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webmaster@PanunKashmir.org

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1 *Aranimal-A Love-Lorn Poetess*

It is a pleasing yet strange coincidence that Lal Ded (14th Century), Habba Khatoon (16th Century) and after a lapse of two hundred years Arnimal adorned Kashmiri literature through their poetical geniuses.

Not unlike Habba Khatoon love-songs of Arnimal (1337-78), 'Vachan' in Kashmiri, are with us as a treasured bequest. Songs as extant in 'Banasaur Katha' & 'Sukh-Dukh Carit' testify that Kashmir had an entrenched and long-standing tradition of writing lyrics. In Kashmiri semantics 'Vachan' is the original form of lyrics embodying the lilting lyricism of folk-songs. As 'Vachan' is deeply imprinted by folk-songs, it is not quite easy to tell it from the genre of folk-songs. In fact, the very recognition of 'Vachan' as such is equally difficult.

The historians of yore have written next to nothing informative of Kashmiri language and literature. There are some stray references about Lalla Ded as a yogic practitioner and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din alias Nunda Rishi as a devotee of God and also about Habba Khatoon as the beloved wife of Yusuf Shah Chak.

The lyrics of Habba Khatoon available via oral tradition are sung in accompaniment with musical instruments like 'tumbaknari' and 'naut' on marriage festivities in Kashmiri homes. The tradition has lasted for umpteen generations. Even today a good number of her lyrics are found scribbled in the song-books of folk-musicians.

Aranimal lived during the tyrannical and barbaric rule of Afghans (invited to Kashmir by Kashmiri Muslims). Prem Nath Bazaz has characterised Afghan rule as 'dark age' in the history of Kashmir. When girls for fear of being lifted away were married off before the onset of puberty. The social structures of that period were as iniquitous and discriminatory as the present-day society is. The status of women was worse than what it was in the Mughul rule. Their life and living with in-laws was a woeful and ignominious saga. They were treated as life-less commodities by a male-dominated society and were fraudulently posed as models of renouncement, patience, piety and love when actually they were subjected to untold oppression and exploitation and were ruthlessly traumatised and rejected.

Aranimal Kachru was also married off at a pre-puberty stage - a stage of sheer innocence. She attained maturity and youth-fulness in the house of her in-laws, a respectable family of Kachrus living at Rainawari, Srinagar. Her husband, Bhawani Das Kachru, was a high calibre Persian poet, historian and politician. He was an achiever in the domain of Persian language and wrote under the pen-name of 'Neku'. The Afghan governor, Juma Khan (1788-92) was a shade removed from his tribe and respected scholars and literatuers. It was in this period that Bhawani Das Kachru scaled heights of success and fame. The Afghans too valued his innate creative abilities that were multi-pronged and varied. Bhawani Das Kachru as a poet of poetic symposia that were held in honour of the Iranian, Afghanian and other literatuers and earned a loud applause for the recital of his scintillating Persian poems. Neku achieved tremendous reputation for innovation of a new metre (bahar) in Persian. His celebrated poetical work, 'Bahar-i-Tawil', written in the same metre became a land mark in the realms of Persian poetry. The scholarly and talented poet moulded in the feudal ambience of Muslim courts grew absolutely indifferent to his spouse who was mad in love with him.

Aranimal spared no effort to establish an emotional bond with her beloved husband. She picked up the tunes of music and tried hard to acquire the graces behaving Muslim court ambience. But, to her ill-luck, she failed to achieve much of success. The distance between the duo yawned into a wide chasm. Neku turned sullen and indifferent .

Burning in the agonising fires of separation Arnimal in all disgust and melanchoby returned to her partents living at Palhalan, a hamlet (in Baramulla district). A line from her sufficiently supports it -

*O golden Jasmine, you blossomed in jungles, bushes and shrubs
but Palhalan is your parental abode.*

Her captivating songs ooze out varied shades of pain and agony. Separation from her spouse was what tormented her. Rejected love was what agonised her. Here is a lyric soaked in pain and agony -

Wreaths of flowers I wove for my husband

Would that he were to accept it

Cups of wine I filled for him

Would that he were to come

I yearn to clasp him in my arms.

Stung by intolerable pangs of separation she is deeply pining for her husband who is distances away from her. In agony she addresses her friend -

O friend, tell him about my agony

I know not what my fault is

Repaired he to my cruel co-wife -

He is hers, since I learnt it

My whole being is set afire I lost my appetite

I am eagerly waiting for him

How I wish he were with me

Despaired and for saken forsaken Arnimal expresses her pathos -

Soaked in tears my hem is

awaiting you my days dragon

Why this futile vanity -

She again sings in melancholy -

When will your solf feet touch our threshold.

I place them on my pate

In agony I came out searching for you

removing veils and barriers all

Pray come to me

The marital life of Arnimal Kachru was seething with pain and anguish. Says she -

O friend, why my husband separated from me

I bathed clean for him

All adornments went useless, he did not come,

O loveless, I can't bear with your separation any longer

Without you I shall fade away

Now no more can I wait even for a short while

Arnimal has sought ample succour from nature to ventilate her heart-ravaging pain and anguish. The creepers (hiya), yellow roses (arni-posh) and narcissuses (nargis) have oft found a mention in her lyrics. Multi-form manifestations of nature like vast green fields, flowing rivers and murmuring rivulets, awesome mountains and snow-capped peaks have deftly been delineated in the context of her gloomy moods and pathos-laden feelings caused by separation from her husband.

For him have I filled brimful cups of wine

O friend, could you go to summon him

On way to meadow, back from peaks

O friend, take my blessings to him.

Rendering me hapless he frisked away like a deer

Call him, platefuls of sweets & candies are awaiting him

*Tears are dribbling incessantly from my eyes
How to bear with pain and agony
Call him loud and clear*

Again she says -

*O friend, why does he kill me by inches?
I left my native abode for him
Why does he not take care of me?
He deserted me in the dense darknight*

**

*I am a youthful beauty, abandoned my abode for him whole day passed awaiting him
His gnawing indifference has rendered me mad
I bear with taunts flung by one and all*

Addressing her husband she in all despair busts out -

O, my love,

You were the friend of my youth

Initially I knew not how to value it

Wasted it away, Now I am pining and withering

Show me your countenance, I am dying for a mere glimpse

O, friend of my youth.

There is an exemplary confluence of hope and despair in the love-laden lyrics of Arnimal. Helplessness, unfathomable perseverance, endless wait and incessant agony are the emotional states that weave the warp and woof of her lyrical orchestrations. But the world of her intense emotions is lacking in broad sweep. Her lyrics limpidly mirror the mind of a deserted woman who is in deep despair, lonely and yearning for a rendezvous with her spouse distances away from her. She is in anguish yet she is hopeful and optimistic. She is a broken reed, yet she yearns for a concourse with her husband who has forsaken her. Malice and ill-will never come her way. She could have screamed fire and fury at her husband who has cruelly left her high and dry. But she maintains her calm and poise. Says she -

Your love impelled me to abandon my abode you knit up your brows and frowned at me

I wished you long life as that of Lomesh Rishi

Who ill-advised you not to return to me?

Pouring out her heart Arnimal says -

Would that he were to come once

I would sacrifice my life for him

Why he trampled me, a creeper that has fully bloomed

O friend, I have none to confide

I am teased and mocked at

What if he does not talk to me

Let him live long and be happy

Let him be with my co-wife

Arnimal is tormented by pangs of separation and is in hell-fires of despair, yet she sings of hope and happiness -

O hope of the hopefuls! enliven my heart with hope

Remove dark despair from it

He repaired to Lahasa for benefits

I am eagerly awaiting him

Sow the seeds of warm friendship

And wish no hurt even to enemies

She is under the perpetual grip of blues and greys. She is wretched and forlorn. Says she -

He never stood by his promises

He bewitched me & went away

O friend, can you manipulated his return?

Everything in this world is fleeting and transitory

Flowers bloom and soon fade away

Memories of her spouse cause her pain and anguish. She weeps and wails for his quick return. In pain and grief she sings -

When will he return to me, a woman in bubbling youth?

I am shedding tears endlessly

Can I ever forget the deep craving for him?

My whole being is afire like a coniferous twig

My pains know no end, tears in torrents

Go on dripping from my eyes.

Despite her husband's indifference and sullenness Arnimal never ceased to yearn and long for his close companionship. A lyric of hers opening with the yellow-hued rose (arin) is highly popular with lovers of Kashmiri poetry and music. She sings -

Mine is a life brimming with pain and agony

you got my heart perforated by the taunts of others

You got it burnt like a half burnt cloth-piece

Who will convey my wretchedness to him

When will he turn up to show his coantenance to me

**

Cheating me he stole away

He mocked at me in presence of strangers

When should I expect him back?

This is quite a popular lyric, almost on the tip of every Kashmiri's tongue Mahmood Gami impressed so much by the lyric has in one of his lyrics immortalised the refrain. *Arnirung gom shrawn...*". In fact, the two lyrics are of different stamp and are not the same in feel and style. Sh. AK Rahbar has dilated in detail on the two lyrics in his work 'History of Kashmiri Literature' and made thorough comparative study. His decisive conclusion is that the opening lines are that of Arnimal and not that of Mahmood Gani. The lyric of Arnimal excels that of the latter in its naturalness and lyrical melodiousness.

The following lyric of Arnimal is an exemplary specimen of highly artistic use of word and meaning in Kashmiri language -

When in slumber he pulled at my soft wrist

The ornament adorning my arm hurt me great

He snatched every bit of gold from me

O friend, he left me sad and forlorn

Who should believe whom?

Another famous and quite popular lyric of Arnimal is that of 'spinning wheel' which became her inseparable companions after separatism from her spouse. The lyric is bequeathed to us from our mothers and grand-mothers and is typically Arnimalian in content and style.

O spinning wheel! do not murmur and grumble

Thy straw-rings I shall oil

Raise thy head from under the earth, O! hyacinth

Arnimal is a master craftsman of simple, bewitching and melodious language, which is not excessively burdened with Persian and Sanskrit vocabulary. Each word of hers is natural, plain, musical and lilting. Her love-lorn mindscape is deeply touching and pathetic.

In an appraisal of Arnimal in his work 'Kashmiri Language and Poetry' Abdul Ahad Azad, a poet critic, writes", Arnimal was masterly in musical arts. This is why her lyrics are found in various works on music. They have the same hue and tune of Habba Khatoon and occasionally she even outstrips her".

In his editorial note Mohammad Yusuf Taing puts, "Azad has not elaborately detailed out the statement that Arnimal outstrips Habba Khatoon. It appears that his observation underlines naturalness and lyrical potential of her songs". Taing has no reluctance to admit that Arnimal's lyrics are quite touching and sensitizing.

Writes Shashi Shekher Toshkhani, "the deftness to weave captivating images establishes Arnimal as an unrivalled poet of her times. Masterly communication of heart-felt feelings and experiences is her forte. She is free from laboured and unwanted ornamentation of word and meaning. This features makes her language simple and musical with powers to touch our hearts.

The lyrics of Arnimal are suffused with an optimism as she never let go hope about the return of her husband. As per an oral tradition Bhawani Das Kachru having been tired of ostentatious court life returned to meet Arnimal. But the pangs of protracted separation had seared her so much as to cause her death at a young age of forty-one. The twain could not meet. Tragic as it is!

2 Kashmiri Pandits' many migrations

By Dr. B.N. Sharga

THE civilizations change with the passage of time. It is a natural phenomenon. Many civilizations of the past do not exist now, but the archaeological excavations at different sites have conclusively proved that such civilizations used to exist once and were subsequently lost due to passage of time and the vagaries of the weather.

According to the European scholars and historians the civilizations of Egypt, China and India are generally considered to be the oldest in the world. The Indian scholars and historians consider their civilization to be more than 5000 years old, but they do not fix any time frame to the Vedic period as such.

Although the Vedas are generally being considered as a part of mythology but whatever is written in them is not all myth. The scholarly contents of the Vedas and their spirit are further explained in depth in other Sanskrit texts like Upanishads, Brahamans and Arankyas so that a seeker of knowledge may be able to grasp the subject in its true perspective in a scientific manner.

The river Saraswati has been mentioned in the Vedas and Puranas as a holy river which provided wisdom to thousands of saints and sages. It used to originate from the glaciers of the Himalayas and after passing through Pir Panjal range and the deserts of Rajasthan, it used to fall in the Arabian Sea. This holy river subsequently vanished around 2000 B.C. due to some geological changes after changing its course at regular intervals.

The modern researches through satellite imaging technique have conclusively proved, the existencive of this holy river, which was uptill now considered to be a myth. According to Dr SK Gupta, the Chairman of the Archaeological Society of India, the invisible holy Saraswati river described in the Vedas is still flowing but about 200 feet below the earth's surface. Dr Gupta in his path breaking research has found some proofs that the water of the Saraswati river is being used in the neighbouring country Pakistan as the main source of underground water.

