Of Youth At Winter Carnival

It is so delightful to see that



The carnival is the first of its kind in our district. I must admit that it has been possible due to the vision of our worthy Deputy Commissioner Dr Doifode Sagar Dattatray, IAS. The carnival celebrates the peace and calm that Kupwara enjoys now



our youth turned out in huge numbers at the winter carnival. Indeed it is time to leave our injured past behind. We shall heal from the wounds of terrorism when we see Kashmir restored to its previous years of glory when celebrations and

festivities were part of our daily life.

The winter carnival is an appropriate initiative to boost tourism in our scenic, picturesque Kupwara. Once more and more people from other parts of the nation get to know about the winter carnival, they will come here in larger numbers. They will taste our delicious cuisines, they shall know the warmth of Kashmiri hospitality.

The DC has rightfully envisioned that boosting tourism is a win-win for all sectors. The tourism industry is humming in Kashmir, and the Kupwara Winter Carnival adds to this joyful calendar of activities focused on our district.

DRANGYARI, THE HIDDEN PARADISE OF KUPWARA

We all look forward to more such carnivals and fests so that all our brothers and sisters across the country know how beautiful Kashmir is, and how beautiful Kupwara is, and how wonderful is the legendary hospitality of the Kashmiris. We welcome you all here



The Kupwara Winter Carnival 2023 was organized at Drangyari. Very few people outside of Kashmir are aware of Drangyari. It is so beautiful that people call it the hidden paradise of Kupwara. Drangyari provides a stunning view of the snow-capped mountains around Kupwara. The breathtaking visuals delight all visitors to our region.

It is a very thoughtful decision to organize the first edition of the carnival at Drangyari. It provided the perfect setting for various zestful activities like ice skating, zip-line, snow mobiles, All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), music, refreshment and food courts.

seen available to tourists. I want the fame of Kupwara Winter Carnival to reach far and wide. I want that when winter comes, people from various parts of the country are inspired to come to Kashmir, and also plan a visit to our beautiful district.

We Welcome Tourists To Sita Kund, Ram Kund, Raja Ram Mountains

Drangyari is situated near the town Chowkibal. While going towards Drangyari, we pass the village Trehgam. Trehgam is one of the beautiful symbols of religious harmony and co-existence in Kashmir. Along the main road, one finds the mandir and the masjid side by side.

Drangyari, our major hill station in Chowkibal region, boasts of historical spots like Sita Kund, Ram Kund, Raja Ram Mountains. Tourists to this area shall be amazed to find a series of springs in Meelyal Harrie. The spectacular view of the Shamsabri Hills view and mesmerizing meadows are covered with thick snow, in which tourists shall love to play snow games.

We all look forward to more such carnivals and fests so that all our brothers and sisters across the country know how beautiful Kashmir is, and how beautiful Kupwara is, and how wonderful is the legendary hospitality of the Kashmiris. We welcome you all here.



Strategy And National Security, Not Politics

**WHY TAKING
COGNIZANCE
OF THE NEW
KASHMIR IS
IMPORTANT
FOR INDIA**

by Gayatri Mohan



The changed reality of Kashmir has been streamed across all news platforms in the country. Suddenly, the nation is looking at Kashmir in a new light. The nation is acknowledging and appreciating that Kashmir is a different place if Lal Chowk of Srinagar can unabashedly be bathed in the colours of our national flag. And hundreds of people can exuberantly carry the Tiranga at Lal Chowk with the mind without fear and the head held high.

Newspapers in Kashmir are carrying in bold headlines that without ifs and buts, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi must thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Kashmir newspapers are stating the simple, evident truth: If Article 370 had not been abrogated, Rahul Gandhi would have been welcomed in Srinagar with heavy stone pelting. Mob violence would have steadily spiked. In counter terror action by the security forces, pellet guns may have been used. Youth may have been blinded or killed. Kashmir would have been on the boil again with a toxic cycle of deaths and agitations set in motion.

It is important to take a 360 degree view of the entirety of the change in Kashmir. The change is definitely Advantage BJP, and also far more.

