Reporting in India
Urban-centric: Dua

Change of Guard in MERC

Interview with
His Excellency
Governor J&K
Shri NN Vohra

Good teachers
are always good researchers

Lab Journal of
MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE
University of Kashmir
His Excellency the Governor of Jammu & Kashmir Shri N.N Vohra, Vice-chancellor Prof Talat Ahmad with HoD (MERC) Prof. S Muheed Ahmad

Veteran Journalist and parliamentarian H.K Dua flanked by Sr. faculty member Mr. Nasir Mirza, Prof. M.A Soli, Sr most Prof & Former Dean Academics and Registrar Prof. S Fayyaz while on a visit to the Department.
The Media Times is a bi-annual Lab Journal of Media Education Research Center, University of Kashmir. It is devoted for enhancing the Print Journalism skills of the students.

Patron
Prof. (Dr.) Talat Ahmad
Vice-Chancellor

Chief Editor
Prof. (Dr.) S Mufeed Ahmad
HoD MERC

Editor
Muslim Jan

Graphics & Layout
Aga Shahi
Contractual

Sub Editor
Rashid Maqbool
Lect. Contractual

Student Editors
Umer Sultan,
Souzeina Mushtaq,
Mir Usman

Feedback and Suggestions from the readers are welcome.

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HoD MERC for and on behalf of University of Kashmir
E-mail: mufeed@uok.edu.in

For further information write to
Editor Media Education Research Centre
University of Kashmir
Srinagar, 190006
email: editor.merc@gmail.com
mjoahanzazili@gmail.com
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MESSAGE FROM
Vice–chancellor

The dissemination of knowledge/information is nowadays a prime cause for the economic, political and cultural transformation of a society. As such, technological and informational progress is among the leading factors responsible for shaping a society that is based on knowledge. To embrace and proliferate the global information and knowledge culture is what defines Mass Communication with its variegated forms viz., the newspaper, television, radio and its new-age media viz., the mobile phone, computers and internet. The aim of Mass Communication is to gain competitive advantage internationally by using information technology in a creative and productive way to create a global connection around the world.

The importance of Mass Communication is immense especially with the explosion of digital communication technology. Never before in the history of making, has the media had such a significant impact on our lives and behaviour. In the last two decades of the 20th century, new communication technologies- World Wide Web and internet-have revolutionized every socio-political and economic sector of the world. These technologies, needless to say, have both constructive and potentially destructive characteristics and Mass Communication is faced with the daunting challenges, of managing the development and application of these technologies, of maximizing the opportunities they present and of minimizing the thereafter posed thereof to our societies.

One of the biggest threats posed by these new technologies is to the future of print media. Newspapers are losing young and techno-savvy readers to television and internet. However, print media continues to hold a formidable place in countries like India because of its special attributes of credibility and creativity. It is these attributes that ensure the longevity of print media as good information invariably contributes to the functioning of the democracy. As a result, Mass Communication Studies and Media Organizations tend to focus on the convergence of publishing. In Jammu & Kashmir newspapers and journals are being published in large numbers. Notwithstanding the fact that newspapers in English play a crucial role in promulgating information to wider audience, local dailies in Urdu and Kashmiri have also gained ascendancy in the state.

The Department of Media Education and Research Centre (MERC), University of Kashmir has been largely responsible for the development and regulation of mass media in the state established in the year 1985, the department offers a vast variety of programme in the field of journalism and media at the post-graduate level. Its objective is to impart theoretical as well as practical knowledge of the Media which includes Print Media, TV Production, Radio Programming, Advertising, Online Journalism and Documentary Film making. Right from its inception, the department has been producing and giving world class professionals to the society. It has also been publishing a fortnightly newspaper, MERC TIMES and a bi-annual lab journal, Media Times- Publications which provide opportunities to students to hone their creative potential. I wish these publications leave an indelible impact on the mindscape of the readers both as the primary source and vehicle of essential information.

Prof. Talat Ahmad
Like any business, the media industry evolves in cycles. Today, the media industry is surpassing mature industries such as corporate world in offering career opportunities for marketers. That's why marketing is going to decide the fate of Media Industry in 21st century. HarperCollins and MySpace, for example, are both media business and are owned by the same parent. However, they go to market in very different ways. Conversely, the availability of new technologies and new experience, cultural knowledge and skills sets that aspirants must be aware of if they wish to go for such a career.

No gain saying that the traditional journalism, especially the print media, is facing manifold challenges to stay in line. But that does not connote or portend the end of a printed word. In fact, this is not the time to despair. There is a dire need to create new ventures in media and take journalism to a new better level.

Of course, media students looking for jobs in traditional journalism and in mainstream media jobs will be sorely disappointed with the job market. Students need to be multiskilled to perform their roles effectively in 21st century. Therefore, students need to understand marketing and how to market themselves.

I personally believe that every journalism student should be required to take an economics or business class. It also makes sense for every journalism student to either take a marketing class or, better yet, a class on human resource management for overall personality development of an individual at social as well as organisational context.

Shibboleths about journalism are gradually breaking. Gone are the old and obsolete concepts that journalists produce only content. New media companies like Engadget and Tech Crunch have been popping up. It's not just the content that sells those sites, but rather it's the ability of their founders to understand business and marketing along with content that has helped make those sites a success.

Even if a student wants to take the traditional media route, learning how to market one's self is a helpful skill to have. It will help students get more and better job offers. It will also succour students crack into new media.

Our focus at Media Education Centre (MERC) will be to develop students with world class marketing media skills & strategies using new media marketing & HR techniques, so as to equip them with necessary skills that they would require in changing global media environment. And i am hopeful that with the support of our worthy Vice-Chancellor Prof. Talat Ahmad, who envisions this Centre as a flagship department of University, we at MERC will strive to make it happen.

I place on record my deep appriciation to the Editor and her team for their hard work they put in for bringing out publications and providing opportunity to the students to display and hone their writing capabilities.

Prof. (Dr.) S. Mufeed Ahmad
Journalism is in constant flux. The past few decades, we have seen more change in the craft of journalism than perhaps in any other profession. Some of the changes have erupted into the mainstream; others have nibbled at the edges. From simple notion of a textual material to a more complex but easily available formats, journalism has proven to be a real indispensable vocation in the world.

We have witnessed varied shifts, changes and perhaps the biggest and most widely publicised change in journalism has been the increasing involvement and expectation of involvement by the readers or audiences. Before sometime we had readers who would write to the newspaper in the format of a letter but now the same reader is a customized user and interacts more sophisticatedly via email or mobile in order to register his feedback. Today’s reader or the ‘User’ even knows the magnitude of his relative participation in media domain.

If pen is mightier than sword, then what does that make a podcast, a YouTube video, a tweet or a Facebook comment? Today’s era in journalism is fast changing and the same shift in attitude has to be inculcated in students of journalism. In the field, print journalists are learning about white balance, and broadcast journalists are learning about local news. The content, what makes news is just a click away from the ‘consumers’ and ‘news factory’ needs more speed, spryness and expertise to win all the scoops of the day.

This is the area which needs more focus in the present time. The requirement of the ever changing market forces makes it essential for the students of Mass Communication and Journalism in MERC to involve themselves completely into the studies, learn techniques and acquire professional knowledge to face up the challenges in the field. The sense of being a Generalist rather than a Journalist is fast catching the scene. In the classrooms, the tale of the day comes alive and plays in the evening to find itself ready again tomorrow; not in one medium but via all available media ranging from print, broadcast, web, social networking, blogs, SMS, micro blogging etc.

We at MERC, try to fulfil the needs of students according to the demands of the profession in the scheme of technicalities and render best of the journalism training especially in print journalism through MERC publications like MERC Times which is a fortnightly newspaper and MEDIA Times-a bi annual Lab journal. These publications enhance the print journalism skills of the students like writing, reporting, editing and using software for layout designing.

Muslim Jan
‘KU has good past and can look forward to good future’

From academics to administration, Chancellor of Kashmir University, His Excellency Shri N N Vohra, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, brings in wealth of experience. In an exclusive interview with MERC TIMES reporters, Mir Usman, Souzeina Mushtaq along with Muslim Jan Editor MERC at Raj Bhavan, Shri Vohra talks about various issues pertaining to functioning of Kashmir University. Here are the excerpts from the interview:

Photos by Sheikh Saleem

Merc Times: As the Chancellor, how do you see Kashmir University doing currently?
Chancellor: Universities are a large affair in the sense that they have many educational institutions affiliated with them and the system of knowing how a university is doing overall is uniformly based on NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council). It is a body of academicians established by the UGC. They hold discussions with HODs and faculty members. They also meet student unions and the non-teaching staff. After coming to some conclusions, they give a formal certificate with grades A, A+, B, B- or C. Our last certification was A which is the highest. Now the NAAC team was here a month ago and we are expecting to retain our A certificate.

Merc Times: Why not better certification?
Chancellor: We could have claimed for A+ or A++ but we had certain deficiencies. Our major problem was that 150 faculty posts were not filled up regularly due to the unrest for the last couple of years. Though we have had adhoc appointments but it is still a major issue. Now the situation is improving and we are looking forward for better certification.

Merc Times: Why were not these issues addressed earlier?
Chancellor: I feel there are two reasons—one is that we have become sluggish over time. This problem arises particularly during the winter season which we, unfortunately, take as off season vis-a-vis work. Though I believe the whole year is a working season, but some or the other way, it starts easing off by the end of October as the government offices move to Jammu. So psychologically we get laid back. The other reason is the tendency that we developed during the militancy period. We don’t want to see too many outsiders and not many of them were safe here. This barred us from benefiting from the expertise of others. Now as the situation is changing, many people have started to visit us again. Education will...
build the foundation of our future so we have to work very hard and aim for A+++ and not just A grade. With the appointment of the new vice chancellor, I am certain that coming years will be very good.

**Merc Times:** How do you view KU as compared to other universities in rest of India?

Good teachers are always good researchers; teaching and researching go in tandem. Nobody can be a great teacher unless he is aware of the latest researches, findings and writings elsewhere in the world. He himself is the part of the process so we have people here who were not encouraged or did not get the opportunity. Environment was not academic; it got lost in some other things which are not academic. Now it is coming back to the normal. We need to devote much more attention to research. I have been discussing this with the present VC. Our own resources are not enough to help us in this regard. We need resources from outside as well. It is a process and once we establish good research ideas then they will take off on their own.

**Merc Times:** One of the recommendations of NAAC Team, which recently visited KU, was regarding quality of research which as per them is not up to the national and international standards. How do you see this observation?

**Chancellor:** By the standards of certification, I think we figure amongst the better universities of India. But at the same time I would like to mention that when I visited KU some 30-35 years ago, I met many more eminent people who were teaching Sciences, Geography, Mathematics, Political Science. And their research papers were published all over the world. Most important thing is that 90 per cent of them hailed from the valley itself. We have had very good past and I can look forward to very good future.

**Merc Times:** Vice Chancellor, Prof Talat has been talking about student-exchange programmes like signing MoUs at national and international level. This needs endorsement at the highest level. Should we expect it in near future?

**Chancellor:** Yes, recently we had the University Council meeting. The members of the council are very eminent personalities, including the chief minister of the state, minister of education and the vice chancellor himself. There are some eminent educationists from outside the state as well. We discussed many issues. We appreciated the new VC’s approach and asked him to go ahead. So there is no further approval required.

**Merc Times:** Due to the turmoil, many migrant positions are lying vacant in the university. Even though the concerned lecturers get their salaries outside the valley, what about filling these vacancies?

**Chancellor:** My opinion is that if somebody has moved to Pathankote, Jammu or is in Delhi, and the government pays him/ her certain amount of salary, I would treat that as state’s assistance to that family. Many people in the state government are also not here. And I would not get involved in that debate whether they are coming or not. However, I seek to fill up the posts. For that I would write one final letter to them requesting to come and visit us, stay with us for two days in our guest house and look around and then decide whether to come back or not. If somebody is
not coming back, we’ll fill up the post.

**Merc Times:** Are you going to initiate this process now?

**Chancellor:** We have had an initial discussion on the issue. You know it has political implications. The moment news about the filling of posts is out, it will create uproar. Within the government our efforts are to convince them to come back. Those who do not want to return because of some reason, have no enthusiasm left. You cannot have a person teaching whose heart is somewhere else.

**Merc Times:** If we don’t start it from the university, the highest seat of learning where everyone is educated and understands the dynamics of politics, then where to begin from?

**Chancellor:** You are right. Baat ho chuki hai (we have discussed it) and I think the system will now validate this process.

**Merc Times:** Amidst the cut-throat competition in the job market, many people believe there is a need to improve the employability of university students. How do you think this challenge can be met?

**Chancellor:** It is not that there is cut-throat competition. All over the world for almost 20 years now, economic depression has been coming and going. We are passing through a severe economic meltdown. In European countries, thousands of people are without jobs. Even in the United States, 9.1 per cent population is unemployed. Keeping this in mind we need to see what other universities have done. I will give you an example of London University, which has carved out short-term courses, enabling students to get jobs and that’s what we have to do. I have been saying it in all the university meetings that let us not just merely keep on teaching diploma courses or degree courses. So the universities have listed about 20 short-term courses as well as certificate courses because what is the point of producing so many graduates and post graduates if they don’t get any job.

**Merc Times:** Supreme Court has made the formation of student unions mandatory in every educational institution. How would you like KU to respond to it?

**Chancellor:** Student associations are good source and input for the management and institution to know what is happening in the campus. In foreign countries, the students assess their teachers on how the courses have been taught. But our problem is that we associate psychologically that unions should be elected, how they should run and function. So we have asked our two VCs (both Jammu University and Kashmir University) to study the Lyngdoh Committee recommendations and see what can be done. In a recent meeting, the Jammu University VC got the approval of the University Council to hold elections.

**Merc Times:** Does that mean student
union will come forth?

Chancellor: I will speak to the VC in this regard but at the same time I would like the students to have a chat with him about this issue.

Merc Times: As part of its expansion plans, Kashmir University is setting up a campus in Kargil and within four days the land was identified for that. But how will you attract the best faculty?

Chancellor: There is a need to create small off site campuses because of the geography of Jammu and Kashmir. Most of the Ladakhi boys and girls have been coming here or going to Jammu so the VC went and identified land there. He will have the plans made for it. UGC has also given us about 87 crores to establish the infrastructure. However, the question is how to attract the faculty.

We have to provide them living accommodation and reasonable incentives like Jammu University which is paying a certain amount for displacement and inconvenience allowance.

Merc Times: The newly opened satellite campuses of Kashmir University have problems of transition from plan to non-plan expenditure. Is there any step in the offing to resolve this problem?

Chancellor: For the first five years, UGC provides financial assistance and after that you have to find resources on your own, which is not always easy. The universities then try to compensate by increasing the fee. But being a welfare state, this is no solution. So we have had a meeting with Vice Chancellors of both Jammu and Kashmir universities which was also attended by the commissioner of finance and planning department. The meeting tried to devise some arrangements for the non-plan expenditure. The efforts are on and we are hopeful for some solutions.

Merc Times: The employees of Central University have received their arrears, but the KU employees are still waiting for the same. Can we expect any progress on this front?

