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Intellectual Educational Resources: Managing the Future in a Conflict Zone, Kashmir

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Introduction

We wish we could have our Kashmir back the way used to be when we were small children--a place where truth dominated and a land like the one found in William Wordsworth's *golden vale of daffodils*. Once a beautiful place with happy people, Kashmir has now become a wailing state ruined by violence. Kashmir was once a beautiful hoard of saints, philosophers, writers, poets, intellectuals. Berneir, the first European visitor, rightly said, "in truth, the kingdom surpasses in beauty all that my warmest imaginations had anticipated" (Younghusband, 1996). Kashmir has always attracted attention, and knowledge-seekers have visited to seek education. Eminent personalities from around the world have visited Kashmir, because of its beauty and the serene environment that have made it a seat of Buddhist learning, with the Sarvastivadan school dominating.

The talent and intellect of the Kashmiris, which were once at their zenith and possessed by majority, are now at the verge of extinction if things go on as they are now. Kashmir, once a sovereign princely state, is now a point of contention for three nuclear nations, India (Indian administrated Kashmir – Kashmir), Pakistan (Azad Kashmir), and China (Aksai Chin). From its partition in 1947, it has remained one of the hottest war zones and most contested land masses of South Asia. The cataclysmic events are destroying the peace not only of Kashmir but also of South Asia. The conflict in Kashmir has become a piercing thorn for academia there. Its problems must be addressed to bring peace to South Asia. Education, which can enlighten, must be rescued and strengthened to help bring peace and survival. Intellectuals, who form the foundation of society, have also suffered from the present problems in Kashmir and are a neglected organizational dimension. This calls for immediate efforts so that they can become elements of organizational and

societal excellence. Proper use of intellectual capability can help in the creation of new solutions for human needs, especially in a war zone like Kashmir.

The intellectual sector of Kashmir is suffering because access to information is closed due to political fragmentation and other causes. Strikes, curfews, protests, and other actions have hindered education. Corruption remains unchecked. The money that could have been spent on research and development and toward the betterment of education has gone to corrupt government officials. Kashmiris have been denied an accountable government, which has affected the educational arena greatly (Bose, 1997a). Increased funding to the military has deprived the educational sector. What should have been spent on R&D is spent on warfare.

Managing the intellectual resources of Kashmir is an urgent need because of the uncertain future. Witnessing rapes or sexual mutilations, killings, threats to life and dignity, loss of family members, custodial killings, disappearances, and all sorts of human rights violations have become routine in Kashmir and the people are caught in a cycle of unending violence. Bose (1997b) comments that he has never before witnessed the suffering and oppression, and the resilience and fortitude of the human spirit that he has encountered in Kashmir. The worsening situation in Kashmir has not spared the teaching community, which is caught in the crossfire. Conflicts in the valley have resulted in the destruction of educational infrastructure, deterrence of students from attending classes, and a lower priority on allocation of funds for educational organizations.

Secure Areas for Academia

Conflict and disturbance affect the physical and psychological well-being of an individual but important resources allied to education are also severely hampered. The academics of Kashmir are living under continuous stress and susceptible to violence. They need security. The right to life, security, and dignity are among the basic human rights and each of them is threatened and violated in Kashmir. Academia should be isolated from the disturbed areas and a protected system developed near educational institutions so there will be the least impact of conflict on this resource. Additional hostel facilities for students and more residential quarters for teaching faculty should be arranged so that a symbiotic relationship between the teacher and students can be accomplished without terror. Government should think on practical lines. Cocooned in official residences, enjoying Z security, political leaders have hardly thought about academia. Z security has become a hallmark of political elements only. Rather than spending money on the ministerial staff, a prime priority should be given for the development of the academic world.

Managing Law

Draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFPSA) and Disturbed Area Act (DDA), conferring special powers on the security forces, need to be repealed or modified in order to be more humane. The illegal use of power must be curbed, if not discontinued. This calls for an immediate reduction of AFPSA and DDA to save the educational sector from a lack of psychological resilience, which has hindered the creativity of academia and has also increased its stress.

Removal of Paramilitary Forces from Educational Institutions

A number of institutions endowed with academic excellence have also become targets of warring factions in Kashmir. Kashmir has become a heavily militarized zone. The deployment of troops in educational institutions prohibits them from achieving an excellent educational platform and this in turn has a drastic effect on education as a whole. Institutions like Islamia College of Science and Commerce,

Oriental Library of Hazratbal Shrine, Islamia Higher Secondary School become the victims of corrupt politics. Action must be taken to ensure proper disaster management strategies for the educational institutions that are occupied by paramilitary forces. The mental state of the faculty and students in such institutions is distressing. Immediate steps should be taken to demilitarize such institutions. International guidelines and their immediate implementation against such situations can save the educational wealth for future generations of Kashmir

Off Campus Access to Resources

The Web has brought with it an environment without barriers to accessing information. It is a river that crosses all borders. This miraculous technology can do wonders in a conflict zone like Kashmir, especially for the educational sphere. Access to various web resources for academia can help in the recognition of a new world for the academic community. Off-campus access can help in accessing Web resources without risking the lives of those in academia. This platform can also help overcome the problems faced due to unending strikes and curfews, which have become common in Kashmir. Scholarly publishers can provide their products to the educational sector in Kashmir. Projects like HINARI, AGORA, OARE, etc., started for poor economies, but can be launched for conflict zones also. This assistance from scholarly giants can help in filling up the scholarly divide, an outcome of conflict and war.

