

WELCOMING DARBAR MOVE TRADITION

The much-anticipated Darbar Move in Jammu & Kashmir has once again commenced, a practice that has stood the test of time and remains a unique feature of administration in the Union Territory. Historically instituted during the Dogra rule by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the biannual transfer of government offices between the twin capitals of Jammu and Srinagar symbolizes not just administrative continuity but also a deep-rooted respect for the region's geographical and cultural diversity.

The Darbar Move, spanning over 160 years, ensures that governance reaches both regions evenly, balancing the socio-economic and political interests of Jammu and Kashmir. By moving government offices, records, and staff from one capital to the other, it fosters connectivity and integration between the two regions. For citizens, it signifies the government's commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that administrative services are accessible irrespective of the seasonal shift.

The move serves as a reminder of the shared history and heritage of the region and strengthens institutional presence across both territories. Furthermore, it generates employment opportunities for local transporters, laborers, and allied sectors, subtly boosting regional economies.

Modernization of the Darbar Move has also addressed several inefficiencies. Digitization of records and online administrative processes have reduced manual workload, making the transfer smoother and more efficient. This blend of tradition and technology reflects a governance model that respects heritage while embracing progress.

The ceremonial aspect of the Darbar Move also reaffirms civic engagement, drawing attention to the historical and cultural significance of the two capitals. As officers and citizens partake in the move, it becomes a shared experience, fostering unity and mutual understanding.

The Darbar Move is more than an administrative exercise-it is a celebration of Jammu & Kashmir's diversity, resilience, and shared heritage. As the Union Territory transitions its offices and personnel, it is a moment to reflect on governance that bridges regions, cultures, and communities. Welcoming the Darbar Move is, therefore, not merely about relocating files and staff; it is about preserving history, strengthening integration, and sustaining the spirit of service to every citizen of Jammu & Kashmir.

■ P K MAM

(I make no claim to perfection - this is but a humble attempt to share what has been read, heard, reflected upon. The intention is not to compare religions or philosophies, but to explore how different civilizations - Eastern and Western - have sought to understand the purpose of human life. While Western existentialism finds meaning through courage amid life's uncertainty, Indian thought - as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, Jain Darshan, and Kashmir Shaivism - views life as a continuum of consciousness shaped by karma, duty, and self-effort. The aim is not to conclude, but to invite reflection on what truly gives meaning to our existence.)

("O Destroyer of Pura, some say the universe is eternal, others that it is transitory; some hold it to be both. Bewildered by these views, I still praise Thee, for even this confusion reflects my audacity." - Shiv Mahimnah Stotram)

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Gita teaches that life has a divine purpose. Each person must perform duty selflessly, without attachment to results. It emphasizes karma yoga - action guided by righteousness - and faith in the divine order that sustains the universe. True fulfillment lies in aligning one's actions with this higher purpose and surrendering the fruits of effort to the Supreme.

ALBERT CAMUS

Albert Camus, in The Myth of Sisyphus, argues that life has no inherent meaning. The "absurd," he says, arises from man's search for purpose in a silent universe. He offers three responses:

- Reject life through suicide - which he calls cowardly.
- Escape through faith - a "philosophical suicide."
- Embrace the absurd - living passionately

despite meaninglessness, as Sisyphus does, finding joy in the struggle itself.

Personally, I do not believe in either divine determinism or nihilism. The purpose of life, to me, is to live with passion - to find meaning not in grand pursuits, but in how we perform the simplest of daily actions.

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, in The Autobiography of an Unkempt Indian and The Continent of Ciree, reflected on the fleeting nature of life and criticized both Indian and Western civilizations for failing to face its deepest questions.

Though not as overtly absurdist as Camus, he shared skepticism toward religious assurances of an afterlife. He saw life as brief, shaped by history and culture, and urged humanity to confront existence without comforting illusions. Camus viewed this philosophically; Chaudhuri, historically - yet both celebrate human courage in uncertainty.

JAINISM

Jainism rejects a creator God but reveres Siddhas - liberated souls worthy of respect, not worship.