Chancellor: In a recent meeting with the chief minister, we have decided to release the arrears. The problem is not the unwillingness of government to pay the arrears, but sometimes money is not available. Paisa nahi hai. Ab 4200 crore hamare arrears hain aur 9000 crore hamari saalana salary hai (the state has to pay annual salary of 9000 crores while we have arrears amounting to 4200 crore). Our tax and non-tax revenues are very small, lowest in the country. We have not generated power for the last 30 years. The state has to buy power for about 2400 crores annually. People are not good tax payers. They don’t even want to hear the word tax. However, these are not permanent problems. If there is good leadership at the local level, good municipal corporation, honest officers and everybody pays tax, then all the financial problems will be solved.

Merc Times: You have studied at Oxford University. Is there anything that you believe KU should or can emulate from Oxford and other such global reputed institutions?

Chancellor: These universities regard their traditions more sacred than anything else. Tradition ko todnay nahi dete (They don’t break their traditions). I was living in a room which was 711 years old at that time, 50 years ago. They won’t allow the windows or doors to be changed. The college was what...
it used to be earlier. The other thing I found was that teacher and taught relationship was very close. I could walk in at 9 O’clock and talk to my teachers. Environment ka farq hai (There is a difference in the environment). But you have a library here which is very high class and very well stocked. Ab kitney bache jaate hai padhne k liye, kitno ko encourage kiya jata hai (Now how many students go there and how many are encouraged to read).

During the turmoil last year, I had asked VC to keep the library open. We are bureaucratic in our approach to these problems. There is so much talent in our students if we will empower them, they will become responsible towards their own future. Then we can compete with such globally reputed universities.

Merc Times: You have served as an academician in Punjab University briefly (between 1957 and 59). Why not to have some guest lecture so that you could share some of your experiences and impressions with the students?

Chancellor: I come and talk to the students who are interested but I think I am too old for the young generation. I stopped teaching when I joined civil services in 1959. The aspirations, expectations and viewpoints of present generation are different from ours. Still I will be very happy to come to KU.

Merc Times: What are your suggestions for KU authorities in order to strengthen the institution, both academically and administratively?

Chancellor: We should take very strong action to advertise, shortlist and hold selection committee meetings to fill up all our vacancies. We have to improve our infrastructure as per the availability of the sources. Furthermore, there should be a cohesive environment and cordial relationship between the faculty and the students. They should discuss major problems and try to find solutions together. The people, who comprise the university i.e. the students and the faculty, should have enough prestige and respect to influence people of the state.

Merc Times: Any message for the students and the faculty?

Chancellor: I have no special wisdom to give messages. But personally I believe that we have a very fine university, with a very good environment. No other university in the country has such scenery. Now when the aesthetics are pleasing and the environment is encouraging, people think of good things.

So far as academics and research is concerned, I see no reason at all why we should not produce the best people in the country.
Censorship is merely drawing the line between freedom and unrestrained devilry. A reminder for those people who cross the lines of humanity and morality under the name of freedom of expression. Increasing instances of immoral inclusion of topics in media which might be inappropriate for certain age groups or topics which are morally wrong like racism needs restrain. Censorship is the control of speech and other forms of human expression, often by an authority, which in many cases is a State or functionary of State. What is censored may range from specific words to entire concepts, and the ostensible motive of censorship is to stabilize or improve the society over which the authority has control.

In contemporary times children of impressionable ages are constantly being exposed to excessive violence as well as sexually explicit content. Media exposure is an instrumental factor in shaping the opinions and values in these children. Such exposure is abandoned through censorship. Visuals of mutilated bodies during riots, bloodbath, massacre etc., are censored.

In contemporary times children of impressionable ages are constantly being exposed to excessive violence as well as sexually explicit content. Media exposure is an instrumental factor in shaping the opinions and values in these children. Such exposure is abandoned through censorship.

Rohail Sheikh

and religious harmony and removes anything, it deems offensive, including sex, nudity, violence or subjects considered politically subversive. Extremely violent video games that children are addicted to tend to increase the aggressive tendencies in children. Use of abusive language as well as abusive gestures can make lasting impact on their young and impressionable minds. Scenes of people consuming alcohol or smoking influence audiences to copy them. It places certain restrictions on content, with a view towards maintaining communal
in news channels in India, for their potential of negative and harmful impact on human psyche. Many news channels often forget media ethics in their rat race for TRP’s. Hence an agency that could keep watch on such violations is mandatory.

There are many who say that the Internet should not be censored. While many others believe that it should be. Let’s start with the case for censorship.

Internet contains many things that are morally questionable. For example, there are sites which exhibit snuff porn, child porn, anti-Islam and anti-Christian rants and so on. There is a site rotten.com, which is particularly foul. There are anarchist cookbooks and satanic sites. There are many sites which promote views which are not politically correct, e.g., pro-Nazi sites. In short, the Internet is full of filth and immoral stuff that can corrupt people, especially young, impressionable people. But how do you decide on what to censor? By whose moral standards? Surely if you allow some points of view to be aired, you should allow all points of view to be shared? What about freedom of speech? Constitutions of many Western nations guarantee freedom of speech. When you censor the Internet, you’re denying someone freedom of speech.

In response, we might argue, firstly, that there may be common moral grounds that we can all agree on, which we can use to decide whether or not a particular item should be placed online for public consumption or not. Secondly, what is so great about freedom of speech anyway? If freedom of speech allows Nazis to post their views, Satanists to post their views, anti-Islamists to post cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), paedophiles to post pictures of child porn etc., surely freedom of speech can be harmful?

Given what I have written I do not intend to hide or downplay the fact that because of its power, freedom of speech is what makes socio-political change possible. The blackest eras of humanity were those in which freedom of speech was not permitted – the Dark Ages, for example. It was only with the event of the Enlightenment and the arrival of free speech through the printing press, that societies started to change. Without free speech, the modern western world would not have came into existence, it was freedom of speech, to speak against the autocratic governments in the West, which led them to revolution. Look at the recent case in Egypt. Internet, effectively, became a cause of Mubarak’s ouster. The same applies to women’s suffrage. If it were not for public debate, women would still not be any better off in the West. Of course, some societal changes are indeed for the best, but some are not. So, for example, allowing Hitler freedom of speech caused World War II. If he had been censored, millions of people would not have died.

Why not to censor Internet. Is it because paedophilia sites would be disallowed, because they represent the infringement on the rights of children. Snuff sites would be disallowed because they depict violence (infringement on the right to bodily integrity); they do not adequately protect a stray person from reaching their offensive content. Think about it. Nazi, racist, misogynist, and other discriminatory sites, also, on the above reasoning, would be disallowed, because they advocate violence: the infringement of human rights.

Extremely violent video games that children are addicted to tend to increase the aggressive tendencies in children. Use of abusive language as well as abusive gestures can make lasting impact on their young and impressionable minds. Scenes of people consuming alcohol or smoking influence audiences to copy them. Visuals of mutilated bodies during riots, bloodbath, massacre etc., are censored in news channels in India, for their potential of negative and harmful impact on human psyche. Many news channels often forget media ethics in their rat race for TRP’S. Hence an agency that could keep watch on such violations is mandatory.
Talking about TV soap operas has now become a household gossip in Kashmir. Inevitably, one has to pass some comments over the daily episodes of these soaps. We are aware of the reality that television has a greater potential influence on social development than any medium ever before had in human history but how much? We prove ourselves so meek in the sphere of reel world that it tends to even shape and mould our behaviours and attitudes. Now the question that strikes our mind is that is it the “pervasive nature” of these soaps that casts a spell on its viewers or is it audience becoming so addictive to it? The answer will be obvious by taking a flashback on the journey of TV serials in India.

The first ever TV soap opera of India was “Hum Log” (1984) aired on doordarshan which telecasted only 156 episodes for 17 months during the years 1984-1985. The series quickly became immensely popular and its characters became legends and a common topic of discussion. Hum Log was a story of an Indian middle class family of the 1980s and their daily struggles and aspirations. Its main aim was to entertain audiences but also promoted such social themes as gender equality, small family and planned family and national integration as well.

At the end of each 22 min episode, a veteran film actor Ashok Kumar used to discuss the on-going story and situations with the audience in a unique style using hindi couplets and rhymes. The study of Hum Log’s review shows that a high degree of “para-social interaction” occurred between the audience members and their favourite Hum Log character.

Para-social interaction is the face-to-face interpersonal relationship that develops between a viewer and a media role model. Being the first ever soap opera of India Hum Log achieved a reliable success and about 50 million individuals watched the average broadcast of Hum Log. Thus we view Hum Log as the first ever edutainment soap opera of India that had positive effect on our society.

Hum Log was followed by another Buniyaad produced by filmmaker Ramesh Sippy following his poor performance at the box office then. It would be interesting to note that according to a 1986 survey conducted by Operations Research Group, a major marketing research company, gross box office collections at Delhi cinema theatres declined by 25 to 30 percent during 1984-85. This was the reason why Ramesh chose to join the soap operas as Hum Log had attracted the attention of Mumbai film industry that otherwise had a sceptic attitude towards doordarshan. In this context we see doordarshan emerging as the trend setter of social milieu and audience shutting up their view of scepticism against it.

The following decade i.e. the last decade of the millennium came with more soaps with varying contents. Talking about comic serials we had Shrimaan Shrimati, All The Best and Ek Se Badhkar Ek; thrillers like Karamchand, Tehqeeqaat, and Janki Jasoos; nationalistic ones like Hum Hindustani, Sea Hawks, Swaraj and melodramas like Jazbaat and Swaabhimaan to name a few, all from doordarshan.

Those were the days when people would throng to the houses of neighbours, friends or relatives having TV sets and very anxiously waited for these serials. History lovers had to wait till Sunday for serials like Akbar-The
Great, Chandrakanta, Panipat Ki Aakhri Jung, Mulla Naseer-u-Din and Alif Laila.

These serials were successful and were liked by the audience and people mostly viewed them for entertainment and unlike today these were telecasted only once a week.

Since the advent of Cable Satellite TV channels in India the Sony and Zee TV being its pioneers; serial channels brought new trends both in its colour and content. With the rise of new millennium these channels were flooded with serials depicting mostly Saas-Bahu relations and family intrigues (the brainchild of Ekta Kapoor). The effect on audiences was so alarming that even many Bollywood actors made their way into such soaps. Ekta’s “K” factor was the turning point in the history of soap operas in India.

Ekta Kapoor not only presented Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi but very vividly narrated Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki and Kasam Se; it not only persuaded audiences but also shaped and moulded their perceptions, attitudes, behaviours or say revolutionized their whole outlook even in Kashmir.

The effect of this feminizing of serials on our female folks is still vibrant. A sense of their dominance over males has inculcated in them, call it a charming spell of Ekta. Not only this, these serials and their characters have become This clearly exhibits the strong hold of these operas over the viewers and also the swaying of their socio-cultural existence.

Keeping in view the changing tastes of audiences the Saas-Bahu soaps shut their shops almost after a decade. Now we have soaps like Parvarish again the socio-edutainment content and other depicting the clash of cultures and romance in a melodramatic way via Bade Acha Lage Hain on Sony TV produced by Ekta Kapoor starring her tamed “K-serial” stars Ram Kapoor and Sakshi Tanwar. The serial is currently a big hit. How? Again call it the celebrated genius of Ekta and also the then Paarvati becoming Priya and Mr. Jai Wallia becoming Mr. Ram Kapoor.

By taking a review on the journey of TV soaps in India the answer is “YES”. Yes these soaps have bewitched us and very easily dominate our delicate emotions as we Indians more particularly we Kashmiries very easily succumb to it. There is also no denying in our being addicted to these serials not knowing why.
FACEBOOK: AN IMPORTED GIFT

Younus Mohammad Dar

Social networking site, Facebook, a name connected with chatting, making friends, uploading pictures and videos and like has become an indispensable and vital entity for fancified youth in this tossed up society. In this runaway Society, gift of Facebook, imported from western minds, flashing across Sub-continent and finally becoming accessible to cozy room(s) from where I am writing this article has struck every one's imagination. Youth of all age groups are excessively and continuously devouring time with Facebook activism. Facebook temper full of excitement potential has disturbed mind sets in different but relevant ways. Preceding Night I messaged a text into inbox of my friend, delayed feedback disturbed my patience and I then fired off an email conveying my irritation and frustration. Following morning, I set and settle with him. Now-a-days youth generation devout maximum time to Facebook usage. Facebook implications are obvious, aware are we but not concerned. Starting with, we spent six-seven hours in educational institutes and that leaves little time for interaction with our parents. Unfortunately we use this time in chatting with our friends, few living across the seas. A sense of estrangement has led youth away from parental duties on account of Facebook activism. We donot listen to calls, attend conferences and sit with our parents, at least, if not completely. Besides along, time import exchanged via Facebook is diverting our attention away from basic social concerns. Facebook also causes irritation and confusion. Networking problems frequently disturb our patience and set fire to our tempers. Last week, my friend opened a chat with me and instantly poor networking signals produce a debatable argument between us. We should limit our approaches to Facebook keeping in view side effects its perpetual activism continuously produces.
Development Journalism and Kashmir

Umer Maqbool

Development journalism has globally emerged as a powerful tool for empowerment and a means of information for the people to keep themselves abreast of the pace of progress of their nation. In context of Kashmir which has suffered economically due to over two decades of turmoil, development journalism never got a chance to evolve fully. While the focus of most of the newspapers and media outlets has been mostly on the political developments and law and order situation the space for growth of development journalism got choked. However, despite all odds some journalists have shown an inclination for practising development journalism, and at times even at the cost of their credibility as often such journalists have been accused as doing PR of the government.

The shining line is that by engaging in such journalism some journalists in the Valley have been able to point out the loopholes in development works of the government. Sometimes while highlighting the loopholes, the journalists have managed to expose big scams ranging from swindling of development funds and use of sub-standard material in various projects. Various important issues like conservation of world famous Dal lake, construction of Mughal Road have for some time now received wide coverage from the local newspapers owing to their environmental, economic and social significance.

We are a part of an impoverished economy ridden with corruption. For all the tall claims about liberalisation our economy is still a centralized economy. This means the political dispensation in power has lot of role to decide the allocation of funds in terms of regions or sectors. The centralized structure of the economy and the role of the politicians in such an arrangement make the system prone to corrupt practices. The media can have a great role of being a watch dog and can be a facilitator in prudent allocation of funds and exposure of corrupt practices. If we look at the big hundreds and thousands of crores of scams in India—they were not exposed in the parliament or the assemblies, but by a very powerful media. However in a place like Kashmir it seems improbable for the media to play such a role. First Kashmir being a conflict zone comes with its very own inherent baggage. Fair reporting in a conflict zone is a delusion. Second is the economics of print and electronic media in Kashmir. The media houses are so dependent on government advertisements and the awarding of advertisements is completely in the hands of the government. So economically muzzling a vibrant press is very easy for the government.

If we compare Kashmir with the rest of India, the press in India though not as free as it seems to be, still has been able to ascertain its independence in some sectors. They have actually been instruments of change—Whether it was killing of engineer who was related with development sector—Harshad Mehta scam—NREGA—farmer’s suicide—all related to development or underdevelopment. The role of the Kashmiri press in developmental activities is miniscule—they have not been able to carve a space for themselves.
Karim Rabaib
A Forgotten Maestro of Kashmir

Feroz Rahim

Karim Dar, a famous musician of 1960’s was born in Manduna, a small hamlet in the southern district of Pulwama. Dar was commonly known as Karim Mandinu or Karim Rabaib.

He was not literate and never went to any music school, still he was most famous in his times. Present generation is not familiar with him but those of the older generation who have heard him still cherish the memories of his melodious notes.