Establishment of Rehabilitation Centres

Atrocious violence in Kashmir is endemic. Academics are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorders. So, proper stress rehabilitation centers specified for the academic community can help overcome conflict-related stress. Educational institutions in Kashmir should develop strategies to cope up with stress. Burdened by the occupational and situational stress, there is an urgent need to adopt a stressless praxis for academia in Kashmir.

Dialogues between India and Pakistan

India and Pakistan, two neighbouring nuclear states who have fought four wars (in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999) over the control of Kashmir, must be firm in forming a dialogue process that can bring the volatile situation of Kashmir to normalcy. Building public opinion through constructively engaging the two nations in the process of peace-building can help to overcome political unrest. The “blame game” between the two nations must stop immediately. This is the most important way to manage the educational sector, which can make Kashmir what it was known for, *a paradise on earth*. The dialogue process, if taken and implemented at the right time can save whole of South Asia from a catastrophic conflict. As Leo Tolstoy rightly says, "a spark neglected can burn the house".

Developing Knowledge Portal: Kash Net

Management of knowledge that came from universities, research institutes, and other organizations, or remains embedded in the culture and folklore of Kashmir must be given a prime significance. The practical applications of our research work in social, economic, political, and moral development are hindered because of the lack of proper knowledge management strategies. Loss of academia can never be repaired, especially in a politically simmering area like Kashmir. The lives of the people of Kashmir are under a continuous threat, and if lost it can create a large knowledge gap. No one knows what kind of future an individual may have.There is an immediate need to develop some curative measures, to save the educational arena from drowning in choppy waters. A knowledge portal (Kashnet) would

provide the ability to incorporate not only the data from the institutions associated with the network, but also the tacit knowledge that is under unremitting risk in Kashmir. Furthermore, it can provide for the most comprehensive access possible to needed knowledge. This new knowledge-management-based environment would also provide the opportunity to add new resources representing different sectors of society. It will provide various sources of knowledge which might be of significance for academicians, administrators, planners, researchers, and above all knowledge managers. This is knowledge that is currently not published on any of the official or popular websites of Kashmir.

Enhancing Virtual Literacy Skills

Developing a knowledge-based portal, Kash Net, calls for developing skills to explore the virtual world to its fullest. This can help in achieving academic excellence. Virtual literacy skills in an electronic environment can do wonders in nurturing the educational sector of Kashmir, which in turn can make the societal elements literate in every aspect.

The exploitation of the Web and ubiquitous computing have been progressing and have had a dramatic effect upon the knowledge cycle. Virtual literacy skills have become a tool to exploit the resources and enhance the proficiency of organizations. Intellectuals, the knowledge carriers, must be equipped with virtual literacy skills. Imparting the latest and changing ICT skills to workers will result in better productivity. The test of charity is to give something that one values greatly, and after life, the greatest gift one can give, comes the personal efforts, talent, skills, and learning as is testified in the Holy Quran (Sura Al-Imran: Chapter 10, Verse 92). Agencies like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) can lend a helping hand to have a well-knitted, techno-literate world in disputed areas like Kashmir. This can help in strengthening global ties with the academic world outside Kashmir, thereby paving way to a literary and educated environment in Kashmir.

Academic Exchange Programmes

The research output of Kashmir is not worth mentioning when compared to other states of India. An immediate need for academic exchange programmes in order to run a parallel race with global educational institutions is urgently needed. Enhancement of such programmes will help the academic sector prepare for successive steps in their careers. Most important, they will return to their organizations with brand new thoughts, innovative skills, and a greater aptitude for addressing the challenges their organizations face in a conflict zone like Kashmir.

Conclusion

No government until now has been able to build a serious platform for the Kashmir issue. Dialogues have always collapsed because of their basis in domestic discontent. The visible impression of injustice is turning the situation in Kashmir from bad to worse. Kashmir is a political problem that needs to be tackled in a political way. The tremendous blow to the educational system in Kashmir can only be corrected by peace. A unified message of peace, based on indigenous interests, can shun violence, and in Kashmir paradise lost can be regained. Professor Peter Drucker, an eminent figure in management, rightly says, "the best way to predict the future is to create it", and creating a secure platform for academia in Kashmir can signal a glorious future that can only be achieved through peace. The trauma and tragedy that academia is witnessing here can be healed through the peace process and the devastated and war-ravaged Kashmir can again become a heavenly abode.

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