TAKING COGNIZANCE OF THE NEW KASHMIR IS ABOUT

* Strategy

* National security

* Boosting peace and prosperity

* Mainstreaming Kashmiris

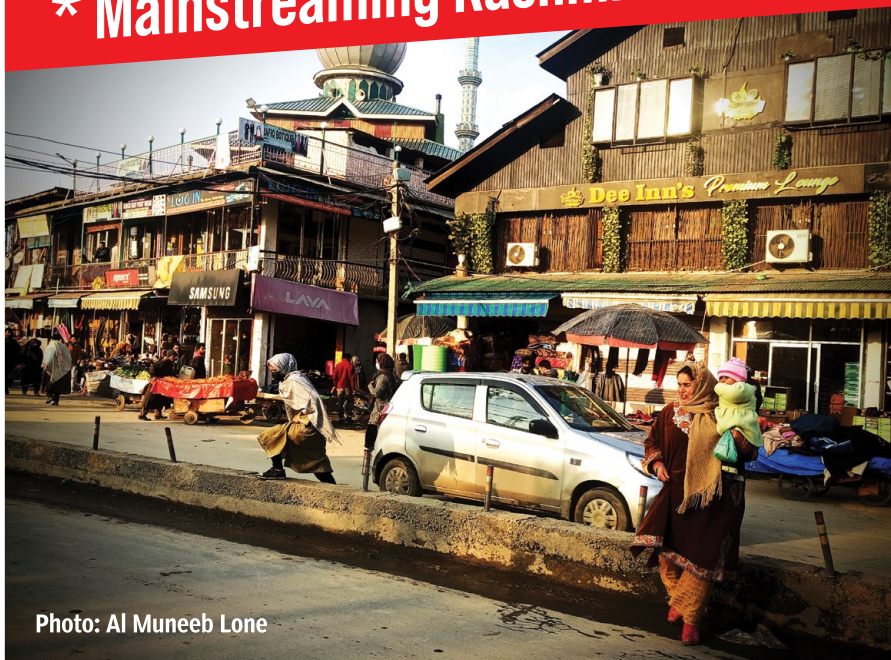


Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

Why Taking Cognizance Of The New Kashmir Is About Strategy

For decades, the lies that Pakistan peddled on Kashmir have prevailed among many dominant sections of the West. This is set to change.

The shift in perceptions will immensely help India both strategically and diplomatically. Often, some global leaders have tried to turn the heat on India where Kashmir is concerned, taking the plea of human rights. It is the people of Kashmir who are themselves correcting this faulty narrative.

Late last year, a Kashmiri friend went to England, where he interacted with many British MPs. He was startled to observe that many British MPs believed in the lies spun by Pakistan on Kashmir. With the groundswell in Kashmir standing up for India, it is steadily becoming difficult for Pakistan to mislead the international community.

The Pakistan project in Kashmir is an Islamist project. It seeks to strike down democracy and turn Kashmir into a Islamist region. This is why Pakistan uses terror and stealth for the targeted attacks on Kashmiri Pandits and on all non-local persons who work in Kashmir

Damage Done By Pakistan For Over 40 Years Won't Be Undone So Soon

Pakistan is currently in the midst of a meltdown. The snakes of radicalization and terrorism that it reared are instrumental in Pakistan's downfall. In order to hurt India, Pakistan wanted to paint Kashmir in its own colours. Our neighbouring country is rattled that after the abrogation of Article 370, Kashmir has woken up to a new era of peace and prosperity.

The naysayers try to counter the major shift in Kashmir by offering arguments regarding the killings of Kashmiri Pandits. They point to the continuing terror activities in Kashmir as some sort of certification that the abrogation of Article 370 has not been successful.

This is a faulty argument. It needs to be remembered that the damage done by Pakistan for over 40 years cannot be undone in a couple of years.

The Pakistan project in Kashmir is an Islamist project. It seeks to strike down democracy and turn Kashmir into an Islamist region. This is why Pakistan uses terror and stealth for the targeted attacks on Kashmiri Pandits and on all non-local persons who work in Kashmir. It will take time to comprehensively address the challenge.

WHY TAKING COGNIZANCE OF THE NEW KASHMIR IS ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY

Perceptions shape reality. Pakistan's thrust in Kashmir has been two-fold. One, radicalize and indoctrinate Kashmiris using religion as the base. Second, deepen faulty perception about India as an occupier state.

