

## CRACKDOWN ON TERROR-FUNDING NETWORK

In a decisive and strategic move to safeguard national security, Indian law enforcement and intelligence agencies have intensified their crackdown on terror-funding networks operating within the country. These networks, often linked to both domestic and international terror outfits, play a critical role in facilitating terrorist activities by providing financial resources, logistical support, and recruitment channels. By targeting the financial backbone of terrorism, the government aims to dismantle the infrastructure that sustains radical and violent agendas.

Recent operations conducted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Enforcement Directorate (ED), and state police forces have led to the identification and disruption of several hawala channels, shell companies, and benami transactions used to fund terror activities. Funds sourced through illegal means - including smuggling, drug trafficking, counterfeit currency, and donations under the guise of charity - are now under strict surveillance. These funds were being funneled to operatives linked to banned outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and others, particularly in sensitive regions like Jammu and Kashmir.

One of the significant breakthroughs came with the unearthing of a sophisticated network involving local overground workers (OGWs), separatist sympathizers, and cross-border handlers who coordinated the transfer of funds through digital and traditional means. These funds were used not only to finance terror attacks but also to radicalize youth, orchestrate stone-pelting incidents, and destabilize peace in vulnerable regions. The arrest of key individuals, including political sympathizers, businessmen, and NGO operators, has exposed the deep-rooted nexus between terror operatives and financial facilitators.

The NIA, in particular, has been at the forefront, registering multiple cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and invoking provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach properties and freeze bank accounts linked to terror funding. Raids conducted across multiple states have resulted in the seizure of incriminating documents, electronic devices, and unaccounted cash, further tightening the noose around these networks.

The government has also intensified international cooperation to combat cross-border terror financing. By engaging with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) guidelines and collaborating with foreign intelligence agencies, India continues to push for accountability of nations that serve as safe havens for terror financiers. Diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to dismantle its state-sponsored terror infrastructure and curb money laundering activities remains a key component of India's global anti-terror campaign.

At the policy level, robust measures have been implemented to enhance financial monitoring. Banks, financial institutions, and NGOs are under strict regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency in transactions. Additionally, awareness campaigns and community engagement programs are being undertaken to prevent vulnerable individuals from being lured by extremist propaganda or financial inducements.

## Handlooms of India: Weaving Heritage, Empowering Futures

■ PABITRA MARGHERITA



Every August 7, National Handloom Day marks a moment that binds India's past with its future thread by thread, story by story. The day commemorates the Swadeshi Movement of 1905, when hand woven fabric emerged not only as a piece of fabric but as a powerful symbol of resistance, self-reliance, and cultural identity. What began as a clean slate evolved into the warp and weft of heritage, art, and community expression.

The handloom sector today supports over 35 lakh weavers and allied workers, 72% of whom are women, across rural and semi-urban India. For all its richness, the sector now stands at one that demands innovation without dilution, technology without erasure, and modernization without marginalization.

### An enduring heritage

The rich heritage of handloom weaving in India dates back to ancient civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Over the millennia, this craft flourished with each region developing its own grammar of weave, signature techniques, motifs, and meaning. From the golden glow of Assam's Muga silk, to the famous Banarasi silk sarees; from Kashmir's Pashmina to Tamil Nadu's lustrous Kanjeevaram sarees, India's handloom traditions are as diverse as its people.

In a weaver's home, where the loom often shares space with the kitchen or a side "angan", each saree or shawl is being prepared to communicate a one of a kind anecdote. With minimal technology, but maximal creativity, weavers convert yarns into heirlooms. The unstitched drape, so emblematic of Indian clothing, became a canvas for regional expression, rituals, and storytelling. To quote our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, "Handlooms manifest India's diversity and the dexterity of countless weavers and artisans."

### The North East: A loom of opportunity

The Northeast region houses around 52% of the total handloom workers of the country, with Assam leading the nation with over

12.83 lakh weavers and 12.46 lakh looms as per the 2019-20 Handloom Census. Sualkuchi, known as the "Manchester of Assam," stands as a testament to traditional weaving excellence, while developing hubs like Machkhowa in Dhemaji district further boost the sector. Recognizing its cultural significance, the government's dedicated mission for the North East focuses on promoting tribal weaves, encouraging handloom tourism, facilitating exports, and training youth. This region is being positioned as a global design hub where natural fibers, ancient knowledge, and modern entrepreneurship converge. Under the National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), financial assistance has been extended to 123 Small Clusters in the North Eastern states. A Mega Handloom Cluster has been established in Sivasagar and two such projects are ongoing in Imphal East and Sualkuchi. Around 3.08 lakh weavers have enrolled for universal & affordable social security under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Beema Yojana (PMJJBY), and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Beema Yojana (PMSBY) in the region, including 1.09 lakh from Assam.

