

INDIA'S GREEN LEAP

India, one of the world's most populous and rapidly developing nations, has embarked on an ambitious journey toward sustainability. Known for its rich biodiversity, diverse ecosystems, and growing economy, the country has a crucial role to play in addressing global environmental challenges. As the impacts of climate change become more pronounced, India's Green Leap is an effort to align growth with environmental sustainability. It is a roadmap that focuses on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and responsible urbanization, all while aiming to provide a better quality of life for its citizens.

A cornerstone of India's Green Leap is its commitment to renewable energy, particularly solar and wind power. With the government's ambitious target of 500 gigawatts (GW) of non-fossil fuel-based power by 2030, India is making great strides in harnessing clean energy. The country is already the world's fourth-largest producer of solar power, and its vast landscapes are ideal for solar panels and wind turbines.

India's push for renewable energy is not just about reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also about improving energy access. Over 300 million people in India still lack reliable electricity, and solar power offers an affordable and sustainable solution. Additionally, solar energy is crucial for rural development, where it can be used for lighting, water pumping, and powering small enterprises, thus contributing to local economic growth.

With the growing urbanization and pollution in cities, the transition to green mobility is another significant step in India's Green Leap. Electric vehicles (EVs) are at the forefront of this transformation. India has set a target to achieve 100% electric vehicle sales by 2030 in the public transport sector and aims for a significant rise in private EV adoption. The government has introduced various incentives to boost EV production and consumption, including subsidies for electric two-wheelers, four-wheelers, and charging infrastructure.

The adoption of EVs will not only reduce India's dependency on oil imports but also help curb air pollution, particularly in urban centers like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, where vehicular emissions are a major concern. Moreover, the country's commitment to expanding its electric charging network and establishing battery manufacturing units will further drive the green mobility revolution.

India's agricultural sector, which employs a majority of the population, faces several environmental challenges, including water scarcity, overuse of chemical fertilizers, and soil degradation. To combat these issues, the government and various organizations are promoting sustainable farming practices, such as organic farming, rainwater harvesting, and crop diversification.

The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) aims to provide irrigation coverage to farmers and ensure that water resources are used efficiently. Additionally, India is also embracing precision farming and agroforestry, techniques that aim to reduce the environmental footprint of agriculture while enhancing productivity and income for farmers.

Life in Exile: The Hopes, Struggles, and Unbreakable Spirit of Refugees in Jammu

■ PANKAJ SHARMA

In the crowded lanes of Jammu's refugee camps, the air is thick with stories of waiting. Many elderly residents recall PoK as a place of peace and beauty, where life was simple and full of promise. They tell their grandchildren stories of the valleys and rivers they left behind, passing down memories of a land their young ones have never seen.

Meanwhile, younger generations are caught in a dilemma, wanting to hold on to their heritage but also yearning to escape the limitations of camp life. They are born into a life that feels incomplete—a life with one foot in the past and one in an uncertain future. In the refugee camps of Jammu, thousands of PoK refugees live with memories of a homeland they fled decades ago. Forced out by conflict, these refugees left behind their homes, culture, and community in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK). Their life in Jammu represents not only a struggle for survival but also a fight to preserve a distinct cultural identity. This article sheds light on the origins of PoK refugees, the government's promises, and the fulfillment gaps, while capturing the heart of a community trying to keep its heritage alive.

The Origins of Displacement: Fleeing the Homeland

The roots of the PoK refugee crisis began with the partition of India in 1947. As the newly formed nations of India and Pakistan clashed over the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, waves of violence and insecurity forced thousands of families to flee. The districts of PoK, particularly Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Poonch, and Mirpur, became conflict zones, and families were left with no choice but to abandon their ancestral lands.

Refugees from PoK were largely settled in Jammu. Initially, these camps were temporary solutions, but over time, they evolved into semi-permanent homes as PoK refugees continued to arrive following other conflicts, like the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971. Despite their resilience, these refugees faced an uncertain future, as they were forced to adapt to a new environment while longing to return to their homeland.

