

ISBUND

NEWS, EVENTS AND
EVERYTHING IN
BETWEEN



ISBUND

A Quarterly Newsletter from Kashmiri Pandit Association of Europe



Pann Puza

From the Editor's Desk

When we launched ISBUND in 2021, we made a conscious decision not to talk politics because the ethos of this magazine was to bring the community together and politics can sometimes do quite the opposite. However, the appointment of Rishi Sunak as the first non-Christian, non-White and not to mention the youngest Prime Minister in 200 years of British history isn't just politics, it's a seismic shift in British society and how it sees itself, a historic moment that generations to come will speak of. We would like to hear your thoughts on how this societal change translates into our own lives, what this means to an average person of Indian descent. We would especially love to hear from our elderly who lived through times when it wasn't easy to be a person of colour or non-Christian faith. We also invite views from our youth, whether this makes it easier to leave our mark and to achieve that unimaginable dream or actually harder to live up to expectations. In the meantime, we wish Rishi luck and send him our very best wishes in these difficult times with the economic turmoil, war in Ukraine, cost of living crisis and a country still recovering from a pandemic.

Since Rishi took to office, his red thread or as we call it '*Naerwan*' has gained prominence in British media. One can't help but notice that it's become acceptable to wear one in public. It's even featured in school assemblies on tolerance and embracing differences. Since we are talking traditions, let's speak of one that is so close to our hearts – our very own Kashmiri *reeth* of '*pann puza*'. Legend has it, that newly grown cotton is spun into thread (*pann*) by an unmarried girl and worn around the ear by the lady of the house, who prepares '*Roth*' (pictured on the front cover) on the auspicious day of *Ganesh Chaturthi* (*Vinayaka Tsoram*) and offered to the agricultural deities, *Vibha* and *Garbha*. For the *puza*, the *pann* is tied around the neck of a vessel filled with water and the head of the family shares a story about the legend of *pann* and *Beeb garab maej*. The *Roth* or *naveed* as we call it, is then shared among family and friends.

The editors for next issue of ISBUND will be our soon to be 10 year olds, **Aria** and **Adhya**. They will reach out to you in the coming weeks and months as they put their thoughts and ideas together for the Navreh edition of ISBUND. I hope you will indulge them with your contributions and blessings as you have given us.

As we wrap up the year and begin to enjoy the festivities around us, from devouring '*Gaed batte*' (fish and rice) and celebrating '*Khaech mavas*' to Christmas, travelling to exotic destinations or just staying in the UK catching up with family and friends, do remember to rejoice, relax and rejuvenate. Prepare yourselves for a brilliant 2023.

Team ISBUND wishes you all an absolutely fabulous Christmas and a very happy new year!!!

Sheetal, Shivani and Anjan

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The Lost Glory Of Basohli Fort

Manu Khajuria

The town of Basohli, founded by Raja Bhoopat Pal in 1635 AD, is some 130 kms north east of Jammu was a very important principality amongst the 22 royal principalities of the Jammu Hills. He founded the many Palaces and forts in Basohli and his descendants Sangram Pal, Kirpal Pal, Dheeraj Pal, Medini Pal and Amrit Pal made additions to these structures from time to time. Surrounded by the Shivalik Hills with Ravi River flowing on one side, both Punjab and Himachal are its neighbours. For 400 years this principality remained under Dogra Chandravanshi Billowria Rajputs. To its west were the Ramnagar (Bandralta), Bhaderwah, Ramkot (Mankot) Jasrota principalities, Nurpur in the south and Chamba in the east. It was in 1914 that Basohli got the status of Tehsil. According to the census of 1941, Basohli had 139 villages. Over time new tehsils of Bani, Billawar and Mahanpur were carved out from the Basohli Tehsil of 1914.

The local legend goes that the Raja of Basohli constructed a ropeway connecting the palace which was on one hillock to the Mata Chanchlo Temple situated within a fort on the opposite hillock. The distance between the hillocks and the height of this ropeway were daunting. The ropeway itself was just a tight rope without any support thrown across two high hills. Knowing well that this would be impossible to cross the Raja declared that he would give away his Kingdom to anyone who would cross this ropeway.

A dancer in his court accepted this challenge and began walking across the tight rope between the two hills. When the Raja realised that the dancer was going to successfully complete the challenge, he panicked and ordered the ropes to be cut. The ropes were cut and the dancer plunged to a painful death. Before dying she cursed the Raja and said that the fort would lose its glory and all that would remain was ruins.



Basohli Fort lies in ruins today. What was once a magnificent Palace cum Fort complex perched on a hillock, and even compared to Heidelberg lies in ruins, deserted and desolate. Built over phases the Palace had three main Halls, Durbar Hall, Rang Mahal and Sheesh Mahal. The Durbar Hall was intended for public and official purpose. The beautiful additions Rang Mahal and Sheesh Mahal were made by Raja Mahinder Pal in 1782 AD. These complexes were decorated with frescoes and mural painting of Lord Krishna and Gopis, of Nayaka and Nayikas. The design of the Palace was such that during summers the walls of the palace became cool and the technology used to achieve this was based on the principle of evaporation. A network of pipes ran through the walls of the structure. Water was run through them and the evaporation made the rooms cool. To keep the rooms warm in winters hot water was made to run through the same pipes.