In the ancient times the civilizations generally used to develop on the banks of the rivers for the availability of water, a vital ingredient for human survival. As we now read about the famous Indus Valley civilization likewise there used to be an equally important Saraswati valley civilization on which much work was not being done due to certain obvious reasons and it was always mentioned as mythical in the books instead of making an effort for its scientific study in depth to find the real truth.

When the holy river Saraswati disappeared due to some geological phenomenon; the saints and sages, who used to live on its banks, commanding both wisdom and knowledge then migrated to the Kashmir valley and took refuge there to pursue their search for the ultimate truth in a calm and serene atmosphere with plenty of natural beauty all around them. These saints and sages were the ancestors of the Kashmiri Pandits whose main profession was to seek knowledge for self enlightenment. They were all known as the Saraswat Brahmins i.e. the learned scholars from the banks of the holy river Saraswati.

With the passage of time their population increased and then a need was felt to evolve a code of conduct to govern the social system, so that their basic characteristics could be preserved without any dilution in them. The rules and regulations were then framed to be strictly followed for proper human behaviour just to maintain social equilibrium known as "Dharma". Any deviation from the prescribed norms was considered as sin inviting punishment. Naturally to enforce all this properly and effectively a kingdom was formed with a king vested with absolute powers to maintain social harmony and to punish the guilty on the basic of his wisdom and sense of justice. This Hindu rule in the Kashmir valley continued upto 1320 AD without much trouble.

The first turning point in the centuries old history of the Kashmiri Pandits, the original inhabitants of the Kashmir valley came in 1320 A.D., when a Tibetan Chieftain Rinchen invaded Kashmir and its Hindu ruler Suhadeo ran away to Ladakh. Ram Chandra the Commander of Suhadeo's army was killed in the

battle field. Rinchen then declared himself to be the new ruler of Kashmir and married Kota Rani, who was the daughter of Ram Chandra.

Rinchen after becoming the ruler of Kashmir expressed his desire to accept the Hindu faith which was promptly turned down by the local Pandits for the reasons known to them. The very next day he accepted Islam and became a bigoted Muslim. He then started taking revenge against the local Pandits who obstructed him from becoming a Hindu. To avoid his wrath the local Pandits then started migrating to safer places to hide their faces so that they may not become a victim of their own doings.

The first major migration or the mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley took place during the rule of Sultan Sikander (1389-1413) when he started large scale conversions of the local Pandits at the point of sword. It is generally said that only 11 Pandits were able to save themselves from this onslaught by hiding themselves in deep forests and caves.

The Kashmiri Pandits became so much frightened that they fled to far flung places in India in order to save themselves. They went upto Bengal in the east and upto Karnataka and Kerala in the down south and out of sheer fear psychosis they even changed their surnames to hide their identity so that they may not be spotted and get killed. With the passage of time they completely got merged with the local population and could not maintain their separate distinct identity for certain reasons. Their descendants are still there, who call themselves as Saraswat Brahmins and their features, colour of the skin and body structure bear a close similarity with the Kashmiri Pandits. Even some of their customs and rituals are common which indicates that their ancestors might have migrated to that place from Kashmir at some point of time, because the river Saraswati never flowed through Karnataka at any point of time. Even in the Rameshwaram temple in Tamil Nadu only Saraswat Brahmins are appointed as priests.

Likewise the features, colour of the skin and some other traits of certain Brahmin groups in Bengal do not match with the local population which gives some credence to this phenomenon of migration of their ancestors from the Kashmir valley.

The second mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley took place during the rule of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The Kashmiri Pandits who came out from Kashmir during this period mostly preferred to settle down in the big cities of North India like Lahore, Delhi and Lucknow for better future prospects. Unlike the previous migrants they somehow maintained their distinct identity by observing certain code of conduct very strictly and religiously for about 300 years. They maintained very close community links and never encouraged intercaste marriages in the community just to keep it a well knit unit. They helped each other in adversity. They succeeded in occupying the top slots in the administration and established themselves in the society with dignity and honour by their hardwork, honesty and devotion to duty.

In 1752 the deputy governor of Kashmir Momin Kanth, invited the then Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durani to Kashmir, to settle his personal score with the self appointed governor of Kashmir Abdul Qasim Khan. Thus Kashmir became a part of the Kabul kingdom in 1753. During this Afghan rule over Kashmir from 1753 upto 1819 due to torture and inhuman sufferings many local Pandits fled away from Kashmir to different parts of India in different times and many of them got converted to Islam to save their souls.

When the Dogra ruler of Jammu, Raja Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir Riyasat in 1846 through a treaty executed with the British, he made an all out effort to take back the converted Pandits into the Hindu fold and many of them even had expressed their desire to come back to the Hindu fold willingly. But when this crucial issue was referred to the high priests of Kashi for their advice, they gave the ruling that the converted Pandits could not be taken back into the Hindu fold as it was a one way process. The Pandits then had to face the music of this ill conceived ruling and many of them were subsequently coerced to migrate from the Kashmir valley to other places to seek refuge just to avoid their religious persecution.

The third major migration of the Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley took place in 1947; when Pakistani army disguised as Tribals in Afghan suits attacked the Jammu and Kashmir state on 22nd October 1947 to grab it by force after the independence of the country. But the Kashmiri Pandits who

migrated during this period, being the citizens of a free country and being more liberal in their approach did not prefer to live in a particular area together like the previous migrants, but instead got scattered through out the length and breadth of the country and even some of them got settled in foreign countries where they found the future prospects for them much better at that point of time. In this process their unified strength became the greatest casualty as they were not able to build up any exclusive centre any where for them to project their unified strength representing their big number for any meaningful political bargain. This lack of cohesion among the community members gradually started the process of disintegration in the community and its marginalisation every where. Because in a democratic setup it is the number which ultimately counts. If you don't have the required numbers with you then your voice obviously becomes meaningless, howsoever sensible it may be. The liberal western views adopted by some of them not only deviated them from their centuries old values and traditions for which they were known once but also accelerated the phenomenon of intercaste marriages in the community which have now become a very common affair as every second boy or girl is marrying outside the community and is feeling a great thrill in doing that. I am unable to understand as to where all this will lead us to say after another fifty years. Will we be able then to maintain our distinct identity or will be lost into oblivion forever. We are reaping now what we have sown all these years.

The fourth mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits due to terrorism took place on 19/20 January 1990 from the Kashmir valley. These unfortunate migrants numbering more than 3 lakhs are living under subhuman conditions in tattered tents mostly in Jammu and Delhi for the last 13 years and nobody has the time to listen to their grievances. They have been left high and dry by almost everybody. According to the reports published in the Statesman of Delhi a few months back some of these migrants in utter frustration embraced Islam just to take them out from the existing rotten and hellish conditions. What does this development indicate? Are we moving in the right direction for our progress and prosperity or are we cutting our own roots. A rudderless ship ultimately sinks in the deep ocean. The wise men always take the corrective steps at the right time to survive the onslaught. It is true that nobody can predict the future correctly. But the coming events cast their shadows before. It is always, better to learn from the experiences of others rather than taking a plunge without fully knowing about the consequences. The time has come now when we should realise the fact that without the adequate numbers on our side, we will not succeed in achieving any thing. So there is no fun in playing the ping-pong game just to keep every body in good humour. Now the sincere efforts should be made to strengthen the community bonds at every level to make it a force to reckon with having a single unified voice rather than projecting divergent views even on most vital issues concerning the community and its future prospects as was observed recently in connection with the elections in Jammu and Kashmir state where the leaders of different groups of our community were found singing different tunes thus creating utter confusion. This also reflects our political immaturity to some extent. It is clear that if we go on following the Bamama policy then it is certain that it will lead us no where. We have to formulate clear cut policies and programmes as to what we have to do and therefore the approach of beating about the bush makes no sense here. One should at least have enough courage to take bold decisions in the wider interest of the community.

*"Hum bewafa hargiz na the
Par hum wafa kar na sake"*

3 Vibrant Kashmiris' world of caution

By David Devadas

A minor sweepstake was organised at the beginning of this month at one of Srinagar's leading hotels, where several of the journalists covering Kashmir's elections stayed. Putting Rs 50 into the kitty, each participant predicted the number of seats the National Conference would win. As it turned out, all the journalists grossly overestimated the then ruling party's performance. One of the brightest stars of Indian television predicted 39 seats. The hotel staff, on the other hand, was much closer to the mark. One predicted 23, another 27. The man who got it right, at 28, is a restaurant steward.

Few city residents voted and not many of the hotel staff could have visited their villages during they campaign. It was, after all, the busiest time for the hotel in a long, long time. Yet they knew the mood of their people. Journalists, not only those visiting from New Delhi, even many Kashmiri journalists, were out of touch. In conversations with several of them over the previous month, I found just one, relatively junior reporter, who had a finger on the collective pulse of his people. Most of the others had an inkling that the National Conference was not riding high but were sure it would get enough seats to coble a majority with the support of independents and small groups.

It is not entirely coincidental that this was also the prediction of intelligence agencies such as the Intelligence Bureau. Srinagar-based reporters have by and large got used to reporting violence as a daily routine, and nothing else. To do this effectively, they have built links with police and security force officers, and intelligence men too. I discovered over the past few weeks that some established Kashmiri journalists do not have even a nodding acquaintance with mainstream politicians, even erstwhile ministers.

These elections showed the inadequacies of an exclusive focus on violence. Some voters asserted that they had separated the "Kashmir issue" from their everyday problems. This electoral process was meant to elect representatives who would get them a road here, a bridge there, drainage, potable water, canal irrigation, electricity.

There is a good reason why rural Kashmiris went to vote in such large numbers - apart from the universal inertia of urban voters and the fact that urban voters have many methods for the redressal of grievances other than knocking at a legislator's door. The fact is that rural Kashmiris in many parts of the Valley experienced virtual rule by the orthodox Jamaat-e-Islami during the couple of years in the early 1990s when the Hizbul Mujahideen dominated that hinterland.

It is the same rural Kashmir that behaved so differently from Srinagar in its response to the boycott call. Without hesitation, rural Kashmir seized the opportunity provided by these elections to force a change of guard. Even if a different government did not bring relief from terror, it might at least build bridges, roads and gutters without skimming funds. Indeed, people spoke of putting an end to corruption and of aspirations for jobs and other economic prospects. "And we can always vote out the new lot next time if they don't perform," said many a vibrant Kashmiri.

4 *Ahad War deserves a memorial*

By Kuldeep Raina

If Kashmiriat denotes religious toleration and pluralistic co-existence, then surely Kashmir has remained bereft of it for most of the medieval and the present times. Rajataranginis of Pandit *Jonaraja* and *Srivara* and the chronicles penned down by Muslim historians - *Tarikh-e-Hassan*, *Baharistan Shahi*, *Tohft-Tul Ahabab* speak about torture, killings, forced conversion, exile of native Hindus besides the pillage and plunder of their shrines. Whenever Kashmiris received accolades for practising Kashmiriat, it has been the individuals, rather than the society at large that has retrieved 'Kashmiriat'.

Nowhere in the sub-continent has history been abused so blatantly as in Kashmir. To borrow a phrase from Edward P. Thompson, the great British historian distortion of history is an nationalised industry here. The trials and tribulations the Kashmiri Pandits went through in the wake of tribal raid in 1947 has still remained under warps due to the compulsions of the ruling class in Delhi and Srinagar. At this crucial juncture of history, when Kashmiri Pandit community is languishing in exile and stands disinherited by the majority community in Valley, introspection on what went wrong in the past would help draw lessons for the future. It is time we remember our saviours. During the tribal raid, Pandits' trauma and agony would have been much-less had the majority community demonstrated secular behaviour. Ahad war's role amply testifies it.

Ahad war belonged to Chogal village, 2 kms from Handwara. He was numberbar of the village. When the raid began he had decided that he would defend Pandits to the last and stood by his word. The Sarpanch of the village was Gh. Qadir Masala. He was an opportunist, who always joined the winning side.

In this overwhelming Muslim village (250 families), 22 Sikh families lived on one side of the Pohru river, close to Sopore-Kupwara highway. Pandit Mohalla was located on the other side of Pohru. There were nine Pandit families. One Kanth Koul had come from Srinagar to try his luck at business. He ran a shop in Chogal. This family's descendants today run a famous business concern.

“Janki Nath - Mahendra Nath”

There is a reference to village Chogal in medieval chronicles. Chogal was very famous because of a temple called *Bomar*. It used to attract big crowds of people. At the instance of an Iraqi missionary this temple was demolished. Locals under the leadership of Ahad war had resisted this then. This was in early seventeenth century.