Home Before Migration: The Rich Cultural Tapestry of PoK

PoK refugees come from culturally diverse

regions, each with unique traditions and customs. Their homeland, located in the lush valleys and mountainous terrains of Kashmir, was known for its traditional music, folk dances, and handicrafts. Communities from districts like Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, and Poonch brought with them a distinct way of life, rooted in Sufi traditions, Kashmiri folk music, and the art of storytelling. Celebrations and festivals were marked by traditional songs and dances, creating a vibrant cultural fabric.

Even in the camps, PoK refugees strive to protect their cultural identity. They continue to celebrate festivals like Baisakhi, Eid, and Diwali in traditional ways, passing down folk songs, dances, and crafts to younger generations. Despite the challenges of camp life, they have preserved their customs, reminding them of the life they once had and the community bonds that define them.

The Struggle in Jammu: New Addresses, Enduring Hardships

Today, many PoK refugees live in camps such as Mira Sahib, Satwari, Bhagwati Nagar, and Purkhoo in Jammu. These camps have become semi-permanent settlements where refugees live with limited access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. The youth face challenges in accessing quality education, while the elderly suffer from untreated health issues due to the lack of medical facilities nearby.

For many families, daily life revolves around survival and managing basic needs. Cramped shelters made from tin and tarpaulin serve as fragile homes, while food, water, and electricity are often insufficient. Despite these adversities, the sense of community remains strong, with residents coming together to support each other and maintain their cultural heritage.

Government Promises and Unmet Needs

Over the years, the government has made various promises to PoK refugees, aimed at improving their living conditions and integrating them into society. However, while some promises have been fulfilled, significant gaps remain, leaving many refugees in a state of limbo. The government announced compensation packages for PoK refugees to help them rebuild their lives. In recent years, some

families received a one-time financial aid package, but many refugees claim that the funds are insufficient to address decades of poverty and deprivation.

PoK refugees were promised full citizenship, including the right to vote and access to government jobs. While many have received voting rights in local elections, access to other citizenship benefits remains limited. The lack of formal recognition restricts refugees from purchasing property and securing stable employment, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Promises were made to improve educational access for PoK refugees, particularly the youth. While some schools have been established in camps, the quality of education remains substandard, and many students struggle to continue their studies beyond secondary school. Financial assistance and scholarships are limited, leaving young refugees with few options for higher education and stable employment. Recognizing the poor conditions in refugee camps, the government pledged to provide better housing and essential infrastructure. While some shelters have been improved, a significant portion of the refugee population still lives in substandard housing. Access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare facilities remains inadequate.

The Distinct Culture of PoK Refugees: A Heritage Worth Preserving

Despite their struggles, PoK refugees in Jammu have managed to preserve their distinct cultural identity. Their communities are a blend of Kashmiri and Pahari cultures, reflecting the diversity of their origins. Traditional music and dance remain central to their lives, and festivals are celebrated with deep cultural pride. The PoK refugees primarily speak Pahari, Gojri, and Kashmiri dialects. In the camps, these languages continue to be spoken, connecting younger generations to their roots. Many refugees from PoK are skilled in traditional crafts, such as weaving and embroidery, which they practice and teach to younger generations. The art of making Pashmina shawls, intricate carpets, and wooden handicrafts is a legacy they have carried with them to Jammu. The PoK communities have a deep connection to Sufi traditions and music. Folk songs, often passed down orally, reflect stories of love, heroism,

and the longing for their homeland. Music and dance remain an important part of cultural events, symbolizing resilience and the connection to their heritage.

By preserving these cultural practices, PoK refugees not only maintain their identity but also instill pride and resilience in the younger generations. Their rich cultural tapestry serves as a bridge to the past, ensuring that their heritage lives on.

The Longing for Home and the Hope for a Stable Future

For PoK refugees, the hope of returning to their homeland remains alive, despite the years that have passed. Elderly residents recall the beauty and peace of Muzaffarabad, Kotli, and Mirpur, sharing stories with their children and grandchildren who have never seen these places. The memories of lush valleys, bustling markets, and community gatherings are woven into the fabric of their lives in the camps.

Yet, many refugees are aware of the practical limitations of this dream. Instead, they yearn for a stable, dignified life in Jammu, where they can live as recognized citizens with full rights. The younger generation, particularly, seeks opportunities to break free from the limitations of camp life, aspiring to become professionals who can uplift their community.

