

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMPACT

The Global Development Compact is an ambitious initiative aimed at fostering global cooperation to achieve sustainable development and address pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. Launched as a framework for international collaboration, it seeks to unite governments, businesses, civil society, and international organizations in a shared commitment to sustainable progress. At its core, the Compact emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to development. It acknowledges that sustainable development requires more than just economic growth; it necessitates a balance of social inclusion, environmental stewardship, and economic resilience. This comprehensive framework aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provides a structured pathway to address global challenges effectively. The Compact advocates for policies that ensure economic growth benefits all segments of society. It focuses on reducing inequalities by promoting equitable access to resources, education, and healthcare, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Addressing climate change and environmental degradation is central to the Compact. It encourages the adoption of green technologies, sustainable practices, and policies that mitigate the impact of human activities on the environment. This includes transitioning to renewable energy, conserving natural resources, and protecting biodiversity. The Compact underscores the importance of collaborative efforts among nations, organizations, and sectors.

It calls for strengthening global partnerships to pool resources, share knowledge, and coordinate actions. Such cooperation is essential for tackling complex global issues that transcend national borders.

Explore Hidden Gem of Panchari - Kari Khoh Caves

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

Udhampur, with its blend of natural beauty, historical sites, and spiritual destinations, offers a range of lesser-known tourist spots that are perfect for those looking to explore beyond the usual tourist trails. These hidden gems provide a unique opportunity to experience the region's rich cultural heritage and natural wonders in a serene and uncrowded setting. Whether you are a history buff, a nature lover, or a spiritual seeker, Udhampur has something special to offer: Nestled between rolling hills and dense forests characterized by hilly and forested terrain, the hidden gem of 'Kari-Khoh Caves' beckons travelers with its untouched beauty and serene landscapes located in a remote and relatively less populated area 'Kultyar Pain' near Pancheri in Udhampur district, Jammu and Kashmir. Although 'Kari-Khoh Caves' has been long cherished by locals, it's only now that that the rest of the world is waking up to its charm. This emerging hotspot is a treasure trove of experiences waiting to be uncovered. 'Kari-Khoh Caves' offers a diverse array of attractions that cater to every type of traveler. Whether you're an adventure seeker or a history enthusiast, there's something here for everyone. There's a place where time seems to stand still, where ancient legends whisper through the wind, and where every corner hides stories of mystery and adventure waiting to be told. Just a short traverse from the tourist spot of Pancheri, 'Kari-Khoh Caves' feels like a world away. Yet, it's surprisingly accessible, making it an ideal getaway for those seeking a quick escape into nature. There is no permanent population at the caves themselves. However, there are small villages and communities in the surrounding region. The Kari-Khoh Caves are a group of natural caves. These caves are lesser-known and have a mysterious charm, making them a perfect spot for adventure seekers. The caves are set amidst dense forests, and the area is rich in biodiversity, providing opportunities for nature walks and wildlife spotting. These caves shrouded in mystery and largely unexplored, hold a unique place in the local lore and offer a fascinating glimpse into the natural and cultural history of the area. The Kari-Khoh Caves are a series of natural caves carved out of the limestone-rich hills formed through the erosion of limestone rocks over thousands of years that are typical of the Shivalik range. Over millennia, water has eroded these rocks, creating intricate cave systems with fascinating formations like stalactites and stalagmites and other interesting formations inside the caves. Inside, the caves feature dark chambers and narrow passageways, with some areas having unique mineral deposits and cave-dwelling bats. The caves are cool and dark, offering a stark contrast to the verdant forest outside.

