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THURSDAY | OCTOBER 01, 2026 | RABI' AL-THANI | 18, 1448 AH

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Kashmiri in a Changing Kashmir: Is the Mother Tongue Losing Its Place?

In Kashmir, language is not just a means of communication. It includes family traditions, humour, generations of poets and poetic tradition, the voice of the land that has always been a talking one. But times are changing. More and more, a child who understands Kashmiri well will answer in Urdu or English. The parents of that generation of children speak Kashmiri, but prefer to communicate with their kids in English, as they believe this will give them an edge.

Is Kashmiri disappearing? Not exactly. But it may be losing the space it once held in the daily lives of younger Kashmiris.

For many educators and writers, this is not about choosing one language over another. Kashmir has always been multilingual. The real question is whether learning new languages is quietly displacing the mother tongue.

Muneer, an educator known for his work through Muneer Speaks, argues that language learning starts at home and is greatly influenced by the environment of the child. According to him, after a child has joined English medium schools, the parents generally start speaking English or Urdu at home in order to make the child more comfortable; but in the long run, this may deprive the child of Kashmiri language.

He believes children should learn Kashmiri from an early age, regardless of the other languages they eventually learn. A strong foundation in the mother tongue, he says, can also strengthen comprehension and help children develop their ability to learn other languages.

In his view, Kashmiri is not disappearing, but it is receding.

This is not because of mere resentment towards English and Urdu. As explained by Muneer, one of the main reasons is the inferiority complex that exists with regard to Kashmiri language. English is considered sophisticated and linked with education and better opportunities in certain social settings while Kashmiri is regarded as rustic and traditional in nature. Kashmir's increasing exposure to the outer world through work and migration has also played its part.

There is also a practical question that many young people may ask: what can Kashmiri offer me professionally?



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English dominates global education, technology and employment and has a vast digital ecosystem. Kashmiri has a much smaller professional and technological footprint, with fewer software tools, applications and commercial opportunities built around the language. This can make it difficult for young people to see an immediate practical reason to invest time in learning it seriously.

Yet Muneer does not see the younger generation as having turned its back on Kashmiri.

He refers to the increasing popularity of Kashmiri music, literature, and culture. Youth are enjoying the songs in Kashmiri, learning about the contemporary artists like Sufiyan, and accessing Kashmiri stuff on the Internet. In his view, it means that young Kashmiris do not reject the language; rather, they only need the language in forms relevant to their lives.

The same, he believes, applies to literature. Kashmiri books have the potential to compete at the highest level and even win major literary awards.

What is needed is literature that speaks to contemporary readers and demonstrates that Kashmiri can carry modern ideas, experiences and debates just as effectively as any other language.

Professor Shad, a retired professor and

former Head of the Department of Kashmiri at the University of Kashmir, who currently serves as Convenor of the Kashmir Chapter of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, and as a Distinguished Professor at the Central University of Kashmir, takes a more reassuring view of the language's future.

He does not believe Kashmiri is in immediate danger. Kashmiri continues to be widely spoken, and dedicated departments of the language exist in universities across Jammu and Kashmir. For him, the deeper concern is not that the language is dying, but that a proper and consistent system for connecting younger generations with it is still lacking.

A language that remains part of everyday life, he argues, does not simply vanish. However, young people need meaningful opportunities to understand its value and possibilities.

He also points to a kind of linguistic hesitation among some young people, who may choose Urdu or English because of a fear or discomfort associated with speaking Kashmiri in certain settings. He believes stronger associations and initiatives are needed to help young people understand the benefits of the language and engage with its literary tradition.

His advice to those who are interested in Kashmiri is simple: read Kashmiri literature, understand it and engage with it directly.

The issue becomes particularly visible in educational institutions.

As per Dr Abid who is a professor at a government college, the change usually starts with the decisions made by the parents. Since the children join English medium schools, the parents usually start speaking English and sometimes Urdu in order to help the children get used to the language spoken in class.

Over time, the Kashmiri language is no longer used in daily conversation.

He believes the education system could play a stronger role in reversing this trend. One suggestion is to make Kashmiri a compulsory subject from Classes 8 to 12, rather than allowing students to stop studying it at an earlier stage.

He has observed college students who do not opt for Kashmiri because they stopped studying it after Class 8 and subsequently lost familiarity with the subject. He also



points to the inferiority complex that some young people associate with speaking Kashmiri.

But perhaps the clearest picture comes from young Kashmiris themselves.

For many students, English is closely connected with higher education, technology and career opportunities. Urdu remains important in religion, education and literature, Kashmiri, meanwhile, continues to be the language of home and identity for many, but it does not always occupy the same space in academic or professional life.

