

One Nation, One Election: Revitalizing Jammu and Kashmir's cultural heritage through artist support

■ MOHD YASEEN

The concept of One Nation, One Election envisions a synchronized electoral cycle where Lok Sabha (Parliament) and all State Assembly elections are held simultaneously across India. This idea has been proposed as a way to streamline the democratic process, reduce election-related expenses, and minimize disruptions caused by frequent elections. Currently, India witnesses multiple elections at different times due to varied assembly tenures, leading to a continuous cycle of campaigning and polling. The idea of simultaneous elections aims to bring stability to governance by allowing governments to focus on policymaking rather than being in perpetual election mode.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of this idea is cost reduction. Frequent elections require massive financial resources for security, logistics, and administration. By holding elections simultaneously, the burden on the exchequer could be significantly reduced. Additionally, elections often lead to the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, which temporarily halts new policy announcements and development projects. A unified election system could minimize such disruptions, ensuring smoother governance and uninterrupted policy implementation.

Moreover, political stability is another key advantage. In the current system, governments at both the state and central levels are often preoccupied with electioneering, preventing long-term planning. A synchronized election cycle could encourage more decisive governance, as governments would not have to constantly worry about upcoming state elections influencing national policies. It would also help political parties focus more on governance rather than continuous campaigning.

However, the implementation of One Nation, One Election comes with significant constitutional and logistical challenges. The Indian Constitution, under Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356, provides different tenures for state legislatures and Parliament, making synchronization a complex legal task. Amending these provisions would require broad political consensus, which may be difficult to achieve. Furthermore, concerns over federalism arise, as states would be forced to align their election cycles with the national schedule, potentially undermining their autonomy.

Another critical challenge is what happens if a government collapses prematurely? If a state government falls before completing its tenure, would the state be left without an elected leadership until the next synchronized election? Solutions such as President's Rule or an interim government might be considered, but these could raise democratic concerns. Additionally, conducting elections simultaneously on such a massive scale would require enormous security and logistical arrangements, stretching the Election Commission's resources.

Given these complexities, a gradual and phased approach may be a more practical way forward. Instead of implementing simultaneous elections across the country in one go, a phased synchronization of a few state elections with the LS elections could be tested first. Engaging political stakeholders, legal experts, and governance institutions in discussions would be crucial for building consensus and addressing potential hurdles. Strengthening governance mechanisms to handle premature government collapses would also be necessary before implementing such a large-scale electoral reform.

The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages (JKAA-CL) holds a distinguished position in the region, revered for its pivotal role in preserving and promoting the cultural and artistic traditions of Jammu and Kashmir. It serves as a platform for artists, writers, musicians, and performers, ensuring that the region's rich and diverse heritage continues to thrive. The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages is instrumental in supporting artists, offering them opportunities to showcase their work, fostering creativity, and maintaining the region's cultural vibrancy.

However, despite its invaluable contributions, there remains a pressing issue that cannot be ignored: the inadequate financial compensation provided to those who dedicate their lives to the arts. Artists, writers, and cultural workers associated with the academy continue to grapple with meager remuneration that does not reflect the value of their work or their contribution to society.

The artist fee, at a mere Rs.1,350 per performance or contribution, stands as a glaring reflection of the disparity between the cultural and artistic value of work and its financial recognition. In the current economic climate, where the cost of living is rising steadily, this fee is simply insufficient to sustain an artist's livelihood. Basic necessities, including food, housing, and healthcare, have seen significant price hikes, making it increasingly difficult for many artists to make ends meet. The fee of Rs. 1,350 might have been more acceptable in the past, but it is no longer in tune with the economic realities of the present. This problem is symptomatic of a broader trend: artists and cultural workers are often overlooked and undervalued, despite their crucial role in shaping the intellectual and creative fabric of society.

The disparity between the remuneration of artists and that of salaried professionals is particularly striking. While employees in the government and corporate sectors benefit from regular pay raises and other financial perks, artists, who are vital to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, do not receive the same treatment. Government employees, politicians, and bureaucrats regularly see their salaries adjusted to keep pace with inflation, while the artists who breathe

life into the art and culture of the region remain stagnant in their financial struggles. Similarly, employees in the private sector are granted annual appraisals and bonuses as a way to reward their performance and to adjust their earnings to reflect the realities of the economy. However, artists are left without a structured framework for ensuring fair and consistent compensation.

The profession of an artist is inherently unstable, with many facing uncertainty in terms of income and opportunities. Most artists dedicate years, if not decades, to mastering their craft, but financial security often remains elusive. The nature of artistic work means that it is project-based, with performances, exhibitions, and contributions occurring sporadically rather than regularly. This unpredictability makes it difficult for many artists to plan for their future, pay their bills, or support their families. The fee of Rs. 1,350 per performance is grossly inadequate in such an environment. Even with a substantial number of performances, an artist would find it challenging to generate a sustainable income. This constant financial insecurity leads to a range of unfortunate consequences: artists are forced to take on secondary jobs unrelated to their passion or creative practice, hindering their ability to fully invest time and energy into their art.