The Kari-Khoh Caves are enveloped in local folklore and beliefs, with stories passed down through generations that speak of their mysterious origins and supernatural occurrences. Local villagers believe that the caves are protected by a guardian spirit, an ancient deity who watches over the area. It is said that this spirit ensures that only those with pure intentions can enter and explore the caves without facing misfortune. According to legend, those who have disrespected the caves or tried to exploit them have encountered strange occurrences, like sudden illness or losing their way in the forest. Another popular legend speaks of a hidden treasure buried deep within the caves. This treasure, according to the story, was left by a local king who sought to protect his wealth during a time of invasion. The treasure is said to be guarded by supernatural forces, and only a chosen one, with a heart free of greed, will ever find it. The legend of hidden treasure adds to the allure and mystery of the caves, though it remains a story rather than a verified fact. The local modern generation too keeps a belief about these caves and one of the local explorers of such destinations in entire Pahari belt of Panchari in Udhampur, Mr. Surat Singh Thakur from Meer village of Pancheri, added that the entrance to the cluster of caves is very narrow but inside five to six people can sit. There is an idol of Demi-Goddess locally worshipped as 'Mata Mashla' and people of the area often visit here and pay their obedience.

The inside of the caves has a condensed form of Marble and he is preserving a piece of it in his house as a divine blessing from Mata Mashla. For modern-day explorers and adventurers, the Kari-Khoh Caves present a thrilling challenge. The caves are relatively untouched by commercial tourism, which means they retain their natural, rugged beauty. The trek to the caves is an adventure in itself, typically involves navigating through dense forests and hilly terrain, and occasional wildlife sightings making it a moderately fascinating journey. The caves are located to the north or northeast of the Pancheri.

The Kari-Khoh Caves are relatively less explored compared to other tourist spots in Jammu and Kashmir. Trekkers interested in off-the-beaten-path destinations have an opportunity to venture to the Kari-Khoh Caves. The area around the caves is rich in vegetation, including pine, deodar, and oak trees. The forests provide a habitat for various bird species and small mammals.

The caves' discovery and initial exploration are likely rooted in local knowledge, with broader recognition developing as more people become aware of their unique features and cultural significance. The caves' discovery and initial exploration are likely rooted in local knowledge, with broader recognition developing as more people become aware of their unique features and cultural significance. The caves are situated approximately 6-8 kilometers from Pancheri, a village in the Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Lastly, I can vouch that if someone is looking to delve into ancient stories or simply enjoy the breathtaking views, Kari Khoh Caves promise an experience you won't forget. Uncover the hidden beauty of Kari Khoh Caves in Panchari. Perfect for nature lovers and history buffs, this unique spot offers stunning views and intriguing stories. Don't miss out on this incredible advent.

■ NUTAN RESUTRA

We are all very much familiar with the much talked about Vivek Agnihotri movie The Kashmir Files. One may wonder; now what is this Mirpur Files? Never heard of it. Yes, never heard of it because this is no movie; but a tragedy of such magnitude that perhaps none can be able to sum it up in a movie. The Mirpur Files is the greatest wound in the heart of India and all the displaced people of Mirpur, Kotli.

A lot of discussions are taking place on various platforms, ranging from print media to electronic to social media about The Kashmir Files. At least for once, the genocide and exodus undertaken by Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 has made everyone think about the darkest chapter called Militancy in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Different reactions have come to the said movie ranging from raising voices against genocide of Pandits to criticizing the movie for not showing the atrocities committed upon other persons including Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. But I shall not go to making comments upon these controversies.

I am reminded of the statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he called upon everyone to observe August 14 as the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day! He said that displacement of millions, killings and rapes during the Partition are still vivid and observing this day is recognition of their sacrificees. What a great gesture! I would again not say why any other Prime Minister of India did not think of such a thing about Partition; least of all the First Prime Minister who had himself been a witness to this holocaust.

My simple plea is: Let another 'Agnihotri' come forward who says something about this Horror Day; brings out a movie called the Mirpur Files. Although the wounds of Partition spread to many areas; most of all Punjab, but I shall try to contain myself only to Mirpur the erstwhile District of Muzaffarabad now submerged in Pakistan's Mangla Dam.