A Legacy of Strength and Hope

The story of PoK refugees in Jammu is one of survival and perseverance. Forced to leave their homeland, they have managed to create a new life, despite the immense challenges they face. Through their strength and resilience, they have preserved a unique cultural identity that continues to enrich the social fabric of Jammu.

As we reflect on the struggles and achievements of PoK refugees, let us honor their journey with empathy and action. Their call for stability, respect, and the right to live as dignified citizens is one we cannot ignore. In acknowledging their past and supporting their future, we honor not only the legacy of PoK refugees but also the values of humanity and justice that bind us all.

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The Festival of ‘Chhath Puja’ in India

■ O.N KOUL

The unity in diversity is the characteristic and hallmark of Indian culture but there is diversity in the Hindu community and religion. There are very few festivals which are celebrated in the length and breadth of India. One such festival is Chhath festival which is celebrated in Bihar, western UP, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and the Nepalese provinces of Madhesh and Lumbini. It is a four day festival dedicated to sun God and sun is worshipped and it is also celebrated to protect and conserve the environment and thus this festival is very important as nature is worshipped during the festival and so this festival has great significance for the nature and its various forms and manifestations. The auspicious four day festival of Chhath Puja is celebrated with much pomp and show in northern India and Nepal. The annual four day festival is right around the corner, and devotees are gearing up to celebrate the festival with pomp and gaiety. Chhath Puja also known as Surya Shashti, Chhath, Chhathi, Chhat, Chhathi, Chhst Parv, Dala Puja, Pratihari and Dala Chhath. Since Chhath is dedicated to sun God, it God of energy and life. It is especially celebrated by the women flock and they observe complete fast which is rigorous and pray to Lord Surya and Chhathi Maiya for their own and families as well as children's welfare. Argya is also offered to Sun God and chhathi Maiya. Chhath Puja is celebrated after six days of Diwali on sixth day of the month of Kartik. In fact the preparations for Chhath Puja are started a day after Diwali by beginning to eat only Satvik diet without onion and garlic. The meals are prepared most hygienically and the food is eaten only after taking bath. This year Chhath Puja is on October 30th. It will begin with Nahay Khay on October 29, Chhath Puja, and Usha Argya on October 31. Very rigorous and rituals are followed by the devotees who observe fast to please Sun God and Chhathi Maiya. There are many legends and stories associated with origins of Chhath Puja and some even find mention in Rig Veda. According to Hindu mythology, Draupadi and Pandavas used to observe the Chhath Puja to regain their Kingdom and resolve their issues. Another legend has it that Karna, who was the son of Lord Surya and Kunti used to perform Chhath Puja. As already mentioned the devotees offer Argya and pray to Lord Surya and Chhath Maiya during Chhat puja to receive their blessings for the prosperity and well being of the children and the whole family. Holy mantras from

Rig Veda are chanted to please Lord Surya and Chhath Maiya. It is also said that the sages of the Vedic period used to perform Chhath Puja by exposing themselves to direct sunlight to gain energy from sun rays. Women generally observe 36 hour fast during Chhath Puja to gain blessings from Sun and Chhathi Maiya. The first day of Chhath is called Nahay Khay-devotees take bath in holy water like river Ganga ,women who observe fast eat a single meal And devotees prepare Prasad for Suya Bhagwan .The second and third days are Kharna and Chhath Puja women observe an arduous nirjala vrat during these days. On the fourth day ,women offer Argya to Sun God and Chhathi Maiya and seek their blessings. It is believed that the beginning of Chhath Puja had been from the Mahabharat Period. First of all Surya putar Karan had performed the Puja of Sun God. Karan was the true and staunch devotee of Sun God and he used to remain in water upto his back and used to give Argya to Sun God. The question arises why is the Puja of Chhath Maiya performed? Shastras say that Mata Chhathi is the Manas Putri of Lord Bhramah. Some also believe that Chhath Maiya is the sister of Sun God. It is also believed that by performing Puja of Chhath Mayia one gets the blessing of long life. One gets child by performing the Puja of Chhathi Mayia. The sun is visible to every being and is the basis of life of all creatures on earth. Along with Sun God, Chhathi Maiya is also worshipped on this day. According to Vedic astrology ,Chhathi Maiya protects the children from diseases and problems and gives them long lives and good health. The festival of Chhath Puja is celebrated by men and women for long life of their children and prosperity in the family, this four day festival involves worshipping the Sun God and Chhathi Maiya .According to legends, Chhati Maiya is an incarnation of one of the famous forms of goddess Durga, Davi Katayaini ,who is worshipped on the sixth day of Navratri. She is also said to be the daughter of Lord Brahma, the creator of the world.

