

Preserving heritage

Heritage sites in any country or region speak about the history of that place. All civilized nations preserve their heritage as it reminds them of the pride and glory that their nation enjoyed. Jammu and Kashmir came into being as a defined state in 1846 through the efforts of Maharaj Gulab Singh but prior to that, the ancient Kingdom of Kashmir can claim thousands of years of history down to the times when its independence was lost with the occupation of the Mughals in 1586 A.D. During those millennia numerous sites were developed and these became historically significant for various reasons. Some of them rather many of them were destroyed by the vagaries of weather and of human callousness. But notwithstanding that many still are in one or the other shape visible to us.

During one hundred years of Dogra rule, while the centre of the J&K kingdom was essentially Jammu, that ruling house raised many structures that attained historical significance. Most of these heritage sites are in some shape still and can be visited by interested persons. Likewise, in Ladakh region also many monuments have been preserved though not in their pristine beauty yet they are still cultural symbols of the people of that region.

Today J&K is a composite State comprising three regions. As such, we have jointly inherited very rich heritage from our past which we need to preserve and protect for our generations to come. The idea of preserving these heritage sites is to instill in our younger generations some significant aspects of our past history which endears us to our birth place. In this connection the plan of the Minister of Housing, Horticulture and Culture, Raman Bhalla is a visionary plan that will attract the attention of all those who love the history of the land. The Minister disclosed that his department had identified no fewer than 28 heritage sites in all the three regions of the State which the Government would like to bring under the scheme of renovation and restoration. The heritage sites mentioned by him in the course of a meeting of senior officers drawn from various departments are of great historical fame and significance. The grandiose plan could be an outstanding contribution to the cultural history of the State. The encouraging thing is that according to the Minister, the identification of the heritage sites has been made by the Archaeological Survey of India. We know that the ASI has already taken in hand some of the sites for renovation and restoration as part of its activities. But now a comprehensive plan for preservation of heritage sites in the State is being contemplated. As per the proposal, the State will also be approaching the Centre for financial assistance to launch the massive project of renovation and restoration. It is not a task that can be fulfilled in a year or two. It is rather a continuous process and there cannot be any end to it. Apart from financial assistance for this long term project, there will be the need of services of experts in the field, engineers, skilled labour, artists, painters, geologists, site planners and landscape architects. We hope that all these details will be thoroughly discussed and the blue print will be prepared for those who will be entrusted with the task. It has to be noted that these monuments are of the time when cement and other materials used for construction in modern structures was not known. As such most of these were wrought in chuna and surkhi as can be seen even now. Naturally, restoration of the monuments will be done in the same material of which these were made. It is said that the nuances of engineering of those times are no more extant. For examples the colour of tiles used during the Mughal times has not been retrieved so far. However these niceties should not come in the way of restoration of the monuments to their pristine purity.

Obviously, the Government should constitute a committee of experts, engineers, geologists and historians to consider all aspects of restoration of these 28 heritage sites. All dimensions of the work to be done should be thoroughly discussed. It is very unfortunate that greedy people have tried to grab some land belonging to these sites. Moreover, slums and shanties have also come up in close proximity of some of the sites. These ugly things have to be removed and the land grabbed has to be vacated. This task should begin right now and it has not to wait for the approval of any outside agency. Once the task of vacating illegal occupation and removing the slums is underway, people will begin to understand that the Government is serious in the plan of restoring heritage sites.