Tribal Raid 1947-48:

Chogal Pandits learnt about tribal raid from Amarchand Pandita, who had gone to participate in the barat of late Pt. Moti Lal Kuchroo of Baramulla. At venukur, the barat was Waylaid and attacked by raiders. Eight members of the barat party were killed. Amarchand, who too was in barat party, had a providential escape. He reached home safely to tell that raiders were killing Pandits. The Pandits of the village, frightened by this first hand account of killings went to seek the advice of Ahad war. He extended complete sympathy and assured all possible help to save them. Ahad war arranged guard for Pandit houses during night.

When the D-day arrived, raiders guided by three locals Imamdin, Mahd Teli and Shamsuddin Khan descended on Sikh part of Chogal. Pandits were in their houses and were caught unawares. To give time to Pandits to flee, Ahad war devised a strategy. Ahad war took Moshar Nath, secretary of Panchayat along with him besides few local Muslims and went to meet raiders, before they would enter Pandit part of Chogal. To hoodwink raiders, Moshar Nath was given a green flag to hold aloft. Sikh houses had already been set on fire. Raiders, to whom loot was more important than anything else, caught hold of Moshar Nath and threatened to kill him. He handed over all gold and the money he carried with him. Ahad war got worried that raiders would not leave Pandits. In broken Kashmiri he pleaded before raiders to spare Pandits. War told them that these people had become Shaikhs and have accepted Islam.

The local trio had incited the raiders. They threatened to kill Moshar Nath that in case he failed to show where Gana Bhat was hiding. To save his skin, Moshar Nath called Gana Bhat out from hiding. Mahd Teli had rivalry with Gana Bhat. He thought raiders would settle the score for him.

Meanwhile, another batch of raiders came accompanied by 1500 people belonging to Kultari, Sikh Chogal, Guloora, Kuhroo and Yaru. This group of raiders particularly looked for Gopi Nath Channa, a Patwari posted here. He belonged to Badiyar, Srinagar. Gopi Nath came forward and agreed to take raiders to his house. Ahad war went along with him and wanted to help him out. Gopi Nath put stealthily Rs 200 in Ahad War's *pheran* pocket so that he could plead that he had borrowed money from Ahad war and save rest of the money. Gopi Nath led raiders to his house and asked Ahad war in raider's presence to give him some money as he had nothing. Gopi Nath murmured in Kashmiri, '*Meh traymay chandas Rs 200, yori ditam bah dimaha yiman*'. (I have put in your pocket Rs 200. Hand me over these so that I give it to them)}. So Ahad war played the trick for Gopi Nath. Raiders felt Ahad war had more money. They searched his other pocket and left him with nothing.

Conversions:

Raiders then shot dead Shridhar Joo Khosa. He was posted as Patwari at Kukroosa. Ahad war came to console Pandits. Shridhar's mother belonged to Chogal. Pandits now feared for their lives. They proposed to War that Pandits will embrace Islam. Ahad war understood that it was the fear which was speaking. He replied, "the situation will not remain like this. It is not acceptable to me that you will embrace Islam." Pandits had, however, taken a decision and next morning called Abdullah Pir, Imam of the mosque to complete the formalities. A section of chogal Muslims did feel happy at conversions and decided to have an inter-dining session with Pandits to complete the conversion. When this decision was conveyed to Ahad war, he burst upon them and shouted, "scoundrels! Pandits will not become Muslims. Even if they become Muslims and anarchy continues to prevail, for three years they cannot share food with us". Earlier also War had protested, when he refused to join Chogal villagers at the conversion ceremony.

Instant Justice:

Devmol, a widow had kept in her headgear cloth her meagre savings and put it in a trunk. During the turmoil she had managed to send it to her neighbour, Rasool Ahanger's house for safe custody. When normality returned, she asked him to hand over the trunk. Rasool sent back the trunk but the bag containing money was missing. Devmal went to Ahad war to seek his intervention.

Ahad called Rasool Ahangar. Entire village assembled. War asked Ahangar to return the money. The latter swore that he had not taken the money. Ahad war got a big stick, (Danda Muhr) and thrashed him severely. Ahangar remained unmoved. War then stripped him naked, leaving him only in underwear (Langoti). He then put a white sheet over Ahangar's shoulders and bit him. Ahangar did not budge. Then war asked people to get a sickle. He put it in fire. When it turned red hot, war ordered Ahangar to take out his langoti. War brought hot sickle near his private parts. At this point, Rasool Ahangar broke down. He begged mercy and accepted the guilt. Ahangar told war, 'Sir, please leave me now. I have committed the theft. I will see and get whatever money is left.'. Ahangar's wife was also there. War put sickle in fire again and shouted, "you are not coming out. Tell your wife where have you hidden the money". Rasool Ahangar asked his wife to hand, over the money to Devmal.

Pandits Property: Ahad war commanded awe and respect from his people. They called him Baab, the benign father. During February raid, when Chogal came under the frequent occupation of Pak army, Ahad War felt he may not be able to save Pandits. He arranged two big boats, *behats* for them at his own cost. As Pandits left, War put up a camp in Pandit Mohalla. War and 4-5 of his men would guard Pandit property day and night and look after their cattle.

After some time, War sent a message to Pandits that they should send person from each family to look after their cattle Sarvanand recalls, "when we reached home we saw Ahad war had put up his camp in our mohalla. He had shifted his bedding also and would guard our houses day and night. War also looked after our cattle."

In 1990, Chogal behaved differently because there was no Ahad war. Out of 20 Pandit houses, nineteen were put on fire by locals in September 1993. Shambnoo Nath's house, which escaped fire stands denuded of its timber and Iron sheets forming its roof. The new dispensation which took over in Kashmir in 1947 never honoured people like Ahad war. The day Kashmiris decide to raise a memorial for Ahad war, Kashmir Pandits return to their homes and hearths can become possible.

(The writer is Gen. Secretary, Panun Kashmir)

5 Tectonic shifts in separatist camps

By David Devadas

A Congress-led coalition has been elected, most of the Congress seats coming from the Jammu region. However, even the Congress and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's People's Democratic Front between them are short of nine MLAs for a majority, once they have elected a Speaker.

There is no dearth of independents and other smaller groups but each will want his pound of flesh, in ministerial berths or other potentially lucrative appointments. Mufti told me a few days ago that a clean government would be his priority, but the pressures of keeping so many disparate members happy will make that rather a tall order. The result no doubt will be public disillusionment sooner than later. Expectations run high. A young village voter in the Ganderbal constituency told me minutes after Omar Abdullah's defeat had been announced that the PDP man who had won the prestigious seat would end unemployment. That is an even taller order. In its six-year stint, the NC made tens of thousands of appointments at government expense - most of them to friends, relatives, neighbours, or for cash.

This leaves little largesse for the new government to disburse. The result inevitably will be disillusionment sooner than later. Indeed, the anger that drift, corruption or non-performance by the new government will generate might in a few months make the current anti-incumbency surge seem like child's play.

The next few months could witness turmoil in the secessionist camp too. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has smartly challenged the new government to deliver on restoring peace through tripartite talks, as at least the PDP has repeatedly promised. Knowing that it would be laughed out of court if it tried to challenge the fairness of the electoral process, some senior Hurriyat leaders quickly confabulated at lunchtime on Thursday, even as the trend of results was just becoming clear. They figured that holding a weak, unstable regime to its campaign word was the best strategy in its awkward situation. Common people too talk of their expectations that this new government will cause a resolution of the larger Kashmir issue. Obviously, that is even tougher for it than to provide a clean, purposeful administration. Its task will be made tougher by the intricate network of NC activists, as well as those among the hitherto secessionist groups who have been encouraged by the success of this process to seek participation in the next round of elections. Shabir Shah and Azam Inquilabi were on the verge of participating even this time. The People's Conference, which was founded by Abdul Ghani Lone, actually backed proxy candidates - and not just two or three but 15. Now, I believe the sons of the assassinated Hurriyat leader want to enter the electoral arena directly in the next few years. They are just waiting for a credible opportunity to leave the Hurriyat, possibly along with the Mirwaiz.

They would like nothing better than for the Hurriyat to expel them but, predictably, Pakistan has pulled out all stops to persuade them to stay. With mainstream politics so precariously poised and such tectonic shifts in the separatist camps. Kashmiris are in for a hot summer next year, if not a sweltering winter.

6 Paradise Regained!

At least now there is an air of hope in Kashmir

By Toufiq Rashid

MY friends back home in Srinagar inform me that the "Kashmiris are rejoicing". Glued to their TV sets, even those who didn't vote are said to be ecstatic. Although nobody believes a change of government will make a substantial transformation in Kashmir, the fact that it is no longer anybody's fiefdom is heartening.

I wonder what Kashmir would be like without the Abdullahs at the helm. The bureaucrats - especially the sycophants among them - would be orphaned. What about the engineers in charge of so many 'prestigious projects' which never took off? What would happen to the number of golf courses, created at great expense, especially the dream project at Chasmashashi adjacent the Dal Lake? Or would the older Abdullah just spend his time teeing off in the greens?

The results were as much of a surprise to the people as they were to the Abdullah clan. People who have witnessed tailor-made elections all these years would never have expected such an outcome. Who could have believed 'democracy' would have its way after decades of misrule? Who could have believed that the poster boy of the NC and Delhi's darling would be ousted by his relatively unknown opponent?

As the world watched, one wished things had been the same in the infamous 1987 elections. Had that been the case, Kashmir would not have been the 'paradise lost' it is today. Although all I can recall of those polls were the bunting lining the streets, college students enthusiastically campaigned for their leaders and hordes of people had participated in the rallies.

From the debates in my family, I could perceive that even my relatives were optimistic about a decisive change in the offing. Since my school was at Lal Chowk, the city centre, I would never leave my mother's hand lest I get crushed in that sea of people. The anti-incumbency wave was evident even then but, unfortunately, the results proved otherwise.

Although I was still a child then and couldn't understand the nuances of politics, the aftermath was horrifying even for me. Hundreds of people were detained and every second day my relatives would be talking about someone they knew who had been arrested. Many of my cousins, who were members of students' unions, were on the run. One of them who lived nearby could not visit his family for days. When we finally saw him after a month he looked shabby, unshaven and was reduced almost to a skeleton.

We grew up on horrendous tales of torture. My cousin told me about how his friends were subjected to 'creative torture techniques' when caught. While many students took to more destructive ways that led to lives of blood and gore, my cousin left the country for a tranquil existence abroad.

With this poll outcome, I suppose, they also stand vindicated. I guess even their faith in democracy might take root this time - for a homeland without dynastic rule was what they had aspired for. Justice has finally prevailed even if it had taken so long to do so.

7 *The National Conference over the years*

It has had its share of ups and downs in the volatile ambience of J&K politics

By Aasha Khosa

My first impression of politics is a view from the window of my old home in downtown Srinagar. A group of children, waving red National Conference flags and shouting slogans, were jeering at an elderly *kiryana* shop owner across the road. The merchant finally lost his cool and chased the crowd away with a lathi. My grandmother, a Kashmiri Hindu, was among the handful of bemused spectators watching the drama. She explained to me that the old man was the lone '*bakra*' - a supporter of Mirwaiz Farooq - in a locality dominated by '*shers*', the lions of the National Conference.

Such was the innocence of Kashmiri politics that the NC could loom over the Valley like a Colossus. The Kashmiris hero-worshipped Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, their Sher-e-Kashmir. After all, he had with a single stroke of the pen changed the lives of lakhs when he introduced land reforms in the early fifties. When Sheikh Abdullah lay bed-ridden, people prayed and wept for him. I vividly remember Muslims women cooking yellow rice as thanksgiving for the improvement of their *baab's* (father's) health in all the narrow alleys of our locality.

The Kashmiri Hindus, though, had always regarded the NC as the party of the Muslims. They complained a lot about their feelings of insecurity with the Sheikh at the helm. Yet, after the NC's comeback in 1975, Hindus began to feel that peace was there to stay and it was then that their slow exodus from Kashmir came to a halt. Ten years down the line and the Sheikh lies in a grave protected by the CRPF soldiers. The Kashmiris who had worshipped him in his lifetime were now threatening to plunder his grave, located on the banks of the Dal Lake. The gun had changed everything in Kashmir and the angry men who wielded it rose in rebellion to erase all the symbols of India. Since the Sheikh was a key player in bringing Kashmir into India's fold, he was obviously their target. The tensions led to yet another wave of Hindu migration from the Valley.

These were hard time for 'Nationalist', as Kashmiris termed NC activists. Many lost their lives, others fled, some quit politics for good. The party leader, Farooq Abdullah, left for London, with wife and children. For five years, NC was virtually missing from Kashmir and the silence of the grave descended on the Valley's political scene. But, after a while, the Kashmiris had enough of militancy. This probably explains the NC's return to power in 1996, with a massive mandate. But there was a new bitterness in the ties between party and people. Many leaders felt that the people had let them down. I remember a neighbour - an MLA - telling me, "The Kashmiris have betrayed us, so why should we care for them?" The NC leaders poured their bitterness around, made money, built safe houses in Jammu, secured cushy jobs for their children. Nobody seemed to care whether retribution was awaiting them in the next elections!

