



# IT IS 'CHERRY BLOSSOM' IN KASHMIR



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## Is'haq Bhat

**T**he Kashmir valley witnessed a bumper cherry crop as the produce recorded this year reached a whopping 11000 metric tons.

As per the official data, the record output this year is much higher than 2012 in which 10880 metric tons of cherry were produced in this Himalayan region. The data reveals that in Kashmir, a total area of 3699 hectares is being used for cherry cultivation among which the varieties grown at Sebdan, Shopian in South Kashmir and Tangmarg in north Kashmir are most popular. Srinagar suburbs, particularly the Zabarwan belt and Gutlibagh in Ganderbal too are famous for cherries that reach the market first.

The harvesting begins from May and continues till July 15. Cherries from Kashmir are always in demand and enjoy a virtual monopoly in Indian markets.

Almost perfect temperature of about 30- 35- degree Celsius and a good weather conditions, this year, Kashmir recorded the largest quantity of cherry produced ever in the valley.

Associate Prof. Division of Pomology, Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture Science and Technology, Srinagar. (SKUAST), Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Mir, said that due to timely rain and snow-fall this year, the production has increased manifold.

"We had a perfect weather for cherry production this year," he added.

Mir further said that as many as five varieties of cherry are

grown in Kashmir. "Mishri is the most expensive and sweetest. The next is 'Double Cherry' which is grown in bulk and has a great market in state and outside as well. 'Makhmali', 'Black or Go' and 'Awal Number' are also grown here," said Mir.

He said that one kanal of land can have almost 20-25 trees. "The produce per tree depends upon the age and specie of the tree," he said.

Farmers associated with the cherry cultivation are jubilant this year. "Last year, I was able to supply only 150 boxes but this year the yield was more than 200 boxes," said Ghulam Mohammad Aram, a farmer in Sebdan area of Budgam district.

He said that after seeking scientific and technical guidance from agricultural scientists, his production increased.

However, the farmers rue the dip in prices as the cherry is available in abundance. "It was good to have such a good output, however, the prices have nosedived to a considerable low," said President Fruit Association Parimpora Mandi, Bashir Ahmad Bashir.

He appealed the government to regulate the market prices so that the cherry cultivators earn a good living.

It is pertinent to mention that after several complaints by the farmers, the government recently the state government today announced that JK State Agro Industries Development Corporation will procure cherries from Parimpora Fruit mandi, here to provide support to the farmers who had complained about incurring losses due to fall in the demand.

*The Echo*







**“Most of the crushing unit owners have strong political connections so the authorities are hesitant to take action against these crusher owners. They (the authorities) are working hand in glove with these people (owners) and have turned a blind eye towards these blatant violations since the last two and a half decades.”**

**Gazi Abbas Shahid**

**Shamshad Ali**

**T**he present scenario of stone crushers in the Budgam district reflects a dismal and lawless picture of violated norms, people vulnerable to serious diseases and an awaiting environmental catastrophe.

While the concerned authorities have allegedly turned a blind eye towards what is happening, the people living around these crushers are complaining of many life-threatening diseases and disorders.

According to Assistant Professor at Chest Medicine department at Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, SKIMS Dr. Naveed Nazir Shah, the minute dust particles produced during the crushing, if inhaled, may cause a life-threatening chest disorder called Silicosis.

“If proper measures are not taken,

the disease may cause lung cancer,” he added.

He said that, in Kashmir, the disease is found mostly among the people living around stone crushers. “The Budgam district is worst affected,” he added

The dust also adversely affects visibility, reduces vegetation in the area and is harmful to the environment as well.

According to the official records there are 688 registered stone crusher units across the state out of which 411 operate in Kashmir region. As per the norms laid out by the Pollution Control Board (PCB) there should be three rows of trees encircling the stone crusher for reducing the impact of dust emission but according to locals and as evident not even a single tree layer is surrounding most of such units.

Samarbugh, is one among the worst affected areas in the Budgam district. The area houses hundreds of families that were shifted from the Choentt Koel (a tributary of Dal Lake) to Samar-

bugh. “Before shifting us here, we were promised that these stone crushers will be removed from this area but nothing has happened until now,” said Sajad Hussain, a resident of Golapora area of Samarbugh.

“Number of people of this area have lost their precious lives to Asthma, Kidney failure and other chest and lung disorders because of all the dust and pollution emitted by these establishments” he said.

