

CINEMATIC REVIVAL

After decades of disruption due to militancy and political instability, the Kashmir Valley is once again witnessing a vibrant resurgence of film activity. From Bollywood blockbusters to regional cinema, and from OTT content to independent filmmakers, the breathtaking landscape of Kashmir is reclaiming its rightful place as one of the most coveted shooting destinations in the world. This revival not only marks a return of cinematic glamour to the region but also brings with it promising socio-economic opportunities for local communities.

Kashmir has always held a special place in Indian cinema. From the golden era of the 1950s and 60s, when films like Kashmir Ki Kali, Jungle, and Jab Jab Phool Khile painted the valley as a romantic paradise, to more recent blockbusters such as Haider, Fitoor, and Shikara, the region has provided a stunning backdrop for cinematic storytelling. However, the eruption of insurgency in the late 1980s led to a complete halt in film activity. For over three decades, the valley remained largely absent from film sets - a silence that is now breaking.

A major factor contributing to the revival of film activity in Kashmir has been proactive policy support from the central and Union Territory governments. In 2021, the Jammu and Kashmir Film Policy was unveiled to facilitate film production in the region. The policy provides a single-window clearance system, location scouting assistance, and attractive financial incentives for filmmakers. Importantly, it aims to create a film ecosystem in Kashmir by developing local talent, building infrastructure like studios and editing labs, and promoting film tourism.

The establishment of the Jammu & Kashmir Film Development Council (JKFDC) has also played a pivotal role in easing bureaucratic processes and connecting producers with local stakeholders. According to officials, over 150 permissions for film and web series shoots have been issued in the last two years alone.

Following the implementation of the new policy, a number of major Bollywood production houses have returned to Kashmir. In 2022, Dunki, starring Shah Rukh Khan and directed by Rajkumar Hirani, shot several key scenes in the valley. Similarly, movies like Yodha, Bheed, and The Kashmir Files have either been filmed in or based on the region, increasing its visibility in mainstream media.

Kashmir's pristine meadows, snow-capped mountains, and traditional architecture continue to captivate directors looking for authentic and visually stunning locations. Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, and Srinagar are among the most sought-after locales. Even less explored areas like Gurez and Kupwara are beginning to feature in scouting tours.

The revival of film activity has opened new avenues for local talent. Many Kashmiri youth are now participating as supporting actors, crew members, fixers, and cultural consultants. The JKFDC is also organizing workshops and training programs to equip young artists and technicians with skills in cinematography, acting, editing, and direction.

Local actors such as Zaira Wasim (Dangal, Secret Superstar) and Danish Pandor are already making waves in the industry, and more emerging talent is expected to join the scene. Additionally, the presence of film units provides a boost to small businesses, including hotels, transport services, catering units, and artisans.

Apart from mainstream Bollywood, regional and independent filmmakers are finding a creative space in Kashmir. Filmmakers from Kashmir and across India are using the valley not just for its beauty, but also as a canvas for powerful storytelling around identity, resilience, conflict, and hope.

■ PARVEEN KUMAR

All pervasive, Drug abuse today has become a curse with no hardly any part of the world free from this menace. This abuse is seriously affecting the physical and socio-economic well-being of the individuals ultimately having a negative impact on economy of the country and hindering the progress of the country. Youths becoming addict during the prime of their age ultimately become a burden on their families, society and country. The epidemic of drug abuse in younger generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. The stress and strain of the modern-day life has rendered the individual particularly youths more vulnerable to the problem of substance abuse. They perceive it as a medium through which they feel relaxed totally unworried of the stress which they are going through. The years when their energy could have been used in a positive way are lost in drug abuse. Most of the researches reveal that suggest that early (12-14 years old) to late (15-17 years old) adolescence is a critical-risk period for the initiation of substance use and that substance use may peak among young people aged 18-25 years. A government survey found children as young as 9 are using drugs in Delhi. Every day India witnesses 10 suicides related to drug abuse.