Today, as the party bites the dust, it may be forced to introspect on its opportunitistic politics. Perhaps this experience will have taught it a lesson that you cannot turn your backs on the people if you don't want them to turn the backs on you.

8 *It's governance not region that matters*

The bickering over chief ministership in J&K has achieved what the RSS could not

By Arun Sharma

The regional divide in J&K has never been so deep. What the RSS-backed Jammu State Morcha's trifurcation and the National Conference's autonomy could not do before the recent assembly elections, the Congress and PDP have achieved. The on-going stalemate between the Congress and the PDP over the issue of chief ministership has not only pushed the state into political uncertainty, it has divided Jammuites and Valleyites along regional lines.

Significantly, during the polls, people in both the regions braved militant threats and, cutting across their linguistic, cultural and religious lines, rejected both the trifurcation and autonomy demands. While the BJP and Morcha candidates lost in Hindu-dominated areas, the NC faced a debacle in the Muslim-dominated Valley. One reason for this was that both Hindus and Muslims, who had been living together for centuries, generally felt that these demands were aimed at creating divisions between them along communal lines. This view gets substantiated when you consider that during the last 13 years of turmoil, there has not been even a single Hindu-Muslim riot in the state despite repeated provocations by militants.

The present regional divide is a different story. The two non-NC groups, instead of arriving at a consensus over the formation of the next state government, began making public statements on who should be the next chief minister. The state Congress president, Ghulam Nabi Azad, who happens to be a resident of Doda in the Jammu region, started contacting independents and smaller groups the day after results came in. The PDP leaders, on the other hand, immediately started lobbying for a chief minister from the Valley.

Both talk of their poll promises without realising the damage they have done to the secular fabric of the state. Groups like the Jammu-joint Students Federation have now threatened to launch an agitation if the next CM is not from Jammu. Similarly, the Jammu Kashmir Panthers Party, with four MLAs, has lent support to the Congress-PDP combine provided the Congress forms the government. The repeated efforts to bring about rapprochement between both these major groups have failed so far. This had to happen given that neither was prepared to yield ground to the other. Now if the Congress withdraws in favour of PDP, the Jammuites will accuse it of having compromised their interests to appease the Kashmiris and, if the PDP relents, it apprehends that Kashmiris may turn against it for being a party to the transfer of power from the Valleyites to Jammuites.

Who is responsible for this situation? Both parties, in fact, instead of evolving a consensus between themselves, they went public over the issue of government formation. It is true that since 1951 the state always had a PM or CM from the Valley and many there may not digest the idea of having a CM from Jammu. However, at the same time, it is also true that the state has never been faced with a hung assembly. There can be no denying that the bruised souls of the Kashmiris need a balm, having experienced as they have constant bloodshed and destruction at the hands of Pakistan-aided militants, coupled with the rampant corruption and non-performance of the Farooq government. However, Kashmiris also realise that what they want is good governance. Had the issue of having a Kashmiri chief minister been the only one, then there was nothing wrong even with the Abdullah dynasty. In other words it is wholly misconceived to regionalise the issue of chief ministership. Whoever occupies the office will have to take care of all the three regions J&K - Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

9 By participating in the J&K polls it could have helped its own cause

By S.S. Gill

The election results to the J&K assembly polls must have come as a great surprise to the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. It had long nursed the illusion that as the people of Kashmir were totally disenchanted with the central and state governments, their stance of championing the right of the Kashmiris to determine their own future would command mass support. It therefore gave a call for the boycott of the elections in the certain belief that people would stay away from the polls, thus discrediting the electoral process and openly demonstrating the alienation of the Kashmiris from India.

But a voter turn-out of nearly 44 per cent has put paid to their hopes. This election, therefore, is not only a slap on the face of the separatist elements, it is a solid testimony of the secular and democratic faith of the people of the state. The Hurriyat Conference leaders must be seriously debating their decision to boycott the elections. They have lost on several accounts as a result of this ill-advised move. First, it has exposed the hollowness of their claim of being the true representatives of the Kashmiris. Secondly, the prediction that the elections would be rigged has fallen on its face. Thirdly, the impressive voter turn-out has refuted its claim of the Kashmiris having become totally alienated from India. Fourthly, as failure is an orphan, the Hurriyat may now develop fissures.

The Hurriyat has not only lost much of its credibility, it has badly hurt the larger interests of the state. Consider the present case. The Congress and the People's Democratic Party together do not have the number to form a government on their own and they would come to depend on the support of splinter groups and independents. This hotchpotch would result in a weak government. If, however, the Hurriyat Conference had not given its boycott call and joined the electoral fray, it too would have won a sizeable number of seats and could have partnered a more stable alliance.

In fact, the whole agenda of the separatist groups and *azadi* seekers has been wholly misconceived. What, after all, are the highest priorities of the people of Kashmir? Revival of tourism and the promotion of local crafts is of the greatest importance to improve the economy. And this cannot happen unless peace returns to the Valley. There are also basic needs to be attended to. That is, the provision of adequate educational and health facilities, upgradation of the rundown infrastructure, and the creation of new job opportunities by attracting entrepreneurs to the state. The attainment of these goals requires good and stable government and not the pursuit of chimeras.

If the Hurriyat had adopted a more pragmatic approach and, following Gramsci's strategy of moving ahead one step at a time, gaining one concession after the other, they would have not only substantially strengthened their position, but greatly benefited the people of the state.

10 Vision Kashmir

Towards an Autonomy of the Mind

By Manoj Joshi

Elections are not a panacea to cure the ills of the body politic. But they are excellent scanning tools, and that is why the polls in Jammu and Kashmir have offered us a better diagnosis of the situation.

The first picture revealed that there remained a substantial block of people, who stayed out of the electoral process by choice. They may be less than one-fifth of the people of the Kashmir region or one-tenth of the entire state, but they are a crucial segment - the urban intelligentsia. They are looking for a political settlement that will take into account their somewhat ill-defined goal best summed up by the word 'azadi' or 'self-determination'. They did not believe that the elections were irrelevant, but neither did they anticipate the "free and fair" nature of the polls.

Second, the bulk of the people of the state were looking for tangibles like "better governance" rather than things like "autonomy" or "azadi". In the Valley, they were mainly rural folk who tend to be more pragmatic. They have been quick to realise that they were the ones who were paying the heaviest price for the armed struggle which, in any case, appears unable in the near or long-term future to bring an end to Indian sovereignty in Kashmir.

Third, the pattern of the electoral turnout confirmed what was known for years - the separatist sentiment was a strictly Kashmiri-speaking Sunni Muslim phenomenon, much stronger in cities than the countryside. In other words, the Shias of Kargil and even of the Valley were not particularly affected by the azadi sentiment, leave alone that of jihad. Neither are the Gujjars and Bakarwals who reside in the mountainous regions of the Valley proximate to the Line of Control.

Fourth, 11 years of fundamentalist propaganda and bloodletting has not altered the basic character of the people of the state. Instead of making them more insular, it has opened them to wider influences. Foreign interest on the issue of Kashmir has played a role, but the greater impact has been that of cable TV which has brought to the Kashmiri all the complexities of Indian democracy as well as its strengths. Conversely, it has also brought home the brittle nature of the Pakistani polity.

Fifth, that Pakistan is not a major factor in the Valley, despite the 2,000-odd militants it has in the state. They retain the ability to murder at will, but do not possess a political message that has any resonance in the Valley.

Sixth, that the ethnically diverse Jammu region with a substantial Hindu population has come into its own. Some may say that this was because the Valley votes were split between the PDP and the NC. Actually, the years of strife in the Valley have brought a dividend of sorts for the more peaceful Jammu region and helped shape a sub-regional identity.

The composite image of these 'scans' points to the unique opportunity that the Union government has to provide a lasting cure to the disease that has afflicted Kashmir.

To begin at the toughest point: Negotiations with Pakistan. Given its obsessive attitude towards Kashmir, this is a difficult area which must be managed. Having tried and failed through armed suasion in the past 10 months, New Delhi has no option but patient diplomacy. India has to build on the credibility of the election process and get the international community to keep pushing Islamabad to withdraw its support to the jihadis.

The elections have provided a true measure of the Hurriyat elements and revealed them to be smaller than they appeared. But it would be self-defeating to pretend that they do not exist. With its present strength, New Delhi should not hesitate to engage them, to the extent they are willing, to conduct a rational and realistic dialogue.

Many in India and abroad have said that dialogue with separatists and the Pakistanis must resume. But few have detailed what it could involve. It has been commonly assumed that the key issue is greater autonomy but there is little clarity beyond this. Should this be the kind of autonomy that was promised by

the Delhi Agreement in 1953, or the kind the Chinese provide to the autonomous region of Tibet? What does autonomy mean in a largely federal India?

The Election Commission's performance has revealed new angularities to the subject. Some Union or Central institutions can actually be a safeguard for Kashmir's autonomy. What would have been the outcome if the state had its own election commission?

Any negotiations will come up against the uncomfortable fact that there are few freedoms that Kashmiris lack even now. They can live where they want, speak their minds, trade, practise their religion and so on. They are ruled by Kashmiri politicians and policed by Kashmiri policemen. Only an insurgency in the Valley aided hugely by Pakistan compels the presence of a largely non-Kashmiri military and paramilitary. So it is not the substance of some additional autonomy that the Kashmiris need, but something else not easily definable, the addressing of a sentiment. Finessing this is in some ways a task more difficult than dealing with Pakistan.

(Courtesy: The Times of India)

11 *Old habits die hard*

In Assam, the AGP's close ties with the ULFA created many problems once it came to power. Will there be similar problems faced by the PDP which has been rubbing shoulders with militants?

By Avirook Sen

DURING the Asom Gana Parishad's first stint in power in Assam (1985-1990), there was a great scandal—apart from the AGP's coming to power in the first place. It was referred to as the 'Statefed scandal'. A group of contractors managed to get Rs 2 crore worth of contracts to supply foodgrain to the state's network of ration shops. They supplied rotten grain and soon, the AGP was stinking along with the godowns.

The government did what governments do: it set up a commission to find out where the money had gone. The commission was headed by Ashok Saikia, the then education commissioner. But as Saikia went about his business, he encountered innumerable roadblocks. Somewhat in frustration, he complained about this at a state cabinet meeting. What happened next is pretty illuminating: Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta reportedly told the bureaucrat that the money was for the "boys". In other words, for the cadres and leaders of the extremist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

So what's this got to do with Kashmir? A lot, actually.

Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) have come to power with the help of the Congress in Jammu and Kashmir. On the face of it, this is a fine thing. People in the state have thrown a dynasty out, and they have done so freely and fairly. But somehow, one feels a sense of *deju vu*.

The AGP came to power in Assam twice (1985-90 and 1996-2001) with the help of a crucial non-political ally, the ULFA. From all accounts, the PDP has a few non-political allies as well. How strong the alliances are is a matter of conjecture. But one suspects that they are probably a little stronger than the Congress-PDP alliance.

The reasons for saying this are out in the open. Kashmiri militants vowed not to let the elections be conducted peacefully. They killed some candidates and tried to kill others. They targeted political workers and tried to disrupt campaign through a variety of intimidatory methods.

Now, can you think of one attack on a PDP candidate? One disruption of a PDP rally?

In the 1996 assembly elections in Assam, several AGP candidates fighting from ULFA strongholds signed—or were made to sign—plain paper agreements saying things like they support Assam's right to self-determination and so on. A front organization of the ULFA was getting the signatures. In return, the candidate got votes from ULFA 'constituencies'. Two AGP ministers were actually exposed for having done this. There were plenty more.

Cut to the PDP campaign of 2002. The party decides to hold a rally in Anantnag district. This is apparently okay with the militants, except for one thing: they need to wrap up the rally by 4:30 PM. Why? Because the militants plan to attack a posse of security personnel shortly after that. The rally ends on time. But here's the chilling part: the ambush is laid as planned. But by a stroke of luck, the forces don't turn up.

And now, Mufti Sayeed and the wise men and women in the Congress have agreed on an agenda for change in Kashmir. It involves disbanding the special operations groups (dreaded by both militants and the common people); the non-implementation of POTA in the state; the review of cases of detainees held on 'non-specific' charges. These are all fine ideas from a human rights point of view. But let's cut all that out. The measures tell the militants; thank you, now we'll go soft on you.

It is here that the new regime in Kashmir needs to remember the miscalculation in Assam. That any favours done are invariably called in.