Pen-portrait of an Army jawan

Prof Javed Mughal

We experience myriads of comforts and joys, watch colourful programmes on TV, relish brisk walks in the breezy morning, taste the delicious dishes at the dining table three times a day and get to the market for romantic purchases only because all this is made possible by a young Army jawan clad in uniform, holding gun in the hands leaving his own life at stake, is standing on the guard for our safety on the border. We are alive because a soldier is ready to die at the hands of enemy; we enjoy among our children because a soldier is gulping down the bitter drougths of separation from his family; we enjoy the soothing warmth by the fireplace only when a soldier is ready to shiver on the Siachen Glacier and we relish sweet sleeps when this proud son of the soil is all awake on the Line of Control. The life of this entire nation is indebted to one soldier who has sacrificed his entire life for the well being of this country. He ensures law and order, maintains peace and security and generates a congenial atmosphere for the common masses to live comfortably. But the tragedy, which pains all those who have a rational mind to think and human heart to feel, is that we, sometimes in the fit of prejudice and bias, attribute all the worst to a soldier. The safety to our life is the by-product of the sufferings borne by these mealy-mouthed soldiers who never utter a single note of protest even at the cannon's mouth.

A soldier, outwardly looking very simple and sometimes unsocial, has multi-dimensional personality in himself. Sometimes he is seen while playing with his enemies at Atari LOC, sometimes he tries to win his enemy with amiable behavior, at times he talks with language of gun, and sometimes the same soldier who is supposed to be one to manage violence, destruction and death, can be seen with the tears rolling along his cheeks at his friends, colleagues or a countryman's death.

Although he kills but it is not only he who does, it has rather been the practice even of all the religions to kill one to save the other; to kill the enemy to save the



friend and to kill the unwanted to save the most wanted. If he does so, he is not on the wrong. It is not easy to muster the courage and nerve to kill other human beings. Soldiers are trained to acquire a streak of raw ruthlessness and brutality when the situation demands. Consequently, according to common perception, soldiers are supposed to be the tone-hearted and unemotional fighters, totally impervious to emotional weaknesses. It is just not 'soldierly' to cry and shed tears like other mere mortals. But then, as Voltaire said, "Tears are the silent language of grief". Grief is a fundamental sentiment and spares no one. At the same time, soldiers do not grieve by wailing, howling, weeping and even sobbing. Their grief finds expression not through tears but through their silent anguish. It is futile to say that soldiering is a profession. It is a commitment that every soldier undertakes with missionary zeal to defend his country. It is a matter of honour for a soldier to fight and win, whatever be the challenges and cost. It is a trait that becomes an inalienable part of every soldier's character and provides motivational sustenance. Soldiers see themselves as the sole guardians of national security. Memories of reverses suffered during the Chinese aggression of 1962 still cause immense pain.

Despite the fact that ill-equipped and ill-clothed soldiers were not to be blamed for the failure. Scars of defeat and retreat in the face of the Chinese onslaught continue to haunt any soldier of the time till date. Inability to dominate

and crush forces inimical to national sovereignty makes soldiers feel miserable. They become restless and always look for an opportunity to redeem their lost honour. The worst thing for a soldier is to lose a 'buddy'. Poignant notes of the 'Last Post' send shivers down the spine of even the toughest soldiers. Tears shed in the memory of a fallen comrade are invariably accompanied by a sense of guilt and helplessness. Many tend to blame themselves for their failure to save their colleague's life. This is the reason why arms are reversed while bidding final farewell to a friend. Military as an institution sustains itself on the trust-loyalty equation existing between the leadership and the rank and file. Trust is the expectancy that the followers can rely on a leader's immaculate personal conduct and professional competence. It flourishes on the credibility that a leader enjoys in his command.

Soldiers willingly repose faith in a leader in the belief that he would remain incorruptible and morally upright. When military leaders indulge in decadent activities and corrupt practices, soldiers start wondering whether such leaders deserve their trust and confidence. They get disillusioned and feel let down by the leadership that they had trusted unquestioningly. They cry out in anguish as they find that their icons of morality are unworthy of their trust.