We do find many books written about those days of Partition regarding Mirpur, Kotli and adjoining areas; but these works are too insufficient to express the real magnitude of the tragedy and sum up feelings of people. Vijay Kumar Gupta wrote about Kotli in his book Khoya Hua

Kashmir and who is now settled in Delhi; Amravati Devi a former Government teacher wrote how she had slapped the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in her book, settled and ultimately left her mortal remains in England; the local newspaper articles of Yuv Raj Gupta the first Railway Station Superintendent of Jammu railway station giving a graphical account of Battle of Kotli and those unforgettable days; and the web articles titled Archives of 1947. Even young scholars of third generation of Mirpuris settled or studying in England are conducting empirical and authentic research on the Fall of Mirpur. The latest in the series is much talked about book titled Embers the Beginning and Embers the End of Mirpur by a former Indian Army Officer Captain (Dr) Kulvir Gupta. I want to quote certain incidents from his book just to reignite hurting memories of those who suffered and are trying in vain to forget!

The residents of Mirpur who somehow survived massacre sought shelter in the famous Alibegh Gurudwara, but were surrounded by the Pakistani soldiers who became their so -called guards. In factthe invaders were there to kill, torture, rape and commit unimaginable atrocities upon them. Dr. Kulvir was a small boy at that time. On second day of their captivity, those soldiers collected forty odd healthy males from the Gurudwara and took them out. When others started protesting the soldiers said that those males were deput-ed to bring ration for inmates. Dr. Kulvir's father was also one of them. This whole group left with soldiers but none of them returned. And nobody knew what happened to them. It was much later that the others came to know of the horrific fate of those unfortunate forty. And this was told by one survivor who had luckily escaped death that day; his name was Master Harbans Lal.

Master Harbans Lal while giving detailed account of what had happened on that unfortunate day said that all those persons were asked to disrobe and stand naked on the bank of Mangla Canal. Some of the soldiers took to guarding those hapless sheep of men and a small group of four to five soldiers picked up one victim after the other, beating him with their gun butts and army boots. Butts landed on heads and kicks rained on hunger starved

stomachs, faces, legs, rather any and every body part! Harbans Lal begged them to shoot him, but the soldiers laughed and scornfully retorted: Hamare pas kafiron par zaya karney ke liye aath aaney ki goli nahin hai ! (We do not have eight anna bullet to waste upon a kafir). Risking life and finding space in legs of guarding soldiers, Harbans Lal suddenly ran and jumped in the icy waters of Mangla Canal. The soldiers ran firing at him, but by luck he survived to tell this horrific tale to all. The former Army Captain Dr. Kulvir also narrates in that book how the women folk were brutally gangraped in that house of God!

I have dared to quote just one incident. Each and every house of a Mirpuri now has tales to tell: tales that are filled with unimaginable brutalities and atrocities committed by none other but those who once had been friends, colleagues, neighbors and even servants; tales that rip open the wounds that have been stitched painfully with threads of time and yet keep on oozing blood in the form of tears from eyes. Each Mirpuri is a living book of horror stories asking only one simple, but unanswerable question: Hamara kya dosh tha ?

Now people also say Mirpur was a flourishing town, a center of trade in whole of the erstwhile State with Biblical land of milk and honey. Was there no faujto protect them when this genocide started? Yes, there was Maharaja's fauj comprising mostly of the Muslims who themselves turned upon their comrades; slaughtered them and joined the Pakistani attackers. The brave Mirpuris did fight for some time, but it was the proverbial fight of the Light Brigade. Being faced with Hobson's Choice, with nothing upon them, they tried to move to safety for their lives and the lives of their family members, only to jump from frying pan into the fire.

There are endless tales and an unfathomable sea of blood and tears. It is just not possible for me to narrate all these. That is why I say Let there be The Mirpur Files also! Why? So that at least some one can try to find the answer to hamarakya dosh tha? My contention in writing this piece is that let us rewrite history and bring the truth to light. Truth that has been wrapped under many layers of lies and deception.Let it also come out and feel a breath of fresh air.