The Basohli Palace cum Fort complex was a specimen of such architectural marvel that it attracted international travellers and the French traveller Vigne who visited Basohli in 1835-39 described the town and the palace as " Basohli contains a large and good looking bazaar, and the palace would hardly as far as I could judge, be worth of traveller's notice, were it not for the baronial appearance of the palace of the old Rajas, which I thought the very finest building of the kind I had seen in the East. And I think the grandeur of the Palace not inferior to that of Heidelberg." From travellers accounts it is clear that the condition of the Palace complex was good till the first half of the 19th century. During the reign of Raja Bhupinder Pal 1813-1834 AD, Basohli state was attacked by the Sikhs several times and in these attacks the Basohli fort cum palace was damaged and weakened.



By various accounts some portions of the structure of the fort and palace complex was lost by mid 1930s. There was no Rang Mahal by 1936 and more was lost in the consequent years due to the apathy of the successive state governments towards the history and heritage of the Jammu Region. The ruins of the Basohli Fort also known as Jalakadi meaning heart of the town, still has a magnetic pull. A walk amongst Palace walls which stand proud, refusing to give in to the ravages of time, state apathy, and a woman's curse seem to be whispering stories of an era gone by. A walk through what is literally a haunting history is unmissable.



Manu Khajuria Singh is the author of the recently published book '***Mountain Goddesses***' - *Finding feminine power from an unexpected place.*



Basohli Ranjit Sagar



Challenges? Let's engineer the hell out of them!

Piyush Kaul

"Every great and deep difficulty bears in itself its own solution. It forces us to change our thinking to find it" -- Niels Bohr.

My life till now has been a course on taking on challenges voluntarily or involuntarily and working on a solution for these challenges using my engineering abilities. Analyzing and solving problems has been a cornerstone of my life since I started understanding the world around me. Even though my parents, grandparents, and forefathers came from the land of Rishis, Kashmir, I began my life in the city of Jammu after migration in 1990. I saw my grandparents put into unfamiliar situations and being asked to solve problems not just in their professional lives

but also in their personal lives. Migration uprooted an entire community from their homes to places they had to rebuild, which seemed like an impossible challenge. Their ability to understand and solve problems irrespective of the odds against them impacted my understanding of the importance of self-independence. It instilled a sense of problem-solving from a young age. It is essential to have exposure to a broader worldview to enhance your understanding of the world and prepare yourself for the upcoming challenges. During my teenage years, my parents made sure I could explore the world without traveling, but in the form of books, encyclopaedias, documentaries, and magazines. I am thankful to my parents because they helped develop my independent thought process, irrespective of what was happening around them. This upbringing exposed me to the achievements of scientists worldwide and inspired me to follow the path toward becoming a scientist. Furthermore, during my school years, I participated not just in academics but in sports and cultural activities, making me the holistic person I am today. I credit this achievement to my parents, who could identify my energy during those years and put it in helpful directions.

My undergraduate study had a tremendous influence on who I am today. I interacted with many people from different cultures in India and understood for the first time what it means to be so similar yet different. During this study, I understood that differences between individuals could be a strength instead of a weakness. During this period, I met my wife, and we started something which blossomed into a beautiful life we are living together. The undergraduate period was responsible for piquing my interest in the field of semiconductors and electronics, which was to some extent inspired by the impact of a transistor on the technology development we see around us.



Progress in life is not just about moving forward and learning new things. It is also about sometimes leaving something behind. Death is a road we all must accept as we progress in life. The impact death of a loved one has on your development must be considered when I talk about my journey thus far. I saw my mother suffer from various ailments during my teenage years, which she succumbed to later. These challenges thrown in your way by life's unpredictability bring out the learnings on handling such scenarios. I learned an essential lesson on resilience towards extreme challenges and the ability to understand and accept the reality of life and death. However, we must move forward. After working for an upcoming technology company in Bengaluru, I felt professionally unsatisfied. I was missing the exhilaration you get after analyzing and solving engineering problems after working for three years. With this dissatisfaction and the discussion with my wife about taking up a new challenge together, we decided to move to the Netherlands. This move would change a lot of things. Not only did we choose to improve our skills by doing post-graduation together, but we also decided to marry each other and start a new life in a different country, culture, and amongst different people.

Adapting and moving to a different country requires tremendous effort, especially when pursuing higher education at the Eindhoven University of Technology, NL. My wife and I had to adapt to a new way of studying as the curriculum was challenging, and the education system was implemented differently than the Indian education system. This taught me the value of the ability to strive harder to achieve the objective of completing my graduation. While studying in NL, I realized that my motivation to work in the field of electronics design comes from the fact that I could see the impact technological development has had on improving our daily lives in terms of health, safety, and being connected with loved ones. This motivation drove me to pursue my doctoral dissertation in the multi-disciplinary field of electronics for wireless communication. Doing a Ph.D. is the biggest challenge I have faced in my life so far. The pursuit required a lot of sacrifices and a lot of ups and downs. This process taught me to take failure as a learning goal instead of a negative aspect of life. Furthermore, this process has taught me the value of enjoying learning. As the Dutch say, everyone must learn, and there is no age not to learn. This mantra is something I have decided to introduce in my life and has helped me to have a curious outlook on this world. As I went deeper into the world of research and education, I became closer to what my grandparents used to do professionally. I looked at the academic world as a logical extension of my professional career, and I decided to continue as a post-doctoral researcher in the new field of Terahertz technology for imaging and spectroscopy. I work with renowned scientific community members, making every workday exciting as I do not know what ideas/discussions to expect.