Soldiers' dedication to duty, loyalty to the nation and willingness for the supreme sacrifice are driven less by material considerations and more by an overwhelming urge to earn love and respect of

their countrymen. Therefore, they tend to be very sensitive to adverse publicity and feel betrayed when the national media ignores their contribution and highlights a few aberrations. Worse, Army's prompt action against transgressing officers is never recognized. Soldiers do not question subjecting the military to public scrutiny. However, they want it to be done in an objective and balanced manner. Soldiers doing duty in remote and uncongenial areas feel terribly pained when a few acts of misdemeanor and indiscretion are cited to paint a negative picture of the services as a whole. They wonder if the countrymen understand their trials and tribulations. They become sentimental for the nation's empathy and recognition.

Although during the last two decades, particularly since the eruption of active terrorism in the country, certain doubts and questions regarding the integrity of our Indian Army have cropped up in the minds of critics and observers keeping in view the unchecked infiltration into Indian territory, yet it can partly be ascribed to their miscalculation of the situations and circumstances. Their officers may largely be responsible for it. But on the whole the Army jawan's first and foremost motive is to come forward to the defence of the honour of their nation. Difficult is to estimate the privations an Army Jawan undergoes on the top of Siachen Glacier, from a comfortable distance. Military is a social organization, albeit highly structured and disciplined. It consists of living human beings with their normal share of sentiments and idiosyncrasies. Soldiers also emote and go through phases of elation and sorrow. It is just that they are trained to keep their emotions under control lest it affects their performance in crisis situations. Their anguish remains muted due to their strong sense of loyalty to the country and to uphold military honour. For that reason, soldiers need to be handled with sensitivity and compassion.

War: Purpose, perplexity, danger and possibility

M.J. Akbar

America's track record in starting wars has been, shall we say, a bit unworthy of European Great Power standards. It lingered rather than leapt, even in the three defining world wars of the 20th century. It needed substantial persuasion by Britain, not to mention some serious stupidity by the Germans, to drag America into the first two world wars. Although America was far more keen on confronting Communism in the Cold War, Winston Churchill can take more credit than Harry Truman for planting an iron curtain between Nato and the Soviet Union. Fear of Communism took America to Korea, a war which has merely paused, and Vietnam, where war is over but on Vietnamese terms.

There were many reasons for American isolationism, but a very good one was uncertainty. America had legitimate concerns about how to end a war before it began one. Europe's colonial wars had cold clarity. The objective was to throw out ruling dynasties and replace them with Viceroy, or obliging Maharajas, Nawabs, Shahs and Emirs. Wars of charity, or ideology if you prefer, in which your purpose is to change the world into something better than it is, are harder to fathom and fashion, for you are confronted with that eternal question: what precisely is better? And how much does conflict actually postpone the better rather than speed it along?

America became more independently aggressive with the Cold War; after 9/11, understandably, it treats aggression as a moral right whenever it perceives a threat from what might be called, broadly, the Muslim sphere. Since the assault on the twin towers was launched from the shadows, it pursues the underworld of militancy with a ferocity that has not been seen in any conventional conflict. This leads to overkill, and collateral damage to ideals that constitute the very basis of democratic civilization, but this is a war in which few prisoners are taken, and those left alive are sent to Guantanamo. Death might just be preferable.

Governments that stand in the way, or confront America's obsessive search for enemies, do so at their peril. They have to be extremely secure, in their nationalism, in their social cohesion, and in their ability to defend themselves, to fend off American incursion or worse. America made mistakes, with Iraq at the top, because could have brought into line without such huge damage. But George Bush, hardly the brightest bulb in the room, and surrounded by as remarkable a collection of dimwits as you are likely to see in a sophisticated capital, misjudged the Iraqi people even if he was accurate in his assessment about the fragility of Saddam Hussein. Iraq has shifted to nebulous on the geo-strategic world map.

Barack Obama is not Bush, although he will go down in history as a Nobel Peace winner who did more to start wars rather than end them. Obama has the wind of 9/11 behind him, but he knows, surely, that it must remain a wind that is helpful to the sailing ships of a superpower, rather than a typhoon that wrecks the home fleet. He also knows that once he orders the navy into position, retreat means an irretrievable dent in his credibility. He is also intelligent enough to recognise confusion as a problem, rather than wallow in it as an opportunity, as his predecessor did. Obama knows his aims in Syria, but acknowledges that they cannot be achieved by a limited war, which is as far as public opinion will permit him to go.