The economic strain also has wider implications for the cultural landscape. When artists are financially stressed, their ability to create, innovate, and contribute to the arts is compromised. Creativity flourishes in an environment of stability and security. Yet, when basic financial needs are not met, artists are left unable to dedicate themselves fully to their craft. This not only harms the individual artist but also affects the cultural output of the region as a whole. A lack of financial support stifles the potential for growth and innovation within the artistic community, limiting the richness of cultural experiences that can be shared with the wider public.

It is time for a structured revision of artist fees. Artists, like other professionals, must be able to rely on periodic fee increments that reflect changes in the economic environment. Just as government employees and corporate workers receive pay raises to match inflation, artists should be granted the same privilege. A reasonable starting point would be to institute a minimum 10% fee increase every year.

This would provide artists with a basic level of financial security and enable them to focus on their creative endeavours without the constant worry of financial instability. The value of an artist's work should be reflected in their compensation, and this adjustment would be a step in the right direction toward ensuring that artists can maintain their livelihoods while continuing to contribute to the cultural and intellectual life of the region.

Additionally, the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages (JKAA-CL) may look to the fee structures of National Academies as a reference point for their own fee structure. By considering the fee models and financial frameworks of established cultural institutions, the JKAA-CL can ease the process of implementing fee hikes, aligning them with broader national standards. This approach would not only ensure that artist remuneration keeps pace with the growing cost of living but also allow JKAA-CL to be more in tune with the needs and expectations of the artistic community.

In addition to increasing the artist fees, there are other ways the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages can provide financial support to artists. The creation of grants and fellowships specifically designed for artists in need would be a significant step in this direction. Such funding could be awarded to individual artists or collectives to help them pursue specific projects or cover their living expenses while they focus on their work. Fellowships could also provide opportunities for artists to collaborate with national and international institutions, fostering cross-cultural exchange and expanding the reach of Jammu and Kashmir's cultural heritage beyond regional boundaries.

Furthermore, the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages could explore the introduction of a pension system for senior artists. Many veteran artists, who have dedicated their lives to preserving and promoting the cultural traditions of Jammu and Kashmir, face financial hardship in their later years. A pension system would offer them the support and dignity they deserve after decades of service to the arts. Such initiatives would not only help senior artists but also demonstrate a broader commitment to the well-being of the entire artistic community.

Finally, exploring alternative revenue sources could provide the academy with additional funds that could be used to support artists financially. The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages could consider organizing ticketed cultural events, paid workshops, and other cultural activities that generate income. Collaborations with national and international cultural institutions could also serve as a means of bringing in additional revenue while simultaneously increasing the visibility of Jammu and Kashmir's artistic traditions on the global stage. These initiatives would not only provide much-needed financial support but would also help to expand the reach of the region's cultural offerings, allowing for greater recognition and appreciation of the rich heritage of Jammu and Kashmir.

Investing in the arts is not just an investment in individual artists; it is an investment in the cultural and intellectual growth of society. The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage are fundamental to a society's identity and well-being. If the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages is to continue its vital role in safeguarding the region's artistic traditions, it must address the financial insecurity that too many artists face. Providing fair compensation, introducing support mechanisms such as grants and fellowships, and exploring alternative revenue streams are all steps that can help ensure the survival and thriving of Jammu and Kashmir's vibrant artistic community.

Creativity cannot thrive when its practitioners are burdened by financial distress. The survival of cultural traditions depends on the well-being of the artists who bring them to life. The time has come for the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages to recognize the importance of ensuring fair compensation for the region's artists. Only through such recognition will the academy truly fulfill its mission of promoting and preserving the rich cultural heritage of the region. Let us ensure that the creators of tomorrow are supported today, so that Jammu and Kashmir's cultural legacy can continue to flourish for generations to come.

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India must lead in AI for the South Asian Region

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At the AI Action Summit in Paris, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged global leaders to collaborate on setting AI standards that benefit everyone particularly in the Global South. He emphasized the need for collective global efforts to establish governance and standards that reflect shared values, mitigate risks, and foster trust. On this occasion, Modi also announced that India is developing AI applications for the public good and is building its own large language model (LLM) to address the country's diversity across various sectors.

In January, Ashwini Vaishnav, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, announced also at the Utkarsh Odisha Conclave that India would build native generative AI models within six to eight months. He revealed that India had secured more than 18,600 high-end GPUs to build the AI infrastructure and scale its computing capacity. Among the 18,600 GPUs, there are 12,896 Nvidia H100 GPUs, 1,480 Nvidia H200 GPUs, and 742

AMD MI325 and MI325X GPUs as comparison to DeepSeek AI was trained on 2,000 GPUs, ChatGPT was trained on 25,000 GPUs.