### From revival to resurgence

Over the last 11 years, India has witnessed a substantial revival in handloom practices, owing to a series of focused interventions from the Ministry of Textiles. Cluster development initiatives, modern tools, and access to credit have helped transform weaving from household activities into micro-enterprises.

The National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) and Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS) have ensured end to end assistance ranging from yarn supply, loom upgradation, work sheds creation to providing access to modern equipment. Schemes like PMJJBY, and PMSBY provided much-needed financial and social safety nets. Concessional credit under Weaver's MUDRA Scheme and margin money assistance have increased access to working capital.

In order to eradicate costs and enhance productivity for weavers and entrepreneurs, Handloom parks are planned to be set up across high-potential regions. These integrated spaces will incorporate dyeing units, plug-and-play workshops, digital labs, showrooms, and sustainability infrastructure like solar power and waste recycling. At the same time,

Design & Innovation Hubs are being set up at regional levels in partnership with NIFT, NID, and other design institutes, where designers and weavers co-create, preserve, and document the traditional essence of weaving, and archive cultural designs online. These interventions promise to level up both the aesthetic and commercial appeal of Indian handloom on a global scale.

Embracing technology is a must, but the soul of handloom must remain intact. AI is now used for trend forecasting and digital color selection, while blockchain ensures product traceability and combats counterfeiting ushering the sector into the new digital age responsibly.

### Reimagining linkages: E-commerce and market access

Marketing and e-commerce will act as the game-changers. The strategy is simple but revolutionary: eliminate middlemen, enhance visibility through promotion, and connect weavers directly to platforms, exhibitions, and marketplaces on the first go. In line with this, handloom weavers are being on boarded on Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and india-handmade.com is offering a transparent, zero commission platform ensuring fair remuneration, free shipping, easy returns, and secure payment options.

### Complementing these efforts, as many as 106 handloom products have already been granted

Geographical Indication (GI) tags, celebrating their unique regional heritage and craftsmanship. Together with the 'Handloom Mark' and 'India Handloom Brand', these measures strengthen the distinct identity of handwoven products, assuring buyers of their authenticity, quality, and eco-friendly nature.

### Skill, security, and sustainability

Tomorrow rests on inclusive capacity building. Skill development programs for youth, particularly in preserving traditional techniques, are paired with financial and social security schemes- including health insurance, educational scholarships, and pension benefits for weavers.

Simultaneously, eco-friendly dyes, carbon-neutral production models, and lifecycle assessments reinforce the sector's commitment to sustainability, aligning Indian handlooms with the global green movement. The

new report titled & Carbon Footprint Assessment in the Indian Handloom Sector: Methods and Case Studies & conducted by IIT Delhi in collaboration with the Ministry of Textiles, serves as both a reference and a guidebook, paving the way for a more sustainable version of India. By embedding environmental consciousness into traditional handloom practices, the study reinforces the Ministry of Textile's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also ensures that the handloom value chain is not only climate-resilient but also rooted in ethical production, equitable wages, and dignified livelihoods.

### Looking forward: Sustain, Support, Scale.

The vision for India's handloom sector is part cultural, part AI, and fully human. Ambitious targets include an export rise, creating new jobs, and providing digital literacy training for weavers across clusters. The future is grounded in three pillars; sustain the soul, support the maker & scale the reach.

Moving beyond wage labor, the sector aims to cultivate entrepreneurship with fellowships, startup grants, and incubation hubs, especially encouraging youth and women leaders.

Branding, mentorship, and business development support will foster ownership-based enterprises that are both culturally authentic and commercially viable.

### India's handloom sector is ever evolving...

Handloom continues to be a key driver in our journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047 while also preserving the cultural ethos of the country and ushering in sustainability and mindful consumption. The journey from a tool of resistance to a beacon of innovation illustrates handloom's timeless significance leaving an eternal footprint throughout the eons to come.

By weaving together heritage, innovation, and collective effort, India's handloom sector stands poised to inspire the world while empowering millions at home. As envisioned by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji "Let us make handlooms a key part of our daily lives & give our traditional handloom products the stature they merit".