Mahavir's philosophy was inclusive and free from dogma. Neither nihilist nor anarchist, he emphasized individual effort and self-realization as the path to moksha (liberation), rejecting rituals and divine authority. True power, he taught, lies in personal action, ethical conduct, and inner transformation. Instead of worshipping imaginary gods, one should follow one's enlightened conscience - the real God within.

JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM

In the Abrahamic faiths, the soul rests after death awaiting divine judgment and eternal placement in heaven or hell. With no concept of rebirth, this worldview encourages a linear, one-life perspective where fulfillment must be achieved within a single lifetime. The modern Western idea - captured in "You Only Live Once" (YOLO) or "Fear of Missing Out"

(FOMO) - flows from this belief.

THE SANATAN VISION

Sanatan Dharma presents a different view. Rooted in karma and punarjanma (rebirth), it sees life as part of an unbroken continuum of consciousness. Every action becomes a seed carrying consequences into future births and shaping the soul's onward journey.

This vision upholds dharma (duty), restraint, gratitude, and ultimately moksha (liberation) - above consumption and transient pleasure. It harmonizes the material and the spiritual and reminds us that true freedom lies not in indulgence, but in transcendence.

KASEMIR SHAIVISM

Kashmir Shaivism teaches that the entire universe is a manifestation of one Supreme Consciousness - Chit or Param Shiva. Nothing exists outside this awareness; every being and thought is a vibration (spanda) of that same Consciousness.

Death, therefore, is not extinction but transformation - a change of form within the same continuous reality. Advaita Vedanta echoes this truth: the individual self is never apart from the cosmic Self. Just as a wave is not separate from the ocean, so the living and the departed remain one in undivided Consciousness.

DEATH IS CERTAIN, ITS FEAR AVOIDABLE

No one truly knows what happens after death - it remains life's greatest mystery. Yet many who have faced near-death experiences feel certain it is not the end.

In the West, denial of death fuels dreams of a machine-augmented "transhuman" future. Traditional cultures face death with serenity. When a volcano erupted in Hawaii in 2018, indigenous people saw it as the goddess Pele's presence and welcomed her; accepting danger as divine will.

Facing death clarifies how we live. Each of us has a purpose and unique gifts to express

through seva (service) and sadhana (spiritual practice). We live fully when we follow what inspires us - without fear or regret. To live well is, indeed, to die well.

FOR BELIEVERS IN KARMA

Indian faith reconciles life's joys and sorrows as means to exhaust past karmas. Faith, though illogical to reason, remains deeply human. If one ends life prematurely, the unfinished karmic account continues elsewhere. The scriptures affirm that only one's deeds - good and bad - accompany the soul. The law of Karma is unfathomable; it cannot be erased or escaped by human will.

REFLECTION

The sky may be limitless, yet everyone needs a ground to stand on - that ground is spirituality. Each person's spiritual journey shapes their purpose and performance in life's race.

In this age of restlessness, man must rediscover meaning - not in mechanical pursuits but in awakening the Self and realizing I-consciousness.

Elevated souls have always stressed two pillars of existence:

- Sadhana (Seeking) - personal discipline leading to self-realization.
- Seva (Service) - selfless action for the welfare of others.

True humanity lies in serving others. As the Bhagavad Gita declares, "There is no fall for him, either here or hereafter, who works for the good of others."

Tulsidas too reminds us: "The welfare of others is the highest Dharma; injury to others, the greatest sin."

Service to mankind is virtue; selfless service invites divine grace.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

The purpose of life, ultimately, is to realize the divinity within and express it through compassion, courage, and service to all living beings.

Loneliness: The Hidden Inequality of Our Times

■ DR. ASHWANI KUMAR

In contemporary society, loneliness is increasingly recognised as an individual feeling of emptiness, but in reality, it is a structural inequality that significantly impacts human lives and social systems, unlike traditional forms of inequality such as class, caste, or gender; which make some groups beneficiary and others victims. Loneliness functions uniquely and paradoxically. Its primary "beneficiary" is not a specific social group, but the market itself. Loneliness does not just mean a lack of companionship, but rather the absence of meaningful relationships, a sense of identity loss, and a lack of trust. Emile Durkheim's concept of anomie, the breakdown of shared norms, illustrates how social ties among people weaken, resulting in a loss of societal integration and social regulations.