The legend states that during the creation of the world, Lord Brahma divided himself into two parts ,one of male and another of female. The part which is divided into females became mother nature and she further divided herself into six parts ,out of which the last part was full of motherly love for all beings and hence was called Shashti or Chhathi. Since Goddess Chhati or Chhathi Maiya is considered to be the epitome of motherly love ,on the sixth day after the birth of a child,

the goddess is worshipped and said to bless the child with good health , long life and success in later life. Another legend states her to be sister of Sun God and therefore ,in Chhath ,both Chhati Maiya and sun are worshipped. It is said that the festival of Chhath was introduced when king Priyavrat who was the son of first mam,Manu ,was blessed by Goddess Chhathi who then revived his dead child. In UP and Bihar there is special importance for Chhath Puja. Chhath is not only a festival but a great festival which is celebrated for four consecutive days. It starts with bathing and eating and comes to close with the offering Argya to the sun set and sun rise. This festival comes twice a year, once in the month of Chaitra and then second time in Krtika. The festival celebrated on the sixth day of Chaitra is called Chatie Chhath and the festival celebrated on sixth day of Kartika is Known as Kartike Chhath. It is celebrated for family blessings and prosperity and for obtaining the fruits willed by the devotees. The festival of Chhath has a historical importance as well. It is believed that Lord Rama is associated with the inception of Chhath Puja. It is said that when Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya then he and his wife Sita observed a fast in honor of Sun god and broke it only with the setting sun. It is one such ritual which subsequently evolved in Chhath Puja. Now apart from the religious significance of thanking the Sun for providing us good life, there is some science too attached to rituals of this festival. The rituals demand to pray at the river bank or standing at the river bank for long hours and there is an explanation to it.

The ultraviolet rays of the sun are at their lowest during sunrise and sunset and that is why the sun rays are most beneficial at these two times .These sun rays help in detoxifying the mind, body and soul by removing all negative energies. This is the only Hindu festival or perhaps the only festival in the world that signifies the rising and setting sun. The most unique feature of this Chhath Puja is that there is no idol worshipping unlike most of the festivals of Hindu religion. Some people amply opine that sun is necessary for the life of every creature on earth and this festival is a way to pay tribute to it irrespective of caste, creed, gender, race and social stigma. In brief Chhath Puja festival is the unique festival which is celebrated in north India and Nepal. May Chhath Maiya bring peace and prosperity to Jammu and Kashmir which is in trouble.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist).

■ MOHANJI



One day Krishna rushed quickly into

Every day Krishna would visit the garden and say to all the plants. "I love you". The plants were very happy and responded the same.

The garden very alarmed. He went to the bamboo plant and said "I need your life. I need to cut you". The bamboo thought and said "You don't have any other choice!" Krishna said, "No, no other way". It said "OK" and gave itself up.

Krishna cut the bamboo and made holes in it, and each time, He carved holes, the bamboo cried in pain. He

made a beautiful flute and kept this flute with Him all the time.

The Gopis became jealous and asked the bamboo to tell them its secret. The bamboo said "I gave myself up. He did whatever was right for me. In the process I had to undergo a lot of pain but I have just become His instrument.

This is complete surrender.

I GAVE MYSELF UP

■ MANZOOR AHMED NAIK

Budhal Valley, nestled within the Pir Panjal range, boasts a landscape rich with pristine lakes, lush green meadows, and perennial rivers, making it an untapped jewel with immense tourism potential. Developing Budhal Valley into a sought-after destination can create countless job opportunities, improve local infrastructure, and uplift the socio-economic status of its residents. This article explores strategic measures to leverage Budhal Valley's unique assets to combat poverty and unemployment in the region.

The primary challenge in developing Budhal as a tourist hub is accessibility. Improving road connectivity and establishing reliable transport services would ease travel for tourists and ensure safer, more comfortable access. Upgrading roads from nearby urban centers and creating well-marked routes to attractions like Simar Sar Lake could significantly enhance visitor numbers.