(The writer is Minister of State for Textiles)

# Strained Minds in the Valley: Children in Jammu & Kashmir face rising mental health challenges

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF



Beneath the surface of daily school routines and bustling tuition centres across Jammu and Kashmir lies a deepening mental health crisis affecting thousands of children. The twin burdens of academic stress and digital screen overexposure are leaving an entire generation of young minds overwhelmed, emotionally fatigued, and developmentally at risk.

While the reopening of schools and normalization of exam schedules post-pandemic has restored a sense of routine, the consequences of prolonged educational disruption - and the tools used to bridge the gap - are becoming increasingly evident. Psychologists, educators, and health professionals are expressing growing concern over the mental and emotional toll these factors are taking on children.

The pressure on children to perform academically has intensified in recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which school closures, online learning, and interrupted syllabi left significant learning gaps. As institutions push to make up for lost time, children are being exposed to heavier workloads, frequent testing, and greater parental expectations.

Recent studies have identified academic stress as a key mental health issue among school-going adolescents in the region. Students are not only expected to cope with regular classroom instruction but are also increasingly engaged in after-school tuition, often leaving them with little time to rest or engage in recreational activities.

Emotional and physical symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, headaches, sleep disturbances, and poor appetite

have become common among children facing academic pressure. Mental health experts have also noted gendered differences in how stress manifests, with boys often displaying symptoms of depression and girls exhibiting anxiety-related behaviours.

Parallel to academic stress, the rise in smartphone dependency is emerging as an equally pressing concern. Initially introduced to facilitate online learning, digital devices have become central to children's daily routines. However, unrestricted and unsupervised screen time is contributing to cognitive, behavioural, and emotional challenges.

Mobile devices are now being used extensively for entertainment, often replacing outdoor play, creative hobbies, and interpersonal interaction. Surveys in Kashmir indicate that a majority of school-aged children spend upwards of four hours daily on their phones, with some estimates placing the number even higher among preteens.

This shift in behaviour has led to the identification of "virtual autism" - a condition in which children exhibit autism-like symptoms such as delayed speech, lack of eye contact, and social withdrawal due to excessive screen use. Healthcare professionals report a significant increase in such cases, particularly in children below the age of seven.

The cognitive impact is not limited to early childhood. Adolescents are increasingly showing signs of poor concentration, reduced emotional regulation, and diminished attention spans. These outcomes are further compounded by disrupted sleep patterns and the addictive nature of digital content.

The problems of academic stress and mobile overuse are not isolated but often reinforce each other. Many children turn to screens as a form of escapism from the pressure of studies, only to suffer from its negative impacts on memory, focus, and mood - further exacerbating their academic struggles.



This cycle has created a feedback loop of dependency and distress.

In households across the region, especially where both parents work or where childcare options are limited, digital devices are often used as pacifiers. While this may provide temporary relief, it is contributing to long-term developmental and emotional challenges in children.

Teachers are increasingly reporting behavioural changes among students. Declining attention spans, mood swings, a drop in creativity, and emotional outbursts during minor assessments are becoming common. Many children display withdrawal from peer interaction, while others exhibit height-

ened aggression and frustration.

Despite these visible signs, many schools in the region remain under-equipped to provide adequate mental health support. The majority lack full-time counsellors or structured psychological services. While some private institutions have introduced no-phone policies and mental wellness sessions, such efforts are often limited and inconsistent.

The growing need for child mental health services in Kashmir starkly contrasts with the region's limited infrastructure. There are only a small number of trained child psychologists and psychiatrists available across the Union Territory, with access in rural Settlement Commissioner of Kashmir. He writes "Puranmashi the full moon of Sawan is the day when pilgrims must reach the distant cave of Amarnath & worship the snow-lingam which gradually melts away after puranmashi." It makes evident that in earlier times, the devotees reached the cave only on Sawan Poornamashi. With increase in rush, people started to perform pilgrimage on Ashard and Sawan Poornamashi and then towards last 3 or 4 days of bright fortnights of the two months but no one performed Darshan in the dark fortnight.

The threat to the Yatra by terrorists, media explosion and most importantly

districts remaining minimal or entirely absent.

Helplines such as Tele-MANAS, launched as a national mental health support service, have provided some relief, receiving thousands of calls from distressed adolescents in the region. However, these services are not a replacement for sustained, in-person therapeutic intervention. The stigma surrounding mental health also continues to be a barrier, with many families reluctant to seek help due to societal perceptions.

### Community Responsibility and the Way Forward

Experts and education leaders emphasise the need for a collective and

sustained approach to address this dual crisis. Families, schools, policy-makers, and healthcare providers must work in coordination to implement preventive and remedial strategies.