As per the norms the stone crushers had to install Water sprinklers to minimize the amount of dust produced in the crushers but the locals informed that most of these units lack this facility as it involves a huge cost and those few units who are using water sprinklers throw out the used water without treating it.

Most of the stone crusher units are installed on the banks of seasonal streams which have a scanty water-supply. To manage a proper water supply, they have to spend a good amount of money, so majority of crushers avoid

using water sprinklers.

“Most of the crushing unit owners have strong political connections so the authorities are hesitant to take action against these crusher owners. They (the authorities) are working hand in glove with these people (owners) and have turned a blind eye towards these blatant violations since the last two and a half decades,” a local in Samarbugh alleged.

Meanwhile, the Pollution Control Board admitted the fact that the stone crusher units violated the norms, however, asked for cooperation by the locals and stone crushing unit owners for implementation of the laws. “There are a number of locals who are employed or own these units in these areas and unless they co-operate with us in implementing we can only do so much” an official at PCB told The ECHO.

“We are taking several measures to control the emission of these hazardous particles and soon we will achieve the results as well,” the official, wishing anonymity added.

# TAKHTI WRITING: A FORGOTTEN ART

**Javaid Lone**

Once a mandatory practice in primary level schools across Kashmir, students writing a Takhti (a wooden slate) is a rare sight as its use has been abandoned for reasons unknown.

Called as Mashq in local parlance, writing on this wooden slate using a pen made of sticks and ink made of mud was a compulsory home and class work for students in order to improve their penmanship.

While few of schools in urban locales encouraged the Takhti writing culture in past, in rural Kashmir it was e was a norm and a common sight. It was mandatory for every student to write Takhti on the daily basis.

“There were strict guidelines from the school authorities in this regard,” says Ashraf Ali, a government employee. Takhti writing was totally a teacher initiative as there were no guidelines from the government.

“In today’s competitive atmosphere, writing a Mashq will be considered a cumbersome task,” he added.

Experts say that it was a poor friendly initiative affordable by everyone. “The work books, slates and other available material was too costly for most of the students in past. Takhti was the best possible alternative available to everyone and it was effective than the modern means of improving the hand writing skills,” says Mohammad Shareef Dar, a retired Headmaster from Tral area of Pulwama district.

He believes the Takhti writing not only improves the calligraphic skills of the child, but also nourishes an artistic aptitude among the students as well.

While the use of Takhti for some was limited to improving hand writing but for some it was an environment friendly exercise. “Use of paper involves felling of more and more trees which is a problem in the long run,” says Dr. Maroof Ahmad Shah, an educationist.

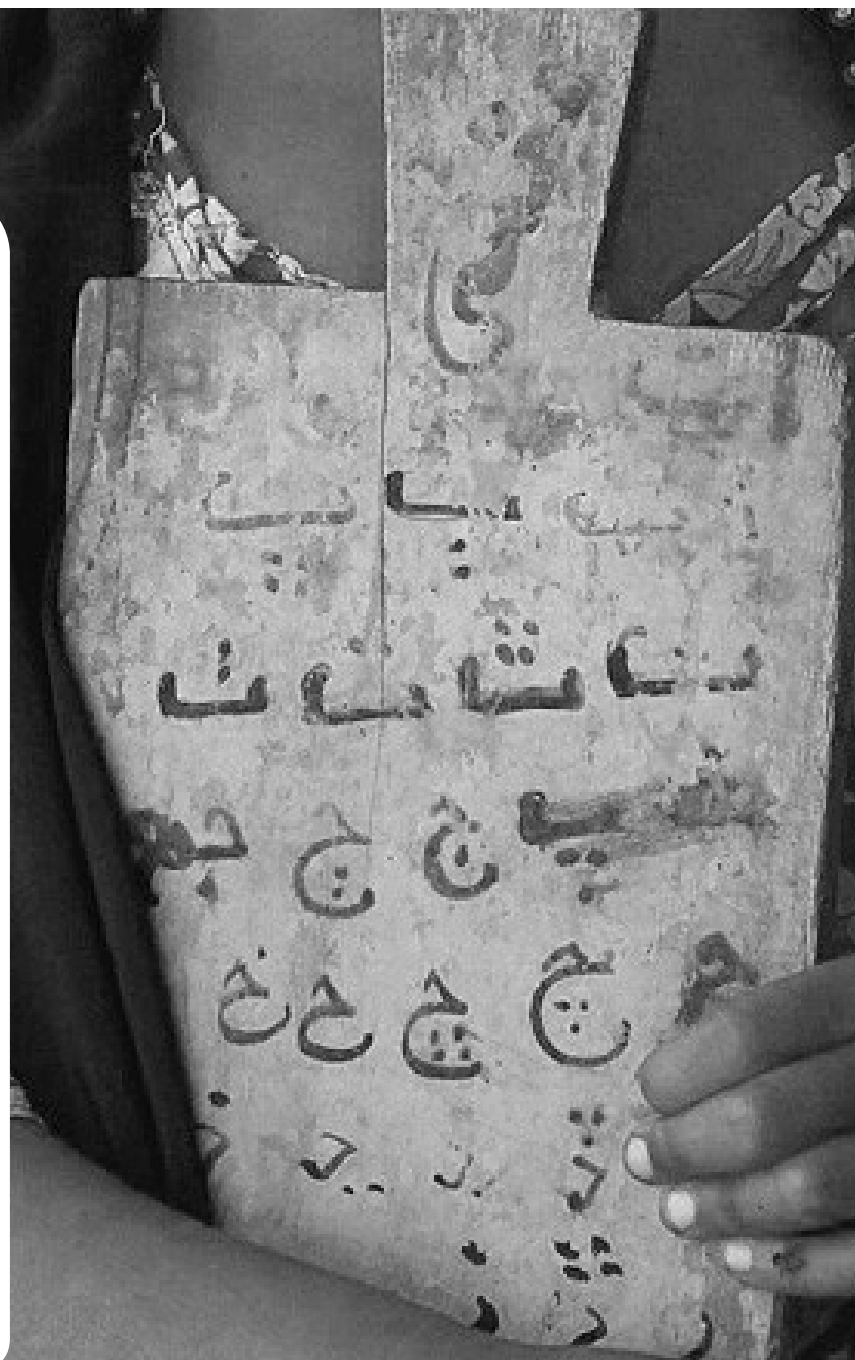
“We don’t have paper recycling facilities so Takhti writing was a best solution available. Write on it and wash it for next use,” he added.