Dear readers, I am neither politician nor do I intend to create any niche for myself; but many lakhs and lakhs of people who have undergone this unimaginable tragedy and their future generations like me do at least deserve this much to know what our fault was. What for were we punished? Whose lust for power it was that separated millions and stabbed a permanent wound in the heart of this country? We, who lost everything, and I say everything, must know the one- word truth: Why?

I want to add just one thing here. A contingent of Indian Army was posted near Kotli that was headed by the then young Major S. K. Sinha who ultimately became Lt. General SK Sinha, formerly Hon'ble Governor of Jammu and Kashmir State. Sh. Yuv Raj Gupta, in a meeting with the former asked him why he did not make any effort to save the civilian population from massacre and not let Kotli fall. Sh. Sinha answered most honestly: Hamey hukamnahintha!! The thing is; kis ka hukamnahintha? Why were Mirpur and Kotli left to fall for the mercy of most unmerciful invaders and ultimately God-forsaken to be made part of Pakistan? Kis ka hukamtha? And why Rajouri and Poonch that had been captured by Pakistani forces and remained with Pakistanfrom November 1947 to April 1948 were easily retrieved by the Indian Army, but Mirpur-Kotli were handed over on a plate to Pakistan? Yeh bhiiks ka hukamtha :yaphirkis ka hukamnahintha?

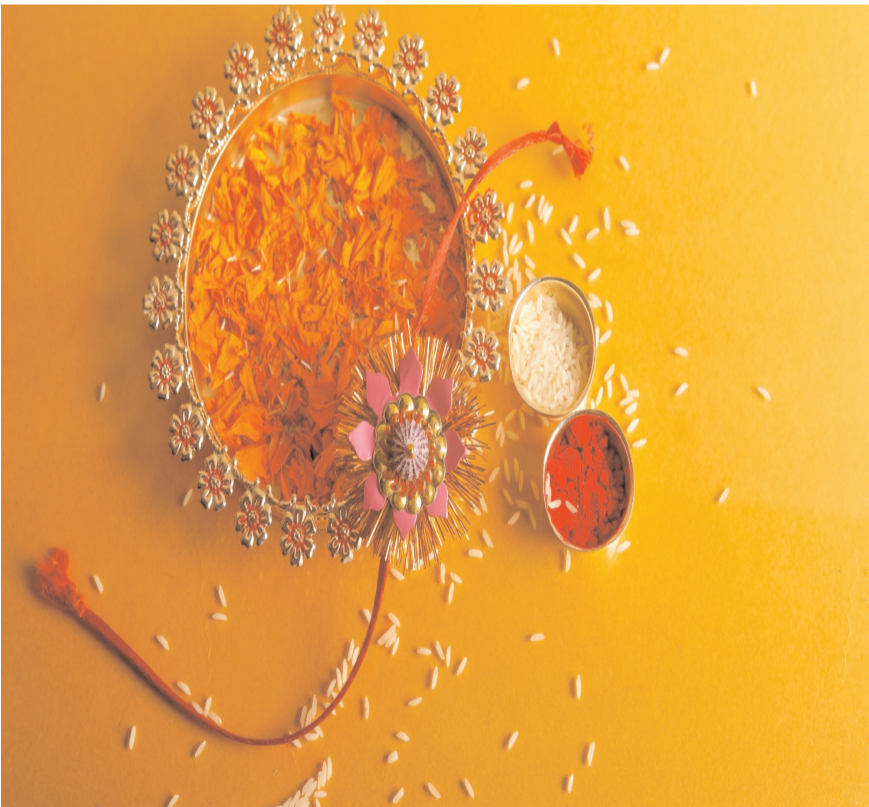
We the Mirpuris want to know the answers to these questions. I know, if truth is brought to light, the answers will surely make many ecosystem politicians very uneasy and the dead ones wriggle in their ultimate resting places, where ever that be. But these answers will surely try to bring at least some solace to those generations who have suffered and are still agonized and are searching for the truth. If truth about Kashmiri Pandit genocide can be brought to light after thirty-two years, why not about the Mirpuris. Why we have to constantly bear the cross of lies of some ones who were in power at that time, acted God and played with lives, dignity, respect, property, everything those happy, peaceful folk had.