Drug addiction refers to the condition of being addicted to a particular drug, particularly narcotic drugs. The most disturbing thing about drug addiction is that people in different countries of the world are becoming addicted to all kinds of drugs. There are different types of street drugs such as Cocaine, Heroin, Marijuana, Cannabis, Opiates and others. Heroin is one of the most dangerous drugs that suppress our heart's work. Drug addiction is referred as drug dependency, as the addict develops dependency for a particular substance. People usually take to drug abuse in order to curb the stress caused due to the family issues, pressure at work, growing competition in schools and colleges, relationship problems, financial issues or feeling of emptiness. Youths usually get involved in this out of curiosity or due to pressure from their peer group. In the long run, they suffer from false beliefs with always being in an

unorganized and agitated violent behaviour. They also develop tendency to commit suicide. Mostly the youth residing in hostels fall easy prey to drug addiction. Drug addiction may also have long term impact on life and one may develop severe symptoms such as fatigue, trembling, depression, anxiety, headache, insomnia, chills and sweating, paranoia, behavior changes, dilated pupils, poor coordination problems etc.

Illicit Trafficking: Another related issue is the illicit trafficking. Illicit trafficking refers to the illegal trade or movement of goods or people across borders or within a country. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including the trafficking of illegal drugs, weapons, endangered species, and humans. Essentially, it involves the unauthorized and often clandestine exchange of items that are either prohibited by law or restricted in their movement.

In 2022, victims from 162 nationalities were trafficked to 128 different countries. About 70% of those investigated, prosecuted and convicted for trafficking in 2022 were men. African victims were the most widely trafficked group. They accounted for 31% of cross-border trafficking flows. Owing to the multifaceted challenges posed by drug abuse and the illicit trafficking, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) vide a resolution 42/112 of 7 December 1987, decided to observe 26 June as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking as an expression of its determination to strengthen action and cooperation to achieve the goal of an international society free of drug abuse.

Drug abuse In Jammu & Kashmir: In recent years Jammu and Kashmir in India has seen an increase in the drug use. The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment has conveyed to the Parliament of India that approximately 13.50 lakh drug users are estimated to be in Jammu and Kashmir, with the majority falling within the age range of 18 to 75 years. In Kashmir Division, the condition is also going from bad to worse. A 2022 study by the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, in Srinagar, observed an exponential rise in substance abuse in the Kashmir Valley. In 2023, a study conducted by this institute revealed that the prevalence of Hepatitis C among

drug abusers in Kashmir is 72 percent. The institute received 150 drug addiction cases per day. It also found that over 33 thousand syringes are being used daily for heroin injections.

This year's campaign "Break the cycle. #StopOrganizedCrime" highlights the need for coordinated long-term action to break the cycle of organized crime and drug trafficking - by addressing root causes, investing in prevention and building stronger health, education and social systems. It is wise to stay away from it. Those who are already a victim to this menace can seek expert guidance to overcome it. Proper medication, support from loved ones and strong will power can take one out of the dark world of drug abuse. The treatment for drug abuse is extended over a long period so as to ensure that the problem does not relapse. This year the day is celebrated with the theme, breaking the cycle. Breaking the cycle of drug abuse can be challenging and daunting task, but surely not impossible. The first step to breaking the cycle is acknowledging that you have an addiction. Trying to break the cycle on your own can be risky and dangerous. Seek professional treatment from a rehab centre. Identify the triggers i. e peoples, places or feelings that can help you avoid them. With this we have also to build a strong support system, a network of friends, family and relatives that can help in breaking the cycle of addiction.

Drug related literacy is also a key remedial measure to solve this problem is education. Schools and colleges should take the lead in educating students about the negative effects of drugs and alcohol. Educational institutions should organize workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns that discuss the harmful impact of addiction on physical and mental health, relationships, and society as a whole.

The stigma attached to addiction often discourages people from seeking help. To overcome this, it is necessary to create a supportive environment that encourages individuals to come forward and seek help.