Once Pakistan was able to cement these two objectives in Kashmir, it did not have to push in terrorists to fight the Indian state. A sizable section of the

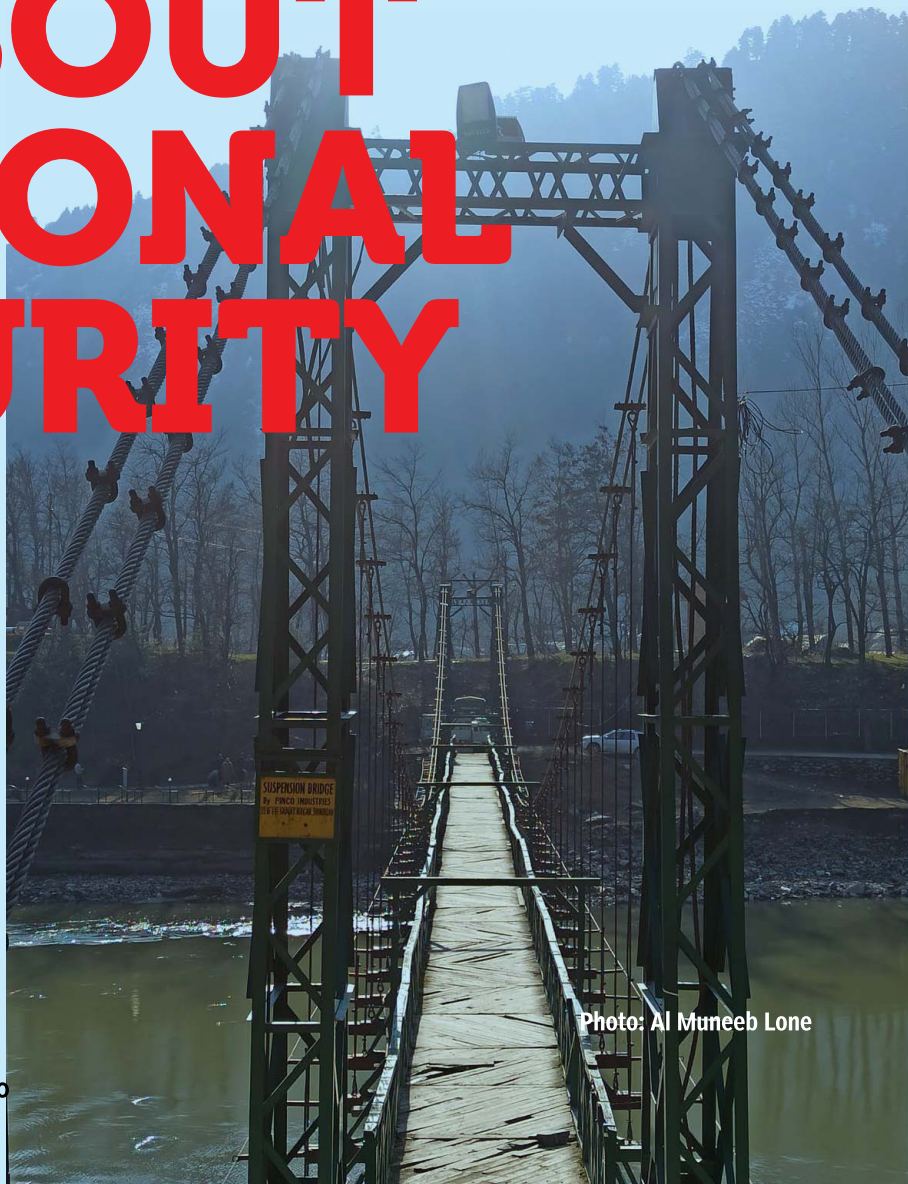


Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

local youth was, and continues to be radicalized by those among the clergy who are agenda-driven. The radicalized youth is then readily brainwashed by manufactured social narratives and perceptions.

This way, year after year Pakistan has got a new brigade of home-grown terrorists in Kashmir. Riding on the shoulders of these local youth-turned terrorists, Pakistan has been able to sell the narrative internationally that the "resistance in Kashmir" is home-grown and was a people's movement.