Obama wants the Assads out of Damascus, but that would need American boots on the ground; the motley and toxic bands of rebels are beyond anyone's control, whether that of America or regional powers like Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The next best option is to deplete Syria's firepower, inflict damage to the morale of its infantry, hit its battle-ready ally Hezbollah, and, last but not hardly the least, expose the limitations of both Iran and Russia as military allies. If all Iran and Russia can do is bluster, then America's message is sent.

The danger is that Iran and Russia could choose their moment to respond, in weeks or months. Russia could use Syrian space for retaliatory action against the Saudis, who are leading the effort against Bashar Assad, in their effort to consolidate Sunni space against Iran and its Shia allies. It is interesting that America remains committed to the Sunni cause despite the fact that 9/11 was a plot by extremist Sunnis. Iran is the paradox encouraging illogical options. What must worry American strategists is Iran's stability in a region spread across shifting sands. Washington has opted for the familiar against the complex.

In August 2014, we will all be flooded with seminars on the First World War, which changed Syria and the Middle East into the patterns that continue to provoke war today. A missile strike will launch the 100th anniversary of a war that has not ended. So what else is new?

25% schools without blackboard !

For a nation which is bemoaning the poor quality of mid-day meal served in its schools, an equally if not more ignominious fact is that over 25% of the country's schools are without a blackboard. At a time, when tablets, smart screens and latest hi-tech teaching techniques have entered the classrooms of a handful of elite schools which charge exorbitant fee, a survey titled "Learning Blocks" and conducted by an NGO called "Child Relief and You" (CRY) makes the shocking disclosure that while 25% of the country's schools carry on their teaching without a blackboard, leave alone mid-day meal, there are as many as 20% schools which expect their wards to bear with the pangs of thirst all through the school hours because there is no provision for drinking water.

Long time ago, in the years soon after Independence, there were a number of schools in the country which did not have a building or a roof overhead but, considering the importance of a

blackboard, even for an open-air class-room, a board used to be hung from a tree trunk... a 1947 India phenomenon symbolically portrayed in a popular Raj Kapoor-- Nargis starrer. That truly is the traditional importance attached to a blackboard or, to use an adage, school education is synonymous with blackboard.

The CRY survey report published last week and based on countrywide inputs from sever-

al states including Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka as well as three metro cities of Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai, goes on to make several more unflattering revelations like, for example, 11% of schools don't have toilets, 49% have common toilets for staff and students, 60% don't have playgrounds and a library...as if it is an unnecessary ingredient... was not found to be

there in over 74% of schools. Obviously, 80% of schools surveyed did not have cleaning staff to keep the toilets clean... which speaks volumes about the hygiene care of children studying there and also simultaneously explains the presence of worms, cockroaches and insects in the mid-day meal served in these schools.

Francis Bacon once said, the greatest harm to the cause of literature has been done by

TALES OF TRAVESTY DR. JITENDRA SINGH

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the teachers of literature. In the same vein, perhaps, one could suspect, the greatest harm to the cause of school education is being inflicted by none other than the so-called educationists or learned planners of the country's education policy. The government policy of allowing unchecked mushrooming of private or so-called public schools inspired by a business or mer-

chantile interest rather than any commitment to the cause of education coupled with criminal neglect of government sector schools has ended up taking toll of the opportunity of education available to the children of lower socio-economic.

For the independent India that began its tryst with education with Moulana Abu Kalam Azad, one of the world's greatest educationists of his time and the country's first Education Minister, and for a country that today makes noble declarations of intent like "Education for all" as much as "Food for all", the findings of the above survey are a grim reminder of the thin veil of hypocrisy and illusion that blinds our eyes.