During the AGP's first stint in office, the party practically abdicated all power to the ULFA. For the people of the state, nothing could have been worse. The first thing they faced was extortion demands. In those days, the ULFA didn't brook any bargaining. If a businessman or planter mumbled anything about a discount, they would simply double the demand.

Then there was the sight of ULFA cadres roaming around aimlessly (they had no government to fight) in figures, brandishing guns, dealing instant justice when they were bored.

The honeymoon couldn't last. Eventually, Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar stepped in and dismissed the AGP government in 1990.

By 1996, chastened by a resounding defeat in 1991, the AGP felt the time was ripe for a second honeymoon. The problem was that the ULFA, hit hard by two army operations and a large number of surrenders, expected at least the same sort of treatment that it got from its political partners the first time.

When the AGP couldn't deliver; the relationship turned sour. The ULFA began to refer to AGP leaders as 'traitors'. They tried to kill Mahanta and senior minister Biraj Sarma. But Nagen Sarma, one of the ministers who had signed those pre-election agreements, ran out of luck. He, along with innumerable nameless AGP cadres, was killed.

The brand of militancy in Kashmir is admittedly different. For one, 'indigenous' groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen don't depend on local money to fight their war-the ISI takes care of that. But militants need several things that a local administration can provide: safe passage, safe houses and, most of all, the government's indifference, if not encouragement. These they are bound to expect.

Which brings us to Sayeed's dilemma: let the militants have a free run and expect a breakdown of law and order; or don't and be sure to make yourself bulletproof.

Sayeed has three years as the chief minister, but possibly a little less time to resolve the above dilemma. Good luck to him.

(Source: Hindustan Times)

12 Consolidation of Jammu's secular, regional identity

By Balraj Puri

AN important outcome of the recent elections is the consolidation of secular identity of Jammu. The way the BJP had been rejected by Jammu voters marks a qualitative change in the regional and state politics.

The BJP won only one seat now whereas it was leading in 31 out of 37 Assembly segments in the last Lok Sabha election in 1999 in this region. Its sole victory was against the scion of the royal family and a minister, Ajat Shatru. A young BJP worker and local candidate from Nagrota became the rallying figure of protest.

The Congress won 15 out of 20 seats from Jammu. It promised to redress its long standing grievances about neglect by the rulers (who always belonged to Kashmir), remove regional imbalances in political, financial, developmental and administrative fields through Regional Development Boards and a federal set up. But its catchy slogan was that the CM would be from Jammu region.

As Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad was a Muslim from Doda district of Jammu, it consolidated Hindu majority and Muslim majority districts into a single cohesive regional identity.

We represented to the Delimitation Commission, on behalf of about 1,000 voters from Doda that they did not want separation from Jammu. I explained to the chairman of the Commission and the then Union Home Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda of the dangerous consequences of division of Jammu on religious lines. Fortunately, both agreed and the proposal was shelved.

When I presented my draft outline of a constitution for the state which provided for regional autonomy, a suggestion for Doda's separation from Jammu and merger with Kashmir was made. However, after I argued against it, Sheikh Abdullah and others changed their mind. Later, the Sheikh asked me to accompany him on a tour of Doda district. He said that some of his colleagues had not reconciled to Doda remaining a part of Jammu and that the issue would be raised during his tour. If I was with him he could assure the people of the district that persons like me would take care of their interests in Jammu region, he added.

At many places, the address of welcome did make a plea for unity of Doda with Kashmir on the basis of religious and linguistic affinity. The Sheikh used his oratorical skill to rubbish the plea. If religions could be basis of unity, Muslim world would not have been divided into more than 50 countries and there would not have been wars between them, he argued. Moreover, what about Hindus who lived in Doda, he asked. He categorically asserted that the bonds of history, geography, trade and culture between Doda and the rest of the Jammu region were too strong to be broken. He further added that if Doda remained a part of Jammu, it would ensure secular character of Jammu.

This settled the controversy about the integrity of the Jammu region; at least so it seemed. Till the idea of division of the region was revived by New York-based Kashmir Study Group headed by a rich Kashmiri businessman Farooq Kathwari. It included many influential Americans. It proposed merger of Doda with Kashmir as 40 per cent of its population spoke Kashmiri (what about 60 per cent of the population?) and of Rajouri-Poonch districts of Jammu with Kashmir; "though they did not speak Kashmiri, but since they had been interacting with Kashmiri Muslims for so long" (as if there is no interaction between Hindus of Jammu within their co-ethnic community of Muslims of the region).

Somehow he became a favourite of the Indian embassy in Washington and came to India in early 1999. He reportedly met leaders including the RSS chief in Jammu, he had a long talk with the Chief Minister and me and, according to him, with none else. Later, he visited Pakistan.

Farooq Abdullah immediately sought to implement Kathwari formula by proposing division of Jammu into Hindu and Muslim majority areas. A few years later, the RSS-VHP combine demanded a separate state for Jammu. Though it insists that it wants whole of the region to comprise the new state, the incapacity of the sponsors to get the support of the Muslims is obvious. Thus virtually it supplemented Farooq's proposal. It was welcomed by Jamat-e-Islam leader of Kashmir Syed Ali Shah Gilani and Hizbul Mujahideen.

Once again the move flopped. The National Conference did not make it a poll issue. Most of the candidates of the RSS-sponsored Jammu State Morcha, despite support of the BJP in some constituencies, lost security deposits. Ghulam Nabi Azad's reluctant but fortuitous leadership of Congress and remarkable recovery of the party at the hustings have again consolidated unity of Jammu.

The significance of this fact should not be underestimated. Not only it would satisfy Jammu's urge for identity and empowerment but also strengthen its role as the vital geo-political link between Kashmir and the rest of India. A secular and friendly Jammu is the best guarantee for safeguarding the identity and interests of Kashmir.

The wrangling over regional claims over chief ministership that followed the election results, however, underlines inadequacies of political developments. For a lasting solution of the problem of inter-regional relations, there does not appear to be any other way out than the assurance of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah on July 24, 1952, on my demand, to provide for regional autonomies in the constitution of the state; so that Chief Minister to one region does not mean total disempowerment of the other region.

**The writer is a Jammu-based political commentator*

(Source: The Tribune)

13 Back-packers, not guided tourists

Instead of its policies on Kashmir being determined by Pakistani and American propaganda, it's time that Delhi learns to think for itself. This can be done only if the Centre has its ears to the ground

If the government does have a Kashmir policy, it is obscure to most. Nevertheless, virtually every step it takes in respect of J&K is imbued with two concerns: how it would go down with the Americans; and will the Pakistanis cut a deal? This is evident even on the eve of an election in the state. Nothing else explains the recent tortuous moves to, say, bring the Hurriyat on board.

The two considerations are linked. Anything you do will be received with favour in Washington if Islamabad sees it benignly, and an India-Pakistan dialogue can begin. But no one has any idea what such an interaction should concern itself with.

If Lahore and Agra are any indication, the dialogue is dead on arrival - unless you agree to part with the Valley, at the very least. Actually, it ought to be a gift-wrapped 'Muslim' package, including Kargil in Ladakh, and Doda, Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu, besides the Valley of course. This is the nub of Pakistan's demands and also that of the Hurriyat's, although some elements in the Hurriyat may have other ideas.

And why should India oblige? The Pakistani answer is typically communal: because Kashmir is nearly all-Muslim. The US invokes the power of suggestion to say that if you don't cough up Kashmir, world peace will be threatened because Pakistan now has the bomb. So, you might as well swallow the bitter pill.

Thus, it becomes India's sole responsibility in western eyes to preserve world peace - not Pakistan's, not even America's as it goes about brandishing the gendarme's staff in just about everybody's face. But the trouble is the US wanted India to concede Kashmir - without ever saying so officially - even before Pakistan got itself the bomb.

It's said India should sort out the Kashmir 'dispute' with Pakistan. But why is the subject a dispute at all? The only reason one can think of is that Pakistan says so. Islamabad also says Kashmir runs in every Pakistani's veins and, therefore, it must have it! So, is the part of J&K that went over to China excluded from Pakistan's bloodstream? What about the territory that was once Pakistan but has since gained sovereignty?

New Delhi seems to have lost sight of the ground situation in the Valley and has come to absorb assumptions made about it by Pakistan and the US. The most important of these are that Kashmir is in turmoil, that the Hurriyat is the only true representative of Kashmiris, and that the Centre must talk to them as well as to Islamabad if it wishes to explore a permanent solution to the 'problem'.

This sort of propaganda has been so pervasive over the years that many commentators outside the government also accept it readily, and base their prognoses on that basis alone. Their credulousness perhaps stems from the fact that they do not place their ears to the ground, and that they interact almost exclusively with the Hurriyat or para-Hurriyat tendencies to learn about the state of affairs across the Pir Panjal. It's time they headed for Kashmir with back-packs and followed all the trails. Ditto for representatives of foreign governments.

Kashmir's reality, they might all discover, is not so unilinear, and in many respects quite different from what is generally supposed. What turmoil there still exists is essentially Pakistan-induced. This is well understood in the Valley. The support for the *jehadi* ideology and for terrorism has shrunk dramatically, and ordinary people now appear to have few qualms about reporting terrorists to the authorities.

Much discussion appears to centre on supposed Kashmiri 'alienation'. The implication is that the alienation is from India, and that this leads them on to the trajectory of separatism that induces a sympathy for terrorism. Perhaps the situation is better summed up by the word 'trauma'. Caught in the

cross-fire of terrorist violence and the often crude and hostile tactics employed by the security forces, the entire Kashmiri society is thoroughly traumatised, even though it is reasonably well off in material terms.

For any policy to have an impact, this must be changed quickly. The state government and the Centre have failed even to recognise the issue. The separatist lobbies have never paid attention to the problem. Perhaps that is one reason why they are short on internal support. As for elections, people don't seem to care too much for the political preferences of the separatists. A few bombs or assassinations will keep voters indoors anywhere in the world. It's up to the authorities to keep the environment secure.

But a relatively low voter turn-out will not negate the 'sea-change' in Kashmir. Policy makers need to bear this in mind, now and after the polls, rather than proceed from any preconceived notion. Elections may be the right time for political leaders, even those not having stakes in the Valley, to visit Kashmir, if only to gain a fresh perspective that will hopefully inform policy in the near future. If nothing else, they could speak about the 'idea of India', to use Sunil Khilnan's splendidly evocative expression.

As for the Hurriyat, its stock doesn't seem to be high. It was a dramatic moment when I saw outside its office in Srinagar (where a pathetic demonstration was in progress) an elderly woman running across the road, screaming out something in Kashmiri as she angrily jabbed the air, all the while pointing to the Hurriyat headquarters. Laughing shopkeepers translated merrily, "The ministers and these people are all 'daku' (robbers)." All that it might take is withdrawal of western affections to knock the bottom out of the Hurriyat.

It is a collective failure of the media that Kashmir's changing reality has been allowed to go unrepresented, leaving observers with overwhelming biases. Kashmir has suffered as a result. The urgent problems of its people, such as full-blown educated unemployment and the pain of thousands of displaced and psychologically dislocated households that have known murder and worse, are not sufficiently appreciated outside. All of this concerns domestic policy - not international roulette.

14 The 'parakram' of feeble minds and weak knees

By Sumer Kaul

Remember the mood in the government after the terrorist attack on Parliament last December? The enough-is-enough rhetoric from the highest political pedestals? The unconcealed determination, further steeled by the Kaluchak massacre, to act against the enemy? The Army chief's categorical assertion, undoubtedly in reflection of the government's resolve, that the time for action had come, and the consequent order to the armed forces to mass in full battlegear on the border with Pakistan? The Prime Minister's visit to a forward area and his exhortation to the jawans to prepare for "*balidaan*" in the impending action, appropriately named Operation Parakram (prowess/valour)? Remember all this?

Ten months later, the whole thing - the mood, the resolve, the action plan - has gone with the wind. Quietly, unceremoniously. The troops have been asked to return to the barracks. Considering the hostile terrain, the extreme weather, the nerve-racking uncertainty in which they had been all these long months, the move back to their peacetime stations cannot but be welcomed by them, as well as by their countrymen. But even as the tanks and trucks and guns roll back, a huge question mark looms over the national heroin. What was Operation Parakram all about?

This is a question the people of India and particularly the jawans and officers of the Indian Army are asking, silently but in palpable anger and bewilderment. After all, it was not as though a brigade or two had been rushed to some local trouble spot and after discovering that it was a false alarm, promptly asked to go back to their station. Involved in Operation Parakram was the biggest and longest ever deployment of Indian troops and armour on our international border. There must have been some aim, some objective behind this colossal effort. What was it? And was it achieved?

When the operation was set up the objective was clear: to deal a crippling blow to the enemy and teach it a terminal lesson. It was to be, in Prime Minister Vajpayee's words, an "*aar paar ki ladai*" (a decisive war). The government meant business, or so it seemed to the country - and to the world. While the country endorsed the resolve and stood behind the government and most of the world viewed India's concerns and intentions with a degree of understanding the United States (with Britain in tow, as always) stood bang in front of the inherently pliable Vajpayee government to block its path and break its resolve.