Karim learned the art from his elder brother Mohd Ramzan Dar who himself was one of the great artists in his times. He was an expert of Rabab: a local instrument similar to Sitar. Karim started with learning Rabab; once he achieved expertise in it, he learned other instruments as well.

Recollecting the fond memories of her uncle Karim’s niece Rahti said, “He used to spend most of his time in learning the musical instrument. He mastered almost all the instruments available at that time”.

After earning experience in instruments Karim shifted to vocals. His fame was such that people would come from far away places wherever he would go for singing. Author of Indrazun Darbar: a compilation of all time famous kashmiri singers, Abass Balpori narrated an interesting incident about one of Karim’s show, “When I heard that Dar Sahib has come to our village I asked my mother to serve me meals early in the evening. Although my father Ghulam Mohi-ud-din Balpori was himself an accomplished singer and a contemporary of Dar but I was an ardent fan of Dar Sahib.” Karim Dar was one of the first singers in Kashmir who started singing the poems of Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal (ra).

A common belief is that Karim was instrumental in introducing harmonium in Kashmir. In his book Ghulam Mohi-ud-din Balpori writes that it was quite an accident.
Dar was illiterate but he was well versed in Persian as he sang many Persian songs. The prominent among them were the writings of Imam Bahai:

Gharbato uftad nazar dedah be dedah roobaroo
Sarah dahamgam twa ba nuqtah mu ba mu

Dar would not sing a Kashmiri song directly he would rather start with a couplet or two by a veteran like Shiekh ul Alam, Iqbal, Rumi or Khusroo. He was an illiterate person but was able to sing in many oriental languages. “He never shied away to ask people who knew a language for help. Whenever he forgot something he used to call me and ask for the forgotten verses,” said Ghulam Mohi-ud-din Dar, a neighbor of him in those days. “Dar sahib had a very good memory. He remembered each and every verse of the song in their original sequence” said Ghulam Mohamad Mir, Dar’s disciple and a famous singer himself.

He was the only person who had attained expertise in Shud, Barvi Folk, Komal in those days.

Recalling Dar’s confidence and knowledge of music another disciple Abdul Gani Trali narrated an incident. He said that once Mohan Lal Aama the then director of Radio Kashmir challenged Karim Dar that his sur is not correct. Karim Dar avoided reply first. Aama challenged him again and this time Dar replied back, “It is not my sur that is incorrect but it is your ears that hear wrong.”

The hall of fame was such that once the then prime minister of Kashmir late Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi wished to listen harmonium from him. After hearing the mesmerising notes Bakhshi was so enchanted that he conferred upon him the title “myon khushwun fankar” (my favorite artist).

Karim Dar was a permanent member of now defunct song and drama division. He also performed on stage as an actor. His experience made him to play the instruments he wished to play anyway. Once people asked him to perform something rare. Dar accepted the challenge. He told people what he is going to do is not his own achievement but merely the will and grace of Allah. Then he took his harmonium and Rabab and started playing both simultaneously. Harmonium he played with his feet and Rabab with his hands.

Dar was famous teacher of music and many would come to learn from far and wide. He was a soft tempered person and never ridiculed anybody except the lone incident that happened with Mohan Lal Aama, however, that was only after he was taunted repeatedly.

This veteran maestro died 55 under mysterious circumstances. At the time of his death it is said bruises were found on his body and also that the gaps between his fingers were burnt.

“He is not now in the record books of Kashmiri music but he was famous all over Kashmir. I don’t think there was anybody in Kashmir in those days who knew all the instruments of the time except Dar Sahib. Had he lived more he could have definitely done miracles in music here,” says Ghulam Ahmed Saznawaz, a renowned Sofiana artist of the valley.

It is said that on his visit to Pakistan an English woman had organized a competition of the local artists. Karim also went to submit his form for the event. When the competition was over Karim was declared as the best. He had performed on rabab and sung a Pahari song. On his best performance Karim was awarded an instrument which was rarely found in Kashmir and the instrument was a harmonium. Thus he was the first person to bring this most commonly used musical instrument to Kashmir.
Houseboat
The Bride of Dal

Paddling down the serene surfaces of the lake, attracting people world over to have a glimpse of mine. Britishers were my inventors, a handwork of artistic genius. I charm you, I make you smile, I do make you wonder, as I float, live on waters, that’s my identity. I am the floating marvel, the bride of Dal, your own houseboat.

Stepping into me is like visiting a palace, I open with a deck, carved delicately and finished superbly.

Greeting you while you step on my carpet floor, under the shade of ‘khatamband’ ceilings. Tempting you to sit on my cozy sofas. Full of Kashmiri embroidered items, it’s my first part, my living room.

Then I invite you for food on my table centrally located surrounded by walnut chairs all round. My painted flower pots make your every meal a delight. It’s my dining room.

Walking through my corridor, makes you to see the world outside through the windows on one side and offer you to rest in bedrooms on the other. Enter my bedroom, the first thing you see is a huge carved bed, a dressing table and kashmiri embroidered curtains from either sides. If you feel tired and want to relax. I promise to make you fresh and rejuvenated, as I offer you a royal bath in my bathroom. Carved woods, Khatamband ceilings and handcrafted fabrics are my grand assets.

You can even walk on my edges, but, hey, be cautious; you may fall into the lake. A wooden ladder takes you on to my roof, the best place to relax and enjoy the scenic beauty of Zabarwan Mountains surrounding the lake.

No doubt I am movable, but I do need a place to rest, I am anchored with iron wires to the wooden blocks attached with land, so that I am fixed at one place.

I am not an easy thing to be constructed, my carpenters are special and well experienced, I am made up of expensive cedar wood. Well versed carpenters use different equipments to shape me up in a workshop.

Floating markets thrive around me, with Shikara Shops full of Kashmiri handicrafts. Every tourist who visits me pays a vist to these floating markets too.

Lotus lakes are my play grounds, I can be seen through the leaves of these lakes and birds weave nests around me.

I am a witness to their joys and sorrows. They see the sun and the shade of their lives in and around me. Vegetable fields inside the lake provide food to my visitors and serene waters a peaceful time.

My heritage is grand and old, I have been visited by great personalities like Beatles’ George Harrison, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Michael Palin and many more who had a wonderful time on my decks. Tourists get a home away from home treatment inside my wooden walls and always prefer to visit again.

My guest book is always filled with satisfactory remarks and I always keep a record of my valuable visitors.

Some famous tales are also associated with me. One such tale is of a butterfly. Once a German citizen Coatmen visited Kashmir and was amazed to see a hovering butterfly. He announced the person on whose shoulder the butterfly will rest, will get a houseboat resembling a butterfly. That’s how a complete floating butterfly came into being.

But now I can see my end. I see myself deserted, sunk and destroyed. I have lost my artisans. I miss my old days, I miss the times I used to be full of lightings always, full of hustle and bustle. I miss the days when I used to be attractions for film makers. Actors used to dance on my roofs and decks.

I want my past back, I dont want to die. I am the bride of Dal, I need your support to survive.

Naeem Raja
KASHMIRI SHAWLS— ANTIQUE, YET CONTEMPORARY

Souzeina Mushtaq

Kashmir is a treasure of handicrafts. The breathtaking beauty of the products evolved by the tender fingers of its beautiful people has been appreciated from royal palaces to ordinary homes all over the world. The handicrafts of Kashmir are considered as an important part of rich cultural heritage. As water is for life, so are handicrafts to the people of Kashmir.

The word ‘shawl’, derived from a Persian word ‘shal’ is of ancient origin not only in India but in the Middle East as well. The Indians wore it as a shoulder mantle with its fineness of material, indicating status. During the period, when the Mughal empire was at its most glittering (1556-1658 AD), the finest woolen shawls became synonymous with the name of Kashmir, whose artistic genius had transformed it into something unique in design and technique, and which was unrivalled anywhere else.

Many speculations have been made by historians of art about the origin of Kashmiri shawls. Historians believe that in Vedic literature there are clues to suggest that Kashmiri shawls were brought as presents to lords and chieftains in different parts of India. The first references to the Kashmiri shawl perhaps point to the eleventh century. However, it is thought that Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, the ruler of Kashmir (1459-1470 AD) stimulated production, especially twill-tapestry weave.

“This is a form of weaving where the weft (the threads that go across the loom) goes one over and the two under the warp, thereby making a diagonal weave. The weft did not run the full length of the cloth, but was woven back and forth around the warp, where a particular colour/pattern were needed. The threads were inserted by wooden spools holding different colour, and not by a shuttle, as is normally the case,” says Abdul Rashid, an artisan.

Zain-ul-Abidin spent a number of years in Samarqand, as a hostage to Tamer Lane, the Mongol. Samarqand was then the cultural centre of both the Mongol Empire and the Islamic world. So the future ruler of Kashmir was exposed to the finest traditions of learning. Upon his ascent to the throne, he encouraged Central Asian and Persian weavers to come and settle down in Kashmir. The twill-weave seems to have been introduced by these people. At any rate it doesn’t appear to have been known in India before that time.

The first real written records about Kashmiri shawls come from ‘Ain-I-Akbari’, written by Abul Fazl Allemi, the court historian of Emperor Akbar. Akbar was the greatest of the Mughal rulers (1556-1605AD) and was passionately interested in all forms of knowledge, particularly in the textile arts. His ‘Toshikhana’ or imperial wardrobe, with its commissioned pieces and textiles offered as tribute, were labelled with their price, date of
entry, colour and weight. He took a personal interest in it and possessed a large wardrobe of shawls, and through his patronage and interest encouraged skilled craftsmen to give out their best. He ordered improvements in the use of fibers and dyes, discovering that the wool was impervious to the colour red.

“The shawl had been folded in four,” writes Abu Fazl, “but with Akbar, they were worn in pairs sewn back to back, to conceal the rough ridges of the tapestry weave, and so were given the appearance of a single shawl.” His example was followed by his son Jehangir, who had fallen in love with Kashmir from his first visit there and once remarked that he would rather lose any part of his Empire but not Kashmir. Akbar’s grandson Shah Jehan (1627-58 AD) continued that interest. So during 17th and 18th centuries, the shawl industry went on to develop and grow.

The Mughal emperors, however immensely encouraged the shawl bringing its weaving to such a perfection that it soon came to be regarded as a symbol of ‘imperial prestige’ and a determiner of commercial ties with the foreign countries. Noted writer Prof. Abdul Ahad in his book ‘From Kashmir to Frankfurt’ gives us details about the genesis of shawl weaving.

“Not before 1796 was the shawl sent to Europe when the Afghan rulers of Kashmir through King Nadir Shah sent it to the ruler of Constantinople. It was during Napoleon’s preoccupation with the Egyptian campaigns that the Kashmiri shawl became European apparel of fashion through the Empress Josephine. She was so mesmerized by it that she ordered 400 shawls, thus setting a new trend in fashions among women, not only in Paris, but in Europe and England too.”

But some historians also believe that shawl existed in Kashmir prior to sultan Zain-ul-Abidin’s reign. “It is testified by the evidence furnished by the tiles at Harvan, bearing the portrait of a lady in transparent robes, and by the early paintings drawn to depict the real life of the valley,” Prof. Ahad writes in his book.

While on a visit to Kashmir, Hieun Tsang, the Chinese traveler found a delicate and soft fabric made from fine wool being exported to Northern India. This undoubtedly was the Kaushiya and Salamali referred to in Sanskrit texts. Kalhana, the illustrious early historian of Kashmir also substantiates this, when he refers to woolen garments which the Kashmiri elite used to wrap across their shoulders. From a Malfuz of Sheikh Moin-ud-din Chisti, it is known that Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya had a Kashmiri shawl.

A tract in Persian, with the title ‘Risaleh Dar Fann-I-Shawl Bafi’, authored by Mukhtar Shah Ashai, a descendant of the house of Ashais in Srinagar gives the story of the origin of shawl which perhaps is not to be found in any other work.

The author writes, “Mirza Haider Dughlat, the Central Asian adventurer, who occupied Kashmir in AD 1541 was the originator of Kashmiri shawls,” adding “a few rolls of Putto or coarse woolen cloth were brought to him as presents from the ruler of Tibet which in those days included the area of Ladakh also. When compared with the Putto produced in Kashmir, he found that the former was a softer and warmer stuff than the latter. This
was the key which helped in introducing better methods of cleaning the raw wool obtained from a special Tibetan goat and then weaving it fine. It was reported to him that the goat had two layers of fleece; the upper one was coarse but the lower one was soft and warm.”

Complying with the wishes of Mirza Haider, a noble of his court, Naghaz Beg by name, procured a few mounds of wool (pashm) from the special Tibetan goat. He got it cleaned by removing the tufts of coarse hair, and the cleaned product was given to the Kashmiri women to spin it fine. These women were masters in the art of spinning fine. Then, Naghaz Beg got two rolls made of this superior stuff. These were presented by him to Mirza Haider, who after examining the excellent fibre asked in Kashghari language whether only do-shawl (two rolls) were prepared or more? Shawl in Kashghari language means a roll or a sheet, just as Shal-i-Kaghaz (a roll of paper), or Shal-i-Ahan (a sheet of iron). This is how the fabric got the name ‘Shal’ (shawl).

Later on Naghaz Beg made some innovations in the craft of weaving shawls. Instead of using a shuttle for weaving, a thin instrument chiseled to a definite shape and called seekh (spit or spike) was made and used. Then two different colours were given to the two ends of the shawl. This was called zanjireh. After Naghaz Beg’s death, Kashmiri craftsmen also made some innovations in the craft and double colour scheme is one among these.

NEW FASHION TRENDS:
Mohammed Iqbal Naqash, owner of Brilliant Arts at Lal Chowk has been in the shawl business since 1965.
“This business was conducted by our forefathers and now we are taking it forward,” adding “there has been a tremendous increase in the use of Kashmiri shawls, both in the valley and outside.”

“Shawls are either made of raffel, wool, pashmeena or semi-pashmeena. Now, cashmelon, count and tosha are also used,” says Khurseed Ahmed, owner of Trade Choice at Koker Bazaar. He has been in this trade since 40 years.

The needle-wrought designs on shawl, called Amlkari, introduced during Afghan rule, brought further sophistication to the making of the fabric, making it more popular in Europe. The Amlkari art was the invention of the creative genius of one Kashmiri craftsman, Ali Baba, and not of the foreign merchant as mentioned by Moorcroft and others.

All the facets of Kashmir’s incomparable beauty of landscape and environment seem to be reflected in Kashmir’s superb needle work-Aari Kaem. The favourite motifs are the Cypress, Chinar, Lotus, etc. other designs used to decorate shawls are Bael Buti, Border Buti, Naemdar, Jaalidar, Jama, Deodar, Paledar, etc. Even though Kashmiri embroidery looks gorgeous, the stitches are simple, thus giving the needle work a flat furnished appearance.

Embroidery is known as Kashida, which is worked in several different forms.

“Jalakdozi is chain stitch done with a hook in long flowing designs on any textile in use from the refined shawls to the coarsest floor coverings,” says Abdul Ahad, an artisan from Lokipora, Beeruh, adding, “Sozni on the other hand is done on superior material.” Aari work is done by a special thread called staple.

“It takes us 10 days to complete Paldaar design, and one full month for Jalidar design,” says Abida, an artisan hailing from Koker Bazaar, who has been in this craft since 12 years. “In its early stages, crimson was used for shawls worn by women but men wore plain ones. Gold, indigo and yellow colours are now fondly used,” adds she.

AMBIGUITY:
When asked if machines had any impact on their work, Ahad says that people mostly prefer machine made embroidery. “Though we work from dawn to dusk, the amount we get in return to our toil is very meager. Also, machines have interfered with our work, thus paralyzing our economy.”