This is why I say, we must also have The Mirpur Files !

Raksha Bandhan - the festival of love and bonding

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Raksha Bandhan is a popular and traditionally Hindu annual rite or ceremony that is central to a festival of the same name celebrated in South Asia .It is also celebrated in other parts of the world significantly influenced by Hindu culture .It is one of the important festival of Hindus and in Santana Dharma its significance cannot be exaggerated .On this day ,sisters of all ages tie a talisman or amulet called Rakhi around the wrists of their brothers .They symbolically protect them ,receive a gift in return and traditionally invest the brothers with a share of the responsibility of their potential care .Raksha Bandhan is observed on the last day of the Hindu lunar calendar month of Shraavana ,which typically falls in August .The expression Raksha Bandhan (Sanskrit ,literally 'the bond of protection ,obligation and care) is now principally applied to this ritual .So this festival is the bond of love, affection and protection between the brothers and sisters and has an important place in Hinduism .Until the mid 20th century ,the expression was more commonly applied to a similar ritual ,held on the same day ,with precedence in ancient Hindu texts .In that ritual ,a domestic priest ties amulet ,charms or threads on the wrists of their patrons ,or changes their sacred thread ,and receives gifts of money .This is still the case in some places .On this auspicious occasion sisters tie rakhi or thread on the wrist of their brothers as a mark of love ,affection ,symbol of protection and bonding between the brothers and sisters .This festival is celebrated every year with great fervor and enthusiasm and with the ritual of this festival the bond and love between the brothers and sisters is strengthened .This festival coincides with the Shravaan Purnima and this day is celebrated and culminates with the Darshan of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati at the natural cave of Shri Amarnath Ji in the Himalayas of Southern Kashmir district of Anantnag .By contrast ,the sister-brother festival ,with origin in folk lore and culture ,had names which varied with location .Some were rendered as saluno ,silana and rakri .A ritual associated with saluno included the sisters placing shoots of barley behind the ears of their brothers .Of special significance to married women ,Raksha Bandhan is rooted in the practice of territorial or village exogamy .The bride marries out of her natal village or town ,and her parents by custom do not visit her in her married home .In rural north India ,where village exogamy is prevalent ,large numbers of married Hindu women travel back to their parents homes every year for the ceremony of tying Rakhi to their brothers .Their brothers who typically live with their parents or nearby ,sometimes travel to their sisters married home to escort them back .Many younger married women arrive few weeks earlier at their



natal homes and stay until the ceremony of Rksha bandhan .The brothers serve as lifelong intermediaries between their married sisters and parental homes ,as well as potential stewards of their security .In urban India ,where families are increasingly nuclear ,the festival has become more symbolic but continues to be popular .The rituals associated with this festival have spread beyond their traditional regions and have been transformed through technology and migration .Other factors that have played a role are movies ,social interaction and promotion by politicized Hinduism as well as by nation state .Among females and males who are not blood relations ,the act of tying the rakhi amulets has given rise to the tradition of voluntary kin relationship ,which has sometimes cut across lines of caste ,class and religion. .In fact Rakhi or Raksha Bandhan is a Hindu festival celebrating the relationship between the brothers and sisters .This year Rakhi will be celebrated on 19thof August 2024.But unfortunately a confusion regarding the date of Raksha Bandhan has been created by some unscrupulous religious brokers as there is confusion whether Rakhi will be celebrated on 30 or 31st August because of Bhadun .However the religious scholars have made it clear that the festival of Raksha Bandhan falls on 31st of August as it always coincides with Shravan Purnima .Raksha Bandhan is celebrated across the country as a symbol of bond between siblings .Rakhi is an ancient Hindu festival .Rakhi celebrates bond between the brothers and sisters. Sisters tie Rakhi on the wrist of brothers as a mark of love and brothers pledge to protect and guard

