

Will We Consider Our Own, The Kashmiri Children Traumatized By Years Of Systemic Violence?

Repetitive, violent trauma in endemic war zones can be deeply damaging for the community, especially children and adolescents, who could be scarred for life, and pass on their fear and anger to generations that follow.

AMIT SEN
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The last time I went to Kashmir was end of September, 2019, with a fact finding team that wanted to take a close look at the ground realities after the shocking shutdown of Kashmir on August 5, 2019. As lawyers, activists and a medical doctor, we felt it was important to understand the situation first-hand. Not just in order to advance the true spirit of a democratic society, but to hold our elected government and the institutions of democracy accountable for their actions.

India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Bipin Rawat, said on January 16 that "girls and boys are now being radicalised" in Kashmir, and those who are "completely radicalised" need to be "taken out separately" and put in deradicalisation camps (IE, January 17).

I remembered 1983, when I was working as a young medical officer in 92 Base (Military) Hospital at Srinagar which offered sincere medical care to primarily armed forces personnel and their families, but also to the "civilians" during medical emergencies and complicated cases that they couldn't handle in the "civil hospitals". And the local people were ever so grateful for that facility.

I would often walk down the undulating roads through Badami Bagh Cantt, along the pristine hills and forests that would lead up to the Dal Lake. Walking through the narrow streets around Lal Chowk, looking for bargains at quaint leather shops or intricate Kashmiri woodwork, or paddling through the floating gardens around Dal Lake, I would meet many families and children. They were a warm, welcoming, respectful and proud people. "Yeh India nahin hai Madam, Kashmir hai (this is not India Madam, it's Kashmir)", a shopkeeper had quipped when my visiting mother had tried to bargain for leather bags. It had irked me then, but I came away with a good sense of their distinct identity. I remember buying a lot of things from that shop.

And the children were everywhere, running and prancing over the steps of Nishat Bagh, going to school in shikaras, picnicking by the rapids in Pahalgam and snowboarding — on makeshift wooden boards — down the winter slopes of Gulmarg. Spring was in the air for most of the year.

The next time I visited Kashmir was in 2003, as a child mental health professional, part of a team that was to address the needs of traumatised children and fractured families in the Valley. This time, the picture perfect landscape had been punctured by protruding nozzles of automatic guns from the security bunkers at



close intervals throughout the city of Srinagar. Over the next three years, through multiple visits, we met dozens of children and adolescents, many of them orphans and others from families that were damaged and disintegrated due to insurgency, terrorism and excesses from security forces. There were eight-year-olds who had lost the ability to play spontaneously, and instead, would sing songs of martyrdom where they proudly proclaimed that the only objective in life was to march to their death in the quest for freedom. There were accounts of children and families getting caught in the crossfire between terrorists and security forces, fathers and brothers being picked up by men in uniform never to return again, and young men getting ruthlessly murdered in front of their kin.

Such repetitive, violent trauma in endemic war zones can be deeply damaging for the community, especially children and adolescents, who could be scarred for life, and pass on their fear and anger to generations that follow. They don't need to be tutored or indoctrinated to form extreme attitudes and prejudices. They learn from the brutal life lessons that surround them, that repeatedly break their trust in people who they expected would care for them and protect them. And that includes our state and custodians of law.

The last time I went to Kashmir was end of September, 2019, with

a fact finding team that wanted to take a close look at the ground realities after the shocking shutdown of Kashmir on August 5, 2019. As lawyers, activists and a medical doctor, we felt it was important to understand the situation first-hand. Not just in order to advance the true spirit of a democratic society, but to hold our elected government and the institutions of democracy accountable for their actions. Members of our team visited different districts in the Kashmir Valley, the high court, district courts and other quasi-judicial institutions, interacted with lawyers, health and mental health professionals, traders, and the victims of state-perpetrated violence. Findings from the exercise were published as a comprehensive report that is available in the public domain.