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Entrepreneurship: Scope and Hurdles in Kashmir

Ashraful Hassan

When Altaf joined Punjab Technical University (PTU) in Chandigarh for his Masters in Business Administration (MBA), he had no idea about the field.

He always wanted to be in the teaching profession, but the rage among his friends and relatives to pursue MBA forced him to study business. He has worked in pharma sector for two years as sales manager before joining PTU. Now a doctorate scholar at Business School University of Kashmir, he is back in academics, he now wants to be in the teaching profession again. When asked about the scope of entrepreneurship in Kashmir, he replied, “Who wants to take the risk. Of course there is a great scope for entrepreneurship in Kashmir, but we only focus on two sectors i.e. tourism and handicrafts. We have ruined Handicrafts sector by inducing duplicity in it and more and more people are getting into tourism which has led to the saturation in the sector.” He adds.

Altaf also blames the government for not making people aware about the new sectors available for entrepreneurship. “Government don’t make people aware about the available avenues,” says Altaf.

When asked about the Entrepreneurship development Institute Srinagar (EDI), he replies that he knows that there is an institute which deals with the development of entrepreneurship in the state but is not fully aware about its aims and objectives. “Being a business scholar I know very little about EDI, how can I expect a common man to know about this institute.” He adds.

Lateef’s answer was seconded by another business school student in the University of Kashmir. Noaman who thinks that a job is more secure than entrepreneurship says that “it is better do a job than going for risks.” Personally I am very interested in starting a business, but our programme trains us to be managers, not entrepreneurs,” he says.

Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship development institute has a mission to facilitate individuals and organizations realize their entrepreneurial potential.

Started in 1997 by the state government as a society, the institute started its regular activities from February 2004, with two regional centres in Srinagar and in Jammu.

The institute receives a considerable financial support from the Centre as well as State Government for the development of infrastructure and carrying out its activities. Recently Chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir Omar Abdullah launched the Seed Capital Fund Scheme under Sher-i- Kashmir employment welfare programme for youth (SKEWPY).
The scheme is one of the major components of this welfare programme and is exclusively for first generation entrepreneurship including unemployed individuals, groups and technically qualified persons. Technically qualified persons include engineers, doctors, computer science and technology graduates, MBA’s etc.

While launching the scheme Chief Minister said that his government is working on a plan to expand the job market for the youth in government and private sector.”

According to the report by Mercy Corps, an International NGO, unemployment scenario in Kashmir has long been worsened by the complexity of the political conflict and protracted insecurity. The weak, tenuous local economy and its fluctuations have left many Kashmiries with few or no options. Jobs are few and those that are available are filled through elite connections and nepotistic measures. Unemployment has affected Kashmiries in general and youth in particular. According to census 2001, carried out by government of India 71% of population is under the age of 35. According to projection based on March 2010 data collected by District Employment and Counseling Centers, Govt. of J&K, an estimate 48% of youth between the ages 18 to 30 are unemployed.

According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) report Global employment trend, 2010 on an average young people across globe are almost three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. The situation in Kashmir is more acute.

Entrepreneurship has been most crucial to the growth and development of many developing countries. It can play a crucial role for improving the quality, number and variety of employment opportunity to the unemployed. Global Report 2010 of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) shows that the popularity of entrepreneurship is now twice as high in emerging markets as in the developed world. Out of every 100 persons interviewed in the developing countries, 10 were looking for entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship has been vital to the growth and economic development of emerging economies. The contribution of entrepreneurship to the economic rise of China is widely recognized. China’s economic miracle, which is now closing in on America to become the world’s largest economy, is being led and shaped by entrepreneurship who have expanded their market reach and created millions of new jobs.

Extensive studies on global entrepreneurship carried out by ILO and GEM, both strongly recommend promoting entrepreneurship. Improving the enabling conditions for entrepreneurship in Kashmir can certainly help promote local economy.

Youth entrepreneurship offers a viable path towards economic dynamism and growth in Kashmir. Fostering youth entrepreneurship will help address the serious challenge of rising unemployment as it will create self-employment opportunities transforming young job-seekers into job-makers.

Socially, entrepreneurship can open new avenues for youth to positively participate in and contribute to Kashmiri society.

In October 2010 Mercy Corps launched the Start-Up Kashmir Youth Entrepreneurship (SKYE) Development project. The 30-Month SKYE project seeks to help build and catalyze a youth-focused start-up eco-system in Kashmir. SKYE will foster the growth of 200 youth enterprise across Kashmir valley. Additionally the project will work to build capacities, raise awareness and undertaking between various stakeholders who want to contribute to youth entrepreneurship in Kashmir, including the local government, colleges and universities, business associations, financial institutions and entrepreneurship and vocational training institutions.

Overall aim of the SKYE project is to reduce poverty and foster inclusive economic growth through increased youth entrepreneurship in the Kashmir valley. Apart from government institutions like EDI, CDI many private players are in the field to help young entrepreneurs achieve their goal. Kashmir Entrepreneurship Centre (KEC) is giving free consultation to the budding entrepreneurs and linking them with the financial institutions for financial help.

In spite of some illustrious examples of entrepreneurial successes in Kashmir we have many stories of failed attempts around too that may influence the decisions of youth regarding setting up their own venture. However, in most of the failure cases it is found that the ill preparations of the entrepreneur and lack of proper counselling are generally the causes for not clicking. While explaining it Shabir Mushtaq, chief consultant at KEC says that most of the times failures are because people take finance first and then they start thinking about the ideas. “We should know how to make our lively hood out of our resources,” says Shabir. “Every city can’t be a cyber city like Ahmedabad or Bangalore, so we have to look for those sectors where our resources support us.” he adds.
Mir Iqbal

Kashmir so called ‘Paradise’ on earth is ravaged by conflict, shocked by lack of accountability and strangled by social taboos, people in Kashmir have been both witness to and victims of violence which has had a significant impact on their mental health. While a sustainable political solution seems far away, psychological wounds inflicted by violence and impunity on the Kashmiri society continue to increase and go well beyond socio-economic problems.

Studies and surveys conducted by various reputed organizations and institutes have confirmed that psychological problems have been increasing in Kashmir. Surveys show that before 1989, about 1,500 patients visited Kashmir’s only psychiatric hospital in Srinagar, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a major psychiatric disorder - was not found. Around 100,000 people from Kashmir valley visited various hospitals during the year 2007-2008 and nearly three-fourths were diagnosed with serious psychological disorders. This represents an over 20 percent increase from 2005(80,000) and reveals that the emotional and mental damage caused by the conflict continues to surge.

Armed conflict brought with itself a new set of social realities. Cross firings and crack downs became a routine. People also witnessed cross firings. With no history of psychiatric problems, they began suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders: recurrent, intrusive and distressing recollection of the events, marked irritability, outbursts of anger, difficulty in concentrating, sleeplessness, sadness, and disinterest in all social, domestic and school activities.

A statistical report of the state health and medical education department revealed that on an average, two to three cases of attempted suicide are admitted into Srinagar’s two main hospitals on regular basis. A large number of people from the villages die on the roads or in local health centres.

It also indicated that violence or the threat of physical violence seems to have had a significant impact on the mental health of people. It revealed that respondents suffered from high levels of anxiety such as nervousness, tension and extensive worrying.

These surveys also indicated high rates of physical complaints including headaches, body pains such as joint and back complaints, and abdominal complaints. It reported that poor health placed a substantial burden on
the area’s health facilities, with most people saying they visit health clinics frequently. Medicine consumption is also higher than earlier years.

According to these survey reports, there were no recognised Mental Health Care facilities in the rural areas, and also there were no OPD facilities at primary or secondary health care in the Valley and the psychiatrists were not exclusively utilised for mental health care. They are made to work as general medical practitioners. Most of positions for psychiatrists in the valley are unfulfilled. The report pointed out that there was a high rate of psychiatric disorders among those who were in jails and other detection centres.

Maintaining that sexual violence has affected the mental health of people in Kashmir more than physical violence, the surveys reported that sexual violence has been used as a common strategy to intimidate people in conflict. they had been victims of sexual violence since 1989. Almost two-thirds of the people interviewed had heard over a similar period about cases of rape, while one in seven had witnessed rape.

The worst hit have been the children among whom the major impact of the violence reported has been fear. School-related problems also scored highly, such as being unable to attend school and having problems studying due to the lack of professional teachers and study material.

Reports also mentioned that the respondents told the surveyors that people deal with stress by isolating themselves or becoming aggressive. They further informed them that talking confidentially to someone they trust is helpful when confronted with tension. These surveys brought out the real picture of the mental health of people in Kashmir. The findings of these surveys revealed a bleak picture of the mental health of people in the conflict-affected region and raised important questions about the government’s failure to adequately provide mental health services to the people of Kashmir.

The Psychiatric Diseases Hospital at Rainawari is the only refuge for mental patients in Kashmir, and its doctors, facilities, and supplies have long been grossly inadequate. Records from the out-patient department (OPD) of Srinagar’s Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases show that more than 300 people arrive every day. Overburdened, understaffed, and in-demand, this is the state of mental health care in Kashmir.

Doctors believe that around 10 percent of those in need of psychiatric care are actually approaching the hospital. Women are the worst sufferers, most self-admitting women patients are aged between 16 to 25. Because of the social stigma associated with psychological disorders, One outcome of this under-treated trauma is an increase in teenage girl suicides.

Psychologists maintain that people living at a place ravaged by conflict often face a number of psychological problems. They say that the physical environment in which people live has a direct impact on their mental health. “Stress caused by feelings of insecurity can deplete physical and psychological buoyancy leading to varied mental problems, this has happened in most of the cases in Kashmir,” said Dr. Nazir Ahmad CMO Shopian. He maintained that crackdowns, frisking by security forces and round-up raids in villages have a deep impact on the mental health of the people.

“When you find yourself in the middle of a situation where your movement gets restricted, where you have to follow orders, where you are abused and humiliated, where your imaginations fail to take a flight and where your identity always remains a suspect, you are bound to suffer from psychological disorders,” added Dr Nazir.

Dr Arshid Hussain, a psychiatrist at the Government Psychiatric Diseases Hospital Srinagar maintained that since 1989 the number of mental patients in Kashmir Valley has increased from 1500 to above 1 Lakh in 2010.

He further added that, “Around 60 to 70 percent of these patients are suffering from depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia; all of these disorders are of serious nature, apart from these problems, there are many other psychological complications associated with violence which can be easily noticed among the people in Kashmir valley”.

The situation has come to a stage where people feel so unsafe that they prefer staying in hospital than going home. Increasing psychological and neurological problems among the people in Kashmir begs further discussion about the continuing situation of impunity in Kashmir for those who perpetrate acts of terror and violence without any fear of being caught and held accountable. Until this atmosphere of impunity is not addressed, psychological problems are bound to increase.
As the Srinagar city is growing faster no quality traffic management system is in place to meet the challenge. The city even lacks digital signal system.

The ever increasing number of vehicles in Srinagar city demand better roads and better traffic management plan. But the reality on ground depicts a total opposite picture. No new roads have been built over the decades in the historical city. Old ones too have dilapidated that results in ever hours long daily tailbacks, causing huge inconvenience to commuters.

People of the city decry the loss of time in traffic jams. Nazir Ahmad, a resident of Lal Bazar Srinagar has to travel to the city Centre Lal-chowk every day to reach his office. It takes him more than an hour to cover the 20 minute drive. “Vehicles move at snail’s pace and are often caught in traffic jams” he laments. “I never reach the department in time, courtesy traffic jams” says Adil Zargar, a student of Kashmir University.

He criticized the government for allowing Tata-407 minibuses to be used for public transport system. “These vehicles were first introduced in Punjab and Haryana for the transportation of poultry and livestock” says Adil, adding, “but unfortunately in Kashmir they are used for public transport”.

Tata 407 buses, with inconvenient seating arrangement, were introduced in Kashmir in early 90’s and are still plying on all the city routes.

Officials say that the lack of human resource was the reason for traffic mess. “We require minimum 1000 traffic police personnel to man the traffic beats in the Srinagar, but we have only 220 men at our disposal who are placed at important junctions in the city,” says Superintendent of Traffic Police for Srinagar city Haseeb-ur-Rehman.

Haseeb attributes the frequent traffic jams to poor infrastructure of roads besides ignorance of people about traffic rules. “People equally are also responsible for the traffic mess. They (people) park their vehicles in the middle of the road resulting in chaos and traffic jams” says Haseeb.

The SP, however, is all praise for his men whom he believes are doing the best possible job. “Our cops are doing their best.”

He points out that different spots have been identified in the city for the installation of traffic lights. Besides, he says, our department is launching a Fixed Number Plate system developed by a Hyderabad based company to avoid thefts of vehicles in the city.

Regional Transport Officer Kashmir, Mir Anees Ahmad, accepts that the public transport system in the city was in shambles. “We have already prepared a comprehensive mobility plan for Srinagar city which has been submitted to the government for approval,” says Anees.

“Besides the old type minibuses which are not feasible for the passengers are being replaced by latest models,” he adds.

Anees says people too need to follow traffic rules and diversions to avoid jams.
A DAY AT KAMAN POST

Sheikh Qayoom Madni

A dorned like the colourful birds in summer the trucks were moving slowly into this part of Kashmir. Each one had surpassed the other in decoration and carried a sign board signifying the place it came from. Some read Chakoti, some Muzaffarabad and there were others from Gilgit and Lahore. This caravan was a part of a routine cross LoC trade flagged off by the governments of India and Pakistan in 2009 as a confidence building measure. Abondoning monotonous deserted look it wears for the rest of days Kaman Aman Setu: entry point for the trucks, was witnessing it’s ritualistic hustle and bustle which I and my class mates were now a part of. Our visit was arranged by our department as a part of the excersise to expose us to some realistic situations outside the class room environment.

For most of us it was the first time we were meeting people from the other part of Kashmir. We were all enthusiastic and curious as well. The moment we saw the trucks coming, some of the students lost control over their emotions. They stopped a truck, gathered around it and started cuddling and kissing it’s fabulously decorated bonnet and some also went atop it and displayed their excitement through all possible gestures. All were eager to freeze the rare moments. We also asked some quick questions to the drivers and they replied with reciprocative expressions of affection.

At the Kaman Post we were received by an Army Officer Major Siddarth with exceptional warmth. He was courteous enough to spent about an hour and a half with us, showing us around and giving us details about a soldier’s life at such a politically and militarily sensitive location. Keeping up the army tradition Major Siddarth and his unit had arranged tea and snaks for us. While talking about the relationship with Pakistani army deployed on the other side Major Siddarth said with a smile on his face, “ It is only the politicians who have problems we otherwise have good relations with each other”. He said that flag-ship meetings are held regularly five times a week between him and Captain Naveed from the other side in cordial atmosphere.

The bridge connecting the two divided parts of the region at Kaman post was renamed as Kaman Aman Setu : the bridge of peace after the launch of historic Srinagar-Muzafferabad bus service on 7th April, 2005. In 2008-09 India and Pakistan agreed to start trade between the two divided parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Inspite of the cheerfulness left by the trucks I had this strange sense of subtle uneasyness prevailing in the air. The only respite from the feeling was sight of a small shrine. As we were leaving for Srinagar Major Siddarth took us inside the shrine just few steps away from the bridge. It was a tomb of Hazrat Kamal-ud-Din Balkhi (RA), a famous saint who came to Kashmir via Chakoti with Hazrat Bulbul shah (RA) in the 725 Hijra. The tomb has been built by the 6 Bihar regiment of Army. At one of the world’s highest potential confrontational points the tomb stands as a symbol of eternal bliss and a reminder of universal values of peace and brotherhood.
Rohi Jehan

Nowadays, girls seem to be more ambitious. In academics they outshine boys. Even at the professional level they are no way lesser than boys. Gone are the days when girls were seen just as doctors, teachers, nurses or home makers. Now girls are not only in the corporate world but in politics too.