Unlike other forms of inequalities like caste, class, education, and gender; loneliness as a form of inequality is hard to measure. It often stays hidden and causes suffering. Some people can manage or mask their loneliness, while others cannot. The affluent often use market resources to mask their loneliness. By joining exclusive clubs, curating social

media presences, or paying for personalised digital companionship. People from this class may lack self-awareness that they are lonely; they may experience loneliness in a latent form. In contrast, people from the lower class show their loneliness in clear, public ways. They are labeled "alienated," "out of touch," or "socially unfit," bearing not just the pain of isolation but also its stigma. People from these groups often focus their actions on their livelihood, and for them, loneliness is not seen as a problem. This uneven situation shows that loneliness affects people differently based on their class. All groups deserve intervention, but in different ways.

The institution of the market excels at addressing people's lacks, real or perceived. Consumer society feeds on commodifying lacks, and loneliness is one of the greatest lacks of all. Dating sites, high-end resorts, self-help literature, therapy sites online, and social media sites have created multi-billion-dollar businesses, asserting a promise to cure loneliness. What they provide is less than a genuine connection-a short reprieve only for continuous consumption. New forms of media, in particular, have progressed from a communicative tool to a performative space,

offering users the opportunity to create curated images of an interconnected life, while encouraging their reliance on validation in the form of likes and comments. This cyclical pattern prolongs engagement for users while feeding the very platforms that use users' reliance on connection to their economic advantage. The result is a remarkable paradox: loneliness can be socially debilitating yet economically productive. Loneliness is one of the few inequalities to which even the alleged beneficiary finds themselves ensnared within. Sure, the institution of the market is the sole beneficiary of this issue, but those who economically mobilise the market-the executives, developers, influencers, and service providers may experience the same fate that they help perpetuate. They have sacrificed authentic human connection, too. Motivated by constant calendars and a singular goal of amassing wealth, the mediation of loneliness becomes a form of loneliness itself, so it's clear that this inequality doesn't discriminate even with its creators.

The impact of loneliness is not limited to the individuals who face it; it can create collective consequences for families, workplaces, and communities,

contributing to what might be termed "secondary burnout." When an intimate partner is socially isolated, families can experience strain, trust among colleagues may erode in workplaces, and a diminished sense of community feelings. Furthermore, echoing the language of wealth inequality, loneliness can redistribute the costs of its structural conditions across society; disrupting social fabrics for the symbolic and material benefit of the commercial sphere.

It is misleading to individualise loneliness as only a mental health issue, without grappling with its structural underpinnings. There are circumstances in which counselling, therapy applications, and wellness products can be effective, but are ultimately not capable of changing their circumstances that produce loneliness."In the first place. The necessary action to counter this trajectory is to change policies and practices that reinforce the quest for community; public, and shared spaces and social trust. When implemented, focused on shared purpose - neighbourhood-level projects, collective cultural practice, or equitable and connected workplaces - they can create a counter context to the atomisation of our worlds. Above all, we must fight against the com-

modification of human connection. No longer can relationships be manufactured and sold as products if we want to get serious about making loneliness a condition that can be solved rather than profitably sustained. The challenge for us is to claim relationships not temporary connections. There is a need for people to realise it is not an individual sadness; it is shared, and it does not just rob individuals; it steals from communities, burdens individuals, and drains families and workplaces. Even the individuals who benefit from the loneliness are unable to act unless it is to continue to create more loneliness. Acknowledging loneliness as a structural inequality is a first step in addressing it. The next step is to ensure that human connection, which is fundamental to our wellness, is not left in the hands of a market that makes money on the absence of human connection. If we do nothing, we are creating a risk society that normalises the false embodiment of connection that masquerades as reality, while loneliness and the quiet despair it carries will emerge as the expected outcome of modern life.

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The Silent Epidemic: Is Your Smartphone a Tool or a Trap?

