

Just Being There: Diary Notes of my Trip to Kashmir in 2011

I did not keep a diary during my ambitious trip to Kashmir in 2011, as I generally never have kept diaries, but only diary notes. The trip was ambitious as I wanted to reconnect with my roots after a gap of nine years. Thoughts occurred to me with what goals should I visit it, but then I abandoned the notion of goals and instead conceptualized the objective of my trip to be *just being there*.

These *Diary Notes* have been written in a stream of consciousness style, capturing my nascent observations. But I have captured the trip in six full-fledged articles, which were published in 2011, and are attached here. The diary notes are a supplement to the articles. The articles are also available on my website, www.kaulscorner.com. The articles are:

1. Fleeting Moments at Pahalgam (83)
2. Siesta at Manasbal Lake (84)
3. In Search of the Soul of Gulmarg (85)
4. Touching the Remnants of Time in Old Srinagar (86)
5. At the Feet of Shiva at Amarnath (87)
6. Meeting Raj Begum (88)

The numbers in parentheses are the article numbers in the Essays section of the site.

But I still had a list of things to do, which comprised of meeting Raj Begum; going down Jhelum in a *shikara* from Zero Bridge to Safakadal Bridge and back; visiting Pahalgam, Gulmarg, and Sonamarg, the last one I had never been to. Also, visiting the houses of my birth and childhood at Malikangan and Malikyar. Furthermore, visiting Zeethyar, which I had also never been to. Living in a houseboat, which I had never done, as natives would not live in a houseboat, that was for the visitors to do. The last but not the least was eating *Nadirmunjas*, my

most favorite snack, which I had not done in a while. In the end I ended up doing a lot more. I got a lot of ideas on Kashmir and other subjects to write on, and I took several hundred pictures and some videos, whose quality has endeared them to a huge number of people all these years. Based on the last genre I made a 35-minute-long composition of stills and videos which I called “Kashmir: A Trip to the Hallowed Land, which has earned a lot of popularity. It is available on You Tube, as it is too long to be attached to an email.

Diary Notes

Indian Scene in General:

1. I witnessed more exuberance and energy than before, let us say ten years earlier.
2. Change in dress. White colored clothing and *chapals* were no longer the most favored, as they were for generations, but were supplanted by colored clothing and shoes and sneakers for footwear. Jeans were ubiquitous, even many women wore them, though not ultra-tight variety used in the West.
3. Mall mania had captured Indians.
4. People were copying Westerners in many things – unquestioningly.
5. Young men and women at airports and hotels were very polite, alert, and efficient.
6. TV – Westernized entertainment, seemingly scant attention paid to details and depth.
7. Indian courtesy is deep and persuasive. It comes from Indian ethos – at times bordering on servility.
8. Indians paying scant attention to environment. Appearance and harmony with the scene do not matter.
9. Indira Gandhi Airport based on Western concepts of architecture, functionality, and style.

1. Trip from airport to the hotel: cabbie was supposed to pay me a balance of 50 rupees, but he would not, even when reminded about it. He would not move my bags to the hotel after dropping me at its gate.
2. Sun Shine Hotel where I stayed was wrongly spelled on its huge sign, it should have been Sunshine. Such glaring English spelling errors were rife in Kashmir, especially hurting were the ones on some *shikaras*, as are in the rest of India.

Hotel was disappointing. No internet, A/C, and shower. Looked shabby. Being at Dalgate it commands a view of the row of houseboats, Hariparbat, and a sliver of Zabarwan mountain.

3. Changing my cell phone to the one operable in Kashmir was a big hassle. A man at J&K Reception Center was very excited to know that I was born in Kashmir. He was enthusiastically helpful in registering me for Amarnath trip, which was necessary for me to qualify for the phone change. Even though I was not yet decided upon undertaking that trip.
4. Visiting Kashmir is reliving some of my childhood, when my consciousness was developed and the course of my life was established.
5. Shalimar garden is in a better shape than before (2002).
6. Made a decision to go to Amarnath, in spite of my age. It was not on my list. Made it not on the basis of religious feeling, but on the basis that it was there, an inspiration used by the British mountaineer, George Mallory (1886-1924), in his three failed attempts to reach Mt. Everest. Planned to go to Baltal on road, then by a helicopter to Panchtarni, then on horseback to the cave.
7. There is still so much muck on the roads: garbage, human and animal excreta. Repellant odors float in the air, excruciatingly messy sites abound, depressing the fine spirits of the visitors. But natives have learned to ignore them.
8. Expansion of markets, housing, etc. being made without an overall plan.

1. Even though Kashmir has become more technologized, economically securer, but the old ways of its people's (KM's) thinking persists.
2. Kashmiris seem to be alive but without a vision. They think as long as they do something it is progress.
3. Kashmiris are dreamers, the people who stick to their dreams, irrespective of anything that happens, and even if the dream is unrealizable. Such a personality can lead to insanity.
4. The people seem to recognize the futility of the two decades of civil war, but they do not know how to get out of it. Having achieved almost nothing in the direction of independence, they are frustrated and have become cynical.

Meeting Raj Begum

At the Feet of Shiva At Amarnath

Touching the Remnants of Time in Old Srinagar

In Search of The Soul of Gulmarg

Siesta at Mansbal Lake

Fleeting Moments at Pahalgam

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