Presently there are not many active women politicians in Jammu and Kashmir and those who are active, are not independent. They are members of one or the other already existing political family.

“Since past no woman in Jammu and Kashmir, be it in main stream or separatist camp, has been independent except Khemlata Wakhloo,” says a political analyst, who chose to be anonymous. He also says that other female politicians are daughters, sisters or mothers of some influential politicians.

“Khemlata Wakhloo is the only independent politician who has no political lineage. She belongs to the minority community. This is the reason for her survival as an independent politician,” he adds. The other example of the influential women in politics is of Mehbooba Mufti, who is presently the president of the opposition party of the State. She became one of the popular elected members in the State Assembly elections held in 1996. She is the daughter of a former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

Now women are willingly taking part in the present politics. This is highlighted by recent Panchayat elections in which a number of women participated by their own will and with the support of their families.

Nonetheless, Panchayati Raj is not considered as main stream politics. The whole process was actually designated on non-party basis. Participants had to participate without being in any main stream party. They had to fight independently. But practically this didn’t happen. Participants were seen as the candidates of one or the other main stream party.

However, this election offered a chance for women to become politically active. This is the
beginning of the gender politics.

The various reasons for which women take part in elections are like they think that they are left out in making political decisions, they want to be part of this process and also want to frame political policies actively; they want to be heard. Agreeing with this point, Hanifa, a Panch contestant, says that she has seen gender discrimination in her society which became the main reason for her to fight the election. She mainly wants to work for gender related problems.

This may act as a concrete base for women to be politically active but they still have miles to go. The people of Kashmir have not shown much support towards the role of women in politics. It is still not very significant.

Zamrooda Habib, a woman separatist leader, says that they need to bear in mind that women in conflict zones have played a special role in peace and reconciliation mechanism. “The resistance or pro-freedom politics of Kashmir has seen number of women faces, but I believe that role of women role here is still limited,” she adds.

Habib wants educated Kashmiri women to become politically active. She also wants them to play active role in this conflict region as is done in other major conflict zones of the world.

“I tried to see how we could facilitate the women of Kashmir to come forward to play their active role and be politically active. It is a known fact that in the major conflict zones of the world women have played a very important and crucial role in the resolution of issues,” says Habib.

In recent Panchayat elections more women from rural areas participated in the elections than their urban counterparts. The reason is that in rural areas more women are unemployed than urban.

Though many women took part in the election process, still on this basis attitude of women towards politics cannot be generalised. This is not going to make any difference because politics in Kashmir is unpredictable. Things are fragile and politics is highly sceptical. Here politics depends upon the mood and the situation.

In this conflict zone elections cannot be taken as basis for future. “It is too early to predict anything from the recent Panchayat elections,” says Hanifa.

A political worker, speaking on the condition of anonymity, reveals that the elections do not affect much, because they were fought to release Rs.7.2 billion from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi, which was meant for Panchyats. Once the election is over, State would be able to get money from the Central government. So the election was a compulsion for the State government and elections were just to legitimise the process of getting the money. But about the issue of women taking part in the elections, he says that women should take this opportunity for making their career as future politicians.

Although, everyone welcomed the participation of women in politics, be it mainstream politicians or separatists. They say that women will be able to know their powers and they can change the world for them.

But there are certain places in rural Kashmir where women participated in recent Panchayat elections not out of their own choice but in place of their male family members. Due to 33% reservation and less competition for women in the elections, male members of the family participated in the name of women. I learnt this while talking to a female contestant who was elected as a Panch, but to my surprise she didn’t know what she has to do after getting elected. And the irony is that she had not participated in the election on the insistence of her family members instead, one of her faraway relative, who is a member of a political party, asked her to contest the election for his own interest.

Women have got opportunities to move forward and change their world. But if they are not able to make use of them for themselves, they would end up as slaves.

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CALL BEYOND THE LINES

Zahoor Khan

There would hardly be any area in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as alienated from the modern world and its technological advancements as frontier area of Machil Valley. Over 170 kms from the State’s summer capital towards far-east Machil is a lost and forgotten place in the conflict ridden State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Separated by Neelum river from the Pakistan administered Kashmir, this remote corner of J&K borders the beautiful areas of Janwahi and Falwahi of the Kael Valley on the other side of the Control line.

Populated by nearly 25000 people, Machil is administered in 7 halqas and almost 20 villages. Ironically the people living on the fault lines are usually without basic facilities of life. Medical facility in Machil is defunct for the want of basic medical equipments and doctors. Only single primary Health Center with one doctor and two medical assistants are supposed to take care of the entire population. Most far flung areas of Machil like Ring Payeen, Ring Bala, Chakoti, Tantary Basti which fall on the 0 kms radius of cease-fire line are at the distance of 26 kms from the only Health Center. Nambardar of the area Aliyaas Khan said that many villagers simply “gave it up”. He said, “Unable to cope up with unbearable circumstances entire population of two villages of Ring area fled to the other side of the cease fire line in mid 90s.” And according to him there has not been much change since.

Education sector is even worse. In two halqas of 5000 population there are only two higher secondary pass outs. And earning that title has been quite an ordeal for these two students. One among them Parvaiz Malik used to walk for seven hours every living still as if in the medieval ages habitants of Machil generally known as the Dards do not have any telecommunication facilities. The area being in close proximity to the Line of Control makes such luxuries impermissible.

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day to reach the only higher secondary school located at a village called Dude. “Every day, I used to begin my journey at 7 in the morning and after walking all the way through the rugged terrains inside the deep forests I would reach school at 10 and same exercise would be repeated on my way back; it was very difficult.” Besides being a hurdle in the way of literacy the lack of proper availability of sufficient educational infrastructure is also depriving the girls of their right to get education. The Sarpanch of the area Gulam Rasool said, “Given the uncertain situation that we are living in no parent can even think of sending a girl child to a school that is so far away and that too when you have to walk through forests to reach there”.

When it comes to the gender education seems to be the least of the problems women of the area are facing. There is no gynecologist in the whole area and that according to Rasool often becomes the reason for some of their worst traumas. “The conceiving women do not get any gynecological advice and that often results in tragedies. Just sometime back a woman had labor pains. Due to heavy snowfall the whole area was cut-off from the rest of the Valley. It was impossible to take her to even district hospital in Kupwara. It was only after a number of pleas to army officers that we were able to get helicopter service to take her to Kupwara hospital. When doctors examined her they decided to go for an operation immediately. But alas! The baby was dead for two days.”

Living under such harsh circumstances and devoid of any help from the civil administration locals in this frontier district more than often depend upon army. People mostly travel in army vehicles and get treated in military MI rooms. For the emergency cases patients could be air lifted to the other Valley hospitals, but that involves a lot of protocol and procedure.

Spread over 1,250 acres, the Machil valley is distributed in the highlands, hills and deep gorges where people reside in the wooden muddy houses. Being the high altitude location this mountainous terrain remains cut off from the rest of the Kashmir Valley for almost seven months. The only land entry to the Valley: Z Gali is located at an altitude of 7000 feet and usually gets up to 10 feet snow during winter.

Living still as if in the medieval ages habitants of Machil generally known as the Dards do not have any telecommunication facilities. The area being in close proximity to the Line of Control makes such luxuries impermissible.

In October 2010 while on visit to the area, 15 Corps Commander General Atta Hussnain cleared the army’s security reservations over the installation of mobile communication towers, Dards celebrated over the approval, “But it still seems a farfetched dream as no move has been taken in this direction so far,” the Area Development Officer Sandeep Sointer said. “There are much complicacies regarding the installation of towers,” he further added.

In the long list of ‘Not-Availables’ an interesting addition is a hair cutting saloon. People get the hair cuts in their homes. Setting up a barber’s shop can perhaps be a nice beginning of the progress and development of the area.
Gurez Nothing Tribal about it

The People of this valley have come a long way from a just “socks and sweater weavers” community. Although they continue to be modest weavers but now also control hotels, resorts and orchards in the Gurez belt and even own farms there. They are the top potato and peas growing farmers; producing highest per hectare potatoes in the state. A good chunk of the population from here are employed in the government and private sectors and even few after qualifying Civil Services are now serving in various departments in Jammu & Kashmir.

They run apple, strawberry, cherry orchards, hotels and resorts in Gurez and have dumped vernacular architecture for convenience.

While undergoing the transformation, wooden and Mud-brick vernacular architecture has made way for brick and boulder and tin-roofed gable-shaped houses. The richer among the Gurez dwellers picked up the trend from government-built tin-roofed rest houses and RCC office buildings.

As you travel from Dawer — the first village in Gurez valley– tin roofed concrete houses dot the landscape. What happened to the local, flat-roofed mud-brick and wooden houses on the Dawer-Tulail road? People have no doubts in admitting the convenience of tin-roof houses.

The valley experiences ten to twenty feet snow every winter and gable-shaped houses save them from the trouble of clearing snow. Apple orchards, once unknown in this snowbound valley, now dot this snow-swathed desert.

Farmers have planted apple trees in lower villages of Dawer, starting from

Shiekh Saleem

Cherry, Apples, Strawberry orchards, aromatic fields of Zeera, tin-roofed concrete houses, poplar trees, vast fields of potato and butter chicken, receding snowline, growing tourism and prosperity. That’s what welcomes you in Gurez Valley.

This snowbound and landlocked home to Shina culture though still carries the visible marks of the past glory of Buddhism is getting a makeover. It is only when spring blooms the 84 km zig-zag uphill Bandipora-Gurez highway opens to visitors with mystical fragrance of destinations like Habakhatoon, Durmaath, Peerbaba, Razdan, Kawbal, Buzgoie and Anzbari peaks.

The People of this valley have come a long way from a just “socks and sweater weavers” community. Although they continue to be modest weavers but now also control hotels, resorts and orchards in the Gurez belt and even own farms there.
Nayal, Wanpora, Khandyal, Gulsahnpora, Tulial and the surrounding villages of Gurez - the tehsil headquarter. Orchards are being raised on irrigated land, signifying a climatic change that is making this valley suitable for apple cultivation, say horticulturalists. “Earlier, land here was not suitable for apple cultivation as it used to be too cold and snowly. But now apple trees tolerate the temperature and harvesting commences in mid-October and November,” says Muhammad Rafiq Baba, an apple farmer in Tullial in the upper Gurez valley. The Apple of Gurez is small sized and different in taste from that of the other parts of the valley.

Farmers in Gurez have this year supplied over 1,700 quintals of potato seeds to the state agriculture department. Gurez Valley - close to the Line of Control (LoC), will soon be developed into a potato belt, said Sher - e - Kashmir University of Agriculture Technology and Science (SKUAST) Vice-Chancellor Dr Tej Pratap. There are potato seed farms at Dawar and Izmarg in Gurez. There are plans to establish a few more in the region. Given its cold environs and the quality of soil, the valley, which already produces a good quantity of potatoes, is also suitable for growing its seeds. The potato seeds, said scientists, will reduce J-K’s dependence on other states. The state has to buy 4,000 quintal of seeds from neighbouring Himachal every year.

Like rest of the country, the “transformed” trials of Gurez now enjoy chickens, Kanti, Biryanie, Kabab, Momosa, burgers, pizzas and dal-chawal are favourite for the youths here. Almost every village in this tribal belt has a road link to the national highway-NHA-1, which has also contributed to the prosperity brought about by potato and pea cultivation.

Earlier, dal and trumb chot (Trumb - is a vernacular name of barley species) was the staple diet for residents, but now it’s over to wheat, rice, meat and potatoes. Though not scientifically established, but changing food habits have given rise to many never-heard-sores of diseases in the valley, say old-timers and health officials who have worked here for years.

Poplar trees planted under the government-sponsored Horticulture development project have sprouted along the national highway between Dawar and Purana Tullial and between Wanpora and Bagtore in Gurez valley. The alien tree species is competing with the local deodar, cupirus, willow trees and other high-altitude deodars and pines found in the lower Gurez valley.

The influences of globalization and corporate world have reached this tribal remote Valley, when we enter the valley, one thing that was common which indicates the corporate and globalization influences was having a Dish TV fixed on wooden walls or standing on altered in roofs. The construction of Kishana Ganga Hydro Electric Project is changing the cultural geography and Anthropology in such a way that in coming few years one can hardly guess that their were tribal living on peaks in the Gurez.

The mechanization is destroying the peaks and hillocks With such a speed that in coming few years all the peakswill be naked without snow. The 60% of literacy rate in this remote valley indicate the transforming consciousness among the people. Only years back the same percentage was three percent, now it is 60% which is increasing by the every passing day. This transformation of education consciousness is adding more to the Development of Gurez Valley.
The once colourful Pansies stooped towards the sun scorched soil. They were not watered for days. The length of the turf in the lawn spoke of neglect. It was not mowed for weeks. The shoots of the mulberry tree had lost their sense of direction. They were not pruned for months.

As she looked at the appalling condition of the garden of her home, every bit of joy in her, diminished. The charming Zinnias that grew on the banks of the brook were robbed of their diverse colours. A thick layer of dust settled on them, making the flowers maliciously monotonous. The white roses that flourished near the fringes of the garden were stripped of their colourlessness. A grey fungus devoured the foliage, making them spitefully speckled. The dense creepers that enveloped the fence shied away from their destined path. A portion of it escaped into the adjoining premises. The leaves of the Poplar trees were scattered gracelessly everywhere; desiccated, dead.

She was made puny by the towering evergreens. Once a minor hurdle in the pathway, they were now transformed into an impenetrable barricade of stem and stipule. The drooping branches of the Cherry tree cried tears of carelessness; its fruits, once relished by her, were consumed by a ruthless army of ants. The luscious plums and juicy apricots, once the reason of childish tiffs, lay motionless on the ground; hornets and wasps fighting for their share. The sick smell of putrefied flora in the garden was more nauseating than the feeling of despair that gripped her.

With each step through the decaying thicket, she wailed more and more at the lost spirit of the garden. The Evening Primrose did not open up for days to greet its beloved dusk- a sign of resignation. The Marigolds and Jasmine shed their petals before fall- a sign of desolation. She tried to liberate a Bell flower entangled in thorny weeds, but the thorns tore through the flesh of her hand- a sign of indignation.

As she walked through the mourning garden of her home, a sense of gloom overtook her. The same garden once promised joy of colourful petals, assured peace of fluttering green leaves and pledged shade of sprawling curly willows. She wondered what was wrong with the eden of her home. It had, for some reason, broken its promise and begged for mercy, for life.

The song of the Mockingbird engulfed her in melancholia- the song which was once the harbinger of merriment and the omen of bliss. This song reminded her of her only son; her gaash, her lakhtejigar. In his presence, the garden flourished and blossomed.
in melancholia— the song which was once the harbinger of merriment and the omen of bliss. This song reminded her of her only son; her gaash, her lakhtejigar. In his presence, the garden flourished and blossomed. It spread unbound joy, showered unmatched bounty and promised never to wither away. In his absence, it was dying an agonizing death, spreading nothing but distress. It was slowly fading into oblivion.