It is crucial to balance professional life with equal development in personal life. The learnings in both aspects must be inter-changeable. Sports are one such method to create this balance. I believe sports can play a huge role in developing mental and physical capabilities, which are helpful in our daily lives. Whether it is cycling the entire coastline of NL or playing in a tennis tournament, I feel sports is an excellent way to process my thoughts and introspect on the learnings.

The values and learnings my grandparents and parents have embedded in me have laid the foundation for me to build my life ahead. With my partner and her learnings, I can envision a combined future on the professional and the personal front. I reiterate my statement that there is still a lot to learn and still a lot to be curious about in this world. In conclusion, I am grateful that I could achieve my childhood dream of becoming a scientist, and I am thankful to my wife, parents, siblings, and grandparents for being a part of that process.

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.” – J. R. R. Tolkien.

Piyush works as a post-doctoral researcher with the Integrated Circuits group in the Department of Electrical Engineering at the Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands.

Being Kashmiri in the Modern Era

Cocoa Mudgal

Despite living in England for almost all my life, the memories which I hold closest to my heart are growing up with my grandparents in their beautiful house in Jammu; I can map every room of it so clearly in my mind's eye, and the thought of picking lemons in the garden or eating buttery tsot on the table or running around the dusty roof is enough to bring fond tears to my eyes in seconds to this day. I don't think I will ever find a home like it, and sometimes it feels like I might spend my whole life missing it.

I have always been in love with the idea of being a Kashmiri because I have always associated it so strongly with my grandparents, and their strength and generosity and beauty. For me, being a Kashmiri for a long time was simply a series of beautiful images in my mind that I didn't really understand; my mother's description of her walnut-wood panelled house she left behind years ago, hazy memories of devouring dish after dish on a hard wooden floor, distant fields of sapphire blue and saffron orange, the intricate embroidery on the curtains in my house that I have traced my fingers over a thousand times, a lilting language that feels so familiar to my ears but clunky and awkward in my mouth. My identity as a Kashmiri was nothing but a distant and fond dream to me in this way, until my first visit to Srinagar when I was eighteen, the first time I began to realise that it was more serious than I thought.

I had always been aware of the political situation, but in my naivety preferred to daydream about the art and poetry that I thought was my cultural inheritance. How could something so beautiful be bad? Being treated with disgust and disdain and feeling fear in a place that I thought would feel like home showed me there was something I had chosen not to see before, that there was a heavy dose of pain to being Kashmiri. The final nail in the coffin for me was watching the Kashmir Files, which has been heavily criticised at my university by many individuals, who viewed it as a piece of inelegant propaganda. For me personally, to see such brutal and heart wrenching violence against my own people reduced to intellectual debate from my peers whom I felt could barely even point out Kashmir on a map was infuriating and beyond confusing. When I had watched the film, every gunshot had felt like a slap in the face to what I thought Kashmir was; I was confronted again with my own blindness and stupidity to the harsh reality that I had been sheltered from. All the things I had not understood began to fall into place, and I didn't like the complete image that they made.

For a long time, I was unsure of what to think. Being so proud to be a Kashmiri had been a central tenet of my identity, and now I was no longer certain of what that meant to me. Was it being an artist or was it being an oppressed exile? Was it beauty and harmony or inescapable conflict? I have now begun to reconcile the two in my mind in some way; just because there is so much darkness and heaviness to being a part of this it does not mean that cannot be shouldered.

I have begun to delve deeper to understand how being Kashmiri can encompass all these things and have encountered the poetry of Lal Ded, a woman who left an unmistakeable mark on the psyche of Kashmiris and struck a blow at the patriarchy and repressive society in which she lived as early as the fourteenth century. Her poetry was deceptively simple and utilised ordinary imagery that appealed to the common man, yet she had the strength to not shy away from the harsh reality of the human condition, exploring emotions and states such as anger, poverty and disillusionment with the world. Her teachings are universal, and ultimately she advocates looking deep into oneself and espouses the idea of mysticism, which means to merge with pure consciousness, which resides deep within us. Many of her phrases were preserved by word of mouth by the people of Kashmir for a long time, meaning they are heavily entrenched in the Kashmiri culture and language. Mysticism is also taught in many traditions across India, showing Lal Ded is as Indic as she is deeply Kashmiri, and showing how the history and tradition of Kashmir is intertwined with the rest of India. Whilst I think it is important to avoid falling into the reductionist trap of twisting Lal Ded's poetry to any agenda, it has shown me something about how to deal with hurt and frustration, how to stay true to oneself in the face of adversity, how to reconcile the complexity of the human condition, and speaking out against oppression and injustice even when your truth is inconvenient to others. She says:

***“Let people abuse and taunt me!
Or let them shower petals in adoration!
Nothing affects me / I am pure consciousness!***

***Only when I can withstand censure
Will my inhibitions break down
Let my pride be torn asunder!***

Let not attacks bother me!”

My passion for being a Kashmiri is renewed, only this time with a greater acceptance and understanding of all the harshness and gravity that entails, and I have been inspired to develop the self-awareness and fortitude to look within and try and overcome violence and turmoil.