That does not necessarily mean young people want to abandon it.

A student who speaks English in the classroom, Urdu in certain social or religious settings and Kashmiri at home is not linguistically confused.

They are multilingual. In fact, the ability to move between languages can be an advantage. The challenge is ensuring that Kashmiri remains part of that linguistic mix.

Knowing Kashmiri is about more than being able to speak with grandparents. It provides access to traditional expressions, folk stories, poetry, humour and cultural references that can lose some of their meaning when translated into another language.

The answer, therefore, is not to ask young people to stop learning English or Urdu. It is to make Kashmiri equally compatible with the modern world.

The language needs contemporary books,

children's literature, digital content, music, films, podcasts and educational resources. It needs writers who are willing to discuss modern subjects in Kashmiri and readers who are willing to engage with them. It also needs technology that makes the language easier to read, write and use in everyday digital life.

Above all, it needs to remain alive inside homes.

Languages rarely disappear suddenly. They become weaker when one generation stops passing them naturally to the next. Preservation can therefore begin with something as simple as parents speaking Kashmiri with their children, children reading Kashmiri, students studying it and young writers giving the language new stories to tell.

Kashmiri does not need to compete with English, Urdu or any other language. It simply needs to retain its place alongside them.

Fluency in English does not make a Kashmiri less Kashmiri, and speaking Kashmiri does not make a young person less modern. A multilingual Kashmir can embrace the opportunities offered by other languages while still protecting the language that carries its own memories, humour, literature and cultural identity.

The future of Kashmiri may ultimately depend less on whether young Kashmiris know English or Urdu, and more on whether they continue to feel that their mother tongue deserves to be heard.

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HOBBIES NEVER ASK FOR AGE

Being brought up in a society where you have a targeted age to follow your passion and to indulge yourself what you love, I have completely scrutinized what actually a person has to face during that time. But is it the age which determines what we need to love and what not. There are lot many questions which gain ground in my heart about being passionate for something except money making. Sometimes I fail to understand that whether we survive to live, or we live to survive. Let me fully elucidate it all.

As we grow through our teenage years we're encouraged to indulge in hobbies. With little responsibilities from school and society and the adults around us encouraging us to keep us busy. However, as the years go by, the school work increases, we start having other responsibilities towards society albeit not too significant but some nonetheless. We have less time on our hands now to do the things we love. "I would love to paint but I got a quiz this week", "I'll practice cardistry later, right now I got to text the cute girl from the other section", and the story goes on in different forms. We keep in touch with some form of our hobbies still. We've still got time to throwback, relax, and unwind.

Then comes senior high school, the time when we need to brace for a job or university. A lot of factors start playing in now, "Would I want to pursue doing what I love or go for what is hot in the employment market?". You're lucky if they're the same thing, for most people it's not. Here people either go for what's hot in the market, work 9-5, and before long realize they're 52 and midlife crisis hits them like a truck on a slippery highway.

Or those who go for what they love, realize it doesn't bring enough food on the table and decide to shift career promising they'll keep pursuing what they love on the side until their big break; except there's only limited time in a day, and the inherent luxury of free time is not for most working-class folks; they end up the same, wondering where did it all go wrong.

Finally, we've got folks who pursue what they love and also happens to be hot in the market. However, over the years the passion and love for the niche slowly changes



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into a need to get good at it and beat the other competitors in the market. The desire to be better for the love of it slowly changes into the need for it, and in the midst of all of this, the passion is replaced with the urgency and compendency to bring food on the table and money to the bank.

No, that'd be ridiculous. We're somehow embedded with the notion that a healthy body, mental wellbeing, and other things good are inherent to us and it's the bad choices we make that make us unhealthy, mentally unhappy, and throws other bad things our way. It's high time we let go of that notion. Good things do not come naturally. Having a shredded or a super slim body isn't what a healthy body is. Being happy all the time and smiling every morning right as you get out of bed isn't mental well-being. Having a back that aches without reason and constant dissatisfaction with your life is not normal.

What I'm trying to say is maintaining a hobby takes work. We're all seeded with the notion from our childhood that if we keep love something we'll find the time to do it. Maybe back in those days, we could. We had a lot of time and very few responsibilities. As adults, we forget how to be happy unless something of monetary value is exchanged.



To do something you love, efforts need to be put in, responsibilities fulfilled, schedules cleared, mindset shifted and efforts put in to find the time to do something not because you want to make money out of it or that it has a potential in the market, but solely because you enjoy doing it; because you love doing it.

Of course, there is a small percentage of people who work in what they love and love every part of it, but for the vast majority of us, that isn't true.