Taking cognizance of the new people's movement in Kashmir is hence about strengthening national security. The driving force in Kashmir is perception management. Youths are drawn to militancy because perceptions are faulty.

Number Of Terror Recruits Has Dropped

Already, the number of terror recruits has dropped because of greater awareness among the youth of the ugly games Pakistan is playing in the Valley. As steadily the perceptions will be corrected, the number of youths drawn to terror ranks shall reduce further.

Perceptions are corrected when a particular perspective becomes part of the local narrative. That is why taking cognizance of the new Kashmir is about national security. Narratives which are strengthened socially through people networks and the media gain higher precedence in the mind. These shall positively influence the radicalized youth

Violence had been normalized in Kashmir because it had social sanction. Now peace is the new normal in Kashmir. People do not want to wake up to curfews, agitations, internet shutdowns, stone-pelting, hartal calendars and the like

and wean them away from the path of terror.

This effort shall be further boosted by the fact that the Kashmir society has rejected violence as an option. This has been seen as one of the major shifts in Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. The UT Administration tightened the noose on all anti-state activities. Channels of hawala funding used for terror activities were squeezed.

Violence had been normalized in Kashmir because it had social sanction. Now peace is the new normal in Kashmir. People do not want to wake up to curfews, agitations, internet shutdowns, stone-pelting, hartal calendars and the like.

Earlier, a sense of despondency prevailed. Now, a large majority of common Kashmiris look upon themselves as happy and progressive citizens of the democratic Republic of India.

Space For Terror Is Being Squeezed

Before 2019, Kashmir used to be marked by troubled waters, in which Pakistan used to fish for terror recruits. The new



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

peace and calm in Kashmir has squeezed the spaces for the terror ecosystem. Youths turning into terrorists or hybrid militants are the aberration, and not the norm. Induction of the youth in terror ranks is low.

The clash of home-grown terrorists with security forces creates more pockets for infiltration, for arms smuggling, for deepening narcotics terror. With a significant drop in the numbers of local terrorists, the security situation in Kashmir has improved. Tourism is at an all-time high and businesses are booming, which is strengthening the local economy.

Narco terror continues to be a problem because the locals involved in the smuggling and distribution have made it a source of income. They continue to provide the logistics for narco trade to flourish.

Taking Cognizance Of The New Kashmir Is About Saving Kashmiri Youth, Saving Kashmiri Parents

Youth from affluent and educated families of Kashmir are protected from terrorism and radicalization. They are integrated into the mainstream. A large percentage of these youth moves out of Kashmir for education, and later for building their career.

It is the sons of the poor Kashmiris who are entrapped in the cesspools of radicalization and indoctrination. When the social narrative is wrong and the youth are radicalized and indoctrinated, a larger number of them fall prey to terror handlers.

They are easy prey for terror handlers who trap them into terror ranks. Parents and siblings are left wailing. Better national security means lesser youth trapped in the toxic circle of terrorism and militancy.

Taking Cognizance Of The New Kashmir Is About Mainstreaming More And More Kashmiris

At times, ordinary Kashmiris who went to the other states of India for academics, for professional or business growth used to feel a trust deficit. This was on account of the path of violence and anti-state action chosen by some Kashmiri youth back home.

Improved law and order in Kashmir shall strengthen the trust of the people of India in Kashmir. It shall have a positive impact and strengthen the interpersonal bond between communities all over the nation.

WEAPONIZING SILENCE IN KASHMIR

IF SILENCE IS APOLITICAL, WHY IS IT SELECTIVE?

by Wajahat Farooq Bhat



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

Over time, in Kashmir valley, political violence has come down. This is such a relief to the people of the valley, bruised by decades of conflict and violence.

We had reached the situation where death had been normalized in Kashmir. A large number of people and even youth would end each day with the count of the dead.

It used to be the usual trend that people would die for varied reasons. I am referring to the



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

We must realize the magnitude of the terror monster amidst us. Once the terror gun is activated, it does not stop killing. Then ordinary people start falling to the bullets for the whims and fancies of terrorists

killings incited by the devotees of violence – such as terrorists and rioters. At times, the armed forces accidentally killed people. People's radical outlook sometimes made the soldiers doubt bystanders as adversaries.