At the Despatch Box

Kashmea Wahi

Youth MP, Harrow



This Friday (November 4, 2022) I had the honour to step up to the despatch box at the House of Commons and represent the youth voice on the topic of the Cost of Living Crisis.

It was an absolutely surreal experience and I could not be more grateful to open the debate on such a critical topic. (The best way to celebrate my first day of being 18). To be one of the handful of non-MPs to speak at the despatch box is a moment that will stay with me for life.

I'm also proud to announce that the over 150 MYPS voted in support of the Cost of Living crisis, making it the national campaign of the UK Youth Parliament. At the moment, there is no more pressing issue than ensuring our people can afford to live.

I have been working alongside Go Dharmic to increase their number of food distributions, to help meet the growing demand. These distributions are absolutely critical for thousands of people across the country, however there is no denying that more needs to be done by the government, and it needs to be done now.

Thank you to UK Youth Parliament for giving me this opportunity and to all those who trusted me and elected me to represent their voice.

The speech can be accessed at the following link (<https://youtu.be/r2wP8TnIESY>) and a transcript is provided below.

Transcript of the Speech

Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker.

‘The cost-of-living crisis’.

It is a term that has been featured in every headline, every news article, and has been politicised relentlessly. But for millions of us this is not just a headline. It is a harsh reality faced day in and day out.

The fact that there are people in this country who are uncertain as to where they are going to find their next meal is simply unacceptable.

In 2020-21, 4.2 million people (6%) were living in food poverty.¹

In April 2022, 15.5% of UK households ate less, or went a day without eating because they couldn’t afford food.¹

If these statistics weren’t concerning enough, Britain has had to resort to opening warm banks as temperatures plummet this winter. These warm banks are heated buildings where people who cannot afford to heat their homes are able to visit, to get a few moments of comfort.

These measures, although incredibly necessary, mark a desperate state of crisis in the UK and as in many crises as such, it is our most vulnerable who suffer the most.

My friends, we are here today to ensure that the youth voice is heard. Our generation must not suffer in silence as politicians prioritise corporate interests over the 2.5 million children living in food poverty.² This Government has enabled energy companies to report record-breaking profits whilst families are forced to choose between heating their homes and feeding their children.

There is no justification, no priority greater than combatting this gross deprivation of a basic human right. The right to survive.

This is not the time to stand idly by, it is the time to act, to campaign and to lobby to ensure that our children do not have to go to sleep hungry or cold. We say that our children are our future, but then why do we continue to fail them, to not provide them with the most basic of necessities, a good meal and a warm home.

References:

1. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9209/>
2. <https://post.parliament.uk/event-summary-food-insecurity-and-childrens-health/>

From Being a Dentist to an Educational Counsellor

Anuradha Kaul

Namaskar Saarney I am Anu from Karan Nagar Srinagar. I have been in Angrez land since last 21 years. I live in Lancaster with my family. I support students through their journey to University from Year 12 onwards in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and not forgetting overseas students from motherland who want to study or work after graduating from home country.

I help with guidance to medical schools, personal statement UCAT, BMAT and the interviews .

I have lead a long and distinguished career as a dentist and healthcare professional in the NHS. My friends and colleagues have always been struck by my passion and intensity. I have always looked to push things a step further and take them to the best place they can go. This is channeled wonderfully into tutoring. My professional journey as a mentor/tutor started in the year 2018 when my daughter started her UCAT journey. I was very much excited and involved, and used my expertise and knowledge to guide her. She achieved brilliant UCAT and BMAT scores and won four places at top medical schools, ultimately choosing to read Medicine at Oxford. She suggested to me that my journey should continue and not end here, as I have a lot to offer students and much to learn from them as well. I took the advice on board and got some flyers ready and started coaching kids of my friends. Neighbours and colleagues kids who were preparing for medicine and dentistry joined too. It was a great experience. I have learnt so much about myself and grown as a person and tutor I have also had the pleasure of tutoring students in various top coaching academies of the UK.

My students have achieved all their hopes and dreams, and gave me wonderful feedback, making tutoring incredibly rewarding. As my journey progressed, like minded colleagues joined me and now we are an established family of committed and passionate tutors. We do not only help students get the best offers and the best UCAT and BMAT scores but. contribute to their personal growth, enhance their personality and sharpen their personal and educational skills, allowing them to reach their full and unhindered potential

I would like to invite all parents and students who would be joining the queue in future to come up with their queries and I would be delighted to provide any help suggestions to secure our kids career choices and a safe future for our Kp community 🙏.



Women in Technology

Archana Tikoo

Tell us about your role at QBE

I am a Principal Technologist at QBE. I work with teams to ensure we're delivering the required value to our customer base effectively and efficiently. I'm constantly looking for ways to improve how we do this, be they procedural, technical or capability related. I also liaise with our business teams regularly whilst guiding and coaching technical members of my team. Having a great team is really crucial to how well we support our customers, so I'm always there for them to help them do their job as well as they can.

What is your career background?

Technology and computers have intrigued me for a long time - so much so, I did my Masters in Computer Science! From there, I started my career as a software developer for a couple of years before moving into leading an IT Service Team. I worked in application delivery in a number of organisations before moving to QBE 5 years ago as an Application Manager. Since then my role has grown into my current position as the needs of the organisation have changed, and my area has become more critical.

What is it like working in tech at QBE?