It is also essential to have strict laws and regulations in place to curb the production, distribution, and consumption of drugs and alcohol. The government can enforce stringent laws that deter

individuals from engaging in these activities. Law enforcement agencies should work closely with community members to identify and address drug-related issues in their neighborhoods. We need to recognize the dangers of addiction and take proactive steps to prevent it from becoming a widespread problem. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has prepared a National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2018-25. The plan focuses on Preventive education, Awareness generation, treatment and rehabilitation of drug dependent persons. June 26 every year is celebrated as International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking to generate awareness among the masses regarding the harmful effects of drugs. As the country is making all out efforts to weed out the menace of drugs, let us become a part of Nasha Mukta Bharat campaign since the evil can be eradicated from the society only with people's participation. Supported each year by individuals, communities, and various organizations all over the world, this global observance aims to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent to society.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment attempts to reduce demand through awareness programmes, de-addiction centres and community based rehabilitation. The National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) envisions a drug-free India and strives towards education, capacity building, and evidence-based intervention.

On the legal front, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, enforces and provides for stringent punishment for drug-related offences.

It allows for the confiscation of any property alleged to have been derived from a person's involvement in illicit drug activities. Recent initiatives like "Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan" involve youth participation, community outreach, and digital platforms to spread awareness and reduce stigma.

These combined efforts and a comprehensive strategy against the drug menace can prove to be effective.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues)

Operation Sindoor A Giant Leap Against Terror

What about displaced KP's Rehabilitation?

■ ER. PL KHUSHU



On 22 April, Pakistan based terrorist group "The Resistance Front" (TRF) perpetrated a devastating attack in Pahalgam, J&K. In this attack 26 innocent tourists were killed in cold blood after segregating them based on their religion. TRF is an offshoot of the well known Pakistan backed terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. Post the attack, TRF claimed the responsibility for this attack not once but twice within a few hours. Pakistan's subsequent refusal to acknowledge or curb these terrorist networks compelled India to take a responsible but resolute action. In response, on the night of 7-8 May 2025, the Government of India executed "Operation Sindoor". The response was non escalatory, precise and targeted terrorist training camps only, at nine different locations within Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. No military targets were engaged.

However, in the early hours of 8 May, Pakistan, in an escalated response launched coordinated drone and missile strikes targeting over a dozen Indian military installations across the Northern and Western theatres, including Srinagar, Jammu, Pathankot, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Bathinda and Bhuj. India's robust Integrated Counter-drone Grid and layered Air Defense systems intercepted these attacks, recovering debris conclusively traced to Pakistani origin. Following these provocations, India conducted precision strikes against Pakistani Air Defence systems at a number of locations in Pakistan. These strikes were confined to the neutralization of systems that had facilitated the earlier Pakistani assault and were executed under the guiding principle of "equal intensity in the same domain." By targeting only those installations directly involved in the aggression, India balanced the imperative of deterrence with its overarching commitment to de-escalation.

Unfortunately along the Line of Control in Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan escalated to unprovoked mortar and heavy artillery fire into civilian areas in which sixteen innocent lives were lost, including three women and five children. Here too, India was compelled to respond in equal proportion with mortar and artillery fire. Indian Armed forces reiterate their commitment to non-escalation. However, any attempts by Pakistan to escalate was responded firmly and under Operation Sindoor will be responded in future too as per the statements of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to teach a lesson to Pakistan for harboring terrorists an

their camps in Pakistan. The operation lasted approximately 23 minutes, utilizing Rafale jets equipped with high precision Missiles and drones. Operation Sindoor, hit about 4 location in the territory of Pakistan whereas 5 within the region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir: As per reports the terror hubs of Markaz Subhan Allah, Bahawalpur, Jaish-e-Mohammed Headquarters, Markaz Taiba, Muridke, Lashkar-e-Taiba Base, Mehmoona Joya, Sialkot, Hizbul Mujahideen Camp, Markaz Ahle Hadith, Barnala, LeT-linked Religious Indoctrination Hub, Syedna Bilal Camp, Muzaffarabad, Jaish-e-Mohammed Training Centre, Shhwai Nalla Camp, Muzaffarabad , Lashkar-e-Taiba Operations Unit , Makaz Raheel Shahid, Kotli , Hizbul Mujahideen Centre, Markaz Abbas, Kotli, JeM Safehouse, Sarjal Facility, Tehra Kalan & the like were precisely hit and destroyed alongwith its occupants, viz the terroriirts manning these centers.