The cycle of violence was manifested in the form of deaths and collateral damage. At that time the cries for accountability would be voluble. The cries for accountability would arise pointedly in the incidents where

it was assumed and charged by people that violence had been initiated by the security forces.

There is no wrong in this articulation, seeking accountability. There is no evil in seeking an answer from the humans in uniform. But the volubility of seeking accountability for the killings was selective.

Silence Systematizes Violence

For decades now, a deliberate and systematic effort was in place to subvert the image of the security forces. For seeking this desired result, different social engineering techniques were adopted. They are weakened now, but they are still in use.

Ideologically motivated, radicalized people bridged the space between truth and untruth. Anti-state forces processed and analyzed each incident with the 'Blame India' filter. Each incident was projected as it suited them, to yield strategic anti-state results on the ground. Social influencers from journalists to authors and orators raised their voices in unison to question and damn the conduct of the armed forces.

Their silence was selective. They remained silent through the decades when we witnessed glaring excesses of the terror forces.

Since 1990, the vicious cycle of violence has lashed Kashmir with periodic interruptions. It has reached a cusp whereon it raises questions about our social conscience. It further attests that violence was approved by us. Violence had social sanction.

Our Silence Absolves And Exonerates The Terrorists

In the recent volley of attacks on Kashmir Pandits and non-locals, the silence of the society continues to provide a helping hand to the terrorists. Our silence absolves and exonerates them. For the terrorists, these deaths are strategic. For them, the silence is also strategic. The strategy looks pointed and engineered.

Terrorists attack a Pandit because he is seen as an extension of India or as a conformist of Indian nationalism in Kashmir. The next day, the same module attacks people from other states, irrespective of their faith. These men who were attacked and killed were innocent. They were driven to Kashmir to seek an opportunity to earn a livelihood.

We must realize the magnitude of the terror monster amidst us. Once the terror gun is activated, it does not stop killing. Then ordinary people start falling to the bullets for the whims and fancies of terrorists. A social media influencer who is intrinsically a nonconformist falls to the bullets imported from Pakistan.

The Kashmiri Pandit is killed in Shopian to supposedly set an example. The next ambush is a labourer sleeping in a shed. In some periphery, a singer of the Ambreen Bhat sort quenches the hunter's thirst.

It becomes vague for people to define the war that they are witness to. The approval of terrorism as a medium is common. Let us never forget that

Let us never forget that the conflict is non-indigenous. It has been planned in Pakistan, and nurtured in Kashmir.



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

the conflict is non-indigenous. It has been planned in Pakistan, and nurtured in Kashmir.

TERROR ACTS
CANNOT BE
ATTRIBUTED
TO CHANGES
IN POLITICAL
STATUS QUO

OUR SILENCE
EMBOLDENS
THE TERROR
PLAYERS

by Wajahat Farooq Bhat

Globally, there can be no justification for terror. We need a discussion within society on this subject. But people are afraid to voice their thoughts openly if they want to support the abrogation of Article 370 for any reason.

This is because people are scared of the terror ecosystem that exists around them. The terror sympathizers profile and target those who disagree with the abrogation. The terror constituency holds a singular argument that justifies that same old political status quo.

The terror constituency argues that the spilled blood of a Pandit can help them to register what they believe to be the truth. The think squad of violence does not theorize how the killing of the Pandit will establish the truth.

The Pandits Are Part Of Us

The Pandits whom they target for the killing are part of us. They sound like us, they sing like us, they mourn like us. They have identical looks like us. They wear what we wear, they speak the language we cherish.

The Pandit is killed for an imagined demographic change,

for an imagined occupation of our Kashmir. For gratification, he is characterized as an extension of India and killed. The question is – why are we largely silent when the Pandit is targeted and killed?

Our silence is strategic, like our other reactions. We chose silence when we watched Bollywood's endorsement of the Pandits. That time, silence was considered essential.

Our Silence Takes A Toll On Innocent Lives

Our silence has always emboldened the terror players. Our silence has strengthened the anti-state ecosystem. We claim that our silence is apolitical. If our silence is not political, why is it selective?