They did it directly and indirectly. They shuttlecocked between New Delhi and Islamabad and brought to the gullible Indian leadership Musharraf's "promise" of "permanently" stopping terrorist infiltration and attacks, and even as they underwrote the wily general's assurance they also more than hinted at the 'unwisdom' of an India-Pakistan war while American troops are in Pakistan! At the same time they commanded their think-tanks back home to create a subcontinental nuclear war scare, complete with horrendous destruction and casualty figures, and to buttress the nightmare, encouraged the Pakistan envoy at UN to say that his country would use nuclear arms in the event of a war with India. The bluff, the duplicity and the pressure worked!

Nobody in this feeble-minded, weak-kneed government is going to admit it, but this is how Operation Parakram was sabotaged. Although the back-to-the-barracks decision was ostensibly taken only the other day, the military option was in fact abandoned much earlier - as evidenced, among other things, by the abrupt capping of all that "*aar-paar*" rhetoric. And even as we withdraw our troops, Pakistan and its terrorists continue with their bloody deeds. In other words, we are back to the pre-Parakram era - plus the burden of the huge (tangible and intangible) costs of the spectacular damp squib!

In terms of monetary costs, the operation is said to have drained the exchequer of close to a staggering ten thousand crore. Add to it the degradation of armour and ammunition and a host of sophisticated war gadgetry because of lying for so long in the open at the mercy of the elements. Close to one hundred lives have been lost, and twice as many personnel injured, in the laying of mines over vast stretches and there is fear of more such casualties in the highly hazardous de-mining operations.

Equally if not more disturbing is the injury that the fiasco has caused to the morale of our soldiers. Geared to fight, deployed on the border, waiting in trenches in harsh environment, ready and eager to avenge the

killing of thousands of their comrades and countrymen - only to discover at the end of the day that they were in the words of Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Afsir Karim, "*mere pawans* in the hands of politicians intent on pursuing their own agenda".

It is an agenda in which national self-respect and interests take a back seat to self-aggrandisement and party interests. Even in these last ten eventful months, our worthy politicians have been busy with their petty politicking, holding rallies, horse-trading, lusting for or clinging to power, celebrating imaginary successes. And amidst all this, see how the architects of Operation Parakram are projecting its wilful abortion. Without so much as batting an eyelid, they now say that there was no intention of any military action and that the whole operation was simply a diplomatic tactic and "as coercive diplomacy". George Fernandes said in a Doordarshan interview last week, "we have achieved a magnificent Victory".

What victory, Mr Defence Minister? with Pakistan continuing with its bloody mischief, with Indian soldiers and civilians continuing to get killed, with the global warrior against terrorism "anywhere and everywhere" continuing to hoodwink your government, what victory are you talking about? And what is the "firm message" that your brand new counterpart in the Foreign Ministry says India has conveyed to Pakistan through Operation Parakram? Surely, it should not be difficult for even an IQ-challenged government to realise that the only message in fact conveyed to the military-mullah machine there is that India may bark occasionally but it will never bite, and so they can go on with their diabolical games.

I am not a war monger. Far from it. But like millions of other Indians I cannot countenance this country and its honour and interests being mauled endlessly. Nor, like my countrymen again, am I prepared to be taken in by the government's rhetorical bravado. The ruling establishment may persuade some committed commentators to echo and endorse the pretence of victory, but the people at large can no longer be fooled. They now clearly see this government for what it is - timid, ever fumbling and bungling, out-smarted by Pakistan and cheated by the US (and still clinging to it!) in short, a complete travesty of what people expected a BJP-led government to be when they voted for this party and its ragtag allies.

15 All political prisoners to be released, POTA to go

Elements of common minimum programme for the coalition government

Objectives

1. The goal of the coalition government is to heal the physical, psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by fourteen years of militancy, to restore the role of law in Jammu and Kashmir state, to complete the revival of the political process which was begun by the recently concluded elections and to request the Government of India to initiate and hold sincerely and seriously, wide ranging consultations and dialogue, with conditions, with the members of the legislature and other segments of public opinion in all the three regions of the state to evolve a broad-based consensus on restoration of peace with honour in the state.

2. Ensuring safety of lives and properties, restoring dignity and honour of all persons in the state will be the foremost concern of the government. The coalition government will take all possible measures with its power, on pretext of the people in the state of Jammu and Kashmir from violence and militancy, whether originating from within or outside the state and to encourage those youngmen from the state who have resorted to militancy to return to their families and the mainstream with the belief that they will receive security and justice according to law. At the same time, the state government will fully cooperate with the government of India in combating cross-border militancy originating from Pakistan.

Restoring peace and normalcy and curbing corruption

3. The government shall review the cases of detainees being held without trial for long periods. It shall release all detainees held on non-specific charges, those not charged with serious crimes and those who have been held on charges that are such that the period they have spent in jail exceeds their possible sentence.,

4. The government shall review the operation of all such laws that have been used in the past decade to deprive people of their basic rights to life and liberty for long period of time, without due legal process, where the government deems that some special powers need to be retained, it will ensure, by instituting careful and transparent prescreening and monitoring procedures, that such powers are used sparingly and those entrusted with them are held accountable for any misuse.

5. All cases of custodial killings and violations of Human Rights shall be investigated and persons responsible for them will be identified and punished appropriately.

6. The government shall strengthen the state Human Rights Commission to make it an effective instrument for addressing the grievances of the people of the state.

7. The government shall formulate a comprehensive relief and rehabilitation package for those families affected by militant violence over the past decade. The ex-gratia relief at Rupees one Lakh per deceased person in militant violence will be raised to Rs 2 lakhs. In recruitment to government posts, preference will be given to the member of each family where an innocent member has been killed in the militancy related violence.

8. The government shall implement special schemes to rehabilitate former militants who have forsworn violence and rejoined the mainstream.

9. The government will reach out to the children, widows and parents of the deceased militants and make endeavours to provide education to the militancy affected orphans.

10. The government reaffirms that the return of Kashmiri Pandits to their mother land is an essential ingredient of Kashmiriat. The government will seek the cooperation of all elements in the society to create an atmosphere conducive to their safe return, will take all necessary steps to ensure their safety and devise effective measures for their rehabilitation and measures for the rehabilitation of the migrants from various disturbed areas of Jammu and Ladakh as well.

12. Persons living close to the line of control and the International Border face special difficulties due to recurrent tension and cross border violence. Permanent shelters will be constructed in all vulnerable areas

to protect loss of life. The government will also devise a scheme to provide wherever feasible alternative land to such families in safe zones.

13. The government shall pursue the matter of due compensation to those people from the border areas of Jammu and Kashmir who have suffered loss of crops and cattle due to security operations near LoC and the International Border.

14. The government shall give priority to ridding the state administration of corruption and nepotism especially in the award of government jobs and contracts and the places like the institutions of higher learning. It will endeavour to make the selection process to all those positions and institutions fully transparent.

15. The government shall establish an institution or Ehtisab for enquiring into complaints received against chief minister, ministers and MLAs. The appointment to this post shall be made by the Chief Minister in consultation with the Chief Justice of the State High Court and the leader of opposition in the Legislative Assembly.

16. A Commission will be set-up to make recommendations for reform of the police administration to make it more effective and humane institution for investigation of crimes and for enforcement of law and order. The government will ensure that the personnel in Special Operation Group (SOG) are assimilated/relocated within the regular police establishment.

17. The coalition government considers that there are enough laws in existence to deal with militancy. Therefore, it will not implement POTA in the state.

Employment Oriented Development State

18. Our government shall make efforts to ensure that all the three regions of the state Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh receive an equitable share of resources available for development. It shall set up a State Finance Commission with a statutory status for this purpose and the effort will be to ensure that the backlog of development and employment at the regional and district levels is made good within a specified time frame.

19. The government shall press upon the government of India for the inclusion of Dogri in the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution.

20. The government shall grant full powers to the Autonomous Hill Council for Leh which has hitherto been deprived of its legitimate powers. Efforts will be made to persuade the people of Kargil to accept a similar Autonomous Hill Council for Kargil. The government will press upon the government of India to connect the Kargil airport to Jammu, Srinagar and Delhi.

21. Our government will give top priority to the preparation of an employment oriented medium term development plan laying particular emphasis on the development of agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts, tourism, information technology, food processing and environment friendly industrial activities. Efforts will be made to evolve a development strategy which provides at least one productive job per family.

22. Employment and welfare of the youth will receive special attention. Measures will be taken to help those youth who have fallen victims to drug abuse and narcotics due to frustration and unemployment.

23. High priority will be given to the development of power resources of the state and to extend the benefit of electricity to all villages of the state. The state government will ask the central government to ensure that the power generation in the state should be available to the maximum extent possible for meeting the needs of the state.

24. Special emphasis will be laid on provision of basic minimum needs such as provision of safe drinking water, sanitation, rural roads, primary health care and elementary education and school buildings.

25. A new scheme will be prepared to universalise access to elementary education for all children. Services of unemployed graduates will be utilized for this purpose.

26. A comprehensive plan for the development of environment friendly tourism in all the three regions of the state will be prepared bringing the hinterland districts on the tourist map of the state. Special measures will be taken to facilitate and protect pilgrim related tourism.
27. Panchayati Raj institutions will be given both functional autonomy and adequate financial powers for making them an effective instrument for decentralized development. Early elections will be held wherever they are due.
28. Keeping in view that women have borne the brunt of violence in more ways than one over the past decade, special welfare programmes will be designed for women such as widow pensions, subsistence allowance for women headed households and self employment schemes for young women.
29. Special emphasis will be paid on promotion of welfare of backward communities including Gujjars, Bakerwals and Gaddis, Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The government will strive for the extension of Scheduled Tribe status to the Pahari speaking population of the state.
30. Effective measures will be taken to check unplanned and unauthorised growth of towns and cities. Jammu and Srinagar municipalities will be given the status of corporations to ensure orderly development of all civic facilities. Effective measures will be taken for orderly growth of town and cities and for provision of basic civic amenities thereof.
31. All the three regions of the state have got religious minorities which face special problems. The government shall give full protection to the minorities and safeguard their rights. A minority commission will be constituted to look after the interests of minority communities.

Courtesy-The Kashmir Times

16 Hindu Shrines in the district Pulwama, Kashmir

The origin of civilized society originates in the villages, where people of different identities interact for mutual benefit, self sufficiency and autonomy. All villages outwardly appear to be similar but each has its core a soul which is as distinct as one finger print from the other. There are what are called artist villages, epic villages, shrine villages fringe villages and forsaken villages distinguished by their inhabitants and their traditions. Of these, in Kashmir the most distinctive are the Shrine villages. In every such village there is a presiding deity recognised by people of all religions on the basis of faith alone.

By Virendra Bangroo

Co-ordinates of the village:

Pulwama, is situated 32 kms from Srinagar and is surrounded in the North by Srinagar, in the West by Poonch and Budgam and in the east by Anantnag. The district Pulwama came into being in 1979 and is divided into four tehsils - Tral, Pulwama, Shopian and Pampore. There are 554 villages in the four tehsils of Pulwama. The district has a rich, cultural and historical background. The ancient temples at Awantipur, Jawbar, Payar, Malangpora, Koil, Kakapora, Narasthan and at other places signify the rich cultural past. The famous love legend, Hemal-Nagrai is believed to have taken birth near Shopian and the legendary mystic poetess, Lal Ded was born at Padmanpora, now Pampore. The district has some beautiful tourist spots and some of the famous places are Aharbal, Kungwattan, Nagberan, Shikargah, Hulpore, Tarsar Marsar etc.

There are number of shrines associated with different villages. These shrines which are there since times immemorial, have shaped cultural and ethical identity of the villagers. Some of the well known shrines in the District are Batuknath temple Tahab; Mangleshwar Bhairav, Serun; Jagarnath Bhairav, Achhan, Serun, Jagarnath Bhairav Inder Raj Shrine, Inder.

Batuknath temple and Spring-Tahab, Pulwama

Swami Batuknath temple is situated in the village Tahab, district Pulwama. There is a spring in the village known as Vatuk Nag and is in the custody of the Muslims. The spring is 40 feet square and Muslims of that area call it Vatuksar Nag.

The temple of Batuknath is situated away from the spring within an enclosure of 60'x80'. The temple consists of a cella (Garb Griha) and a *Pradikshana* (circumbulatory path) covered with a conical slopping roof. In the cella is a 1.25 meters high Shivlinga. A small Dharmashala is also attached to the temple.