And, even as the common man tries his best to disbelieve the prospect of schools without blackboard and instead lures himself to believe what the leaders at the helm say, Umaphaty props in to drop the Iqbal refrain "...Gustaf Ka Qazi Ban To Gaya, Kardar Ka Qazi Ban Na Saka !"

Another paradise ravaged

Col J P Singh, Retd

The lesser known town of Kishtwar, "Kashmir within Kashmir", was ravaged in broad day light by the radicals on the holy day of last Eid. It took almost whole day for the Govt to realise that it had a constitutional duty to protect life and property of its citizens. It took so long while its own Minister of State for Home, 'the govt itself, happens to be present on the spot besides the District Magistrate and security forces including the army already in situ. Yet there was no response to the constitutional obligation by any of the above authorities. The minister, govt officials and the security forces personnel are all under the oath of allegiance to the constitution of India wherever they may be. Still they chose to close their eyes. Why did they not respond to the call of the duty? If they are not held accountable, then let us not have the constitution. If they were restrained because higher ups had a personal agenda, they must say so. It seems that we have forgotten the tragedies of Kashmir and lost touch with realities which have been staring at us since partition.

Kishtwar is South Eastern extension of Kashmir Valley. It lies across the Symthan Pass of Pir Panjal Range which hems the valley from the South. Kishtwar falls in Jammu region. It is a beautiful landmass; no less than the mythical paradise; though not said in so many words. It is a mosaic of religious, linguistic and social identities and is known for not only its inclusive social and cultural life but also for its shared religious spaces.

Hazrat shah Farid-ud-Din Bagdadi, a Sufi saint is known to have brought Islam to Kishtwar. Kishtwar has a distinct history of communal harmony. During the 1947 communal riots, conscious and collective efforts were made by the elders of both communities to maintain peace and existing brotherhood. While the communal riots took place at many places in the region and in the nearby town of Bhaderwah, Kishtwar remained unaffected. This township was so safe that Muslims from other parts of the region sought refuge and there- after continued to live there. Unfortunately this little Kashmir chose to go the Kashmir way on 9 August 2013.

History of a nation, a race or the people follows a chequered pattern of extinctionism or existentialism. The history of Jammu & Kashmir is exactly the same as that of rest of India or of many other nations. The colonial legacy of 'divide and rule' was pursued in J&K till eighties. In the nineties it became 'terrorise and drive out' due to which minorities were driven out of the valley. In the recent Kishtwar riots it was 'strike and scare'. Kishtwar was struck perhaps because the minorities could not be scared away otherwise.

There have been periods of bitter confrontations in the history of J&K depending on the path chosen by various segments of the society. Bitter confrontations started in the valley with the 'quit Kashmir' movement launched by the National Conference before independence. Periods of war and peace, stability and turmoil, consolidation and division, hope and despair had come and gone in

the nascent history of J&K. But the trend of ethnic cleansing, the worst of all, in places considered remote for communal tensions, is alarming. The scenario in Kishtwar today is of similar hopelessness and insecurity. All this is due to the influence of radical outfits proliferating world over at an industrial scale with no end in sight. Such radical elements are directing the course of history of J&K. In 1947, J&K chose a particular path and decided to throw its lot with secular India rather than theocratic Pakistan. Today unfortunately it is drifting away from that path and is choosing an altogether a different path.

One is awe struck by looking at the ways in which religion is being relentlessly used as tool by the radicals and the politicians to promote their communal agendas which pit communities against each other. This enables them to promote hatred and provoke conflicts. I am astonished by the fact that various religions are interpreted and understood by their adherents in remarkably diverse ways that completely belie the simplistic notions of all religions as enshrined in their treatise and it is not being resented by the society.

While the root cause of the conflict is being investigated by the judicial commission, religion cannot be delinked from it. Secular India considers Kashmir dispute as a political issue. What is conveniently ignored is the religion, particularly in the case of Kashmir dispute, involving Muslim majority Pakistan and Hindu majority India. After all the Kashmir issue emerged directly out of division of India on the basis of religion.