GPUs or Graphics Processing Units are specialized hardware designed to accelerate the rendering of images and videos, but their parallel processing capabilities make them ideal for a range of complex computational tasks, including machine learning, scientific simulations, and crypto currency mining. Leading manufacturers of GPUs include NVIDIA, AMD and Intel, with NVIDIA being especially dominant in AI and machine learning through its CUDA platform and hardware like the NVIDIA A100 and Tesla series. India has already implemented the DeepSeek-R1 AI model and experts are currently evaluating the technical report to better understand its capabilities.

Meanwhile, Large Language Models (LLMs) have become foundational for AI systems. These models enable machines to learn human-like intelligence, facilitating more diverse and sophisticated interactions between

machines and humans. LLMs have immense potential in various governance sectors, including health, education, transport, defence and security. However, creating LLMs requires massive funding, along with strategic resources such as semiconductors, which complicate the process.

The race for LLMs began with the launch of OpenAI's models in the USA, Google's Bard, Meta's AI and Microsoft's Copilot, initiatives supported by large tech giants in Silicon Valley with substantial funding. Yet, a notable disruption in the LLM market has come from the Chinese start-up DeepSeek. It has created an affordable open-source LLM that has challenged the dominance of Western tech giants and sparked a global reassessment of AI research policies. This shift is particularly relevant for smaller countries in South Asia, particularly India's neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

DeepSeek's success demonstrates that the AI race is not limited to countries

with vast technological and financial resources. However, DeepSeek's AI models are not entirely free in terms of data analysis. Due to China's strict internet regulations and content controls, these models are designed to avoid discussing politically sensitive topics, such as democracy, human rights or global conflicts. As a result, China's AI models often reflect the country's geopolitical interests, shaping user behavior; especially in countries that lack their own AI infrastructure.

India, with its 22 officially recognized languages and numerous dialects, faces both opportunities and challenges in AI development. Country's linguistic diversity offers a chance to create more inclusive AI systems, but also poses challenges in ensuring that AI models can effectively support a wide range of languages. Several years ago, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore worked on RESPIN Project. It was said that this is worked for speech recognition in agriculture and finance for the poor is an initiative predominantly to create resources and make them avail-

able as a digital public good in the open source domain. This was speech recognition project in nine different Indian languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Bhojpuri, Kannada, Magadhi, Chhattisgarhi, and Maithili. At that time, there are several inputs required from such experts including assessment of sentence quality in a language, pronunciation of the people from whom recordings are done etc.

To create indigenous LLMs that cater to India's linguistic pluralism, it is crucial to ensure that AI systems are culturally relevant and accessible to a broader population. By providing services in multiple languages, such models could improve public services, enhance educational resources, and facilitate more effective communication. Furthermore, developing homegrown LLMs would help preserve linguistic heritage and promote digital inclusivity. Geopolitically, investing in domestic LLMs would reduce dependence on foreign technologies, thereby bolstering national security and technological sovereignty.

Many global AI models struggle to support smaller languages. While Chinese models prioritize Mandarin and regional dialects, and Western models mainly focus on English and other widely spoken global languages, an AI model developed in India would likely include languages like Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Newari, among others. Such a model would increase the contextual relevance and accuracy of voice recognition, natural language processing (NLP), machine translation, and AI-driven content creation.

At this juncture, South Asian countries need to collaborate with Indian leadership to develop autonomous LLMs that respect their unique languages and governance systems, ensuring a fair and open AI ecosystem. Relying on censored AI models is very risky for objective knowledge, foreign digital dependencies and regional technological sovereignty.

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Plant Trees-Save the Planet

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Planting trees is a fundamental and effective way to combat climate change, restore ecosystems and enhance biodiversity. Trees play a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, thus helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stabilize the climate. Additionally, trees provide numerous environmental, social and economic benefits to communities around the world.

are home to a vast array of plant and animal species, many of which rely on trees for habitat, food and shelter. By planting trees, we can create and restore habitats for wildlife, promote biodiversity and help many species thrive. Healthy forests also play a crucial role in regulating water cycles, preventing soil erosion and maintaining the quality of air and water resources.

Furthermore, planting trees has numerous social and economic benefits for communities. Trees provide valuable resources such as timber, fuel wood and non-timber forest products that support local livelihoods and economies. In addition, urban trees help to improve air quality, reduce noise pollution and enhance the aesthetic appeal of neighbourhoods, contributing to the health and well-being of urban residents. Planting trees also creates opportunities for community engagement, education and volunteerism, fostering a sense of environmental stewardship and collective responsibility for the planet.