At the family level, it is crucial to set consistent boundaries around screen use, encourage regular physical activity, and create open channels of communication with children. Parental awareness of emotional distress symptoms is essential in ensuring early intervention.

Within schools, a shift is needed from performance-centric models to ones that prioritise emotional and social learning. Hiring trained counsellors, integrating stress management programs, and reducing unnecessary academic burdens can significantly improve student wellbeing.

At the policy level, investment in mental health infrastructure must become a priority. This includes increasing the number of child psychologists, expanding district-level mental health centres, and running mass awareness campaigns in local languages to destigmatise therapy and mental healthcare.

### A Generation at Risk

Across Kashmir, a generation of children is navigating the complex terrain of academic ambition, digital temptation, and emotional vulnerability. The signs of strain are clear - in classrooms, clinics, and homes - yet the societal response remains overwhelming.

Addressing this crisis is not just about reducing exam stress or cutting screen time. It is about reimagining how children are nurtured, taught, and supported in an increasingly complex world. Their wellbeing is not only a personal or familial matter but a public health imperative.

Without timely action, the long-term impact on the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children in the region could be profound.

(The author is a senior analyst in Kashmir)

## Amarnath Pilgrimage-Symbol of faith and nationalism

■ SATISH PANDIT

Amarnath Yatra is the most ancient and revered pilgrimage in Kashmir. Kashmir that is known for Shiv- Shakti worship has many religious shrines and places dedicated to Shiva and Shakti and Amarnath Cave is the most prominent amongst all. The cave has historical back ground as it finds mention in ancient historical and religious scriptures in Kashmir.

There is reference to the holy cave in Kalhana's Rajtarangini, Valley of Kashmir,Bringesh Samhita, Nilmat Puran, Amrath Mahatamya etc. The Cave is also referred by famous foreign travelers like Francois Bernier and

Vigne in their travelogues. The global ambassador of Hinduism and inspiration of Indian youth, Swami Vivekananda also visited the cave. All such facts underscore divine glory, belief and significance of Amarnath.

There are two legends that make foundation of the significance of the holy cave. One is that Lord Shiva appeared in the form of Ice-Lingam to grant immortality to Devtas. The another is that on the insistence of His consort Mata Parvati, Shiva revealed Amarkatha (tale of immortality) to Her. The pair of pigeons that over heard the tale gained immortality and their vision at the cave is believed to be auspicious.

The Ice-Lingam is believed to wax and wane corresponding to waxing and waning of moon. The Lingam is to be believed maximum on Poornmashi and minimum on Amavasya. Keeping in view of being snowbound and the significance of Shravan Poornmashi, people performed Yatra on Poornmashi, trekking long track and having halts on important places- Chandanvari, Sheshnag and Panchtarni before reaching the holy cave. The holy Mace- Chari Mubarak- is also taken to Amarnath in a religious procession after performing traditional Pooja at different places. Same fact finds mention in "Valley of Kashmir" by Walter Lawrence, the

Settlement Commissioner of Kashmir:

He writes "Puranmashi the full moon of Sawan is the day when pilgrims must reach the distant cave of Amarnath & worship the snow-lingam which gradually melts away after puranmashi." It makes evident that in earlier times, the devotees reached the cave only on Sawan Poornamashi. With increase in rush, people started to perform pilgrimage on Ashard and Sawan Poornamashi and then towards last 3 or 4 days of bright fortnights of the two months but no one performed Darshan in the dark fortnight.

The threat to the Yatra by terrorists, media explosion and most importantly

the establishment of Amarnath Shrine Board attracted more pilgrims to the cave from length and breadth of India and even from abroad. The Yatra which was a symbol of hope got the tinge of nationalism amidst threats as the pilgrims across the country started to visit the Cave to send a message that the Indian Citizens cannot allow the annexation of Kashmir that is the abode of Lord Shiva. They also wanted to send a message that no degree of threat can prevent them from undertaking pilgrimage there. Kudos to the Shrine Board for adding to the basic facilities enroute and managing the Yatra efficiently. But promoting tourism in the name of pil-

grimage is unacceptable. It goes against the sanctity of the Yatra and hurts the feelings of the Shiv Bakhts. For last four- five years, it has been observed that there is heavy rush in initial days and even Yatra is discouraged in the concluding phase, particularly on the Shravan Poornamashi on one pretext or the other.

The Yatra schedule needs to be revisited. It needs to be restricted to a month with first darshan on Ashard Poornmashi and last on Sawan Poornmashi. If the Shrine Board takes such a decision, it will restore the sanctity of the pilgrimage and save the exchequer as well.