Operation Sindoor is a principle-driven military response underpinned by strategic restraint to convey to Pakistan not to harbor the terrorists and their camps in Pakistan, which are being used in Jammu and Kashmir for the last more than 30 years by Pakistan to disturb peace and tranquility in J & K. It was in response to a barbaric terrorist attack on innocent tourists which originated from Pakistan. India had a right to response which it did, in a responsible, restrained, measured and a non-escalatory manner.

While addressing the nation Prime Minister Modi made it specifically clear that, Terror and Talks cannot go together, Terror and trade cannot go together and Water and Blood cannot flow together. It conveys enough signals to Pakistan not to rear and fan terror and terrorists in its country and use these as a proxy war against India, in the shape of brutal terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir which is going on there for the last more than 30 years.

The word "Sindoor" for this operation has a special emotional significance, which indicates the taking the revenge for the widowing of young Indian ladies in the terror operations at Pahalgam brutally and mercilessly, by the Pakistani sponsored terrorists, when the word "Sindoor" in Indian Hindu culture signifies the symbol of the sanctity of presence of a married status of an Indian Hindu woman, which they exhibit on their foreheads, by applying symbolic Sindoor on their foreheads as mark of and regard of their married life status. It is a sign of the sacred marriage of a woman.

Better late than never. Enough is enough now on the part of Pakistan. Operation Sindoor is a welcome step in this regard and presumably it appears that a start has been given to deal with Pakistan the perpe-

trator of terror in Kashmir, with some kind of kinetic reaction, though much more needs to be done on the ground security levels to tackle Pakistan militarily with an appropriate response.

Such operations were not taken recourse to in the case of the mass genocide and forced displacement of the more than six lack Kashmiri Pandits, who are living in exile as refugees in their own country.

It is not a new phenomenon of terror for the forcibly displaced Kashmiri Pandits , as they have witnessed it 35 years ago, when they are living as refugees in their own country for long now. Thanks to the pseudo secular policies of the power corridors of this country. With the extreme influx of the of Islamic fundamentalist wave in Kashmir right from 1988, even though its deep roots were very much there in a section of the majority population, it resulted in the shaking of the foundations of the basic existence of the roots of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir, being the aboriginal dwellers of Kashmir. KP's were driven out from Kashmir at the gun point, naked and barren, along with carrying of the deep scars of their genocide, loot, arson, rape and mass devastation with them. Since then the displaced KP's continue to live as refugees in their own country as a "Caged - Community", anticipating and expecting a fair treatment with them at the hands of the power corridors, when tall claims are being made about the same day in and day out. Nothing has matured on the ground, nor does it appear to happen. Displaced KP's lost everything under this communal fiasco of Islamic fundamentalism, which was more loaded with terrorism than any Islamic peeping of any sacred principles of even the tough Islamic teachings and preaching's, to be classified under any ism of reality or truth of a religious dogma or faith. History is privy to the fact that the role of the terrorist imported in Kashmir across the border with the aim to Islamize Kashmir fully under the umbrella of fundamentalism, almost turned the other way round, when they targeted Kashmiri Pandits first to cleanse the valley from their presence. It was aided and abetted by most of the political leaders of Kashmir along with the majority of the local population. The authorities in power of varied classifications that matter for peaceful governance and freedom for all ignored it spitefully, as KP's do not have a vote bank tag, being a miniscule community. It reminds the KP's of their past periods of tyrannies of Muslim rulers like Moguls', Pathans, Chaks and the like. It is said that seven mounds (about 280 Kgs) of the sacred thread of the murdered Brahmans were burnt by Sikandar Butshikan and all of their sacred books were thrown into the Dal Lake.

The KP's numbering over one lakh were drowned in the Lake and were burned at a spot in the vicinity of Rainawari in Srinagar City, known as Bhatta Mazar (The grave yard of the Bhattas, the KP's) beyond present day Jogilanker.

