

## Chenab Valley: Not a Lost Treasure: “Neither ‘J’ nor ‘K’, We are Only ‘&’:



People in the Chenab Valley have a deep sense of deprivation as against rest of J&K. They ironically identify themselves as “&” – People of Chenab valley are only ‘&’ within Jammu ‘&’ Kashmir.” It is the Kashmir and Jammu region which take the development pie...” Having no medical, engineering or even agricultural or such higher and specialized educational facility the youth have to go out, spend more than they should and can, and thus only those who can spend can pursue such studies and not all who deserve. There are three huge power

production plants in the Chenab Valley region, but people there get none. It goes out of J&K and the state buys at a higher premium what is produced from the Chenab waters!. The list of instances of discrimination, deprivation and step-motherly behavior by the State is long and perhaps justifiable. This area has seen wide spread militancy. Now it is almost gone. The youthful SP of Doda, who joined Police Service in 1990, at the height of militancy in Doda and elsewhere told me “ we will have to go searching for a militant now”. But the youth is in unrest, angry. It has to be not just J&K but Jammu, Kashmir, Chenab and Laddakh.



Haq Nawaz Nehru, A veteran Journalist, RTI Activist



**Not a Lost Treasure:** What the people of J&K have achieved through a long and most unique spiritual journey in terms of a unique symbiosis of religions in the realm of spirituality and thus shaped a culture and society is being lost at the altar of politics. What has been gained at as high as an altar of spirituality and religion is being lost at the altar of as baser a thing as today’s politics. The treasure has continued to be inherited until the generation of the elders, in each family,

community and the society. They have lived that culture, but the passing of the inheritance of this treasure stopped mid-way somewhere between the elders and the post 1990 generation who has grown and lived in terror, violence and trauma. Point is, that the treasure is not buried into a distant past, it is very much within their reach, and it is accessible, waiting to be owned up by the present generation. Chenab valley has 30-70 and in places 40-60 ratio of Hindu- Muslim population and makes no difference between the two. Militancy did not done them apart, but recent events like communal flare-up on the day of Eid of 2013 in Kishtwar are sawing the seeds of discord and communalization, frustrating the urge of the elders to transfer the social-cultural inheritance of the plural culture. (see SP report on Kishtwar Violence, Sept 2013 )

However, the bright, well-informed and articulate youth we met have not yet allowed their minds to be communally vitiated enough to naturalize communalism in their social culture. It is the divide between the politics of Kashmir Valle and Jammu region and the complexity of J&K conflict-politics which is factored into the communal-ethnic-regional polarization. And yet one can sense the symbiotic socio-religious culture trying to find its space – in narratives of the

elders who have lived that time and life; in social-cultural and religious events, festivals, occasions and needs; strong Hindu-Muslim family relationships and friendship bonds; even in political expression when a lot of people don't vote communally; mix-community living that people still prefer.. One needs to be optimistic no doubt but that is not being irrational.

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