Introducing eco-friendly infrastructure like solar-powered lights, clean sanitation facilities, and well-maintained picnic areas will create a positive visitor experience while preserving the valley's natural beauty.

Encouraging local entrepreneurs to open eco-friendly guesthouses, homestays, and campsites would provide tourists with authentic experiences and reduce environmental impact. The income generated from these accommodations would directly benefit local families. With its rugged terrain and lush landscapes, Budhal Valley is ideal for trekking, camping, and river rafting. Partnering with adventure tourism companies can create seasonal jobs for guides, porters, and hospitality staff, helping the local youth gain employment.

Showcasing local crafts, cuisine, and cultural performances can offer tourists immersive experiences while creating an income stream for artisans and performers. Known for its breathtaking serenity and beauty, Simar Sar Lake can become a prominent attraction if developed thoughtfully. Introducing guided boat tours, hiking trails, and well-maintained picnic spots around the lake can draw more visitors while preserving its natural state.

Budhal's expansive green meadows

offer ideal locations for eco-resorts and photography tourism. Regular events, such as nature festivals or photography workshops, can attract specific tourist demographics while creating seasonal employment. The valley's rivers are not only potential rafting spots but also support local fishing practices. Promoting river-based activities can engage tourists while supporting local communities dependent on these waters.

Conducting regular training sessions in hospitality, customer service, and basic foreign language skills can equip locals to host tourists effectively. Local youth can find sustainable employment as tour guides, camp managers, and hospitality staff, contributing to the region's economy. Training programs in crafting and design can help artisans create souvenirs that reflect Budhal Valley's heritage. Encouraging entrepreneurship among artisans will add to their incomes and give tourists an avenue to connect with the local culture. Collaborating with adventure tourism organizations to train and certify locals as mountain guides, fishing instructors, and outdoor educators would enhance tourism opportunities and allow locals to generate income from their expertise.

Creating a dedicated digital presence for Budhal Valley through platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube can showcase its attractions to a global audience. High-quality images and videos of scenic spots like Simar Sar Lake, green meadows, and river activities can captivate potential tourists. Developing an official tourism website or mobile app that provides information on lodging, dining, local attractions, and events can simplify trip planning and attract tourists who prioritize convenience. Inviting influencers and bloggers to experience Budhal Valley and share their journeys online would increase visibility, reaching audiences who may otherwise be unaware of the region.

By offering different activities for each season, such as skiing in winter, wildflower treks in spring, and river rafting in summer, Budhal Valley can establish itself as a year-round destination, providing locals with consistent employment and revenue opportunities. Hosting local festivals celebrating

Budhal's heritage and natural beauty can attract tourists during off-peak seasons. These events could feature local crafts, culinary experiences, folk music, and performances, adding to the valley's appeal while fostering community pride.

Encouraging partnerships between government agencies and private investors can stimulate infrastructure development and offer local training programs. These partnerships could also secure funding for conservation projects to protect Budhal's natural resources. Incentives for Investors: Providing tax breaks and other incentives for businesses that establish eco-friendly resorts, restaurants, and recreational facilities in Budhal Valley can attract sustainable investments, boost local employment, and contribute to the local economy. Offering subsidies and low-interest loans to local entrepreneurs can encourage the establishment of businesses catering to tourists, like cafes, souvenir shops, and equipment rental services. To maintain the valley's pristine environment, it's essential to implement eco-conscious practices. This includes setting up waste management systems, minimizing plastic usage, and educating visitors about respecting local flora and fauna. Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Ensuring that tourism development respects Budhal's cultural heritage and supports indigenous knowledge and traditions will contribute to sustainable growth. This can involve offering incentives for businesses that integrate local cultural elements into their services.

By tapping into Budhal Valley's extraordinary tourism potential, we can create a sustainable model for combating poverty and unemployment. With strategic investments, community engagement, and a focus on eco-friendly practices, Budhal Valley can transform into a vibrant tourist destination that provides a steady income for its residents. Empowering local youth, artisans, and entrepreneurs through targeted skill development and government support will play a crucial role in realizing this vision. By following this approach, Budhal Valley can achieve socio-economic progress while preserving its rich natural and cultural heritage for future generations.