■ MOHAMMAD AYAZ RAINA

Smartphones and social media have become the heartbeat of modern life. They wake us up, keep us entertained, connect us to friends, and even guide us through emergencies. Social media, too, has turned into a virtual home where people spend hours every day. But behind the shiny screens lies another reality - one of sleepless nights, anxiety, poor focus, and broken human connections. What began as a tool of empowerment is now quietly shaping into a new epidemic: digital addiction.

Doctors, educators and psychologists warn that excessive mobile use shows symptoms similar to gambling or substance addiction-craving, withdrawal, and loss of control. The signs are everywhere: people checking their phones every few minutes, children refusing to sleep without a gadget nearby, families sitting together but talking less. In Jammu & Kashmir, studies already show a worrying pattern among students and young professionals. Many feel restless when away from their phones, and a large number admit to spending more time online than on studies or outdoor activities.

Globally, more than 5.4 billion people - two out of every three humans, use social media. Each spends more than two hours daily scrolling through feeds. In India, the scale is even greater. Over 491 million Indians are active social media users, and the number is expected to touch 900 million by the end of 2025. Research shows that Indians spend 7.3 hours every day on their phones - more than both Americans and Chinese. Among children aged 10 - 14, smartphone use has already reached 83%, much higher than the global average. A study in Jammu revealed that nearly 79% of college students show signs of internet addiction. Across the country, one-third of teenagers are hooked on their phones, with visible impacts on health, studies, and relationships.

Addiction does not spare even the global icons. Bollywood actor Amir Khan admitted in 2021 that he was addicted to his phone, checking it every 15 minutes. The habit disturbed his peace of mind so much that he quit using a smartphone and deleted his social media accounts. His choice, once surprising, now seems like a wise step many others wish they could take.

One of the most disturbing effects of digital addiction is the shrinking human attention span. Once, people could focus through long movie scenes of 45 minutes. Television reduced



it to 26 minutes. YouTube brought it down to 5 minutes. Today, Instagram Reels and TikTok keep attention for less than a minute. Experts warn it may soon fall to just 10 seconds. This is reflected in daily life - students unable to focus on studies, families distracted during meals, and drivers glued to screens even on the road. In Kashmir, the challenge is even more severe. Surveys show that over 60% of children aged 5 - 16 are digitally dependent. Many panic when their phone battery drains. Popular games like Clash of Clans, Free Fire, PUBG and Call of Duty are household names even among primary school kids, fuelling aggression and detachment from real life. Homes glow with the blue

light of screens, while parks & playgrounds lie empty. Parents, themselves busy scrolling, often hand gadgets to toddlers to make them eat or sleep. This goes against the World Health Organization's advice: zero screen time for children under two, and just one hour daily for those aged two to five. Famous J&K Doctors like Dr. Sushil Razdan and Dr. Kaiser warn that early screen dependency is damaging brain development, creativity, and emotional strength. Headaches, poor posture, and eye strain are now common among schoolchildren.

The biggest damage is to relationships. Real friendships are being replaced by "followers" and "likes." Family conversations are giving way to endless scrolling. Children are increasingly exposed to violent games, fake online identities, and harmful content. Mental health experts now speak of a new condition called "Screen Dependency Disorder."

The answer is not to reject technology, but to use it with balance. Families can create small rules: no phones during meals, no devices at bedtime, and limited screen time during family gatherings. Parents must set the example. Teachers can promote phone-free classrooms, encourage outdoor activities, and guide students on safe internet use. Young people can set app timers, switch off unnecessary notifications, and spend more time on hobbies like reading, music, or sports. Policymakers can enforce child-safe platforms, introduce age checks for apps, and develop more parks, libraries, and community clubs. Schools, especially in Jammu & Kashmir, can include screen-time checks in health programs and encourage device-free study hours during exams.

Smartphones and social media are not going away - and nor should they. They are powerful tools for learning, creativity, and connection. But if we don't act wisely, they may control us instead of empowering us. If India hopes to become a developed nation by 2047, it needs a generation that is strong, focused, and socially connected. The challenge before us is clear: reclaim balance, protect childhood, and rebuild human connection.