According to Sh. Amarnath Tikoo resident of Tahab, age 56, some 115 years back in the village of Kaed Chak was found a Shivlinga in a spring. Kaed Chak village is 1 km from Tahab and is a Muslim inhabited village. Those days there was a lone Hindu family. Head of the family was Pandit Gokul Nath son of Pandit Maheshwar Nath. He too shifted to Srinagar city. When the news spread about the finding of Shivlinga the villagers of Trisal came forward to acquire it but the Pandits of Tahab came in their way and there was confrontation between the villagers. Pandit Ramju of Tahab some how brought it from the Kaedchak village and installed the Shivlinga in the Swami Batuknath temple.

The temple was renovated in 1982 and the temple is under the Batuknath Mandir Committee. The Brother of Batuknath is said to be the Jagarnath Bhairav and his abode is at Achan village, Pulwama.

The temple of Batuknath is under active worship and still some Pandit families are living in the village.

Jagarnath Bhairav temple, Achhan, Pulwama

Village Achhan is about 7 kms from the district headquarter Pulwama on the Pulwama - Litr road. In the village is the sacred shrine of Jagarnathjee Bhairav. The shrine complex is spread on four kanals of land and consists of a temple, a spring and two Dharmashalas.

The temple proper consists of a curvilinear structure and enshrines a Shiv Linga. Besides it in the stone lined spring is an idol of Jagarnath Bhairav.

The temple was renovated in 1980's. Pandit Nathjee Pandita son of Pandit Dharshan Lal Pandita, resident of Achhan was the priest of temple till 1990's. Besides the daily *puja*, *bhajans* were sung on Tuesday and Saturdays.

People from far off places used to come here to perform Razkath (sacrifice given to the presiding deity). One who used to take daughter of this village was supposed to perform Razkath in the temple after marriage.

The temple is still under active worship because of the some Pandit families who are having faith on the shrine and decided to stay back whatever the consequences be.

Mangleshwar Bhairav Ashtapan, Serun, Pulwama

The village Serun is one kilometer from the district headquarter Pulwama. The village is surrounded by Monghama, Pulwama, Aashmandir and Wachapora.

In the village is the Ashtapan of Mangleshwar Bhairav. The Shrine has about 1½ kanal of land. In the shrine is a stone lined circular spring, having the diameter of thirty feet. There are four mighty Chinar trees and a Bran tree which is the sacred spot and the abode of Mangleshwar Bhairav. Name of the spring is Mong-Nag. Adjacent to the spring is a Dharmashala where many idols are kept including Shivalinga, Ganesh and photographs of Gods and Goddesses. In the centre of the spring is also a Shivlinga.

The Dharmashala was renovated in 1947 and couple of rooms added to it. Pandit Nand Lal Sharma, resident of Rohmu village used to run *Pathshala* in one of the rooms of the Dharmshala. He expired in 1980's.

Bhat's, Raina's, Koul and Razdan's resided in the village of Serun and Mangleshwar Bhairav was the presiding deity of the whole area. In 1980's a mosque was built adjacent to the shrine and its land grabbed. A dispute arose and there was confrontation between the two groups. Even though there was large scale protest by the Pandits but nobody could stop them to encroach upon the land of the shrine.

In 1994 the Shivlinga was taken by the local Muslims and used for thrashing paddy. It was later on recovered and installed at its place.

Mangleshwar Bhairav Asthapan Committee, Serun was taking care of the shrine till 1990. President of the committee was Pandit Dwarkanath Koul, presently residing at Muthi, Jammu, age 70 and the secretary was Pandit Jagarnath Bhat presently residing at Muthi.

Hindus and Muslims equally had faith on this shrine till 1980's. The first milk of the cow was offered to the spring by both Hindus and Muslims. The situation changed after 1980's and the Muslims started parting away from their Hindu counterparts.

The Shrine was the Centre stage of the Hindu religious activities and people used to assemble here to worship and also to greet each other on festive occasions.

There are still four Hindu families left in the village Serun and in one of the Dharmashalas of the temple, J&K police is stationed.

**Virendra Bangroo, Documentation Officer, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Janpath, New Delhi.*

17 Face-to-face with life red in tooth and claw

By Aditi Tandon

THE terrorists have struck at different places. Two landmine blasts have occurred in a small village of Kulgam almost simultaneously. One turned the marketplace into a junkyard and destroyed two houses. The other happened in a park. A few civilians are feared dead. There are firing incidents at other places. The assessment of loss is on..." The first reports of deaths in Kashmir always flowed from the police headquarters in Batmaloo. The policemen on duty impossibly listed details and irrespective of the quantum of loss they sounded "immune" to the routine of terror. They often gave the names of the dead without any emotion. This kind of indifference you also witnessed in the people around you. Right after a firing session, you could spot women stirring cauldrons of tea or squatting over improvised fires to cook their meals.

While this warlike situation left you chilled, everyone else from the Valley did not respond to terror as you did. Here death was a routine, as was firing and shelling. As life took a seat soon after death had departed, one was caught between the rawness of the routine and the subjugation of emotion. Reporting a democratic ritual called election from this "valley of death", had you reminding yourself that here both the voter and the contestant were the targets of militants. Nobody was safe. Caught in the most challenging and conflicting of situations, you had to be prepared to come under fire anytime. As danger lurked, the security forces would never miss telling you whenever you asked their permission to venture into hard-target areas. "The IED threat is there. A blast can occur any time." You were, however, ready for such risks. With every passing day, fear had become an integral part of the routine, so much so that it ceased to affect the schedule anymore, unless of course there was shelling right in front of your. In the heart you knew that death could strike from any corner.

The other day, 21-year-old Maimoona Akhtar of Kulgam was killed in the most unexpected of places. Having survived the mine blast that damaged the village bridge, she rushed into the building of the Middle School for shelter. This building was to be her grave as militants were firing indiscriminately at the school where the security forces had taken cover. Along with Maimoona, two children lay in a pool of blood, their bodies riddled with bullets. Kulgam mourned the death of children all day, swearing against democracy for a while. However, on the final day of polling these very villagers risked their lives to stand up and be counted. Such instances of bravery and courage were repeated again and again all through the election days. For Kashmiris, the bellicose rhetoric, the military build-up, and the resultant tragedies have become a familiar, though uncomfortable, routine. They have learnt well to live with it and without fear at that. No wonder, when a terrorist of the Al Al-freen outfit gunned down an NC worker in broad daylight in Srinagar's Koker Bazaar, not a single shop was closed out of fear. Braving the routine of death, the Valley has, sadly, gained immunity against pain. Or may be it has learnt to hide its scars well, lest it gives the terrorists another reason to strike. Even in areas worst hit by militancy, the ability to adapt quickly runs strong. When a mine blast occurred in Devsar, killing five persons, we zipped through towns to reach the spot. However, normalcy had reached Devsar even before we did. Reporting from the Valley was almost like reporting from a war zone. You could smell terror in the air, you could understand fear in real terms from the day of landing to the day of take off. Life hung in the balance; you expected to be cornered any moment. The most terrorizing of all experiences was the drive through Tral, the prime target of militants. For miles together there was no soul to be seen. It seemed as if the town was devoid of civilian population. On the day of the third phase of polling in Pulwama, the militants hit Tral with a vengeance. Perhaps they had learnt that the voters of Tral had waited for hours to collect their voter identity cards the previous day. About three days prior to the third phase of polling, grenades were repeatedly hurled at polling booths in Pulwama and Anantnag. Voters were shelled at and fired upon. With the risk to life running high, most people chose to remain in their houses. In Anantnag, cross firing was already the order of the day. So heavy was the presence of terror that road operating parties were not allowing vehicles to go on untraced, unchecked roads. Despite care, lives were lost, courtesy the belligerent neighbour.

And as you lived the pain of the people in the Valley, you wondered if their losses could ever be assessed. For the world outside, the holding of the Kashmir elections might have been a “mighty exercise in democracy”, but for those living in the militant-infested Valley, elections were more a test of strength. In this Valley, where fear is the only constant in the ever-changing equation of life and death, hope finally managed to raise its head, despite the terrorist strikes.

The writing on the wall is now loud and clear, for everyone to read and understand. But even while the country celebrates the victory of democracy in Kashmir, your mind remains laden with terrifying images from the Valley that has somehow learnt to survive in the shadow of pain.

You are still busy recounting horror tales and putting them into a fresh perspective that has room only for the voters’ verdict.

How fast can the equations change here! Only yesterday, the very anticipation of this verdict was an invitation to death. Fear was writ large all over the Valley. In 24 days, the Valley recorded over 40 killings. In fact, it was looking like a potential battleground where the enemy could trap you anywhere, any time. In sensitive segments of Handwara and Kupwara, terrorists roamed and struck at will, ripping up men and bridges alike. All over, roads were mined-awaiting victims. Within seconds, the most peaceful stretch of a sleepy, little village could appear like the gravest war zone in the world, with shelling and firing taking place incessantly.

Once in a while fate even put you face to face with bloodshed. And like any other average Kashmiri, you found yourself braving a mighty fire from across the hills or a blast on the road, and feigning immunity from the “deadly routine of the Valley”.

18 Kashmir - What Went Wrong

THE oft-repeated statement that the Indians have been rather poor in both their conceptual as well as executive endeavours sounds no where as true as in our tackling of the terrorist menace in Kashmir. It has not been errors but blunders all the way. Not only the political leadership but also the military top brass have been slow in evolving an adequate response to the situation in Kashmir.

Soviet Intervention:

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan provided Pakistan everything it needed to unleash a new war of subversion against India—a secure arms pipeline, funds-diverted from narco-terrorism, mercenaries and American diplomatic support. Jihadist Army did not understand Zia's doctrine of proxy-war-*'make them wither on the wane'* and missed the strategic fallouts of Soviet intervention. Pakistan kept us busy in Punjab all the while it went about making preparations for subversion in Kashmir. Army failed to read moves of Jamaat and could not correlate Jamaat's political gameplan with military game-plan. Visits of Saudi intelligence chief and other high-level emissaries to Kashmir in early eighties were not meant to discuss weather. . . By 1984 reports were available that ISI had started dumping arms in Kupwara. Lack of source-running became problem for Indian army to trace these dumps. Civil intelligence agencies had kept Army fully posted with threats. Reports regarding Kashmiri boys undergoing training across the border were available as early as 1983. Army was also advised to pursue the plan of strategic satellite locations in 1986. Had it been implemented there would have been no *fidayeen* attacks. Army generals were not able to discern threat perception or to speak militarily, 'read the battle'.

Army failed to sensitise political leadership on the threats to source-running due to politico-terrorist and administration-terrorist nexus. What were the undertones and implications of dangerous Resettlement Bill? Why was Pandit community being targetted as fifth columnist in Atish-Chinar? By August 1989, as many as 2600 boys were reported to have crossed the border for receiving training in subversion.

How Army was handling the job in the incipient stage of the insurgency, has been best explained by two senior Army officers themselves. Brig. Vijay K. Nair laments:

"The military hierarchy paid scant attention to the increasing internal turmoil, which it considered beyond its ambit. In the middle and late 80's when Pakistan started training subversives and providing them with the arms required for insurgency, the Indian side displayed a comprehensive lack of appropriate intelligence. Even the military sources did not know, till it was too late, that large-scale infiltration with arms had been going on for about two years. There was obvious loss of contact with ground realities".

Lt. Gen. Vijay Madan, the military strategist remarks.

"To believe that the Govt. its intelligence agencies, the army guarding the LoC in J&K and the Paramilitary forces similarly employed, none had a clue of what was brewing across the LoC since at least 1986 onwards, if not earlier, is to stretch one's credulity to unimaginable limits. Hundreds of youth were sent across mountain passes for arming and training in PoK and our picquets and patrols on the LoC remained ignorant of such passage speaks poorly of these responsible for guarding the frontiers. That a number of those youngmen went to Afghanistan for on-the-job training in insurgency operations was obviously unknown to us till recently. Even if it was, we were unable to add it all up and arrive at any worthwhile inference about what was going to hit us in the Valley. Immense quantities of sophisticated arms and ammunition were brought into the Valley without knowledge or interception. That this was done over difficult passes and impassable terrain is no excuse for our failure, though it certainly speaks highly of people who oppose us. Assuming this information was available, then why no suitable action taken nor any alarm bells rung? There can be no doubt that initially the trouble in Kashmir was allowed to gain momentum because of sheer neglect".

Initial Lapses:

Border management was absent. For quite a few months in 1989-90 borders were not porous but open. It was around this time that Sopore, Kupwor, Apor' became a phenomenon. Kashmiris thought that either

BSF manning the border was involved or there was some understanding to hand over Kashmir on a platter. This feeling strengthened when BSF pickets in Srinagar city were suddenly removed and mass processions demanding secession were allowed. Azadi was round the corner. Why not to be with the winning side' feeling enveloped by the populace. A large section of uncommitted or neutral population at this stage switched allegiance to the secessionists. All this time Army continued to follow concept of peace-time deployment i.e. Army was in barracks, and BSF was manning the border.