According to the living memory of the KP's, only eleven KP families stayed back in Kashmir, the rest, rather than abandoning the religion of their father's, chose to migrate leaving behind their beloved homes hearths, lands and everything, only to protect their religion and faith).

With the brute advent of militancy in the year 1989-90, during the national conference rule, abetted by the sympathetic support of the Congress party from Delhi, the situation for the KP's became a death knell for them. It is almost like a last nail in our coffin to get extinct from the history of Kashmir and become a mystery and a history of past. Mass genocide and exodus of the KP's occurred, which is reverberating still on the fascia and the minds of the KP's and will continue to be so as long as humanity exists in this universe. Prominent leaders, intellectuals, politicians, individuals, government officers and the like amongst the KP's were brutally killed in broad day lights in thousands, along with the mass migration of this minuscule community to their destinations of devastations. It shows an extreme apathy of the various governments who have not doing anything tangible to save the KP's from extinction.

Actions initiated by the government of India in the past for the return and rehabilitation of the KP's to the Kashmir valley were half hearted and were not taken after due consultations with the community members, who were knowing as to where the shoe is pinching in this regard. As soon as such a news with regard to government moves for the rehabilitation of KP's, became public, Muslim leadership across the political divide in Kashmir valley rejected the return of KP's to any kind of secured settlements in the valley. This unanimous rejection of the return of KP's to the Valley by the entire populace of the Muslims of Kashmir along with their leadership shows clearly that the forced migration of Kashmiri Hindus was not only an act committed by a few, but an organized off shoot of "Islamic Jihad".

It shows that there was a societal connivance amongst the majority community of Kashmir, in this entire operation of religious cleansing of KP's. Kashmiri Muslim leadership of all the ranks and files including the so called pseudo secularists were thus an integral part of the intolerant Islamic fundamentalists, when these elements continue to be so.

If Operation Sindoor could be taken recourse to for the brutal killings of just 26

souls at Phalgam, which was a shocking situation for Tom, Dick and Harry, why such operations were not taken so for by the various governments, particularly the present government at the Centre, to avenge the mass destruction of KP's through terror and terrorists.

Are the KP's on the path of extinction, after their throttled ouster from the valley of Kashmir, due to the Islamic fundamentalists terror assaults of sorts upon them, during 1989-90. Should KP's now at least get alarmed about their extinction as an ebb original community known as Kashmiri Pandits (Battas), having been shattered by the tyranny of the times since last 35 years, when no one is listening to our woes with concern and appropriate remedies.

The authorities in power have no causative concern about them, as they are not a vote bank treasure and tag, due to their minuscule and displaced status.

KP's are being applied fragile balms like petty job packages that too with suicidal moratoriums, when our youth who opt for such jobs under situational circumstances have to work in Kashmir only under the threat of Islamic gun, which has taken so many precious lives of our meritorious young men . These are petty sops as political Lollypops, for national consumption by the present ruling dispensation at the centre.

Is not the concept of " Viksit Bharat" or " Vikasit Bharat" applicable to KP's. Do they have no right under such schemes of development, which are for the welfare of the people of India? KP's could have been accommodated for a "Home Land" under such schemes. The simple reply is that they do not carry a vote bank tag with them, thus are neglected.

Under such circumstances displaced KP's want a return to their "homeland", but not to the servitude of a Muslim State, as Kashmir has become now. Under such grave circumstances, the only solution left for the rehabilitation of the KP's is to create a "separate homeland" for the KP's, with in Kashmir, having a status of "Union Territory". Such a call is not any political proposition. It is in fact the only way to ensure the return of the KP's to their "homeland" securing their return with safety and dignity.

Let rehabilitation of the KP's back to their home land " Kashmir", become a part of "Operation Sindoor" at least now for the forebly displaced KP's who are victims of grave acts of genocide, murder, loot and indignation due to terror assaults of sorts upon them , during 1989-90., when they are living as displaced persons in their own country, but away from their birth home land Kashmir.

(The author is a chartered consultant civil engineer)