Working at QBE in tech has been one of the best parts of my career. I can directly influence how we work in technology services and clearly envision how our work aligns to the global strategy. My understanding of the landscape enables me to influence the technical strategy, which is really exciting, especially when I see it becoming a reality. Yes, there are challenges and negotiations that I have to manage, but I also get to innovate and experiment. All of this gives me exposure and empowerment as I know I'm making a difference to the organisation.

I am also one of the core members of the Women in Tech Group in QBE EO, which is a group who meets regularly with the aim to connect, share, inspire and support women working within QBE's EO Change & Technology Service teams. We are a positive group of individuals who are passionate about making the best of our opportunities within QBE and the wider world.



What's been the most rewarding project you have been a part of?

It would have to be the underwriting workbench program where QBE introduced and implemented Pega as a system for underwriters to help them manage data quality and workflow in one system. This operating model has now been adopted by various technical teams in QBE.

What excites you most about your role?

I am empowered to make strategic recommendations; I know that what I do has an impact on QBE's ongoing development, and my actions do improve service delivery.

Spirituality in Nature or Spiritual by Nature: God's Creation or God in Creation

Rekha Tukra

Every day hollering sea at the crack of dawn implores me to step out onto esplanade towards the beach to submerge into its turquoise salty water barefoot, knee deep serenaded by softly crashing foamy tides in sync with seagull's squawking sounds nature's natural music therapy.

As though effulgent sea is hankered to listen to me and I serenely listening to it, when gently water covered me completely. Momentarily I felt weightless, dually one obviously by buoyant force and probably another what weighed heavily on my mind also got immersed in it.

When I was peering at nearby scores of early bird boaters, sailors at the helm navigating to far with boats raft up with other boats, small ships cruising to far happily singing shanties, it suddenly reminded me one chant of my grandmother which repeatedly played in my ears and head, I replay it humming "*Bhavsagarus Dizhem Tar...*"

Multiple times it reverberated in my mind and I remember how in our household generally our elders would on many occasions with a sigh exhaling uttering "*Bhavsagarus Dizhem Tar*" took casually then, hardly elicited deep meaning it signified but now today on diligently delving I can divulge with iteration how our earthly life '*Samsara*' personified as devout ocean and our Gurus, Gods as oarsmen should lead us towards spiritual salvation when we embark on the boat help us to cross our boat to moor it at harbour apparently pave the way to attain inner realisation, enlightenment and eternal peace.

Moment of Truth:

My mind wanders off onto cliffs and downhill with cascade of emotions wondering inundated, probably reflecting on memories, hence for instance introspecting why, besides having idyllic life surrounded by all the worldly comforts, luxuries, and abundance of accumulated wealth, living fast paced high-tech lifestyle, greedily to advance in life we have turned into social climber, constant expectations, desires are bane of our lives.

Even though having plethora of reasons to be happy on the contrary you start totally loathing your mechanical, monotonous routine mundane life therefore it misses zing nothing to perk up you still thus far can't fill the void, midst of it we forget we lack modesty to be bare minimalist believer in necessities and sufficiency.

Taking cognisance of this discontentment and frustration you start evaluating the option to escape from own created facade and this complicated life then it gets to this point when it is a turning point how to give life a meaning as though catapulting me to other side of vale, caves, rivers, and mountains of nature's spiritual sanctuary.

It was worthwhile to ponder as it instantly prompted me either to permanently forsake or likelihood of renouncing imminently, apparently become spiritual traveller to find inner peace in seclusion.

Spiritual Tourism: Our "Reish Waer"

Kashmir: Excitement ramped up sequentially imagining to getaway to gateway of Garden of Sages, "*Reish Waer*" land where nature and nurturer himself "*Svayambhu*" blessed the soil made it sacred where Spiritual reality pervading in all aspects what is eternal and real.

It is imperative to understand the chronology it will enable to cement proof of Gods, Demigods who descended and those Kings, Monks, Sages, Scholars and Spiritual tourists validate the significance of place for austerities and attain spiritual wisdom.

Fact of the matter, it is the land that derived its name by sage Rishi Kashyap, Lord Krishna blessed vale by visiting for coronation of Kashmiri queen Yasovati. The Pandvas also had their footfall in vale evidence and ruins suggest so as the name of site goes by “Pandav lare”. The great emperor Ashoka made frequent trips to Kashmir valley; spiritual scholar Swami Vivekananda twice visited Kashmir.

Hamlet, Hermit, Holistic, Hymn and Hari:

Like birds soaring high in azure sky gliding, manoeuvring over luminous sea braving to dive into it momentarily to cleanse then abruptly fleet likewise, I have burning desire to dive into real Vitasta or Ganges river confluence amalgamating with ocean of spirituality to take spiritual bath for brief period to purify my body, mind, and soul.

The H₂O though symbol but natural element of nature in physical form has intrinsically relation with water inside us connecting to physical body elements with physical world's nature's elements further with meditations reach higher cosmic elements of light ultimate reality. So is why we pray near all water natural sources.

Natural Springs and A Hermit:

Gulmarg Potato Seed Multiplication Farm: The below description illustrates an incredible inspirational true story of a Western tourist turned recluse into solemnly spiritual person.

During early eighties when my father, Deputy Director formerly was posted to district Baramulla, overseeing for agricultural and horticulture Dept., Tang Marg jurisdiction and Gulmarg Potato Seed Multiplication Farm, this Farm is nestled on terraced slope green grassy hill on high altitude extending swathes of farmland for cultivation and for terraced farming to whole stretch so far, your eyes can see.