their sisters through thick and thin .The festival is very famous with several cultures in the country as the concept of duty and love between siblings is universal .On the morning of the festival day ,brothers and sisters gather together with their families .Sisters tie rakhis (threads) as a symbol of protection .Rakhis are also used to celebrate other relationships between neighbours and friends .Raksha Bandhan is a monsoon festival ,which has a deeper meaning .The rainy season eradicates all the filth and convolutions of life .The season gives us affluence and a new hope to relish life to its fullest .That is why Shrawan month is considered as holy to celebrate the untainted bondage of love between siblings and the advent of good fortune .Raksha Bandhan also known as Rakhi or Rakri ,is a joyous festival celebrated by Hindus worldwide to honor the bond of love and responsibility between brothers and sisters. However ,the significance of this festival goes beyond biological relationships as it brings together the people of all genders ,religions and ethnic backgrounds to celebrate various forms of platonic love .The term 'Raksha Bandhan 'translates to the knot of protection in Sanskrit .Although the rituals associated with festival vary in different regions ,they all involve the tying of a thread .The sister or a sister like figure ties a colourful and sometimes elaborate thread around her brothers wrist ,symbolizing her prayers and well wishes for his protection .In return ,the brother presents his sister with a meaningful gift .The origins of Raksha Bandhan can be traced back to ancient times .References to this festival can be found in legends related to Alexander the Great dating back to 326

BCE .Hindu scriptures also contain several accounts of Raksha Bandhan .There are many stories how this festival started in Sanatan Dhrama .

But in all probabilities ,the most popular story in Indian mythology is that of Lord Krishna and Draupadi, the wife of the five Pandavas .The story goes ,on Maker Sankaranti ,Krishna cut his little finger when handling sugarcane .His queen Rukmini immediately sent an official to get bandages .Meanwhile Draupadi ,who was watching the entire incident ,cut off a little bit of her saree and tied his finger with it to stop the bleeding .In return Krishna promised to help her when required .That is the story behind the help Krishna provides during the uncere-monious disrobing of Draupadi ,Krishna came and made her saree never ending ,saving her the embarrassment by giving her protection when she needed it most. .

And this is how it is believed that Rakshabandhan started. Another story as per Shrimad Bhagavtam describes another event centered around Bali Maharaja ,who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu .Won by the Bali's devotion ,Lord Vishnu agreed to eternally protect Bali Maharaja by becoming his doorkeeper .Goddess Laxmi ,Lord Vishnu's consort wanted him to come home ,disguised herself as a poor woman seeking help ,and approached Bali. While there ,she tied a thread around Bali's arm .

When Bali asked her what she wanted as a gift in return ,Laxmi asked to grant leave to her husband ,who now revealed his identity .As Laxmi was now his sister and he made the promise to grant her wish ,he agreed. .

Another story says that Lord Krishna advised King Yudhishtera to tie Rakhi .There is also the story of Yamuna tying a rakhi to her brother yama .As the time passed the festival of Raksha Bandhan started to be observed as a symbol of duty between brothers and sisters .The occasion is meant to celebrate any type of brother-sister relationship between men and women who may not be biologically related .The bracelet symbolizes the brothers oath to protect his sister throughout her life ,and the sisters prayers and blessings for protection and wellbeing of her brother .

He then gives a gift ,signifying his acceptance of this duty .Though Raksha Bandhan is specifically related to the bond of a brother and sister ,the festival is ultimately a message of the universal brotherhood and sisterhood that can be recognized amongst people cutting across religions .

Raksha Bandhan is a festival furthering communal harmony and communal amity and thus the significance of this festival is great for the pluralism and secularism .May the bond of ,love ,duty and protection between brothers and sisters thrive and strengthen with each passing day and give meaning to our relationship. .

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