Planting trees is a powerful and cost-effective strategy for addressing climate change, restoring ecosystems and promoting sustainable development. By investing in tree planting initiatives, we can harness the natural benefits of trees to mitigate carbon emissions, support biodiversity and improve the resilience of communities to environmental challenges. Whether through large-scale reforestation projects,

community tree planting events or individual efforts to green urban spaces, everyone can contribute to the global effort to plant trees and create a more sustainable and resilient future for generations to come.

Jammu and Kashmir, is renowned for its picturesque valleys, majestic mountains, and fertile plains, rich natural resources and diverse agriculture contribute significantly to local livelihoods. However, challenges like climate change, deforestation, and soil erosion threaten the region's agricultural sustainability. In response, agroforestry, the integration of trees, crops, and livestock, emerges as a promising solution to enhance agricultural productivity, conserve the environment, and restore ecological balance.

Agroforestry in Jammu and Kashmir has deep roots in traditional farming practices. Rural communities have historically integrated fruit-bearing trees, timber, and crops to sustain their livelihoods. Trees like Walnut, Chinar (Platanus orientalis), and Willow have been staples in local agricultural systems, offering shade, fodder, timber, and income. The terraced farms of Kashmir Valley combined apple orchards, grains, and vegetables, creating a unique agroforestry model.

In Jammu's plains, trees like Shisham (Dalbergia sissoo) and Poplar (Populus species) were grown alongside crops like wheat and mustard to stabilize soils and provide timber.

However, modern monoculture and urbanization have led to the degradation of traditional agroforestry systems.

The uniqueness of a place is attributed to its prominent vegetation which can be gauged by the fact that the names of many places across the globe are derived from their distinctive flora. In India, "Nilgiris" draws its name from the blue flowers of "Kurinjii" and "Sunderbans" from the Sundri trees in West Bengal. Similarly, Kashmir draws its uniqueness from its majestic Chinars.

Chinar, a tree of antiquity and magnificence is an integral part of the landscape of Kashmir and holds a unique place in its cultural traditions. The tale of changing seasons in Kashmir often finds expression in the distinct appearances of Chinar. Numerically, Chinar trees has seen a decline over the past decades, due to plant diseases, pests, as well as impact of urbanization. Government is taking proactive steps for the conservation of mighty Chinars, and has embarked on, zealously, for planting Chinar trees on various locations like educational institutions, office complexes, parks, gardens, and other open areas.

Last year heatwave has set new records, causing widespread concern. The distressing temperatures in April, May, and even June have not only worried environmentalists but also the general public. Environmentalists stress the need for vigilance. They

advocate that more trees planted during spring season, the better our future will be, thus sparing the next generations from hardships. Through robust tree plantation campaigns, we can mitigate future challenges, necessitating public engagement and committed action at individual levels.

Active participation of social, religious, and voluntary organizations in tree plantation drives can expedite solutions to this problem. Emphasis on greenery is critical, yet we are engaged in creating concrete jungles instead of tree-filled forests. Deforestation and forest destruction lead to polluted environments, adversely affecting public health, and causing people to spend most of their income on healthcare.

Today, agroforestry is being revitalized with scientific methods to ensure ecological and economic sustainability while aligning with the needs of small-scale and marginal farmers. Illegal logging, overgrazing, and urbanization have significantly reduced the forest cover. Agroforestry restores degraded lands, increases tree cover, and improves soil fertility.

The hilly terrain of Jammu and Kashmir is prone to soil erosion, landslides, and loss of topsoil, particularly in monsoon-prone areas. Tree roots in agroforestry systems anchor the soil, reducing erosion. The region faces glacial retreat, erratic weather, and extreme cold conditions. Agroforestry creates microclimates, protecting

crops and improving resilience against climate variability.

Agroforestry integrates fruit, timber, and fodder trees with food crops, ensuring year-round income for farmers and reducing dependence on single crops. Tree-based systems reduce water runoff, recharge groundwater, and maintain soil moisture, addressing water scarcity issues in Jammu's drier regions.

Agroforestry in Jammu and Kashmir holds immense potential to transform the agricultural sector while preserving its unique Himalayan ecosystems. By integrating trees with crops and livestock, agroforestry addresses critical challenges like soil erosion, water scarcity, and climate change while ensuring economic stability for farmers.

The degradation and loss of forests threatens the survival of many species, and reduces the ability of forests to provide essential services. People have been for ages depending on forests for timber and other services for construction and nourishing herbs besides other numerous benefits.

The effects of degradation of forests are already visible due to accelerated soil erosion, flash floods, silting up of reservoirs, loss of biodiversity and reduced forest productivity. There seems to be a lack of appreciation of the unseen benefits of forests but the already existing impact is for everyone to perceive. Efforts should be to save and protect the forests.