Interestingly, this westerner tourist was so bewitched and moved by spectacular landscape especially natural water springs on top of the mid hill plus its tall pine and fir trees on the brow near summit which compelled him to forsake thereafter he never returned to his native country instead made this hillside his abode,

where it is said this foreigner turned into yogi to meditate in midst of nature, jungle, calm and quiet in solitude essentially to satiate his ignited spiritual curiosity.

He manually levelled acre of slope into flat area, himself meticulously designed and built a big wooden log house with forest wood material consisting of exposed beams high ceiling also all outer walls boarded with wooden planks, did he use other human resources which is debatable as remains unknown.

His carved in italics “Leopard’s Den” on wooden name plate on the main entrance of lodge on veranda was till date visible from far, there was an old-style big gong thereby suspended from veranda beam with striker still functioning properly and which he had installed.

Meditation Deck:

This interior of wooden cottage till date seemed impeccable, comprised several specious rooms, store, and separate pantry in outhouse in back garden surprisingly it still was in ship shape so had the original character remained till intact.

Therefrom while taking a tour, eventually on backside of cottage house we discovered elevated protruded deck area, our chef Mr. Amsheikh AKA ‘khuda Dost’ who had mystic power himself was entrusted to tour guide narrated us how this wooden deck this westerner hermit utilised for his daily meditation further adjacent overlooking were garden beds blooming with variety of all perennial flower’s kaleidoscope beyond.

Natural springs:

Simply were awestruck when Mr Amsheikh showed us five natural water springs formed at different heights and levels on mid, upper hill, two springs had crystal plain still water and other two had milky aqua colour water, fifth one on the top hill sprouting bubbly Smokey water but not flowing, there was popular widespread myth while travelling through this starch of land Saint Babarshi had dig hole with his stick on these spots consequently these water springs had erupted.

Henceforth for that reason no one was permitted to wash their feet or utensil as it was considered entirely very pious, holly somehow.

From foothill you can trudge on zigzagging trail to intersecting grassy hill with wildflower meadows with daisies, dog flower, blue bell, lavender etc in between using narrow few steps of slate stones blocks leading to cottage. Enroute, we plucked cheery, crunchy pink apples from few trees that grew in the premises it was joy to enjoy lot of apricots too.

Bael Patra:

Later, on another day whilst trekking through slightly steep dense woody forest, saw loads of conifers cones on moist soil intertwined with the thick pungent fragrance reaching to us from hilltop, although unprepared but excited to see such mystified ethereal beauty, we plainly were bowled over by treasure trove which was hidden from our eyes so far now been revealed, considered it quintessential to see God Shiva's favourite offering leaves to worship him.

The hillside was carpeted infinitely with evocative aromatic "Bael Patra" green Bilva leaves, shrubs with enormous scent engulfing hill. We all kids hurriedly plucked Bael leaves filled in bags as souvenirs so to retreat safely back to our guest house lodge because of fear of wild animals like Lions and Bears which were sighted by hikers roaming on peak top hill.

It remained bothering us forever specifically how this westerner hermit evaded encounter with wild animals while living in solitariness and tranquillity, just speculating may be animals realised his spiritual power so never harmed him.

After our whole family returned home from unforgettable trip of "Gulmarg Potato Farm" afterwards we distributed all the bags full of "Bael Patra" to our next-door neighbour whose son's Yagnopavit ceremony was in coming days of summer of 1981.

To be continued.....

Rekha Tukra

Maximising Your Weekends?

Krishna Zutshi

(A Techie Traveller)

One of the reasons, working professionals can't travel much for leisure is the limited number of annual days off. Vacation does not necessarily have to be a week or more long. So why wait for that week off work when you have the whole weekend to travel, to explore, to venture out in the unknown!

Then why don't we maximise our weekends? The response I have got most from friends and family is this misconception that travel is expensive, and a weekend is too short. I am a firm believer that travel can be adapted to suit your wallet and we can make the most of the little time we have. We can still find cheap flights, book an affordable bed and breakfast and explore. Even with a demanding job, a growing family I feel we can sneak in a short trip over the weekends. Some of you may be thinking that I am a bachelor, mostly travelling solo but I think short family trips even with kids and babies are manageable and perhaps even more enjoyable.

I know 2020-2021 has been tough for travel due to COVID restrictions and limitations. But now that the pandemic is almost over, let's not let the difficult memories discourage our travel plans in 2023. There are loads of benefits of travelling, but here I will be sharing only my experiences. Travelling has changed me both physically as well as psychologically. It has brought in me a great transformation resulting in self-realisation and a sense of eternal bliss. Travelling for me is no less than meditation.



Improves Health

Working long hours during the week, running errands used to mentally exhaust me. So I decided to take a break from the mundane, so called 'normal' 'chaotic week and started giving myself the time and space to breathe, relax and rejuvenate. It helped reduce my stress levels, lowering my risk of developing any stress related health issues in future. As a working professional I used to sit on a chair all day long at the workplace, attending meetings and coding all day. I started feeling lethargic but when I started travelling on weekends, I am more energetic and productive all week long.