Seeing the dejection all around the garden, she missed her son more and more. The sound of hush giggles and faint footsteps of her son, when he was a little kid, echoed in her ears. The images of his playful smiles while running around the garden, trampling the green grass, stabbed her watery eyes. The taste of the subtle kisses she planted on his forehead, stung her dry tongue. The scent of his sweat pinched her puckered nose. The touch of his silky skin sent a shiver down her feeble body.

Perhaps, she thought in the heart of her hearts, the garden missed him too; just perhaps. The creepers, perhaps, climbed over the wall searching for her son. The Pansies, perhaps, refused to display their vibrant colors because they wanted only her son to adore them. The Marigolds and Jasmine, perhaps, parted with their leaves so early in the season, to show their sense of loss. The willows, perhaps, spread out their shade only for him. The breeze, perhaps, refused to blow in his absence. The overgrown evergreens, perhaps, towered above all other plants, just to catch a glimpse of her son coming from far away. Perhaps only, she thought; just perhaps.

His being away from home razed the soul of the garden; seed by seed, leaf by leaf. She asked for their help, but the tools of resurrection— the Scythe, the Shovel, the Water hose avoided her pleading gaze. Their scornful look reiterating that it was only her who possessed the elixir of life.

As she walked past the lifeless garden, a faint figure caught her eye. Suddenly the leaves fluttered once again, the curls of the willow whirled in the breeze, the Bell flower broke free from its shackles and the Evening Primrose rose from its deep slumber.

**BACK TRACK**

**THE BENGAL GAZETTE**

Founded by James Augustus Hicky, Bengal Gazette or the Calcutta General Advertiser was the first English language newspaper, and indeed the first printed newspaper, to be published in the Indian sub-continent. The newspaper soon became very famous not only among the British soldiers posted in India at that time, it also inspired the Indians to write newspapers of their own.

It was a weekly newspaper, and was founded on January 29, 1780, in Calcutta, the capital of British India. The paper ceased publication on March 23, 1782.

As a novelty every person read it, and was delighted. The paper itself survived until the 1830s, when its circulation was exceeded by The Englishman (also published from Calcutta from 1818, and now known as The Statesman).
BOOK Review

Gandhi’s Outstanding Leadership

Umreena Majeed

Pascal Alan Nazareth’s 223-page book “Gandhi’s Outstanding Leadership” is for a die-hard Gandhi fan. Published by Sarvodaya International Trust, of which the author is the founder, the book doesn’t merely carry an account of the strategies that the Father of the Nation adopted for the cause of freedom. It is rather an analysis of those strategies highlighting as to why they were embraced whole-heartedly by the masses at that time.

Gandhi’s “militant non-violence” is deified throughout this book. His contemporary world and its problems, today’s showdowns and tomorrow’s anticipated sorrows are seen through this prism. Inspirations behind the rise of humble and great personalities, including the likes of Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Corazon Aquino, have been traced back to Gandhi.

Major scenarios of the current world have been dissected to show the relevance of Gandhian ideals of non-violence e.g., revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt; the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan; the US handling of Iran.

It would do well the present-day self-styled leaders to consider and ponder upon many interesting words and sentences written in this book like “enlightened patriotism”, “militant non-violence”, “moral jiujitsu” etc. Of the many quotes of Gandhi given in the book one in my opinion is highly significant in the context of present-day Kashmir, in particular, and world, in general which is “Peace must be just. In order to be that it must neither be punitive nor vindictive.”

The book in itself is more of a compilation of quotes, anecdotes and incidents related to Gandhi and his life as a leader. The element of innovation which entices an ordinary reader is sorely missing.

One glaring factual error saddens the reader that events in Gandhi’s life have not been chronicled with accuracy. In the chapter titled “Components of Gandhi’s Leadership”, under the heading “Self-Assurance”, Sarojini Naidu’s first meeting with Gandhi, which occurred in 1915, is narrated and Nazareth writes that on seeing Gandhi having his meal out of a wooden bowl Naidu “burst out laughing and exclaimed he looked more like Mickey Mouse than the great Indian hero of South Africa.” That Naidu called Gandhi “Mickey Mouse” is often found written in history books but it is unlikely to happen at their first meeting because the famous cartoon character Mickey wasn’t there at that time. It came in 1982 i.e., much later the two veterans met.

Prof. Alan Brinkley’s quote included in this book states that “Gandhi has been so mythologized since his assassination in 1948; the real man has almost disappeared.” Unfortunately, this book does the same. For 350 rupees there definitely would be a better book about Gandhi in the market.
In a 1965 Horizon article, Washington editor of Fortune, Alvin Toffler coined a term ‘Future Shock’ which he later published as a full-fledged researched science fiction novel to “describe the shattering stress disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.” The book is about the changing contours of the world and the transience of things in the lives of people, their sudden change towards the things and their nature of disposability towards them.

After 46 years of the origin of the term, future shock seems to have been a perfect discovery and is, now, capable of reining an uncontrollable horse which could crush all the permanency and wash away it with the nuisance of transience in the social set ups of the world, be it Europe, America or some other third world nation. Due to the changing social set ups of the world people are changing at an alarming race. The transience or temporariness of things people use could lead to a bigger problem than the Great Depression, if not controlled. To go to the basic level people tend to use the disposable items more than those whose permanency would be lifelong. From cell phones to new PDAs people keep on changing them without noticing the losses and their impermanence with them. The temporary relation is not with things only but human relations are also plagued with the same disease.

Those were the best days when people would warmly receive each other but now according to Toffler they are completely changed as people don’t have enough time to meet face to face. Toffler’s Future Shock is completely based on the issues of permanence and transience and of changing natures of the people. The conundrum of fast life according to Toffler will increase hundred folds within the coming years. The second most daunting challenge, the biggest future shock according to Toffler is of migration. Thousands of people migrate to the cities leaving behind their ancestral homes. This social change has also influenced human society in innumerable ways.

From portable playgrounds, universities to the rental revolution and disposable items, Toffler has highlighted everything future-shocking in his novel. From the household changes to the classroom renovation, all are the faces of future shock. Coming down to our local level, Toffler’s Future Shock could be the best lesson for all times to come. He has not only pointed out the sharp edges of the change but also suggested remedies. He not only opposes disposability and transience but also inspires to be permanent with the things which we own. Toffler has been much successful in conjuring up the future with such exactness and providing an insight of negative developments of “needless” change. The pace of life, as it seems to Toffler, is going to supersede all the human emotions and is going to bring a revolution of disposability and temporariness.

The ‘Future Shock’ is a peek through the window of future and it signals the reverse development which in other words could be understood as Shocking Future.
Yasir Hamid: 

The graph of education is witnessing an upward trend. Everyday more and more men and women are added to the list of educated. A lot of emphasis is laid on improvement of the education sector, utilizing all available resources and devising new policies. Serious efforts are done for its development and why not. It is the education or knowledge that takes a person from darkness into light, makes known what is not known, creates awareness and removes ignorance and arrogance.

The result of these efforts is evident as every year we see hundreds of graduates and post graduates passing out from the colleges and universities and at the same time thousands of new ones getting admission.

Now the question is that are we acquiring the knowledge in its real and true sense? Are we developing the spirit of education within us? Or are we merely producing literates. After taking a glance on all the parameters of education it can easily be assessed that we lack the real spirit of education. Literate and educated are two different qualities. Our education rate may be increasing quantitatively (literacy) but it is retarding qualitatively (real education). It will be better to say that our predecessors were more educated than us. No doubt our educational institutions churn out good number of doctors, engineers, technicians, administrators, economists, teachers etc, but what they fail to produce is an ideal and real human being. We produce professionals, who are the specialists too, in corruption, fraud and wrong doings. Our present education system teaches us how to fly in air like birds and swim in water like fishes. It however, fails to impress upon us how to walk like humans on earth.

Had we achieved the real spirit of knowledge then the crime rate, we are witnessing in our societies would not be so high, there would be no moral waywardness, no corruption and other evils. But it is not the case, we see so called educated persons indulging in all sorts of illegal acts – smoking, drinking, suicide, bribery, corruption, female foeticide, pollution, crime etc. So the tall public claims by government regarding the development and improvement in the education sector do not seem to be in sync with the reality. In true sense the standard of education is degrading with every passing day. Our whole society and system is in the process of severe ethical and moral
What is the reason behind this miserable condition of education system? The answer is simple that we do not seek knowledge in its real essence and spirit. We do not aim to achieve the real purpose of education. As education liberates a person from stereotypes, enlightens and opens horizons, broadens vision and invokes conscience. But these definitions remain confined only to books. Education in contemporary times does not inculcate the liberating spirit in us. It does not eradicate the curse of ignorance and arrogance, because people seek education only for the purpose of earning livelihood. The aim of education has been oriented towards gaining the good status in this world, and not purification of souls. We achieve education only for the fulfillment of temporal needs. We gain knowledge to pursue higher standards of material comfort, luxury and extravagance. We hardly acquire knowledge according to its values and goals nor do we pursue it to achieve modesty and humility.

Knowledge is identified in Islam with worship (Ibadah). The acquiring of knowledge is worship; traveling to gain it is worship. The real purpose of education is that the person should be able to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. It should raise moral and ethical standards, should promote virtue and combat vice, should enjoy right and forbid wrong. This is the real essence of being educated. If after acquiring knowledge, these qualities do not reflect in a human being then there is no fun of being educated.

The factors responsible for this sorry state of our educational standards and system constitute almost all the sections associated with this process—parents, teachers and administration.

Parents utilize all the resources and efforts, lay stress on the child’s career education but hardly make the arrangement for the child’s moral, ethical, behavioural and religious education. As a result the child from his early years remains focused towards his aim and develops a preconceived notion of his materialistic career and does not pay any attention to the rest of the necessary aspects and purposes of education.

As for as teacher is concerned the primary responsibility and duty of a teacher, in addition to teaching basic studies to a student, is to shape the overall personality and all-round development – physical, mental, ethical, moral, psychological, religious, social etc, which in fact is the first and foremost service of a teacher towards his Master (God), his own conscience and even to his nation. But the present day teacher (from primary to higher level) only focuses on his concerned subject of teaching and hardly cares for the other sensitive responsibilities.

Our society is in favor of the western mode of education which is totally materialistic in essence. Its focus is more quantitative and less qualitative. They want higher literacy rate and hardly matter about whatever be the standard of education.

If the current status and situation of education system remains as such then it is obvious that our whole generation will lead into darkness rather than enlightenment.

Who was Pulitzer?

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seph Pulitzer (April 10, 1847 – October 29, 1911) was a Hungarian-American newspaper publisher of the St. Louis Post Dispatch and the New York World. Pulitzer introduced the techniques of “new journalism” to the newspapers he acquired in the 1880s and became a leading national figure in the Democratic Party. He crusaded against big business and corruption. In the 1890s the fierce competition between his World and William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal introduced yellow journalism and opened the way to mass circulation newspapers that depended on advertising revenue and appealed to the reader with multiple forms of news, entertainment, and advertising.

Today, he is best known for posthumously establishing the Pulitzer Prizes. The prize is administered by Columbia University in New York City. Prizes are awarded yearly in 21 categories. In 20 of these, each winner receives a certificate and a US$10,000 cash award. The winner in the public service category of the journalism competition is awarded a gold medal, which always goes to a newspaper, although an individual may be named in the citation.
With the changing lifestyle, the consumption of fast food has also witnessed an increase in Kashmir, which the doctors believe can pose severe health risks to all age groups.

Terms fast food and junk food are often used interchangeably. The former is used for food that can be prepared and served very quickly while junk food is an informal term applied to some foods that are perceived to have little or no nutritional value.

Typically fast food refers to food sold in a restaurant or store with preheated or precooked ingredients, and served to the customer in a packaged form for take-out/take-away.

Junk foods are typically ready-to-eat convenience foods containing high levels of saturated fats, salt, or sugar and are considered to have little or no health benefits.

Common junk foods include salted snack foods like chips (crisps), burgers, sandwiches, vegetable rolls, chicken roll, mutton roll, beverages and other stuffs. Chips are very popular among children.

According to doctors, the junk foods pose several health risks especially cardiovascular and weight related disorders like obesity.

Junk foods are totally imbalanced. They contain lot of fats, salts and preservatives. Excess of salt causes cardiovascular diseases like hypertension and even cancer. Lot of fat content causes diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure due to shrinking of blood vessels, said Director Shere Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, Soura, Dr Showkat Ahmad Zargar.

Dr Zargar, who is also a renowned gastroenterologist, is seconded by noted cardiologist, Dr Mehraj-u-din Shah.

Junk foods contain lot of trans fats due to repeated frying.

Trans fats directly cause the blood vessels to shrink which in turn poses more chances of coronary attack, said Dr Shah.

He said there has been an increase in the percentage of patients suffering from different cardiovascular diseases and one of the reasons for this is increased usage of fast foods.

Previously there used to be 2 to 3 cardiovascular patients visiting me in one month, but now there are 2 to 3 patients visiting me on daily basis, said Shah.

Doctors suggest that parents should not encourage their kids for eating these food items.

Parents must be disciplined. They should provide their children with lunch boxes, fruits, eggs and vegetables instead of chocolates and ice-creams. Give them plain and clean drinking water instead of carbonated drinks. Parents should also ensure that their children don’t spend the pocket money on junk food, said Dr Zargar.

Meanwhile, people share different reasons for the increased usage of fast food.

These foods are very tasty, easily available and easy to use, said Afla Beigh, a post graduate student of Economics.

I prefer these foods because they are less time consuming besides being expensive, said Touseef Ahmed, who is pursuing his Masters in Political Science.

Parents have expressed concern over the increased consumption of fast food by youngsters.

I am very concerned about my childrens health. They consume chips several times a day on routine basis. I know these stuffs are harmful but I can’t prevent my children from having them as they are easily available in the market. Besides, it has become sort of fashion now-a-days to have the junk food, said Mohammad Amin Waza, father of two children.
Q. What made you to opt for radiation oncology after MBBS when there are so many options?

A. During the pre-final examination of my MBBS, my aunt was diagnosed with esophageal cancer and after radio radiation therapy at Sher Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), she was discharged and finally she went into terminal phase where death is the last resort for the patient. Seeing her in pain, I decided to help such patients by opting for radiation oncology. Worldwide only 12 to 15 per cent esophageal cancer patients survive for five years. Cancer patients have a great stress in life because of the disease and it becomes a challenge for doctors to treat these patients.

Q. In Kashmir doctor-patient ratio is far higher than the metropolitan cities. How did you manage to sort this problem?

A. In 2005 when I joined as a permanent faculty member I proposed a plan to the higher authorities at SMHS hospital for the creation of new Oncology department. In Kashmir valley we had only one cancer ward at SKIMS which can accommodate 20 patients at a time and cancer patients had to wait for months for radiation treatment and post radiation treatment at this ward. We proposed a plan for upgradation of Oncology department at SMHS hospital for which we needed staff which can be sufficient for next fifty years and the present government made this possible. National Cancer Control Society came up with a programme. Dr Parekh and Dr Bahadur inspected SMHS hospital and sanctioned Rs 3 crore for the purchase of cobalt unit and a simulator. Bhaba Atomic Research Centre guided us in layout and designing of this department on modern scientific lines. The department finally got completed in 2009. This department is presently having one of the latest equipments in cancer treatment called EQUINOX-18.