This time, there were no children on the streets or the gardens. In fact, they were not even in schools. The streets of Srinagar were completely deserted, and it felt like a ghost town in the centre of the city on a Sunday afternoon, when I landed there.

Besides the abject failure of the state to engage with the Kashmiri people in the decision-making about their own land and life, what concerned me most as a mental health professional is the impact of the violence that the security forces unleashed on the young people there. Children and adolescents who could access mental health services, were reporting all

kinds of abuse (physical, sexual and emotional) and nightly raids by security forces — as corroborated through reports from other members of our group who had visited villages and towns in different districts — which had created an atmosphere of terror and panic amongst young people and their families. They shared experiences of paralysing fear, acute anxiety, panic attacks, depressive-dissociative symptoms, post traumatic symptoms, suicidal tendencies and severe anger outbursts. There was a marked increase in psychological distress in 70 per cent (as estimated through a recent survey by mental health professionals in the Valley) of the population. Professionals working on the ground expressed concern about the aftermath of this imbroglio and feared that the trauma suffered by thousands of people will become evident in the months and years to come.

Experiences of such violent aggression and abuse can cause deep, destructive trauma that may take generations to heal. The damage is particularly severe if the very people who are supposed to protect you become perpetrators. The manifestations may take various forms: From complete psychological breakdown to an extreme numbing of emotions and lack of empathy. The current spate of violence by the state has not only caused extreme suffering and a plethora of mental health disorders of unprecedented proportions, it has also manifested in the seething anger, acute polarisation and paranoia, a complete lack of trust and hardening of attitude towards the Indian state.

So who is responsible for the radicalisation of Kashmiri youth, General Rawat? Who will bear this burden and help them heal? Who will pay the price for the consequences of this terrible oppression and violence on the children of Kashmir? Are we ever going to treat them as our own children?

(The writer, a historian, is professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. The writer is a child and adolescent psychiatrist working in Delhi.)

Tips For A Budding Writer

What must a budding writer religiously follow to be overwhelmingly successful?



SHREEPRAKASH SHARMA

Aspirings to become a writer and to earnestly see one's name in print is very much natural human trait. There is nothing strange about it. But to be a professional writer, that too a successful and best selling, is not an easy task. It is a hard nut to crack. The task is very much difficult. It calls for hard labour, life-long-learning inclination, confidence and patience. Walter Mosley, the famous American novelist, once had said, "If you want to be a writer, you have to write everyday ... you don't go to a well once but daily." So, it is crystal clear that the mastery over the art of writing is the outcome of consistent efforts and regularly improving upon the mistakes.

You must have seen a toddler learning to walk with the support from his parents. Once the child learns well how to walk, he starts running without any fear and help from anyone. The same is the condition with that of a budding writer.

A newbie writer needs the support of in-depth knowledge of basics of English grammar to start his life long journey to become a successful writer. Once he becomes a published and famous writer he needs no guidelines for writing the piece which is admired by the readers. So the most important question arises here is - what are the basics the knowledge of which is very essential for an aspiring writer?

The famous American writer Mark Twain had once said, "I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English - it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in." The quote has a deeper meaning which says a lot about the art of how to write professionally flawlessly.

There goes a general perception that writing is confined to simply picking up a pen and piece of paper or sitting before a typewriter or a computer and start writing or typing on the subjects' one may feel pretty curious about. But alas! The things are not

so. In fact, writing is a nerve-racking ordeal. In fact, the process of writing starts right from thinking earnestly about a subject to finishing a final draft. But before the final draft is accomplished, a good writing has to pass through a host of stages like those of editing, additions, deletions, rearrangement of sentence structures, rewording and remodelling the contents.

So writing is a multistage process which calls for paying attention to one activity at a time. What it basically connotes is the universal fact that a writer cannot work like a juggler who is amazingly skilled at juggling with various facets of writing so quickly.

Here are given the various stages of a writing process which a writer, whether experienced or novice, must follow religiously to produce a flawless, professional and interesting piece.

Planning

This is the stepping stone of the art and profession of writing. Under this process we gather ideas to write about.

