



Born to win

A story of Resilience & Success

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Are leaders born?

This is a story of hope which tells you that nothing is impossible to achieve in life if you have passion and love for what you aspire for. It tells you that you can live life on your own terms, in spite of the adversities of life. It teaches us what makes a person a leader and others followers and how a person from a humble background, who faced all the odds in life, could rise so much so that the politicians and bureaucrats had to listen to him and act on his assertions.

This is the story of a man who with his daring imagination and a positive attitude towards life could turn his imagination into reality with his persistent efforts. An energetic young man who was an artist and a sportsman at the same time, who chose to become a teacher so that he could inspire future generations to build a strong nation. It was a profession very close to his heart. He rejected lucrative government job offers to become a teacher.

He was a man who always lived life out of passion and on his own terms and dared to imagine, the children of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community studying in best of the institutions all over India after they were forced to leave their homes in Kashmir. He convinced various heads of the state governments in India to reserve an additional quota of seats in educational institutions, for Kashmiri Pandits across the country. He was none other than Shri Amarnath Vaishnavi.



Leading a protest

Childhood and Fear of Math

You will be surprised to know that Shri Amarnath Vaishnavi feared Math as a student and he even left his answer sheet blank in his tenth standard pre board exam. He wrote a note for his teacher in the same answer sheet and in that he wrote that he would do well the next time and that he should be given a second chance. Few days later, the teacher read his answer sheet in front of the class and the whole class burst into laughter. Next day, the principal called him in his room. He was quite scared as he thought that he would be punished. The principal

asked him if he could promise to do well if given another chance. He made a promise to his math teacher and the principal that he would do well in the final exams. He wanted to fulfill his promise at any cost. Passing was not as important to him as the fulfillment of his promise was. He worked hard so as not to let down his teacher and the principal. He had the habit of being committed to his word.

Math was his weakness but he had many more strengths. He had a charismatic personality right since his childhood. He was friendly with everyone and was loved by all. He grew up as a motherless child as his mother passed away when he was merely 18 months old but his elder brother Shri Gopinath Vaishnavi and his father Shri Sarvanand Vaishnavi loved him immensely. He had a maternal aunt (father's sister) whose name was "Haar Dyad". She taught him to be happy in spite of adversities in life. He was a soft-spoken man with lot of warmth and affection for everyone. He was a good hockey player and also the head of school assembly.



In NCC Uniform

He was inducted into NCC (National Cadet Corps). During the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh, he used to be involved in social work activities being a member of NCC. He would lead the extra-curricular events in school. Leadership skills could be seen in him right since his boyhood. He was a great Artist and he received a degree in Fine arts from City & Guilds, London. It was during the British era that the institution was conducting classes at Amar Singh College in Srinagar.

In 1947, when India attained freedom, Pakistan attacked Kashmir and Maharaja Hari Singh requested Pandit Nehru to send army to Kashmir to save it from Pakistani aggression. That was the time when the treaty of accession was signed and Kashmir became a part of India. When the Indian troops flew to Kashmir, Amarnath Vaishnavi, with his friends made a make shift airport for the landing of troops. When he was a young boy in 1930s, he used to pass on letters to revolutionaries who were fighting for the independence. His father and brother used to tell him the stories of Maharana Pratap and Shivaji which always inspired

him. He was born in 1925 and attained Nirvana in the year 2012. He served the community for more than six decades and inspired many generations of youth. He was a jovial person with a great sense of humour and he loved children, who in turn enjoyed his company.

Bold and Fearless

He became a teacher in 1950s and was posted in various towns and Villages of Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits were living with past wounds and were insecure. They had faced violence against them in the year 1931, subsequently in 1947, perpetrated by Pakistani Kabayli attacks and later due to subsequent wars with Pakistan. He had joined Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and also formed the Vivekananda Society. He used to visit Pandit homes and ask them about their problems. Once he noticed a Pandit family which had colored their house green and also kept Muslim costumes ready in their house so that they could disguise themselves as Muslims if ever they were attacked. Having seen this, he went and met the army officer in Budgam and informed him about the fear amongst the people. The army officer ordered a flag march in the village to give people confidence.

He was posted in Handwara school as a teacher, where he was in charge of organizing events and sports in addition to teaching Art. Kashmir had Muslim majority and Pakistan always looked for opportune moments to fan violence and aggression, hence celebrating independence day was a challenge in Kashmir. He took a bold step of hoisting Indian flag and celebrating Independence Day for the first time in the history of any village or town in Kashmir region, in his school in Handwara. Later, he took it to other schools also and it became a regular practice thereafter to celebrate the Independence Day in the same way as it was celebrated in the rest of India.