Stretch your Annual Time off

So how does one maximise on vacation time without taking much time off work? The answer is quite simple "Weekend Gateways". Take advantage of your weekends, go on a short break, and still have enough annual leave left for those longer holidays, to visit family or to explore those far away destination.

Social Media Detox/ Monotonous Routine of Daily Life

Let's be honest here, we all spend a great deal of time on social media. We have all developed this attachment to social media apps that our lives revolve around them. I must admit, I am glued to them myself, posting snippets of my travel diaries all the time. Social media has kept us connected to our



loved ones, to our friends and families far and near and sometimes this relationship can be toxic too. So, it's very important to delink ourselves from this digital world, to hit the reset button, to reconnect with yourself and the real world. And while you are at it, detoxing yourself off the virtual work, remember to log off from your work devices too and bring a true balance to the work-life equation. Reset the pause button and truly let yourself lose. As our kids drive us mad, remember we drive them to equal insanity with our crazy work ethics. So, step back, travel and enjoy the ride.

It Makes You Smarter

Over the last 2 months I have travelled to 10 countries. I have added new words in different languages to my vocabulary and learned a lot more about myself. Every time I visit a new country, I get to learn amazing cultural facts. I meet people from different countries, interact with them, listen to their stories, their good and bad experiences, and imbibe their positive characteristic features. I have realised that this has enriched me and is helping me make better

and smarter decisions in both personal and professional life. While travelling we might run into challenging situations where we must be resourceful and think differently, this brings out the already existing set of skills within us that had remained unexplored due to our unawareness about the same.

Getting More Attention and It Makes You More Interesting

We are all conversationalist at heart and to have few stories from places you have visited to share at dinner parties is likely to get you much attention. When I am back from my trips, my friends, family and colleagues alike are curious to know more about the places I have been to. Your travel stories motivate them to travel to those places, and sharing your experiences of new places brings a new perspective to their outlook.

You feel like an Adventurer

Travelling especially hiking makes you a daring person. Daring doesn't mean risking your life and limb every time you take a chance. It sometimes means being a little braver, trying to push your limits, stepping out of your comfort zone, and embracing that attitude of 'I can do it'.

I remember the time when I was planning my first ever trek to Kheer Ganga in India. I was in a dilemma whether I should go or not, because at the time I wasn't sure if I will be able to complete it, if it was a big mistake to begin with. Failures are important in life because they make you realise the true value of success. I am glad, I took the decision to go on that trek. It was hard for me as it was my first ever trek, I was only to complete around 70% but I assured myself that soon I will be able to tell myself 'I can do it'. Happy to share that a few years later, I am now a professional trekker and have a long list of high-altitude treks to my name including Umasi La Paas, Gandhari (India, 16000 ft), Ben Nevis (the UK's highest peak), Piz-Gloria (Switzerland), Giant's Causeway (Ireland) to name a few. So be adventurous and don't shy from those daring ideas and taste the success.



It makes you love your home even more

The magical thing about home is that it feels good when you are leaving and feels even better to come back to. When you are back, it may seem that you are back to where you started, to the same place, same problems, and same people, but one thing is different. You are not the same now, you have a better attitude, richer experiences, lots of stories to tell and newer ideas to deal with whatever life throws at you.

Try amazing authentic food

I am a big foodie and a pretty good chef too. I bet you are one hell of a chef yourself and all your home cooked meals are delicious, but it's always good trying the local delicacies of places you haven't been to before. Trying local food in a new country is completely a new experience. I recently visited Eze village in France. It's one of the most beautiful villages I have ever been to in Europe. I thoroughly enjoyed the local Christmas drink, only available in the village, so unless you travel there you won't get to taste it.

While traveling you can also promote your authentic dishes. Being a Kashmiri Pandit I always love having and cooking authentic Kashmiri dishes like Rogan josh, Yakhni and many more. The best thing about Kashmiri dishes is it very easy to cook with minimal ingredients and less complicated process. It's all about the authentic spices. I always carry these spices in my backpack whenever I am travelling. If I am staying at hostels with access to a Kitchen, I tend to cook some Kashmiri dishes and share with other travellers. The dishes have always been relished with a promise of visiting Jammu and Kashmir whenever they visit India. This is how I promote my culture and cuisine while travelling and I am pretty much sure you all can do it.

Create Lifelong memories

When a memory pops up on my phone or when I look back at good times, I recall fun times I had during my weekend trips. It may not be a grand event, but the experience is out of the ordinary. I urge you all to pack a backpack and travel to places near and far, as much as you can in 2023. Happy new year.



The Lost Thing

Aria Raina Kumar

All sorts of misplaced marvels scampered, slithered, or stampeded around the misaligned paradise. The Lost thing gazed at what was happening before his astonished eyes. One of the many interesting objects that were laid in front his eyes was a silver statue with tinged edges, by a sunny yellow machine which was shimmering brightly in the vibrant summer sun.

Before the Lost thing could move his large bold red body any further, he was whipped away by a pineapple-coloured cardboard box-shaped bot. The Lost thing could not even ask where he was. The Lost thing found himself to be inside a sort of den made out of a collection of old rusty scraps of metal collaged to form a very basic shelter with a random blue door. The Lost thing was confused this misaligned paradise filled with misplaced marvels was crazy enough and now he had no idea what he was about to experience. Thinking he was about to be killed, the Lost thing decided to explore his surroundings.