Q. What are the reasons for surge in the number of cancer cases in the valley?

A. World wide there has been 10 per cent increase in the number of cancer cases, but in J&K it is 18 per cent because of various reasons. Kashmir falls in the belt of cancer endemic area. The valley falls on old silk route (South China to Iran) which is more vulnerable to GIT cancers. The soil found along silk route is alkaline in nature which adds to the problem. Besides, most people are smokers. People in Kashmir overcook their food which destroys its essential nutrients like Vitamin A and Vitamin C which are otherwise
helpful to keep cancer at a bay. Our population is Vitamin A and C deficient.

A research conducted in Poland established direct relation between Vitamin A and C deficiency and esophagus, stomach and lung cancer. They enriched their food with Vitamin A and C and the cancer rate came down. Drinking hot tea is also one of the reasons for esophagus and stomach cancer as found from a research in Iran.

Q. Government hospitals still rely on old and outdated equipments.

A. We have devised a proposal with the state government and central government for new equipments like IMRT (Linear Accelerator) for cancer treatment and if every thing goes as planned no cancer patient will have to go outside J&K for treatment.

Q. Is there an increase in the cases of cervical and breast cancer among Kashmiri woman?

A. At present there is a very low rate of cervical cancer because of religious bindings, but the rapid changes in life style like pre-martial affairs and extra-martial affairs has crept in our society which can give rise to cervical cancers. However, counseling by the department through various mediums has led to early diagnose of breast cancers among woman.

Q. What are the various measures taken by the Oncology department for proper counseling of patients for early diagnosis of this deadly disease?

A. We had made a proposal to educate girls at higher secondary, college and university level about lumps of breasts and cervical cancers and from last week of March 2012 onwards, every month such programmes will be held in educational institutions.

Q. Cancer treatment is quite costly. Is there any provision for helping poor patients bear the expenses?

A. Under Chief Ministers Financial Assistance programme poor patients get financial assistance from Rs 30000-50000 for cancer treatment. Besides, this department has created fund for poor patients in which employees of the department voluntary donate. At this time we have Rs eight lakh in the chest.

Q. Why is post operative care in the valley lagging behind from the rest of Indian states?

A. With limited resources we cannot think of providing best medical facilities, but we try to achieve a level where majority of people get benefited from these limited resources.

Q. Waste Management has been a challenge for hospitals of the valley.

A. All the hospitals of the valley will come under new waste management scheme and STPs will be installed for effective waste management as mentioned in the WHO guidelines.

Fearless Journalism: Ramnath Goenka

Ramnath Goenka (April 3, 1904 – October 5, 1991) was a newspaper baron of India. He launched The Indian Express and created the Indian Express Group with various English and regional language publications. In its 2000 millennium issue, India Today magazine, named him amongst “100 people Who Shaped India”. Goenka was born in Darbhanga district of Bihar.

In 1932, he took over the loss-making Madras edition of The Free Press Journal and drove the delivery van himself to dispatch the papers. He founded the Indian Express in 1936, and in 1941, he was elected President of the National Newspaper Editors’ Conference. Following this, both the Indian Express and Goenka openly challenged the British Raj.

Goenka would always be remembered for his role during the “Emergency” in India and his crusade against Indira Gandhi. His bitter fight against the business tycoon Dhirubhai Ambani is still remembered. His critics believe that his passion for politics was the fire that led the newspapers from Indian Express Group on a blazing trail.
In a joint effort to save the critically endangered Hangul (Kashmiri Stag), Shere Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) and the state wildlife department put forth some recommendations in 2009. However, even as two years have passed there has been little headway in their implementation.

The recommendations were in the form of a report and suggested new strategies for the conservation of Hangul. These include introduction of breeding system, establishment of the state-of-art medical diagnostic centre, management of eco-tourism, landscape and habitat development.

The use of GPS/satellite telemetry system to locate the seasonal movements of Hangul especially in the Dachigam National Park was also one of the recommendations.

Ten GPS systems have been mounted on bears out of which only six are functional at present, but using GPS for Hangul has not been undertaken yet, said Sameena Amin who was part of the wildlife census team.

The government had also claimed of protecting the “Hangul habitat” by notifying the areas surrounding Dachigam National Park as Green Belt areas. But the ground reality is different as grazing and human encroachment in these restricted areas is going on unabated.

Residential colonies are coming up in these areas with little action from the authorities.

The government has also been unable to shift the cement factories including those in the Khrew and Wuyan areas which fall on the backside of the Dachigam Park. The limestone mines around the park have also not been closed.
It is very difficult to ask the cement factories to relocate to some other areas because the factory owners can use their money to influence the officials, said Gulzar Ahmad, a local resident.

Meanwhile, the wildlife department is working closely with SKUAST to devise the strategies to safeguard the endangered species.

SKUAST is providing us every kind of technical and scientific assistance to make our plans work, said Shantmanu, Commissioner Secretary of Wildlife Department, J&K Government. We will be allotted by a five crore project to implement our policies for the conservation of the endangered species in the state, he added.

In an endeavour to seek cooperation of the stakeholders in the conservation efforts, Panchs, Sarpanchs, Gujar, Bakarwals and other people from forest areas were invited to a two-day workshop organized by SKUAST as part of its ‘Save Hangul’ campaign earlier this year.

The participants underwent training where they were taught about the possibilities of safeguarding wildlife animals and their habitat.

Steps are also taken to stop the livestock and nomadic grazing in the wildlife pastures.

The participants were made aware about the possible threats caused by the grazing in the pastures.

Wild life education through symposiums, workshops and conferences on wild animals, imparting education to teachers and students at district level are other extensive educational programmes are part of the strategies devised by SKUAST and the wildlife department.

Wildlife department is also trying to strengthen its infrastructure and capacity building of the wildlife personnel and other allied departments.

We are making every effort to strengthen our department, but for this we also need liberal funding, said Shantmanu.

The department is also working to devise policies for the management and regulation of the eco-Tourism to ensure ecological stability in the wildlife parks. For this the wildlife department has already prohibited the vehicles with loud noise from entering the park.

Also the department has bought some ‘silent’ vehicles to maintain the ecological balance in the parks and to safeguard the wild animals from loud noise.

The wildlife department is also making plans to carry out ‘Hangul reintroduction programme’ by expanding the range of Hangul by restocking Hangul in some of its past ranges.

The establishment of the Disease Diagnostic and rehabilitation cum Referral Research Centre with the state-of-art facilities in the breeding farm at Tral is part of the recommendations. Health assessment studies, disease diagnosis and treatment on different wildlife species especially the endangered species like Hangul, Musk deer, Markhor, and Chiru would also be done.

SKUAST is also committing itself to the scientific research to safeguard the wildlife species and their habitats in Kashmir. Like the wildlife department, SKUAST has also asked for the liberal funding to initiate research on different aspects of wildlife and other biodiversity issues.

The university has also conducting joint extension programmes of research in collaboration with Wildlife Institute of India, Hyderabad, Macalav Institute, Scotland, Chinese Forest and Wildlife Agency, and Chicago & Smithsonian Institute USA.

Our job is to provide technical and scientific inputs to the wildlife department and we are honestly doing our job, said Vice Chancellor of SKUAST, Prof Tej Pratap.

About the possible threats to the Hangul population, Prof Pratap said it is the human and economic greed which puts the wildlife species in danger.

There is a dire need to put an end to this greed, he said.
In the age of science and technology, there is a need to develop educational system to the point where it nurtures creativity, said Union Minister of State for Earth Science, Science Technology, Planning and Parliamentary Affairs, Ashwani Kumar.

The minister was addressing the faculty and the students of the University of Kashmir on the “Role of Science and Technology in the development process and improvement of quality of life in the State of J&K” at varsity’s Gandhi Bhawan on May 26.

He announced that Rs 200 crore will be spend annually for a period of five years for massive Skill Development programme for J&k youth to increase their employability.

“We need to pick up students from here to premier institutions of the country and abroad for training then so that they come back and provide leadership in the field of science and technology,” said Ashwani, adding that frontiers of knowledge can only be explored when we encourage our students to take up science as a career.

Stating that today we need a cutting edge research in front areas of science and technology, translate research into innovation which will finally benefit aam aadmi (common man)

Briefing media persons about the initiatives taken by the Centre, Ashwani said his department will encourage university groups interested in specific research programmes to apply ‘Respond’ scheme.

He said this will enable scientific groups working in the universities of Jammu and Kashmir to pursue research activities in space technology, space applications including natural resources studies as well as space sciences. The necessary support to make the proposals from the university could be made available from the department of Space, he added.

The Minister said that centre for excellence in atmospheric sciences would be established in Jammu and Kashmir for promotion of specialized training in post graduate studies in atmospheric sciences and mountain meteorology with stimulation and modeling.

He said opportunities will be provided to students interested in the research areas of Astronomy and atmospheric science and planetary science to seek short term positions in the department of space.

Ashwani said that initiatives will be taken to make Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agriculture Science and Technology, Kashmir a model university for mountain agriculture education and research.
Muslims choose Pandit woman as Panch

Ashraf Ul Hassan

Fazi came all the way from the other end of the village to congratulate the newly elected Panch of her village. Despite being a patient of arthritis she made it to Asha Ji’s house to wish her on her success.

Asha, a pandit woman from Wussan village of Tangmarg, Baramulla district won the Panchayat elections, defeating her counterpart, Sara by 11 votes. Asha is the first Kashmiri pandit woman, who won the election in the ongoing panchayat elections.

“I always wanted to do something for these villagers, but I needed a platform to do that. They now gave me the stage I needed. It is my turn to serve them,” said Asha.

There were many who came to wish her and all of them were Muslims.

“I did not get any Pandit vote, because nobody is here. They have migrated from here and are living in different parts of the world. I am only getting their good wishes on phone,” she said.

When the turmoil started in 1989, most pandit families of the village left the valley.

Asha’s son, Ashok recalls the day when their Muslim neighbours pleaded with them not to leave the village.

“All our pandit neighbours and relatives left the village in the night without letting anybody know about it. We also decided to leave our motherland, but during the day. When our Muslim neighbours came to know about it, they stopped our way and some even said they will die but not let anybody harm us. We stayed back,” said Ashok.

He acknowledged the support by their Muslim neighbours.

“They showed their support all the way and now again by choosing my mother as their representative,” he said.

Meanwhile, the residents are hopeful that Asha will work for the betterment of the village.

“She can do better for our village. She is a literate person. She can take our problems to higher authorities so we chose her as our representative,” said Muhammad Subhan, a local resident.

Religion, he said, did not come in their way as they voted for Asha.

Asha wants to convey the message to Pandits residing outside the valley that they are safe here and should come back to their motherland.

“Government wants the pandits to come back and settle down in prisons like Sheikhpora Colony in Budgam. Why would one like to live in a colony like that? Why they can’t live on their own land as they were living in the past?” questioned Asha.
A Peep into Ladakhi marriage ceremony

Hajira Banoo

Like in many other respects, the marriage customs in Ladakh region are unique in their own right.

In Leh, boy’s family approach girl’s parents with the marriage proposal. The boy’s father and ‘ajang’ (maternal uncle) visit the girl’s house. In Buddhists they carry ‘chang’ (local beer prepared from barley) whereas in Muslims they bring ‘cha’ (tea) to the girl’s family. If the girl’s family agrees to the marriage proposal, they accept ‘chang’ or ‘cha’ as a sign of their willingness. A date is fixed for the ‘pakston’ (marriage ceremony).

Once the date is fixed, ‘pakma’ (the bride) is gifted with ‘norna’ (jewellery and cash) by the parents of ‘makpa’ (groom). The bride’s parents also gift some ‘raktak’ (dress and cash) to their daughter, but this is not compulsory.

“Earlier as ‘raktak’ the parents used to gift Ladakhi traditional kitchen set (heavy bowls made of heavy copper and brass),” says Rigzin Yangdol, a 56-year-old woman from Leh.

The bride and groom wear traditional Ladakhi dress. The groom wears ‘goncha’ (a long gown shaped dress) with ‘shkeraks’ (rope made of silk) tied at the waist in a delicate way.

The Buddhist bride wears a ‘perak’ while a Muslim bride wears ‘jugin’ and dupatta at the head. This is the only difference in the attire of Buddhist and Muslim brides. They both wear ‘soulma’ (long gown shaped), ‘tunglak’ (ladakhi bangles), ‘sondus’ (large earring shaped that is hanged at the chest), ‘ldocha’ (same as sondous but tied at the waist), ‘seri kau’ (golden locket) and ‘pabu’ (heavy shoes made from a hard ladakhi fabric).

“My father gifted me all silver items but with changing time and keeping in tune with the social status I would like to give gold items to my girl,” said Konchok Lamo, a 51-year-old woman from Saspol.

On the day of marriage ceremony, the ‘ajang’ and ‘nyopa’ (groom’s relative and friends) and ‘nathit’ (youngest male member of the groom’s family) go to bride’s house to get the bride.

The bride does not remove the ‘perak’ all the way till she reaches the groom’s house as it is considered as inauspicious.

She is accompanied by her ‘aney’ (paternal aunt) and few friends.

The groom’s mother welcomes her with ‘cha’ and put ‘khataks’ (sacred scarf) around her shoulder as a symbol of blessing.

The senior most member of the family sings Ladakhi folk songs and praises the bride. The special ‘nyopa rtses’ (dance) is performed. The bride is treated with great respect and sacredness.

In Muslims instead of dancing, religious hymns are recited. The relatives welcome the bride with ‘kalchor’ (butter, tea, water, flowers) at the door and the ‘ajang’ is supposed to give some amount of money to everyone.

The sitting arrangement is made in ladakhi style. They sit on Tibetan carpets at the floor with ‘rtsichok’ (table) painted with dragon and flowers on it.

The groom’s parents first put ‘khataks’ around the bride’s shoulder and everyone blesses the couple and present their gifts. The bride strikes her ‘tunglak’ twice and says ‘ojju lay’ (thank you). These gifts are registered carefully so that they could be returned when an event is celebrated in the giver’s family.

The ceremony lasts till late in the night. After the dinner the couple is invited for dance on music of ‘surna’ (oboe) and ‘daman’ (drum). On next day the couple and the groom’s whole family is invited for ‘pakdon’ (grand feast) at the bride’s house.
Located at a hilltop in Changspa area of Leh, the white domed structure, Shanti Stupa, is quite popular with the tourists. It was constructed in 1985 as part of the international collaborative effort between Japan and Ladakh to commemorate 2500 years of Buddhism and to promote world peace. The structure houses relics of Buddha. The outside walls of stupa are sculpted depicting the life of Buddha.

“I like Shanti Stupa the most in Leh. It truly reflects the pure and untouched beauty of the land,” says Shafqat, a student of Home Science of Kashmir University.

The Namgial Palace (Leh Palace): People interested in the ancient history of Leh visit Namgial Palace. Built by King Singay Namgial in the 17th century, the palace has nine storeys. The palace is famous for the three-storey long statue of Buddha situated inside.

Thiksey Monastery: Thiksey Monastery is 600 years old and one of the largest monasteries in Ladakh. The wall paintings showcase some of the prominent religious figures, Tibetan calendar and the ‘Wheel of Life’.

Stok Museum: The museum has a vast collection of thang-kas, also known as “Tangka”, which is a Tibetan silk painting with embroidery, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, famous scene, or mandala of some sort. The museum also houses collection of coins, precious stones, traditional clothing and ornaments from erstwhile Ladakhi Royal Family.

Hall of Fame: Another museum ‘Hall of Fame’ is also popular among the tourists. Constructed and maintained by Indian army in memory of the soldiers who lost their lives in the Indo-Pak wars, the museum also houses weapons used during the 1999 Kargil war besides other things.