Honesty

He was an honest man who in spite of having a say in the corridors of power never used power for his personal benefit. He lived in the migrant quarters provided by the government in Buta Nagar and was seen either walking or



Performing Shivratri Pooja at home

travelling by matadors in Jammu. He acquired his honesty from his ancestors. I will narrate to you the story of one of his forefathers whose name was Manji Vaishnavi. Manji worked for a carpet factory owned by a Pathan .He was Pathan's accountant. Pathan's sons had all sorts of bad habits and one day they asked Manji to give them money for drinking alcohol and gambling without their father's permission. Manji was an honest man and hence refused to give them the money. The boys threatened him and said that they would feed him beef if he didn't give them the money. Now Manji had two options one was to eat beef and the other was to give them money. But both these options were against his principles. He started abusing the two boys deliberately to hurt their sentiments and consequently the boys got angry and stabbed him to death. Manji preferred the

third option of dying. He could not cheat his employer or eat beef and therefore he provoked the boys to invite death for himself. Such was his integrity.

A witty person

Pandit Amarnath was fearless with a sharp presence of mind. I will narrate to you another story about Praja Parishad movement of early 1950's in which he participated actively and was also jailed for nine months. This movement was launched by Praja Parishad, a Jammu based organization under the leadership of Pandit Prem Nath Dogra and later the movement was taken over by Jana Sangh. The objective of this movement



was to integrate Kashmir with rest of India. At that time Kashmir had its own flag, a prime minister and a separate constitution. This movement was launched so that Kashmir could follow Indian constitution, have Indian flag and have a chief minister contrary to having a Prime minister. 'Ek Nishan, Ek Pradhan Ek Vidhan' was the slogan.

He was a teacher in Pathankot during those days and the movement required people from all over India to reach Jammu for a mass protest. He was given the responsibility of receiving people in Pathankot and then escorting them to Narot Jaimal, a place in Pathankot from where buses had been arranged for their further journey to Jammu. Police already had the information that Vaishnavi was involved in the movement and hence they kept a close eye on him. The day when people were to arrive from other states of India, Pandit Amarnath went to the bank of a lake . As it was summer, he swam in the lake and later he sat there and ate mangoes. One police man was standing there and constantly watching him. He offered mangoes to the policeman too. Police was happy that they had a close vigil on Vaishnavi and therefore movement of masses into Jammu could be

stopped. In the evening after many hours Vaishnavi bid good bye to the policeman and walked towards home. The truth was that Vaishnavi ji had already instructed his other associates, on whom police had no suspicion, to accompany the people to Narot Jaimal, while he kept the policeman busy watching him. People were transferred into buses by his associates while Vaishnavi ji whistled his way to home after spending the day near the lake. By the time police got to know , it was too late. They could not even hold Vaishnavi ji responsible for this act because they had seen him by the river the whole day, swimming and eating mangoes.

Another time, in Kashmir police was waiting for him outside his school, when he was a teacher, to arrest him because he was an RSS Swayamsevak and this organization was banned during those days. As a member of RSS , he worked for the Kashmiri Pandits to protect them from the threats which they faced, being a minority in Kashmir. He knew that he would be arrested outside the school. He had



the information that the police were at the bridge which he had to cross to reach home. He was good at the hide and seek game and he took off his clothes and

Police Lathi charge in 1997

gave them to his friend and he himself jumped into Jhelum River. Instead of

travelling over the bridge he travelled through water and later collected his clothes on the other side of the river. The police kept waiting on the bridge but they could not catch him. In 1997, he was 72 years old, when he led a protest in Jammu, against Sangrampora massacre of Kashmiri Pandits. At that age also he was hit by a Police Lathi and his head was bleeding.

Roti, Kapda, Makan

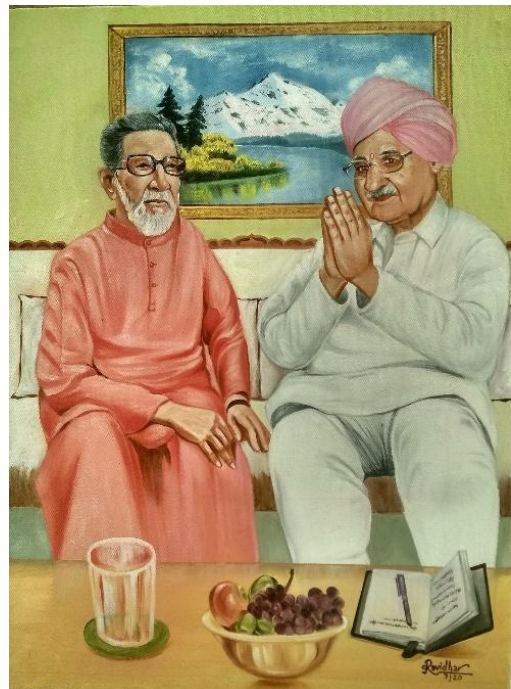
(Food clothing & Shelter)