He blames capitalism for making Takhti writing an obsolete thing and wants the trend to be revived again.

As Takhti writing tradition is fast reaching its twilight, however, few people still consider it as a revered practice and work hard to maintain and revive the culture.

Principal, Sheikh Mohammad Bakir (RA) Memorial School (SMBMS) at Khana-gund Tral, Assadullah Dar, who believes that Takhti writing helps students to inculcate creative attitude and good habits, has kept it a mandatory practice at his school. “It is compulsory at our school. I believe that writing a Takhti is not just about improving ones hand writing, it is a practice which teaches us good habits, discipline and above all an attitude to work hard,” he asserts.

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**Minister for Social Welfare, Sakina Ito with Vice Chancellor IUST, Prof A R Trag at inaugural ceremony of book donation event 'Nooran' organized by IUST.**



**Students enthusiastically participating in book donation event Nooran.**



**Registrar, IUST, Prof A G Rather, Director Physical Education, IUST, Prof K A Trazan, and others posing for a photograph with the winning inter departmental Basketball team.**

**Photos by :Arif Bashir Wani**



Faculty and students during the field trip to Dachigam National Park. The trip was organized by DJMC to aware students about different techniques involved in wildlife photography.



Founder Chairman of Department of Journalism and Mass Communication , Aligarh Muslim University, Prof. N. A. K Durrani interacting with students of DJMC at IUST.



DJMC students at a theatre workshop





**“Message of Islam is Universal and complete. All we need is to act upon the commandments of Allah and follow our religion”**



Photo : Arif Bashir Wani

**IUST holds National Seminar on**

## ‘Muslim Response to Modern Education’



**“These changes should be adopted without compromising on the religious fundamentals. If we adopt these changes we will prove to be exemplary Muslims.”**

### Echo Desk

**A** two day National seminar on “Muslim Response to Modern Education: Approaches and Prospects” to explore different realms of Islamic Studies was organized at Islamic University of Science and Technology.

The seminar was held on July 2 and 3 and 40 Scholars from various Universities including Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Milia Islamia, Jamia Hamdard, MANUU, University of Kashmir and Central University (Kashmir) and different colleges of state participated and read their papers during five technical sessions.

Different realms of Muslim response to the modern Education were explored during the two day seminar. Contribution of Muslim scholars and Educationists in India and across the globe was also highlighted.

Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Ali Mohammad Sagar Tuesday inaugurated a two-day national seminar on “Muslim Response to Modern Education: Approaches and Prospects” here at Islamic University

of Science and Technology.