Masjid Shah-e-Hamdan: Fifteen kilometres from Leh town, a historic Mosque is situated in village Shey on the banks of Singay Khababs (local name for river Indus). Built by one of the greatest preachers of Islam Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA) it is the oldest mosque in Ladakh and has assumed significance of a shrine.

Pangong: Ladakh has four lakes of which ‘Pangong’ is the largest and most popular lake. Situated in the northeast of Leh, Pangong lake is famous for its clear blue-blackish waters.

“Pangong is a very beautiful lake flanked by naked mountains,” says Muzzaffar Khan, a visitor. “A visit to Pangong is refreshing.”

The lake is 144 km long with half of it running to the other side of Indo-China border.

Besides Pangong, tourists also visit Tsomoriri lake (mountain lake) situated in the middle of elevated valley in Rupshu village. The twin lakes- Tsokar and Taisaphuk Tso are also popular with tourists.
Tsomoriri lake is also known for the black-necked Siberian cranes. The marshy patches in the periphery of the lake act as breeding ground for these migratory birds.

Besides migratory birds, wild asses (kyang), phya, yak, red fox and snow leopard are also found in the area.

While travelling towards Leh, visitors come across “Magnetic Hill”. The hill gets its name from the magnetic phenomenon due which the vehicles slide up the hill even in neutral gear.

Those interested in adventure go for trekking to snow-capped mountains of village Stok and rafting down the Zanskar river. The popular rafting points are Phey to Nimo and Upshi to Kharu.

“Leh is an amazing place full of adventures. I will never forget the experience of rafting in Leh,” says Shahid, a law student from Jammu University, who has been to Leh in 2009.

One can approach Leh from Srinagar and Manali. Leh is 434 kilometres from Srinagar and 485 kilometres from Manali.

“The best part of the trip was the journey to Leh by road. It was a wonderful experience,” says Souzeina Mushtaq, who visited Leh in 2008.

“To absorb the beauty of Leh, one must travel by road so that the beautiful villages of Kargil don’t go unnoticed, which otherwise are missed while travelling by air,” she adds.

Leh has emerged as a popular place for shooting movies. Several movies have been shot in the region with LoC Kargil, 3 Idiots, Lakshya, Dil Se and Tashan being the prominent ones.

PALAGUMMI SAINATH

Palagummi Sainath is one of the best known development journalists of India. He has been extensively reporting on social problems, rural affairs, poverty and the aftermaths of globalization in India. He is the Rural Affairs Editor for The Hindu. Amartya Sen has called him “one of the world’s great experts on famine and hunger”. The International Monetary Fund-led economic reforms launched in 1991 by Manmohan Singh constituted a watershed in India’s economic history and in Sainath’s journalistic career. He felt that the media’s attention was moving from “news” to “entertainment” and consumerism and lifestyles of the urban elite gained prominence in the newspapers which rarely carried news of the reality of poverty in India.

In 1993 Sainath applied for a Times of India fellowship. At the interview he spoke of his plans to report from rural India. When an editor asked him, “Suppose I tell you my readers aren’t interested in this stuff”, Sainath riposted, “When did you last meet your readers to make any such claims on their behalf?”

He got the fellowship and took to the back roads in the ten poorest districts of five states. It meant covering close to 100,000 km across India using 16 forms of transportation, including walking 5,000 km on foot. He credits two sympathetic editors at the Times with much of his success in getting the articles published in their present form. The paper ran 84 reports by Sainath across 18 months, many of them subsequently reprinted in his book, Everybody Loves A Good Drought.

Canadian documentary film maker Joe Moulins made a film about Sainath titled “A Tribe of his Own”. Another documentary film, ‘Nero’s Guests,’ looks at inequality (as manifest in India’s agrarian crisis) through Sainath’s reporting on the subject.

His writing has provoked responses that include the revamping of the Drought Management Programs in the state of Tamil Nadu, development of a policy on indigenous medical systems in Malkangiri in Orissa, and revamping of the Area Development Program for tribal people in Madhya Pradesh state.
Tibetan dishes like Momos, Thupka and Shafali have emerged as popular street food among people in Srinagar, courtesy Kareem’s Momo Hut. Located on the main road opposite the historic Eidgah, the shop is frequented by people, mostly youngsters. The shop grabs the attention of every passerby and there is a huge rush of people in the afternoon.

Apart from momos, Kareem’s Momo Hut is also popular for its Thupka (momo soup) and other vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes such as nuggets, fries, wedges, sausages and so on.

“In the evening, people come with their families to eat momos. We have different varieties of momos like fried and steamed ones. Initially I feared that people would not like momos as they did not know about the dish, but now I am surprised and glad at the way people have developed taste for the food,” says Karim, the owner of Momo Hut.

Youngsters like momos for their taste and also affordable prices. “After doing a lot of workout in gymnasium I often come to this place to eat momos as it is highly nutritious and healthy- it has low fat content while being rich in proteins and fibres. The dishes served here are good to taste and quite affordable,” says Musaib, a 12th class student.

Kareem learnt the art of making momos from his father Late Haffizullah at the age of 15. Haffizullah set up the shop in 1960 after he and his family migrated from Tibet to Kashmir and settled at Eidgah, Srinagar.

There are two basic varieties of momos- fried and steamed. Traditionally, momos are steamed in a container called mokto, in many places they are being prepared in microwave ovens as well. Momos are stuffed with minced beef and onions. The process is very simple- hot steam is passed through cooking trays of mokto which warms the hollow space between the trays.

“The other special varieties that we cook include Shafali where we put minced meat in Roti and fry it in oil,” says Kareem.

“Momo making is an art,” says Karim as he elaborates the method of preparation.

“The vegetables have to be cut fine; you cannot over stuff the dough, the steaming has to be just right. It is something we all automatically know how to make because it is inherited.”

Apart from the city, people from different places come to Momo Hut. “I have been eating momos from the past five years. This is a good place to have tasty steamed momos at reasonable rate,” says Shabir Ahmad, a resident of Kupwara.

Kareem says momos are in demand winter as well as summer. “We are continuing with this business despite all odds because it is the legacy of our ancestors and our living is dependent on it. In Kashmir we want to keep this tradition of Tibet alive.”
Rich rose water tradition breathing its last

Faisal Rafiq

Step inside the shop of Abdul Aziz Kozgar at Fateh Kadal in old city and you will be greeted by aroma of rose water coming from antique glassware, decanters and flasks arranged neatly on the wooden shelves of the dark and dingy room.

Aziz learned the craft of making rosewater from his father at the age of 17. Kozgars are the only family in the valley practicing the art of making rose water and other herbal syrups manually. Some 400 years ago, Kozgar’s forefathers came from Central Asia and settled in Kashmir. They set up a shop at Fateh Kadal.

According to Aziz, his ancestors started production of rose water on a large scale on the orders of Mir Mohammad Hamadani, the son of revered Islamic preacher, Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (RA). The rose water was used to be sprinkled on people who assembled in shrines and Mosques, gradually becoming an integral part of such gatherings.

“Some 400 years ago our ancestor Syed Mohammad Nooristani accompanied Mir Muhammad Hamadani to the valley. He knew the art of making rose water manually and initially showed his devotion to the Sufi preacher (Mir Muhammad Hamadani) by sprinkling rose water on the multitudes that gathered to hear his sermons,” says Aziz.

The process of making rose water, he says, does not involve any complex mechanism.

“The process is very simple rose petals and other herbs are boiled in a cauldron, and the vapors travelling through the mass of coils are condensed and distilled,” says Aziz, adding that pure rose water is the distilled water of roses.

“It is usually made by stream distillation, and it smells heavenly and tastes delicious.”

If concentrated rose water is required the process is repeated. The rose water can be added to tea, coffee, and sherbets. It is known as an effective body cooler.

“The rose water can be applied topically for skin diseases too.”

Besides rose water, Aziz prepares some syrups like tshandan arq, kaah zabaan and arqineelofar, which are considered to be effective medications for stomach and kidney related ailments.

While he narrates the rich background of rose water and its applications, Aziz is not too sure about the future of the art.

“A few decades ago, there used to be large scale of production of rose water and other products. Rose water was sold in all parts of the valley, but now they prefer allopathic treatment which has affected the rose water production,” he says.

“People want fast results where as our system of treatment aims at removing the root cause of the ailments so it takes more time.”

There are some other factors also responsible for the decline of rose water tradition as Aziz says, “In the past pure Kashmiri roses were used in making rose water, but since other rose verities were introduced into the state, it started to dilute the quality.”

“This art is going to die. I run this business to uphold the legacy which is fading fast.”
Bicycles lose to motor vehicles!

‘Number of cyclists in Valley is fast decreasing’

Zubair Mohammad / Aamir Manzoor

Bicycles, once the preferred mode of transportation in Kashmir, are becoming rarer amid the crowd of automobiles.

Mohammad Aslam Wani, a bicycle retailer at Magarmal Bagh Srinagar, says the demand of bicycles is minimal with people preferring motor vehicles.

“People now-a-days give priority to bikes, cars and other vehicles over bicycles because they believe it is easier to handle vehicles than bicycles,” he says.

Aslam, who has been running bicycle business for the past 15 years, fears bicycles may no longer be found on roads in the coming years.

“The business was great when I started it some 15 years back. Now it is on the declining day by day.”

Blaming people for the poor sales of bicycles, he says, “People have become selfish. They use cars and other vehicles which run on petrol for long as well as short distances and avoid the trouble of pedaling the bicycles.”

“Every month new cars and bikes are being added to the roads of the valley and these vehicles pollute environment besides increasing the congestion,” Aslam says, adding that bicycles could work wonders to reduce congestion and pollution levels. “Besides it is affordable to even poor families.”

More and more people are relying on cars and bikes for their daily travelling. “Majority of people in the valley think that the cycle era has gone,” says Khalid Hussain, a resident of Bemina, Srinagar.

“People are in search of comfort and believe that cars and bikes provide more comfort as compared to bicycles. Infact some people believe that bicycle riding is associated with one’s social status.”

According to SP Traffic Srinagar, Maqsood-ul-Zaman lack of government planning for earmarking separate avenues has discouraged bicycle riding in the valley.

“Unfortunately corruption in policy planning and formulation over the last so many decades after independence has discouraged non-motorized means of transportation in India and as a result the avenues of passage of bicycles have vanished,” says SP Traffic.

“Today even to cover a distance of half a kilometer, people prefer vehicles which is not only shameful, but a burden on our economy.”

With the decrease in prices of cars, more and more people go for them. As a result, the sales of bicycles see further decline.

Suhail Sheikh was once an ardent cycle-rider from Bandipora. However, he left bicycling for Santro car.

“Due to modernization more and more people adopt other means of transport instead of bicycles. I also followed the trend,” he says.
Floating trouble:
Floating gardens used as tools for encroachment

Adil Shah

“This residential colony you see here was once a lake! I used to come here for boating and fishing.”

This is probably what a father would tell his son some 50 years down the line. According to the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (lawda), 600 kanals of lake have already been transformed into land. A survey conducted by the tribune in 2006 reveals that the dal lake is shrinking. It has reduced from 58 sq km to 11.05 sq km.

Environmentalists attribute a host of reasons such as pollution, illegal construction. One of the major causes being filling of the lake. Floating gardens, locally known as raads, are made for cultivation but are later solidified to create land masses.

Nazeer Ahmed, 34 is an owner of many floating gardens in the lake. He cultivates vegetables on these floating gardens and sells them at his shop on Ashai bagh bridge. “We create floating garden by first sowing reed beds and then filling it with grime from the lake and also with silt. In a matter of 1-2 years, the garden is hard enough to walk on and cultivate vegetables.” Says Nazeer Ahmed.

Floating gardens are a part of the natural habitat of the lake. They act as natural filters and aide in maintaining ecological balance in the lake. However, these natural floating gardens have now become a tool for encroachment by the lake dwellers.

“The floating gardens are potential threats to the lakes. They can be used as a major tool for filling the lake and the caving in on the shore lines. The dwellers have proprietary rights on the lake, but are not permitted to fill the lake.” says Irfan Yaseen, Vice Chairman LAWDA.

Mohammad Sultan, 42 cultivates cucumbers and gourds on a piece of land in the middle of the lake. This piece of land has been created by filling floating gardens with earth and silt.

“We are aware of the fact that the lake is shrinking and we are one of the primary causes for it. But we cannot ignore the fact that there are around seven thousand people living in the dal lake whose livelihood is solely dependent upon these floating gardens.” Says Mohammad Sultan.

The vice chairman lawda claims that laws are in place and are enforced strictly against any kind of attempt to fill the lake are being dealt with an iron fist. “Lawda is strictly observing the lake and its peripheries; such is the strictness that even repair work is not allowed, leave alone new constructions.”

Despite the strict measures by the authorities, the lake is shrinking each passing moment.
Prof.(Dr). S Mufeed Ahmad is a distinguished writer, scholar and teacher in the Business School of University of Kashmir. He was accorded Ph.D in HRD, M.Phil, M.com, PDGBA & FDPM from IIM-Ahmadabad. He is the first faculty member from the state of J&K who got selected for one year course “FDPM” at IIM Ahmadabad & got distinction (A+) in the said course. Dr. Mufeed has more than two decades of teaching and research experiences in the field of Management and HRD in particular, having guided more than 12 scholars at Ph.D and M.Phil Levels.

Dr Mufeed has written three books in the area of HRD and HRM and has around 50 research publications published in National & International Journals. He has attended 55 conferences, seminars and workshops at National and International levels. He has a privilege of presenting keynote addresses in the area of HRD at various international conferences within & outside the country.

He continues to share his expertise in several Research Projects in the areas of HRD funded by UGC, State Government of J&K, Planning Commission, Government of India, Institute of Social Sciences, Ministry of Information Technology & other agencies of the country.

He has conducted various MDP programs at various levels in E-Governance, including MDP programs for college principals of the state.

Prior to this, he has also contributed to the corporate life of University by performing at various positions, roles and responsibilities such as Founder Director Convocation Complex, Chief Proctor, Co-ordinator HRD & Trainings for E-Governance project, Chairman placement cell & Co-ordinator PALSME DIS project to mention a few. Dr Mufeed has conducted first job fair 2008 in the history of J & K where in more than 400 graduates and post graduates got inducted in various National and Multinational Companies. He is also a life member of various prestigious academic, training and development institutions of the world.

Besides, Prof. S. Mufeed has obtained various awards & recognitions within & outside the country. Some of them include Excellence Teaching Award, Best paper award-Taiwan University, Best Director Awards for event management(By South Asian Foundation, Times of India, Associated Press of India & etc),Best Citizens of Indian Academic Award, State Award Honor.
Students along with faculty and staff members on a trip to Kaman Post.

Editor MERC presenting publications of the department to H.K Dua.

Sr. faculty member Nasir Mirza with Director IANS Tarun Basoo in MERC.

A group photograph of MERC Students with H.K Dua.
Vice-Chancellor Prof. Talat Ahmad interacting with the students at MERC

Veteran educationist Prof. A.G Madhosh delivering a lecture in the Media House

Students of the outgoing batch performing at the farewell party

Faculty and Non teaching staff members at the farewell party organized by the students of MERC in the Media House
Media Education Research Centre
University Of Kashmir
Hazratbal, Srinagar-190006, Kashmir

http://kashmiruniversity.ac.in
http://mercs.uok.edu.in
e-mail: mufeed@uok.edu.in