When the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits took place, even the government was taken by surprise. Amarnath Vaishnavi was in Delhi in January 1990 for meetings with then Prime minister Mr. V P Singh to discuss the threat to Hindu lives in Kashmir. Later he came to Jammu and he noticed Pandit families trickling into Jammu almost every day. Sensing that something was not right, he walked up to a family near Shiv temple in Jammu and asked them why they were there in Jammu. He had seen them looking here and there, not knowing where to go. But the family was hesitant to answer at first and they said they had come for a wedding. This answer was not convincing and Vaishnavi ji said, "Please do not hesitate, tell me what is the matter. I am Amarnath Vaishnavi and I can help." On hearing his name, they opened up and told him the story of terror. During those days there were no phones and information traveled slowly. Amar, It was then that his close associate Mr. Hiralal Chatta bought a notebook and a pen and they decided to write names of people who were moving out of Kashmir. He arranged for their stay in Geeta Bhawan in Jammu. They started the registration process when even the government had not initiated the registration of the displaced Kashmiris. Later the government requested them to provide the registration data for their official records. Amarnath Vaishnavi and his associates founded Sahayata Samiti and under its umbrella they negotiated with the government to provide relief measures to the displaced community.



Formation of Sahayata Samiti

Mr. Vijay Bakaya who was the divisional commissioner at that time, once narrated a story. He said, “When I saw Mr. Vaishnavi for the first time, he was followed by thousands of people. I was afraid that the crowd might turn violent because they were agitated as they had become homeless overnight. However, when Mr. Vaishnavi started talking to me politely and his first words were, “ How can I help you in arranging for relief measures for our community members?” His tone was soft I could not imagine that this man with a gentle smile was leading such a large gathering of protesting, angry people. His soft, supportive but assertive demeanor encouraged me to seek his help as a representative of Kashmiri Pandits. That day onwards I started working on behalf of the government very closely with him. He would tell me the issues faced by the displaced Kashmiri Pandits and I would convey them to Mr. Jagmohan who was the governor at that time and subsequently we started resolving issues gradually. We also started camp



schools and colleges and set up tents in Muthi, Jagti and Purkhoo etc.” To discuss the financial assistance for the displaced Kashmiri Pandits, a meeting of the top brass of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was convened in Jammu in the year 1990. Vaishnavi ji, drew the attention of all the participants on the decision of Punjab High Court in the late 1980s, to provide financial assistance to the victims of terrorism in Punjab. Shri Kidar Nath Sawney and all other members agreed with Shri Vaishnavi’s proposal that a demand be put before the government of the day for sanctioning monthly financial assistance to the victims of Kashmir who were forcefully thrown out of their homes, in the same way in which people of Punjab were offered, when the terrorism started there in 1980s. After a long struggle government agreed to pay a subsistence payment every month to people who had lost land, business and jobs. The relief continues to be paid even today.

In 1991, he observed that the educational institutes in Jammu did not have enough capacity to enroll all the displaced Pandits and he thought that it was time to look for educational opportunities outside the state. He left with his associates to meet Shri Gopi Nath Munde who was a minister in Maharashtra. He put forward a proposal of creating a separate quota of seats in educational institutions of Maharashtra. At one point he even took off his turban and kept it in front of the ministers

With Balasaheb Thakrey (Painting by Ravi Dhar)

in charge in Maharashtra, requesting them to create a separate quota of seats for Kashmiri Pandit children. Finally, after a long struggle, Maharashtra government, under the leadership of Shri Balasaheb Thackrey agreed to his proposal.

Later they met the chief ministers of other BJP led states and worked out the model of reservations in those states also. Subsequently, the reservations were extended all over India. It was a long struggle, repeated visits, meetings and persistent effort to convince the state governments for almost a decade and we see the result today in the form of Kashmiri migrant quota in educational institutions all over India.