The seminar which saw various technical sessions chaired by academic luminaries is organized by the Department of Islamic Studies, IUST.

The Minister was accompanied by Commissioner Secretary Agriculture Production Department Asgar Samoon, Vice Chancellor

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IUST, Prof A R Trag, former pro vice chancellor Indira Gandhi National Open University, Prof Baseer Ahmed Khan and Registrar IUST, Prof A G Rather at the inaugural session.

Addressing the gathering, Sagar urged that Muslims across

the globe should act upon the teachings of Islam. “Message of Islam is Universal and complete. All we need is to act upon the commandments of Allah and follow our religion,” he said.

Sagar said that there was no contradiction between Islam and knowledge. “Our history and legacy is witness to our knowledge rich past. Muslims were the first researchers, scientists and educationists, however, at present our condition is not good,” he said.

He added that Muslims provided a disciplined way to the world. “However the way was targeted with vengeance. Our position, nowadays, is not good,” he said.

“Despite many problems, Kashmiri youth have done well in every field,” he added.

He said that there is a need to produce eminent scholars and luminaries who will work on development of better Muslim societies.

In his address, VC IUST, Prof A R Trag said that Muslims should adjust themselves with the changing global scenario. “These changes should be adopted without compromising on the religious fundamentals,” he said

“If we adopt these changes we will prove to be exemplary Muslims,” he added

Prof Trag said that the teaching of Islam lay emphasis on Education. “The Holy Quran tells us to read, write and educate ourselves. So we should be focused about it,” he said.

VC further said that Muslims have created history from the 7th century and have influenced all walks of life since then. “We are a part of that rich history, it is our duty to carry forward that legacy,” he added.

Commissioner Secretary Agriculture Production Department Asgar Samoon said that the present day Muslims have the responsibility to take forward the message of Islam. “Global researchers are needed as Islam is a global religion,” he added.

He said that Muslims should not separate religion from the worldly affairs. “We should remember that teachings of Islam are applicable in every activity we do,” he added.

Head, Department of Islamic Studies, the seminar was a platform where several controversial stereotypes and beliefs about Islam will be discussed. “We will try to know the real content behind the terms like extremism, Islamphobia and develop an intellectual strategy to deliberate upon these questions being used against Islam,” he added.



# ISLAM IS FOR KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION: Taj Mohiudin



**"More and more seminars and deliberations should be made over the subject so that we can excel in every walk of life."**

**"Islam is for knowledge and education. We need to change the approach towards the modern system of education,"**



## Echo Desk

Senior Congress leader and Hon'ble Minister for Medical Education, Youth Services and Sports, Taj Mohiuddin was the Chief Guest at the valedictory function.

Vice Chancellor Central University Kashmir, Prof Abdul Wahid Qureshi and Prof. A. R. Trag were the guests of Honour at the valedictory function held at the IUST auditorium.

Addressing the gathering, Taj Mohiuddin said that the modern education doesn't stop the Muslims to practice their religion. "Islam is for knowledge and education. We need to change the approach towards the modern system of education," he added.

The Minister further said that the Jammu and Kashmir has fully adopted the modern Education system and people here have excelled in ever field across the

globe. "Modern education system is required more in northern parts of India," he added.

In his address, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Central University Kashmir, Prof. Abdul Wahid Qureshi said that use of modern education by the Muslim world has become indispensable. He added that there is an effort to reform the education system in the muslim world, however, there is a need to identify the facts behind the decline of the golden past witnessed by the Islamic world," he added.

Prof Qureshi said that the contribution of Muslims to the education system and the science and technology has gone unnoticed.

He asked the varsity authorities to have more deliberations on the topic in future. "More and more seminars and deliberations should be made over the subject so that we can excel in every walk of life," he added.

Vice Chancellor Islamic University of Science and Technology, Prof A R Trag, in his address, said that

the purpose of organizing the seminar was to bring people under one roof to discuss the measures to be taken to contribute in the field of Science and Technology and other modern fields of study.

He further said that there was no conflict between science and Islam. "We have been fore runners in every field. Science has flourished in Islamic era," he said during the valedictory function.

He further urged the students to be inquisitive referring to famous Islamic philosopher he said that we should doubt issues, that would lead us to explore and research to cross the barriers of doubt and reach reality.

He also suggested updating the academic curriculum of Islamic studies to make it relevant in modern times.

Head, Department of Islamic Studies IUST, Dr Showket Hussain also spoke on the occasion.