Inside the fort the Lost thing stared at the bot rolling forwards and backwards, left and right, rapidly until,

“Hi, I’m Wheels”, Wheels announced proudly to the Lost thing’s shock.

“I’m the Lost thing”, responded the Lost thing confused as he had never had a proper conversation before.

“Welcome to my den”, declared Wheels loudly.

Wheels went closer to the side of the den and listened to the outside in case anyone was listening to their conversation especially insufferable red bot because Wheels had a plan to exterminate him with his secret crimson red punching glove encased inside him.

More to come, stay tuned.....

Career in Civil Services

Jahnvi Nagpal

I'm Jahnvi and I am a Civil Service Fast Streamer, currently in the Cabinet Office. I find politics, government and public policy very interesting, but I didn't always think I would end up there. My journey has changed many times through the years, but I wouldn't change a thing because it allowed me to explore my likes and interests fully.

I did the International Baccalaureate (IB) in school, in which I chose to study Biology, Chemistry, Psychology and English, as well as Maths, French and Theory of Knowledge. I chose Science as my focus because I wanted to help people, and although I started receiving my acceptances for Medical School, something just didn't sit right for me. I studied hard for the University Clinical Aptitude Tests (UCAT or UKCAT) and BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) for the Medical School entrance tests, using books and practice papers, all whilst also completing all of my internal assessment (IA) Projects for the IB and preparing for my final exams.

It was all very intense, but I couldn't knock the feeling that, although I had a lot of respect for doctors and surgeons, in this life it wasn't for me. My IB Extended Essay being in English and feminist writings of modern day literature should have clued me in that my heart belonged somewhere other than a Science field. Till date, I find Biology and Psychology ever so interesting, but my passion was helping people but in a different manner. It is a burden to expect to know what you want to do for the rest of your life at 16, but hey, that is how the educational cookie crumbles. I decided it was the law and charity sector that may be for me.

I knew my heart belonged in changing the world, but as a young person I knew it's easier dreamt than done. I pursued a degree in LLB Law and Human Rights, which still helped me follow my passion for helping people. After a years break due to the lockdown, I decided I wanted to take my knowledge and this drive further, to a global scale, I completed my masters in LLM International Law and International Relations. I learnt more about Public International Law, Policies, and Armed Conflicts around the world. With all of this work for Public law and the drive to make a change, Private, Commercial and Corporate Law just didn't appeal to me. During this time, the world had also shut down and we were in the middle of a world-wide pandemic. Although I was applying to roles and opportunities, it was radio silence. I was actively applying for roles in charities between my degrees, but to no avail. But what's a journey with no hurdles? The thing that kept me going the most was never giving up and continuing to put myself out there. There were of course moments I wanted to give up and felt no hope, but my mum pushed me continuously. She also provided many reality checks, with she is notoriously good at, but most importantly the world was literally closed for business so there are bigger fish to fry than beating myself up.



Once I started my masters, I found my work in armed conflict the most interesting, and I wrote my masters dissertation on Kashmiri Pandit Exodus, titled “A Paradise Lost: Why is there no adequate legal remedy for the internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits in India and how can this be addressed in Law?”. I explored the plight of Internally Displaced Persons, and how Kashmiri Pandits were denied the protections they deserved and how IDPs need a ratified treaty binding countries to protect their citizens, including those who have been displaced. During this time, I also applied to the Civil Service Fast Stream, which had extensive tests, work based scenarios and personality quizzes. After the many stages, through video interview and assessment centre, I finally received my acceptance and placement in the Cabinet.

It felt quite surreal. Walking out on Westminster station, facing the Big Ben, just stunned in the awe that I actually work here. While speaking to my late grandfather, who would tell me stories of his struggle and life as a refugee, who would have thought that the day would come that I work in the government with the ministers. It can all be very daunting, but I kept to my most authentic self and trodded along and now I find myself in one of the best teams to work in. The Civil Service entrance process is one that assesses you for your own self and experiences; they aren't exams one can necessarily prep for, because they assess you through so many stages and it is you that must shine through it all. You can try doing practice tests online, but you must portray the behaviours and success profiles they seek through your actions.

I like to believe, even after all those years of school, four years of university and various experiences I have had, that I am still at the start of my journey. Find your passion, what drives you, what interests you, what fits your personality and go from there. There are so many different courses, avenues, and ways to start a career, you have to find what fits you; not what you can try fitting into! I am still in the process of figuring out how I will make a difference in the future, how I will use my knowledge of law, human rights and international relations and how I will climb the ladder. That is okay!! You have your whole life to figure out where you'd like to go in the future, but don't sit by and let your life happen. Be proactive, seek out opportunities and explore different fields. Networking will become your best friend; ask for mentors and don't be afraid to ask for advice. More often than not people will feel flattered and want to help you as it is likely they know the importance of networking and mentoring. People came out of the Pandemic with many different outcomes, but it was not a productivity competition. It's okay that you had to take a break, we all did. But now that we are in the tail end of it all, pick yourself up and dust yourself off and put yourself out there.

Remember, *koshish karne walon ki haar nahi hoti*.

Diwali Celebrations



























Upcoming Events



Khaech Mavas: 22 December 2022

Badminton Tournament

Watch this space



Herath: 14 to 20 February 2023



Navreh: 22 March 2023

KPAE Elections

Q1 2023



ISBUND next issue will be in March 2023.

Please do get in touch with us at isbund@outlook.com

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