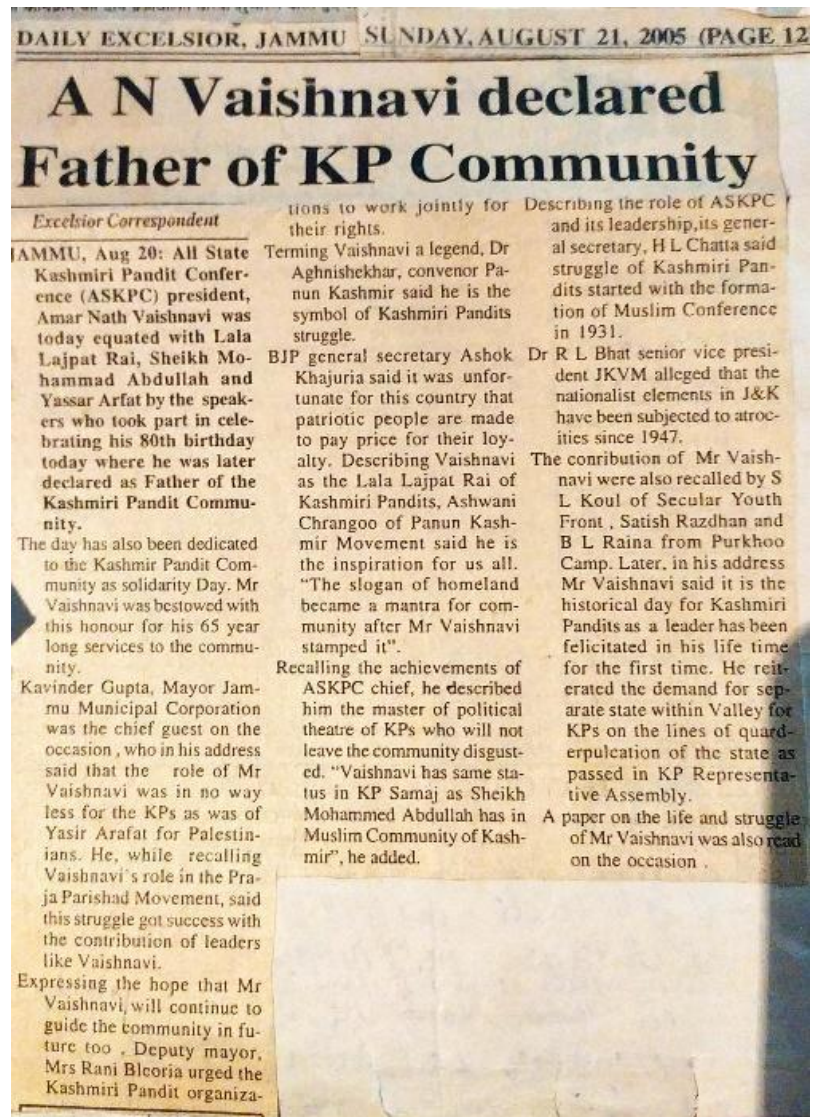
Kashmiri Pandit community also gave him the sobriquet, Father of Kashmiri Pandit community.

Priceless learnings

Can an ordinary man make so much impact that policy makers are forced to listen to him and the masses follow him out of trust and hope? Shri Amarnath Vaishnavi had some remarkable personality traits. Firstly, he had a tremendous ability to keep cool in most horrific situations. Secondly, he was a good listener. Thirdly, he had the courage to take bold initiatives and pursue till the end. Fourthly, he never gave up hope. The remarkable thing about him was that

he was a visionary who dared to imagine the best outcomes for life and then work on it till he achieved that outcome. A person who dares to imagine seemingly impossible, yet desirable is the person who can reach greater heights in life.

His passion was to help Kashmiri Pandits to lead a dignified life and he loved what he was doing, without expecting a return. Bhagwat Geeta says that we should work without worrying about the result. If we focus on the means the end will take care of itself. Results are bound to come if our focus is on the activities that lead to that end. if you are really very passionate about your endeavours, you are sure to win.





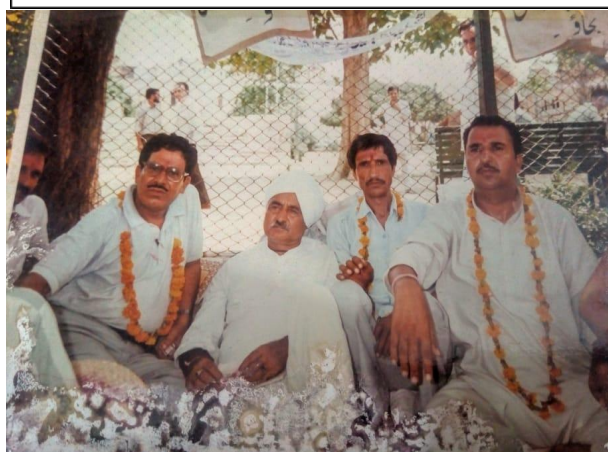
At a dharna



With CM of MP, Mr. Shivraj Chauhan



With Former PM Mr. Rajeev Gandhi





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