We, humans, have a very different notion about things associated with a monetary value and as soon as you assign your hobby one, it stops being your hobby. You might love painting and can paint endlessly for hours submerged in the splash-splash of colors across the canvas but as soon as someone offers to pay you to paint a dozen pieces for them, the hours put in start seeming longer and the splash-splash of colors appear only to fulfill your accountability towards the person in exchange for their money.

Adults deserve to be happy



Why are the only places where we have coloring books are kindergartens and mental health clinics? Why is it that only children or troubled adults are given the opportunity to paint or read silly books? We need to change our mental model of being an adult from someone who is constantly tired and grinding every day to someone who is happy and interactive, making new friends, and looking at life from over its tragedies. We need to start doing silly things and play-

ing silly games and feel the sand in our toes and rub some crayons on paper for fun not intending to make a masterpiece but because we love doing it. It's time to normalize mental well being and I strongly believe diverging from daily routines of life with a hobby is the first step towards it.

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Cricket Goods Making in Kashmir Needs Push

When we talk about Kashmir's sporting potential, we usually start and end with the athletes. We celebrate the cricketer who reaches the IPL, the footballer who represents the country, or young men and women winning medals at national competitions. But I think there's another aspect of this sporting story which deserves just as much attention and that is the people who make the equipment our athletes compete with. Kashmir has already shown it can produce sports goods that travel far beyond the Valley.

The Kashmir willow cricket bat is perhaps the strongest case in point. It was a largely unbranded cottage industry that slowly morphed into a manufacturing ecosystem. Today, brands like GR8 Sports and KIS Sports have put Kashmir Willow on the map in markets beyond the region.

This is a particularly instructive story of Fawzul Kabir and GR8 Sports. In 2010 Kabir decided that Kashmir should not just be a supplier of willow clefts to companies elsewhere who would then sell the finished product under their own labels.

After years of investments in technology, research and market development, GR8 became the first Kashmir-based willow bat manufacturer to receive ICC approval in 2021. Later, its bats made their way into international cricket, including the 2021 T20 World Cup, while a GR8 bat was used by UAE's Junaid Siddique to hit the longest six of the 2022 T20 World Cup.

The brand has since gone on to partner with international players and markets, and has even joined hands with Legends League Cricket in 2024 when the tournament came to Srinagar.

But GR8 is not the sole story. The local sponsorship culture in its nascent stage saw players like former India and J&K cricketer Parvez Rasool choosing the brand, which was also promoted by Sheeraz's KIS Sports, creating a market for Kashmir Willow.

That same ecosystem has given birth to other manufacturers, including Alfa Sports, Asia Star, Valley Woods and several smaller brands. Men like Javid Ahmad Parry of Chursoo, who started small and built up to a unit making hundreds of bats a day, show that this isn't just a story of a few established companies.

It is an industry that is based on craftsmen, entrepreneurs, carpenters, polishers, machine operators, willow selectors, designers, packers and salesmen. Even the presence of young entrepreneurs like Saad and Hamad Tramboo of Tramboo Sports on Shark Tank India was a sign that the next generation is now starting to see bat manufacturing as not just a



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family trade but a modern business.

And that's where I see the larger opportunity for employment. Not every young guy has to be a government staff in a sports manufacturing industry.

It builds an employment eco system of different skills. A young person can learn to shape, press, season and finish bats, but opportunities can also be found in product design, machinery maintenance, quality control, digital marketing, e-commerce, packaging, logistics, photography, branding and export management.

The existing government cluster assessment itself mentions over 400 bat manufacturing units in the Valley and employment for thousands of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

The employment potential is much larger if we can move away from being mainly a producer of one product, to developing cricket balls, protective wear, sportswear, football equipment, hockey equipment, trekking equipment and water-sports equipment.

Some steps have already been taken by the government in this direction which need to be reinforced, not reinvented.

The Kashmir Willow cricket bat was formally registered with the Government of India's handicrafts framework which provides the industry a better recognition in the formal handicraft ecosystem. J&K Trade Promotion Organization has also identified willow bats as a District Export Hub product for Anantnag and has worked with artisans, exporters and manufacturers for GeM onboarding and export promotion.

Capacity building, technological intervention, skill development programs, financial support and collaboration with sports associations are specifically suggested in the Anantnag export action



plan. The J&K Skill Development Mission already runs programs such as PM Vishwakarma, PMKVY and SANKALP. Its network of ITIs and polytechnics provides an institutional base on which specialized sports-making courses can be introduced.

We also need to recognize the part that local cricket itself plays. Walk into a tournament ground anywhere in Kashmir, and the association is clear.