If ignored, this silent epidemic could reshape not just individual lives but the social fabric itself. But if addressed wisely through awareness, discipline and healthier habits - technology can remain a tool, not a trap. The choice, ultimately, is ours.

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Literary women getting lost in the era of semi-nude mujras

‘The voice of books has been lost somewhere in the glitz and glamour of social media’

■ DR. PRIYANKA SAURABH

This is the era of Instagram and digital media. Attraction and spectacle sell the most here. But to save the soul of society, it is important that women return to literature again. The noise of Instagram will subside after some time, But the words of literature will remain immortal. Women who read literature are never lost, they remain alive in the pages of every book that one opens with all their heart. In today's time when there is a smartphone in every hand and hunger for likes and followers in every mind, the existence of women who read literature and books is being left behind. This is the era of platforms like Instagram reels, TikTok and digital entertainment. Here, images of semi-nude women performing mujra reach millions of people in seconds, but the voice of women reading serious literature, poetry or criticism seems to be suppressed somewhere. This is not only a social irony but also a cultural crisis. For centuries, women have been watering the soul of society with sensitivity and compassion through literature. Writers like Mahadevi Varma, Amrita Pritam, Krishna Sobti, Maitreyi Pushpa not only created literature but were also symbols of women's identity and society's consciousness. But today's time is busier in making "quotes" from them and decorating them on Instagram stories than reading them. A large part of today's generation is engrossed in visual content. The quick consumption of videos and pictures has pushed back the slow, deep and introspective world of books. Women, who once sought solace in books, are now being forced to create a glamorized identity on social media. There is no doubt that social media gives women a platform, but this platform often gives more importance to their bodies, not their ideas. This is the reason why a dance or semi-nude act on Instagram gets millions of likes, but a literary analysis by a woman does not even reach hundreds. Women who read and wrote literature used to leave a deep impact on society. They used to challenge the system through their writings, create new definitions of relationships and prepare new grounds for gender equality. But today, priorities have changed. Modern women often join the race of social media to prove themselves. Here beauty and attraction sell more, thoughts and feelings less. It is ironic that the same literature that gave voice to women is now waiting for their voice. Mahadevi Varma's poems were such a symbol of a woman's compassion, pain and beauty that the soul would tremble after reading them. She used to write - "Main neer bhari dukh ki badli..." The

soul of a woman spoke in her poems, but today the same soul is getting suppressed in the noise of Instagram filters and background music. Where earlier women used to tell the society "listen to my voice", today they are forced to say "like my dance." This is the biggest cultural degradation. However, it would not be entirely fair to say that women who read literature have disappeared. They still exist, but their scope has become limited. Women are still reading, writing and discussing literature in libraries, universities and small literary forums. The only difference is that their voice is not as loud as that of the glamorous content of social media. Actually, the problem is also with the platform. Instagram's algorithm itself gives priority to entertainment and glitz. Serious literature or long studies do not become "trending" there. Reading literature means looking within yourself, understanding the pain of others, and feeling the soul deeply. When society is away from literature, it also loses its sensitivity. The compassion and tenderness of women keep the society balanced. But when these women are limited to only body show and ignore the depth of the soul, then the hope of society becoming sensitive also decreases. To overcome this situation, it is important that the family and the education system instill a love for books. Children, especially girls, must develop the habit of reading books at home and in schools. Writers and publishers should present literature in an attractive form on social media. The government and society should give more platforms to women who read and write literature, so that their voices are not suppressed. Women should form literary groups and book clubs among themselves, which inspire each other. History is a witness that whenever society plunged into darkness, literature showed the way. And the role of women in that literature has always been decisive. Be it Meera, Mahadevi or contemporary women-they decided the direction of society with their words. Even today, if women embrace books, the coming generation will not just get "followers" and "likes" but will also get a deeper understanding of life. Today's conclusion is that this is the era of Instagram and digital media. Here, attraction and spectacle sell the most. But to save the soul of the society, it is necessary that women return to literature again. Because the noise of Instagram will stop after some time, but the words of literature will remain immortal. Women who read literature are never lost-they only become blurred due to the negligence of society. Whenever a book is opened, they will come alive again.