There was total absence of decisive orders after exfiltration and infiltration became a regular affair.

Kashmir insurgency has followed the copy-book. First, there were selected isolated blasts by militants to show their arrival and gauge response of people. Then there were selective killings to silence the dissent. Next the terrorists declared their political objective by launching a campaign of ethnic-cleansing against Kashmiri Hindus. Whether it was JKLF or Hizbul Mujahideen, all this was being done in the name of Jihad.

Army reacted to the initial phase of terrorist violence from a defensive mode. No counter-insurgency doctrine tailored to requirements in Kashmir was evolved. 15th Corps was not clear about political or military objectives. *There were frantic knee-jerk reactions. Troops were inducted and launched. Since there was no thinking, everybody followed his own doctrine or experience gained in North-East, Sri Lanka, Punjab or against Naxalites. It was a situation of free for all.*

Army leadership was also overawed by thinking that it is a political problem and not a military problem. Army officialdom did not define takes for juniors though there was no paucity of ideas. The result was initiative passed on to militants. Militants took advantage of this defensive response. General Zaki's promotion as security advisor did not help the Army either. He interfered too much and the Army brass did not like it. Even as a tactician, he did not display good military acumen. It was during his time that Sopore became a fortress for militants and mercenaries. Main finances of militants came from Sopore. It goes to the credit of BSF that it launched a decisive campaign to flush out terrorists from Sopore.

Lack of a clear counter-insurgency doctrine induced a strange psychology. Troops and the commanders became obsessed with survival of self and the unit and finishing tenure without any controversy. They concentrated on safe passage for convoys, not leaving adequate troops for counter-insurgency deployment. Two divisions were reserved for 'Road Opening Party'. The Army became 'Road Masters' or 'Road Marshals'. How was it possible that during the day Army would act as 'ROP' and launch counter-insurgency operations at night? There were hardly any troops left for conducting counter-insurgency.

This was the time when militancy was cent percent indigenous. Militants were not battle-hardened nor were they tactically sound. Their training was inadequate and militants were also less motivated. Had there been vision to evolve a counter-insurgency doctrine, Army could have launched a no holds barred campaign to smash the militancy, decimate the leadership and the cadre. Other duties could have been relegated to BSF or the CRPF. Teeth of the militancy could have been taken out. Blunders at the combat level did not go amiss by senior army commanders. General Madan rightly describes the period from January 1990 to till end of 1993 as "*one of the wasted efforts*". He notes.

"The Higher Hqs at Delhi or Udhampur had no clue on how to handle matters and the higher Hqs at Srinagar spent its time carrying out small unit operations rather than ensuring that a proper atmosphere was created in order to give the psychological space for manoeuvre to the cutting edge i.e. the fighting units to enable them to carry out their operations more aggressively and in a proactive manner".

At the militancy level no two insurgency can be dealt within an identical manner. The approach by the armed forces will depend on the nature of the causes, vulnerabilities of the militants and the people supporting them, levels of militarisation achieved by the insurgents, access to and nature of foreign support and the availability of sound intelligence. *In 1990-93 Army leadership did not till inducting troops understand about genesis of the problem, local psyche of the people and modus operandi of militants in a particular area.*

Shift to Rural Areas:

Kashmir terrorist movement initially started as an urban insurgency. Two of the most disastrous results of this period of military muddle were that militancy was allowed to spread from urban to rural areas. Had correction at the appropriate military level been taken to control the towns, known drills to isolate them from the countryside put into practice, it is more in than likely that the problem would have remained confined to a few towns and within certain specific areas inside them. The other fallout of bad planning at combat level and sloppy psychological efforts was delivery of neutral or uncommitted population to militants. Was Army leadership so naive as not to appreciate what was good for winning the war in Kashmir? *“Suggestions on all these aspects were made and well in time. They were ignored due to personal biases, lack of conviction and sheer lack of military acumen”*, laments a former General.

Pir Pansal Control:

By the time the Army leadership realised what had gone wrong it was too late. Pakistan had begun inducting battle-hardened mercenaries and gained direct control of all terrorist groups. Section, Flatoon and Battalion “commanders” were all Pakistanis. It was at this stage that it dawned on Army to do something.

With induction of foreign mercenaries, there was better professionalism and quality of combat was upgraded. To blunt the new strategies of the Army, terrorists decided to force dispersal of army by occupying Pir Pansal line in Doda, Rajouri and Udhampur districts. Terrorists’ objective was to dominate inhospitable terrain and gain automatic edge over the Valley by drawing Army to fight in this terrain. Army strategists did not appreciate it.

Army had options to foil this design by denying the terrorists hideouts and gain control of this strategic region. This was possible through sending long range patrols (which they are doing now), aerial reconnaissance and dominating the routes. One brigade strength of soldiers was enough to achieve this objective. With terrorists having dug deep, now even one division strength is insufficient to meet this task.

Fallout of allowing terrorists to dominate Pir Pansal region was something the political and military cost of which was quite heavy. It forced dispersal of Army over a large and inhospitable area. Pakistan gained propaganda mileage that whole of J&K was up in arms. Srinagar-Jammu national highway became insecure and more troops were needed for road opening. Ethnic-cleansing campaigns of non-Muslims started in these Muslim-majority districts and Cis-trans Chenab belt came under terrorist campaign. Political conspiracies to delink Doda via ‘Greater Muslim Kashmir Plan’, ‘Kathwari Plan’ or ‘Regional Autonomy Report’ were hatched with strong repercussions for national security .

Failure to deny the hideout to terrorists kept routes of ‘infiltration and ex-filtration in Pir Pansal open. Heavy infestation of militants in Anantnag district is fallout of this. Helicopters were not used to flush out mercenaries. Naive arguments were put forth that this will embarrass India internationally. At times it was said that the decision was put on hold either because Prime Minister had to speak in the UN or Geneva session was on. The truth, however, remains that it was never in their scheme of things. All this because it was said too often that Kashmir was essentially a political problem and army’s role was to bring down violence to a level where political dialogue can start. This made mincemeat of our counter-insurgency strategy. Talking too often that Kashmir was a political problem sent wrong signals. The terrorists interpreted this as a sign of army fatigue.

Army also did not launch ‘seek and destroy’ operations in most of the terrorist infested areas and pursued policy of ‘recovery without losses’ in areas of inhospitable terrain. The large concentration of mercenaries in Lolab Valley, Ganderbal-belt, Aru-Pahalgam, Kokernag, Traal in Kashmir valley in itself suggests that ‘seek and destroy’ operations should have been launched long back.

Miscellaneous areas:

A) Tasking problem of Troops: Results could not be qualified because there was no clarity about the tasks. Seizure of Weapons became the yardstick to please politicians. Tasking should have been in terms of controlling infiltration, denying hideouts, eliminating support structures rather than terrorists only.

Army failed to built upon large-scale excesses of terrorists on Kashmiri Muslims. Counter-insurgency battle had to be waged not only on tactical front but also on psychological front. Army could have published these excesses as a matter of policy and won over the victims through rehabilitation scheme.

B) Intelligence gathering: There was virtually total collapse of intelligence in the wake of insurgency in Kashmir. The reasons were drying up of border intelligence. Army and paramilitary forces had to rebuild it from scratch, initially from captured terrorists. Intelligence gathering continues to remain hampered due to non-protection of sources and their families, lack of adequate finance for sources, and absence of policy border management. Some damage was also caused by the politicians who had no qualms of conscience in indulging in populism on crucial security policies. Removal of Ashok Patel, who knew Kashmir like his palm at a crucial time was a monumental blunder.

C) Counter-Insurgent Groups: Till 1994 raising of these groups was not possible because there was no committed cadre available for counter-insurgency. It started when many of the militants got disillusioned due to criminalisation of militancy and inter-group rivalries. Use of renegade militants could not be harnessed to the optimum because army had little say in group recruitment. No proper screening was done. Antecedents were not verified before recruitment. Many of the active militants got recruited. These counter-insurgents had free access to arms, including service weapons. In 1996 in Kangan these militants decamped with weapons including LMG and provided intelligence inputs to ISI. Lapse was that army had allowed them to read their routine.

For proper running of these counter-insurgent groups, unity of command was desirable. The role of these groups could have been restricted to intelligence gathering. In the management of counter-insurgent groups there was absence of uniformity of orders and higher orders were never passed down. Everybody wanted to retain them on their side. Whenever these ex-militants looted Pandits' property, forest wealth engaged in criminal extortions and settled personal rivalries through killings, Army did not put its foot down. All this sullied the image of Army in the eyes of the common Kashmiri. Initially there was sympathy for these militants, when they acted strong enough to liberate people from extortions by terrorists. Army did not realise that overlooking all this would create anarchy. Soon 'renegade' militancy turned counter-productive. Return of NC to power changed power equations. This eased pressure on Hizb and other terrorist groups. Counter-insurgents became soft targets. Many of them had to desert their homes along with their families. There was no policy to preserve these groups as an aid to counter-insurgency. Infact, Lt. Gen. Arjun Ray went on to claim that "recycling of militants was amoral". Airing of such views in public is definitely a bad strategy.

Another blunder was the over publicity given to counter-insurgents. It created backlash from separatists, and other mainstream political groups in Valley. Their families had to face terrorists' and public wrath. Renegades became over-dependent on Army for survival and lost basic value of intelligence gathering.

Counter-insurgents played a very useful role but could have been used better. In the initial stage it were these people who helped gather crucial intelligence. They smashed the Jamaat-Hizb infrastructure on which the terrorist movement was sustaining. It forced Jamaat Islami cadres on the run. Creating conducive atmosphere for holding 1996 assembly elections was possible solely because of the efforts of these counter-insurgent groups.

Had there been a clear perspective, counter-insurgents could have continued to play useful role. Their services could have been harnessed to build responsible intelligence network and some operations under cover. These renegade militants were misused after they were disowned in 1998. They were distributed and every party assigned them a role that suited the particular party. The two major policy blunders were assigning them a political role as a group and secondly recruitment in Police. Recruitment of these renegades in police kept alive the risk of internal subversion. Indian state has a moral responsibility to rehabilitate these people who have abdicated militancy. It should not be done in a manner that undermines the legitimacy of the state and makes these groups controversial. Stunning disclosures by Chief Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh that there was a plan to rig elections through police-surrendered militants nexus should serve as a warning on how to handle surrendered militants. Bad work done by these

renegades and the partisan use made by opportunistic politicians has brought disrepute to all the good work done by SoG and STF wings of state police.

19 Offer amnesty, revamp SOG, equip forces

By Manoj Joshi

The installation of a PDP-Congress government may have changed the political ambience of the Valley, but the threat of terrorism and insurgency is alive and kicking. Thousands of armed men belonging to a dozen organisations remain in the Valley. Some are dormant, waiting to see which way the wind is blowing. Others, like the Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Al-Badr, are ready to act at the bidding of their masters in Pakistan. How can they be neutralised?

First, offer Kashmiri militants an amnesty with a realistic rehabilitation package. This could encourage those who are dormant to surrender. Second, negotiate with Pakistan to end cross-border infiltration. This is not as farfetched as it seems since Gen. Musharraf actually committed himself to the idea in June and the result was a perceptible drop in militancy for a month or so thereafter.

Third, step up the anti-terrorist campaign in the urban areas to eliminate terrorists sheltering there. This requires good intelligence and a reconstructed Special Operations Group. The SOG, a special arm of the J&K police, has played an important role in curbing urban militancy, but their undisciplined conduct and occasional atrocities made them counter-productive.

Fourth, provide market rate compensation for people whose houses are destroyed in anti-terrorist confrontations. When the police learn of militants hiding in a house, they surround it. The confrontation usually ends with the house being destroyed, killing the militants holed up inside. The owner, who in all likelihood was coerced into sheltering the militants, merely gets Rs 1-2 lakhs as compensation. So most people facing the predicament prefer to let the militants hide there hoping they will leave soon. Informing the police is seen as the worst option since it ends up in the loss of home and hearth.

Fifth, step up operations against hardcore Pakistan jihadis sheltering in the high mountains. Typical Army troops such as the Rashtriya Rifles are not sufficiently trained or motivated to tackle these tenacious adversaries some of whom are *fidayeen* forces.

Special forces units conduct daring and difficult operations against these militants with considerable success because they are trained and have the professional confidence to operate in small groups deep in the mountains. India needs to raise two divisions of SF units if it is to sanitise the heights from which the Pakistanis have been operating for the past five years.

Sixth, raise the training standards and equipment of the police and para-military forces operating in the Valley. Better trained forces are more disciplined and less prone to committing excesses. Equipment levels are abysmal with the BSF, for example, having to make do with 20 kg bullet-proof plates instead of lighter jackets.

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