Every local tournament brings with it a need for bats, balls, gloves, pads, helmets, kits and other equipment. When local players start using local brands, bat is no longer a piece of wood, it is an advertisement. Parvez Rasool's association with KIS was one of the early examples of this transition and growing sponsorship of local players by Kashmir-based manufacturers has contributed to creating a market for indigenous brands.

The arrival of big events has amplified the effect.

GR8 cashed in on the 2024 Legends League Cricket at Bakshi Stadium, pushing Kashmir Willow and even giving away bats to match performers. These tournaments should be seen not only as sporting events but also as platforms for local manufacturing.

But we should not romanticize the industry. The bat makers of Kashmir suffer

from shortage of good quality willow, lack of modern seasoning facilities, poor technology, marketing problems, transportation problems and shortage of trained workers. The Export-Import Bank of India in a study has also pointed out that much of the industry still functions as a backward linkage to manufacturing centers outside J&K, where Kashmir willow can be used in products sold under other brands.

The solution is therefore not just to produce more bats. We need modern common facility centers, scientific seasoning and testing labs, sustainable willow plantations, design and product development centers, easier access to credit and machinery, professional branding and dedicated export assistance. The existing Common Facility Center at Sethar needs to be strengthened and modernized. New facilities can be considered wherever clusters have been developed.

I was particularly happy to learn that Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had visited the Hallamulla-Sangam industrial area in July 2026 and assured the government's support in strengthening the cricket bat industry, and discussed issues of willow plantation, power supply, infrastructure and ease of doing business.

This is the type of intervention that can help us take an existing strength and

turn it into a larger economic opportunity. "Now we should take the next step and create specialized sports-manufacturing skill courses in our ITIs and polytechnics, connect the trainees directly with the manufacturers, give incubation and credit for young entrepreneurs, set up quality standards and testing facilities and actively connect Kashmiri brands with national and international sporting events.

Kashmir need not be another Meerut or Jalandhar. We can create something that is only ours.

The foundation is already there in our willow, our craftsmen, our sporting culture and our young people. What lacks is scale, technology, branding and a deliberate policy push.

If we can educate our youth not only to play the game but also to design, manufacture, market and export the requirements of the game, sports can become more than a source of medals for Kashmir. It can be a source of livelihoods.

GR8, KIS and others have already shown that the bat can travel from a small workshop in South Kashmir to an international cricket ground.

Then the challenge is to make sure that the young people standing out there, outside those workshops, can find a career inside them.

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Solidarity with the People of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and Concern Over Human Rights Violations

I am writing to draw attention to the continuing human rights violations and restrictions on fundamental freedoms reported from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The situation in PoJK has remained a matter of concern for a long time, and recent developments have further highlighted questions surrounding freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, access to information, communication, and protection of civilian life.

In 2026, international and Pakistani human rights organisations and media outlets have reported on internet and mobile-service restrictions, arrests, clashes, alleged excessive or lethal use of force, and restrictions on civic mobilisation.

Amnesty International has called for an independent investigation into reported deaths and injuries and for restoration of communications, while the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has also called for urgent political dialogue and raised concerns about restrictions on expression and connectivity.

Against this backdrop, civil society in Jammu and Kashmir, India, has a legitimate humanitarian interest in drawing attention to the concerns of people across the Line of Control.

As communities connected by a shared history, culture, heritage and human bonds, we should not remain indifferent



Syed Showket

to credible reports of killings, arrests, disappearances, restrictions on basic rights, communication blockades and suppression of peaceful dissent.

There are also concerns regarding the political and democratic participation of ordinary citizens, opportunities for youth, economic development, access to basic services, protection of minorities, and the preservation of local culture and heritage.

These issues deserve to be examined through credible, independent and trans-

parent mechanisms rather than being allowed to remain obscured by political narratives or communication restrictions.

We therefore appeal to civil society organisations, elected representatives, human rights institutions, journalists and concerned citizens to maintain attention on the humanitarian and human rights dimensions of the situation.

Any allegations of unlawful killings, excessive use of force, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention or other serious violations should be subject to prompt, impartial and transparent investigation, with accountability established through due process.

We also believe that the people of PoJK deserve access to fundamental freedoms, transparent governance, meaningful political participation, economic opportunities and essential public services.

Human rights should remain a concern irrespective of political boundaries, and the suffering or rights of civilians should not be overlooked because of the unresolved political status of the region.

As members of civil society in Jammu and Kashmir, India, we express our solidarity with the people of PoJK on humanitarian grounds and urge our elected representatives and institutions to take note of their concerns and ensure that their voices receive appropriate attention in democratic and public forums.



This is not merely a political question; it is fundamentally a question of human dignity, civil liberties and the protection of civilian rights.

The voices of ordinary people, particularly youth, women, families of those detained or missing, journalists and peaceful civic actors, deserve to be heard.