We watch one more social facet. We watch that a specific class of people reacts to

The terror architects capitalize upon our silence and our fear. The day we decide to throw off silence and fear, the terror acts shall end. This is so important for us. It will avert our social breakdown



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

Bindaas Chowk, Baramulla



the inhuman conduct of the terrorists. At that time, why is their reaction labeled as political?

The truth is that weaponizing silence is the norm in Kashmir. We ignore the fact that our silence takes a toll on innocent lives. We watch the sustenance of radicalism. It seeks to enforce a uniform pattern of thinking which is anti-India. Radicalism rules out any alternate routes that people may want to take.

The 'Vocals' Ensure That The Faulty Narrative Never Changes

There is a category of people in Kashmir called the 'Vocals'. Across ages, the Vocals are the dominant class of Kashmir. The Vocals are involved in making the terror acts more and more ambiguous so that they remain covert.

In order to ensure that the faulty narrative never changes, the language engineers have perpetuated words like 'agency'. They have perpetuated words like 'fear'. To ensure the perpetuation of terror acts, the language engineers popularize 'agency involvement'. Everybody knows that the reference is to the security agencies.

Our beloved Kashmir is on the list of terror players. They want to turn our beloved Kashmir into Syria or Afghanistan. Detoxification of Silence as a virtue will save our Kashmir. It will save our pluralistic fabric

Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

At times the truth emerges. The stern contestation of truth sometimes forces them to change their tune. This happens when clearly-available evidence bulldozes their version. In such a situation, the cohort employs the word 'Fear' to particularize the act, as it enforces the silence. Fear is deepened in popular imagination.

For those who do not understand the dynamics of Kashmir, this phenomenon may appear to be opaque.

Conflict Beneficiaries Need Social Enmity To Political Conflict Perspective Alive

The conflict beneficiaries need social enmity to keep the political conflict perspective alive. Some of these conflict beneficiaries hold gigantic stature locally. The stature is bestowed upon them by some Western organizations that seek to glorify terrorism.

These organizations have

no understanding of what we Kashmiris have suffered because terrorism ruled the valley. The vested interests of these Western organizations override the desire of the common people for a life free of terror and conflict.

The workforce involved in glorifying terrorism includes journalists, authors, clerics and political orators. By sticking to our silence, we help this 'whitewash terror' project. Local silence ensures control of terror pockets on the streets. Local silence ensures the availability of vulnerable youth for terror networks. It ensures that the exploitation of local youth for terror flames endures.

Our Silence Is Destroying The Social Edifice Of Kashmir

In the existing fiasco of Kashmir, silence holds symbolic value as that of the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall was not just a wall. It



Mr Wajahat Farooq Bhat

Mr Wajahat Farooq Bhat is Chairman, J&K Save Youth Save Future Foundation. He hails from Baramulla, Kashmir

orchestrated social breakdown. It was the mammoth of the time and orchestrated a sad disconnect.

Silence in Kashmir is evolving as a wall. Our silence towards all that is wrong is destroying the social edifice of Kashmir valley. The terror architects capitalize upon our silence and our fear. The day we decide to throw off silence and fear, the terror acts will no longer be popular. The terror acts shall end. This is so important for us. It will avert our social breakdown.

Our beloved Kashmir is on the list of terror players. They want to turn our beloved Kashmir into Syria or Afghanistan. Detoxification of Silence as a virtue will save our Kashmir. It will save our pluralistic fabric.

A Little Girl With A Message

Arise And Awake, My Beloved Youth Of Kashmir!

Build A Beautiful Life

Make Your Parents And Nation Proud

by Al Muneeb Lone

It is said that it is better to fail in the process than to succeed in imagination.

On January 28, Mudasar Baya and I were sitting at Modern Sweets, a popular eatery in Baramulla. I received such

a beautiful message from the divine on this day. Who knows this message may transform the lives of so many youngsters.

Our Youth Seems To Have Surrendered Even Before Achieving Success

All around us, we see so many people who are distressed. They seem to be tired of their life.

Everybody seems to love to be alone, stay in solitude. So many times, it seems to me that our youth is in the mode of surrender even before they have achieved and tasted success.

