

“Challenges before KP overseas organizations during post-exodus period”

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I. GENESIS OF POLITICAL ADVOCACY BY KASHMIRI PANDITS IN THE U.S.

1. This is a collective presentation – meaning that when I say I it really means we and we actually means the entire overseas diaspora in the US. Yes, there were volunteers who took up the advocacy with greater commitment and passion but let me reiterate that we represented not ourselves but the entire Kashmiri Pandit fraternity in the US which was organized under KOA. So, while I can mention a few names, let me also be clear that the list is longer. I begin with our guide and mentor, the late K L Kaul from Michigan, our former IAKF Presidents Hira Fotedar, Ashok Raina, Ashok Moza, Rahul Pandit, Lalit Koul, and other prominent founder-members like Jeevan Zutshi, late Inder Bhat, Suresh Raina and Rakesh Kaul. Present leadership team is younger and is listed on our website, www.iakf.org. I can go on with the names, but for the sake of brevity, let me turn to the subject at hand.
2. While today’s speakers have not discussed what precisely they will talk about in advance of the meeting, we will try our best not to repeat the material that each will present today.
 - I will discuss the origins of the political advocacy in the U.S. and how it evolved and what successes we had in the initial period which is least remembered now – from 1990 until 2000 (a decade)
 - Ashokji will discuss, besides activities in Canada, how we interacted with the NHRC, and what our present collective focus is in India

- Krishnaji will talk about how she leveraged a relationship with the wider community of Hindus in UK and brought them around to support our cause
- Autarji will discuss how the three forums interacted synergistically at the UNRC to accomplish our collective aims and objectives

3. In 1990, let me draw the political scene:

Messages from home

our own inexperience in political advocacy, KOA limitations.

1986 Experience (NYT correspondence)

An ad in India Abroad on 11 May 1990 by KM's.

KM's had seized the initiative, formation of KAF (ad in NYT, 28 Oct 1990)

4. 1991: KOA GS (KL Kaul) initiated action to form the group, IAKF. 19 members of KOA became its charter members. KL was the SG, and Hira Fotedar was selected as President. IAKF Constitution and bylaws were duly registered subsequently in the State of Michigan

Interacted with KP's in Canada and UK to do the same (ICKF and IEKF)

IAKF set its goals and defined its focus (BROCHURE)

Started meeting Congressmen, Senators, Indian media, etc. Our friend Stephen Solarz, a Congressman from Brooklyn, was confused. (Shekhar Tiwari's help in the initial stages)

A hard check on reality happened when WKFM held a Conference in an expensive hotel on 13 July 1991 – Emergence of WKFM, KAC, Dan Burton and big money (Black, Kelley and Manafort Lobbying Firm). KP's invited but not allowed to speak

Redefined Strategic Goals internally:

Core message: We exist

Main focus: The Kashmir Issue (political) versus the (new) Kashmir Problem (religion)

Aspirational goal: Neutralize KAC

5. 1992: USIP (Government NGO) started a dialogue on Kashmir, inviting India, Pakistani and KM delegates. KP's are excluded (letter)

Major positives: Two Symposiums May 13 in MD and November 15 in CA.
National exposure

August 3: The US Congressional Caucus invites IAKF to describe KP plight:
We find two Congressmen - F Pallone and S Brown receptive

August 27: Washington Post (M McGrory). Aug 28: Pakistani Govt reaction
FIRST MENTION IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPER (KM's in NYT ad 1990)

6. 1993: Bill Clinton elected, both Senate and House under Democrats

Feb 20: WTC Bombing (Ramzei Yusuf)

IAKF Symposium in NJ (March)

BOMBSHELL: Robin Raphel on Accession, Indian-Americans ablaze. 10/28

7. 1994: IAKF letter to Prez Clinton on Jan 7, meeting with Raphel on Feb 4
IAKF CREDIBILITY AND BRAND NAME ESTABLISHED

8. 1995: June 28 Meeting in the U.S. Congress arranged by bipartisan members: Brown (D), Rob Andrews (R) – consequence of 1993 WTC bombing

9. 1996: Kathwari establishes the Kashmir Study Group. 20 policy makers, politicians and professors sign up (tied to autonomy talks indicated by GOI)

U.S. State Department Report on HR (Brown pushing Secretary Madeleine Albright)

IAKF CORE MESSAGE ACHIEVED

10.1998: KSG issued the “Livingston Report” calling for plebiscite to decide on fate of the valley alone – no takers

11.2000: KSG issued a new report, “Kashmir- A Way Forward,” to synchronize with Clinton visit to India (March 20), but the report publicity overtaken by the massacre of 40 Sikhs in the village of Chati Singpura (Mattan) by Islamic terrorists on the same day

18 September: The US Commission on International Religious Freedom invited IAKF to speak on religious persecution of Pandits. Our assessment highlighted Kashmir problem as fueled by religious bigotry of Kashmiri Muslims

IAKF MAIN FOCUS ACHIEVED

12.2001: Paradigm shift – 9/11 Previously closed doors began opening

13.2011: KAC put in limbo – Fai jailed: **IAKF ASPIRATIONAL GOAL MET**

II. LIAISON WITH INDIA BASED KP GROUPS

1992: Started Liaison with Indian organizations – AIKS, then KSD and Jammu Groups. KSD, KPS, etc. Alliance with PK for their political focus (Overseas Coordinator), AIKS – PK unity talks

1993: PK invited to the US, Framing a Road Map, money, etc. (in May)

1994: UNHRC in Geneva – PK, IEKF and ICKF – first and only KP Press Conference on UN premises, 14 February

1996: Resignation of Dr. Agnishekhar and subsequent breakup of PK.

- Resigned as PK Overseas Coordinator. PK

1997: Creation of KPPSC in London: ASJKPC (Vaishnavi), KPS (Khosa), AIKPC (Jattu), KSD (Gadoo), PK (Chowdhury), PKM (Chrungoo), KOA (Raina), KPAE (Kaul), ICKF (Sumbly), IEKF (Tikou), and IAKF

- The organization wound up in about a year

1999: “A New Vision and a New Focus” (published by the Koshur Samachar in April 2000)

- Focus on our roots: “Sustain, Strengthen, and Enlarge Kashmiri Pandit Identity in the Valley”
- Connected with KP’s in Kashmir: HWS, HWSK, KPSS, and various local temple trusts run by VALLEY BASED KP’s
- Gave lectures on holistic solutions to the Kashmir issue to the US Think Tanks and in Kashmir
 - Malfeasance and Misgovernance in Kashmir will surely lead to Central Government political intervention in J&K sooner or later
 - 2012 Presentation to the Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Institute at the University of North Texas. It is among the most viewed articles on the website: www.KashmirForum.org after 5 August 2019

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