The seminar was organized by the Department of Islamic Studies, IUST.



# MESMERIZING KASHMIR ATTRACTS ALL

**Aijaz Nazir**

The screeches of brakes are being heard regularly on a narrow road leading to Pahalgam, a popular tourist resort. Kashmir's famous tourist season has begun and already a large number of tourist vehicles are making a beeline on these roads in south Kashmir, which are covered by lush apple orchards on both sides.

"These orchards are no less than the paradise," says 30-year old, Nikhil Ranade from Mumbai, who along with his family is visiting Kashmir for the first time. And tourists like him can't seem to have enough of Kashmir.

Farooq Ahmad, a vendor has erected a make-shift tent on the Bijbehara-Pahalgam road. While moving the ladle in a pot full of tea, he gleefully says, "Sir, it takes me no time to prepare whatever you like," as tourists make themselves comfortable on chairs in his tent. Vendors like him have erected these make-shift establishments for providing refreshments to tourists and make a fast buck.

In summer, Kashmir Valley adorns a picturesque look, making the visiting tourists' days cheerful and memorable, who have escaped the scorching heat prevalent in rest of India. In the cool comforts of Kashmir, these vacationers spend their time merrily. Thousands of tourists visit the Valley, particularly south Kashmir which has many famed tourist destinations like Pahalgam, Achabal, Verinag, Kokernag, Duksum and recently discovered Sinthan Top. However, tourists mostly prefer staying in Pahalgam and visit other places.

In 2012, almost 1.3 million tourists including 37,000 foreigners had visited the Kashmir Valley.

"This year, response from our stakeholders is great. They are content

with the numbers. There is no decline in number of tourists," asserted Assistant Director for Tourism, Anantnag, Tariq Hussain.

Vikram Kumar, an engineer from Bihar, who is on an eight day trip to Valley said, "I have visited Kashmir for the first time and got the chance to visit places like Mattan temple, Achabal and Kokernag. The beauty of this place is just breathtaking." "I would like to come once again, if I get time," he vowed.

Locals are satisfied with the turn of events. "I am happy with the tourist rush these days," says Nazir Ahmad, a local shopkeeper from Pampore, on the outskirts of Srinagar. "We were not expecting this, after protests and curfew earlier this year," he added.

**"This year, response from our stakeholders is great. They are content with the numbers. There is no decline in number of tourists."**

Meanwhile, some elder folks regale of the good old times when Valley was the most favorite place for the Bollywood industry. But that was before the insurgency. In 1989, when militancy raised its ugly head, tourism was the first casualty and the Bollywood film crews stopped coming. "We were making good income from the film industry," says 45-year old Yaseen, Anantnag who had worked as labor with the film crew. "I have worked for films like Raj Tilak, Betaab, Bobby and Farishtay," he recounts.

However, those days are seeing a return as Bollywood film industry rediscovers the beauty of Kashmir. Late director Yash Chopra whose love for Kashmir was well-known, shot parts of

his final movie, Jab Tak Hai Jaan last year in Pahalgam. Most recently, stars of Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani- Ranbir Kapoor and Dipika Padukone descended on Valley for shooting of the film.

It is 10:30 at night and the market at Srinagar's Dal Gate is yet to shut, a scenario unimaginable in the Valley few years back. A row of glittering street-lights adds a nice touch to the heavenly atmosphere with the majestic Dal Lake behind. Tourists are taking a leisurely walk around the market while vendors are busy showing them handicraft and other traditional items.

The State Government has taken many steps for developing the tourism industry here. In a bid to attract more tourists from outside the State, the Tourism department in collaboration with the local academy organised a series of cultural programmes at various tourist places in the Valley. "Organising the cultural fares indeed attracts tourists and also benefits us economically," says Mushtaq Ahmad, a hotelier in Pahalgam.

Assistant Director, Tariq Ahmad says that "tourists love to see the culture of Kashmir," - a view echoed by the tourists who attended these events. "I am very happy with the Government for organising the cultural programme. This is the first time, I got a chance to witness traditional Kashmiri culture very closely," says Sameer Patil, who came from New Delhi to visit the Valley recently. "I request the Government to organise more such festivals, outside Kashmir in cities like Mumbai and Delhi," he added.

For the ordinary local Kashmiri populace, which has been scarred by violence for almost two decades, a record tourist season like this gives the opportunity to yield economic benefits and put their lives back on track. For too long they had dreamt of return of normalcy. And now those dreams are materialising, albeit gradually.

*The Echo*