Shaping

This stage is associated with considering the ways for the organization of materials to write on the ideas planned.

Drafting

Under this stage we write about ideas in sentences and paragraphs.

Revising

It is the stage at which we evaluate writing along the lines of ideas gathered and visualized. It includes the following steps-

1. Rewriting
2. Adding some more ideas.
3. Deleting or dropping irrelevant ideas.
4. Replacing words or sentence structures with more exact and meaningful words and sentence structures.
5. Recasting and renovating materials.

Editing

This is the most important step in the process of writing. It includes the following two procedures-

1. To check the correctness of grammar.
2. To check the correctness of spellings and other important aspects of a language.

Proofreading

It is the process of reading your final copy to

seriously find out typing errors or other blunders which might have been crept in.

To sum up, writing process involves the following four steps-

1. Planning and shaping
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing and proofreading

WORDS MATTER MOST

Choose the closest meaning of the words given in the capital letters -

1. IGNOMINY
(A) personal disgrace (B) crowd (C) scream
 2. ABOMINATE
(A) to loathe (B) huge (C) difficult, hard to deal with
 3. GARRULOUS
(A) duplicate (B) pleasant (C) talkative
 4. GIMMICK
(A) a trick (B) a beautiful woman (C) intelligence
 5. ERRATUM
(A) regret (B) chance (C) a mistake
 6. DYSPEPSIA
(A) blunder (B) indigestion (C) rustic
- Answers: 1.A 2. A 3. C 4. A 5. C 6.B

Choose the word most nearly opposite to the words given in the capital letters

1. WANE
(A) to grow fast (B) to respond (C) to attack
 2. SOPHISTICATED
(A) unaccustomed (B) uncouth (C) expert
 3. BLOOM
(A) to cut (B) to wither (C) to shrink
 4. ZENITH
(A) cruel (B) nadir (C) torture
 5. SUPERCILIOUS
(A) harsh (B) obsequious (C) futile
 6. CLARIFY
(A) affirm (B) to obfuscate (C) to muddle
- Answers 1.A 2. B 3.B 4. B 5. B 6.B

PHRASAL VERBS

To pull one's sock up - to brave challenges or problems very courageously (The students have decided to pull their socks up in the wake of the fast approaching final examination.)

To dawn on - to realize (It dawned on me very late that life is a saga of pains and pleasures alike.)

To get something across - to make something clear (She needs to practise consistently to communicate better for getting her ideas across the audi-

ences effectively.)

To run away with something - to win something very easily (The cricket team ran away with the champion's trophy yesterday.)

To run away or off with something - to escape (The burglars ran away or off with all the valuables from the neighbour's home.)

IDIOMS

A hard nut to crack - a very difficult problem (If you are very consistent in your efforts then getting through civil services examinations is not a hard nut to crack.)

To rise to the occasion - to be able to do what is required in a situation (He has always been a timid student but when he was elected to the president of the students' union he so splendidly rose to the occasion.)

Pretty as a picture - very pretty (She purchased a house last week which is as pretty as a picture.)

To take a dim view of someone or something - to disapprove of someone or something (Stop taking a dim view of the people by their appearances.)

To whine about someone or something - to complain or whimper about someone or something (The common masses are whining about the current education system without seriously thinking over it.)

WORDS USUALLY USED IN MEDIA

The writing is on the wall (for) - used to indicate that something or someone will fail (The writing is very much clear on the wall for the private sector industries which use coal as the raw material for producing their goods.)

Vicarious - the experience you get by watching someone doing it rather than doing it yourself (The parents usually get vicarious excitements and happiness from the meteoric successes of their own children.)

The tip of the iceberg - a very small sign of the problem which is so enormous (The arrest of the hundreds of children traffickers in the city yesterday is just the tip of the iceberg.)

WORD OF THE DAY

Déjà vu - the feeling that it has happened earlier in the same way

Shreepakash Sharma is principal Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Mamit (Mizoram) and can be reached at spsharma.rishu@gmail.com