Hence an effort must be made to analyse religious dimension of Kishtwar conflict. I start with the premise that kishtwar riots are continuation of pan Islamisation of J&K. I consider Hindu chauvinists, Islamist radicals and various politicians as the greatest enemies of Hindu-Muslim amity and consolidation of ethnic diversity of the state.

The return of ethnic amity in the valley is now unimaginable. It is gradually disappearing from other parts of the state. It is happening because certain new norms of religion are being pushed in from outside. Such alien dictates are playing havoc with traditional understanding of communal harmony. These days large number of Mandirs and Masjids are having priests / clerics from Andhra, UP and Bihar. Such clerics are ardent followers of unorthodox right wing ideologies and disdain of other religions. Lots of Burmese and Bangladeshis are illegally entering the state and are being sheltered by clerics and politicians. Ironically religion is increasingly being marshalled by both Hindu and Muslim priests as prime mover to foment communal hatred which is being exploited by inimical forces from other side of the LOC.

Jammu region was known for considerable harmony between Hindus and Muslims at the social level. With the hateful propaganda and oppression unleashed at the behest of outside clerics and vested interests, a fear psychosis had cropped up in the civil society. The rest of Jammu, considered to be religiously tolerant was getting affected by the happenings of Muslim majority areas. Incident

of Kishtwar consequently agitated Jammuites. This led to few incidents of retaliation and subsequent curfew in eight districts of Jammu region.

Kashmiri Pandits, Jammu Hindus and Buddhists of Ladakh have been skeptical of intentions of Kashmiri rulers. Hence they have been resenting their hegemony since independence. This sentiment is shared even by Jammu Muslims. To think that Hindus, Buddhists, Shias and Rajput Muslims of J&K would not resist Kashmiri agenda of ethnic cleansing, even to the point of violence, would be to admit the oblivious. Continuation of curfew for 13 days in Kishtwar and many days in other places has revealed the obvious. The coming days have cast their shadow. While India is championing the cause of Sri Lanka Tamils against Sinhala hegemony, why is it silent about Kashmiri hegemony and forced migrations / ethnic cleansing all these days?

Ethnic cleansing from the valley is now an irreversible event. What is left must be protected. What can be prevented has to be done. What is the solution to the future conflicts. The ethnic distribution and political affiliations are such that they cannot be disassembled on religious lines alone. Kashmiri Muslims though majority in population but are confined to a limited geographical area. Hindus though majority in Jammu region are scattered throughout while Buddhists are in majority in Leh and Shias are in majority in Kargil. Poonch and Uri districts are inhabited by Rajput Muslims, closer in race

and language to Hindu Dogras. Whereas in Doda and Kishtwar region the Muslims speak Kashmiri but in ethnicity they are akin to Dogras. The Bakewells migrate between Jammu and Kashmir every season. Thus the ethnic spread is such that it necessitates communal harmony. Therefore the inter region and inter religion cooperation is inescapable.

Dialogue can play a vital role in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the religious and ethnic discords while the political process follows its own trajectory. A road map for this is said to have been framed by the Interlocutors. Checks and controls over alien clerics and illegal migration is the responsibility of the govt lest the anarchy of the eighties overtakes. And then the Sufism, which has deep roots in Kishtwar psyche Civil society can still play a valuable role in promoting Sufism thereby promoting inter faith harmony.

Islamist and Hindutva militancy feeds on each other's religious turfs and both need to be resolutely contested and neutralised.

Hence it is necessary for the govt of J&K, the security forces, and the politicians to rise to the occasion, catch the bull by the horns and take corrective measures to prevent Kashmir type situation in Jammu region. Above all the constitution must be followed in letter and spirit and the rule of law must be strictly enforced.

Nothing should be subordinated to the whims and fancies of individuals howsoever high or mighty they may be. If this message goes down the streets, there will be peace and harmony in the state. We want the govts which can enforce the rule of law.