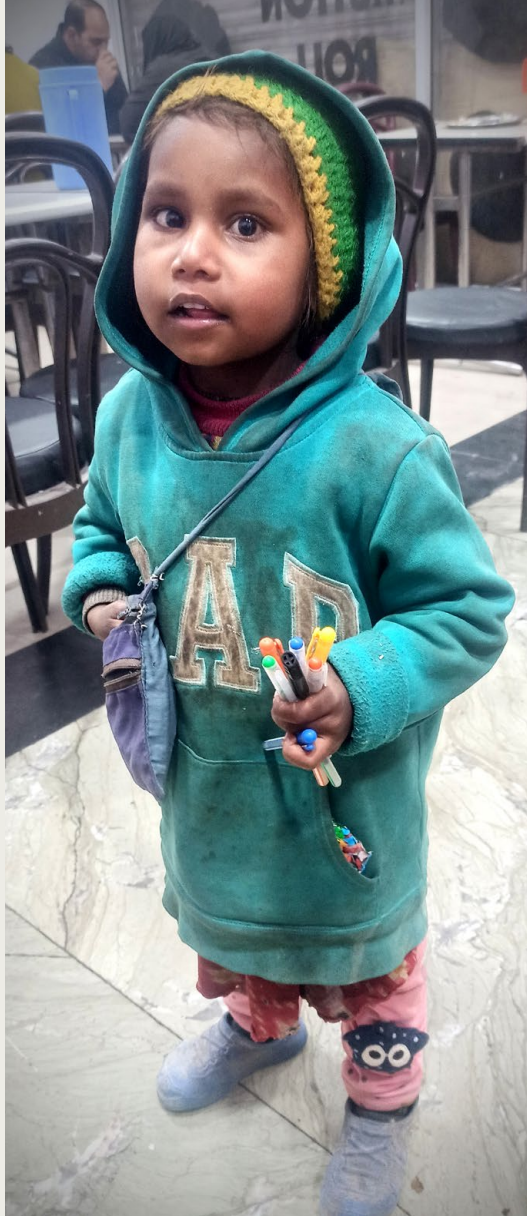
It makes me sad that our youth is not dedicated. Our youngsters are not consistent in any task, and nor are they patient. If we ask people how they want their life to be, they answer – sukoon ki zindagi. All want a life of peacefulness and success.

But why aren't we able to find peace or success?

We Have To Work For Success, For Peace

I feel that we don't get peace or success. We have to find it and we have to work for it.

I was sitting with Mudasar Baya at Modern Sweets when a sweet, innocent child entered the eatery. She said to me, "Baya please buy a pen from me." I was surprised to see such a small child trying to earn her living.



to my mother in the evening, she said.

I was completely shocked to see this sweet innocent child.

Let Us Strive For Achievement

O my beloved youth of Kashmir! You don't have to sleep so much. Arise and awake. You have to mark the definition of success. What stops you from achieving success? I am so astounded to see this little child. She is shouldering so many responsibilities at a time when she does not even know her age.

The Almighty gave us a comfortable childhood. We were not dependent on anyone for our daily needs. Our parents gave us everything we needed, everything we sought. They worked

day and night so that we would have a comfortable life. It is now our responsibility to work so that our parents are always proud of us.

Look at this sweet doll. She has never begged for money. It is her age to enjoy life. But she is sharing the burden of her parents at such a tender age. She is standing on her own feet, and is not dependent on anyone.

Our parents have given us a quality life. They have ensured that we got a good education. Instead of falling to the evil of drugs, or going on the path of

Instead of falling to the evil of drugs, or going on the path of radicalization, we must seek a joyful, healthy life full of honest work and endeavour. We must pull ourselves out of the darkness in which some of us are trapped. We must build our future and serve our nation

radicalization, we must seek the blessings of the Almighty to live a joyful, healthy life full of honest work and endeavour. We must put in our energies to build our future and serve our nation. We must pull ourselves out of the darkness in which some of us are trapped.

This little girl has given me a huge, significant message. Learn to take responsibility even when you do not have any responsibility.

I asked her, Beta, why are you selling these pens? She smiled and answered happily, Mein pen bechti hoon kuchh kamane vaaste aur kuchh khaane vaaste. I sell pens to earn money so that I may get something to eat. I asked her, Beta, where are you from and what is your age?

The little girl said she is from UP. She wasn't sure about her age. I asked her where are your parents? She said her parents are here in Kashmir. My mother sells jhaadu (brooms) and my father is a labourer, she said. I sell pens. Whatever money I get, I give it



Al Muneeb Lone Is Staff Correspondent-cum-Photographer, The Kashmir Connect

NOTES FROM THE VALLEY



FROM THE CONSULTING EDITOR'S DESK

SHEIKH MUDASIR HUSSAIN



MS MEHBOOBA MUFTI'S STATEMENT REGARDING CLOSURE OF SHOPS ON REPUBLIC DAY IS WRONG

PLEASE PURSUE POLITICS WHICH IS NOBLE AND VISIONARY

I feel highly concerned when our political leaders dish out complete lies in their statements to the media. Their attempt is to project the Central government and the UT Administration in a bad light. This may be normal for politics nationally and also globally. It may be considered politics as usual for other regions.

But because of the unique history of our region, I believe

that Kashmir cannot have politics as usual. Truthfulness and honesty is very important for the politics of Kashmir. Our leaders must be conscious all the time of the impact of their statements on our youth.

We all are aware that a section of our youth has gone on the wrong path. In order to wean them away from the path of terror, we need to be very honest and straight-forward.

Ms Mufti's Tweet Spreads Misinformation

On January 25, former chief minister and PDP president Ms Mehbooba Mufti claimed that shopkeepers in Kashmir have been ordered to keep their shops open on Republic Day. "While rest of India will celebrate Republic Day as a holiday tomorrow, shopkeepers in Kashmir have allegedly been

ordered to keep their shops open or face consequences. One of many abnormal and coercive steps to project normalcy," Ms Mufti tweeted.

Let us examine this statement. Are markets in the rest of India closed on Republic Day? The answer is no. Offices in the government and private sector are closed on Republic Day. Since our large workforce has a holiday on January 26, it is a bonanza for all markets and malls.

The malls are lavishly decorated in the colours of our national flag. Market committees of our cities and towns across the nation ensure that shops are decorated attractively in saffron, white and green so that consumers are drawn to the happy market-places. Individual shopkeepers go the extra length to make their shops even more attractive so that buyers are drawn towards them.

Hence for markets, a national holiday becomes a time for huge business.

Foot-falls are massive. Office-goers know that the holiday is a good time to make the purchases they had planned. From electronic gadgets to clothes, home furnishings to daily use products – all shops look forward to healthy sales on R Day.

Kashmir's Shops Were Closed Earlier On R Day Because Of Radicalization

Now let us examine why markets in Kashmir remained closed on Republic Day before abrogation of Article 370. This was because



The National Flag proudly put up by shopkeepers in a Pulwama market on Republic Day 2023. Photo by Roving Editor Mudasir Dar

of the wrong thinking that had been imposed upon us by the terror ecosystem. Pakistan-backed separatists had spun the narrative that our markets had to remain closed on R Day as some sort of protest against the government.

At times, on such days of national importance, there was unnecessary stone-pelting. There was unnecessary violence. At times, in counter terror-action, youth were killed. Then a cycle of violent agitations was engineered, in which there were more killings and more violence. And Kashmir would be on the boil.

In August 2021, a few days after Independence Day, LG Shri Manoj Sinha had said that if Pakistan could use guns and terror to keep shops closed on August 15 in Kashmir, there was nothing wrong if the state used coercion of the stick to keep shops open.

Kashmir Welcomed Republic Day 2023

In January 2023, the markets in

Kashmir are happily open on R Day to welcome office-goers to make their purchases and enjoy the festivities. Please look at the accompanying photograph shared by Kashmir Connect Roving Editor of the markets in Pulwama. Shopkeepers have decorated the street with the national flag to welcome R Day.

Ms Mufti is well travelled. She well knows that markets are open all across the country on Republic Day. By making such statements, she is trying to breed disaffection against the state. Such statements have a cumulative effect upon the section of our youth who are radicalized and indoctrinated. Such statements add to the manufactured anger of those vulnerable youth and fill them with toxicity against the state. This ultimately results in those youth joining the terror ranks overtly or covertly.

Our leaders must refrain from such irresponsible statements. My ardent request to them all is to please pursue politics that is noble and visionary.



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