

Book Review

The Chronicles of Kashmir

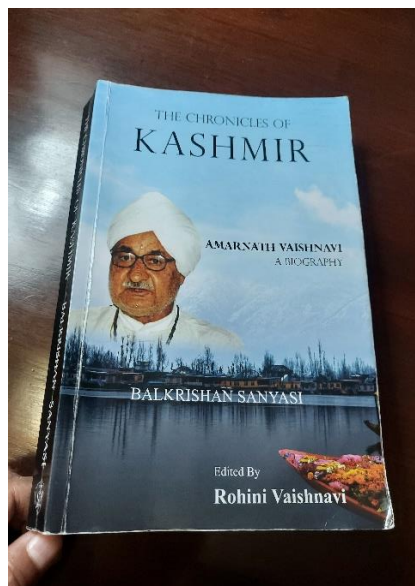
Amarnath Vaishnavi

A Biography

by

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“The Chronicles of Kashmir – Biography of a Leader-Amarnath Vaishnavi,” is a roughly 370-pages paper back authored by Bal Krishen Sanyasi, nephew of Amarnath Vaishnavi, and edited by his grand niece, Rohini Vaishnavi. The book is published by Sabre & Quill.



The life story of Sh. Amarnath Vaishnavi makes a fascinating reading right from the time his name appears first in the book as a young teacher and a Pracharak of RSS. The book covers some important milestones of this well-known community stalwart that traverses a wide swathe of experiences - nearly all devoted to the service of the nation and his own community. Going through difficult situations that life presented him with, Sh. Amarnath Ji carried himself with quiet dignity and poise. He would always have a cheerful visage and his public appearances would fill his listeners with hope, optimism and inspiration.

Starting as a pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, Amarnath Ji, besides working in the valley and Jammu, also galvanized the people of Ladakh and later Punjab, where he was sent on a posting, perhaps, to keep

him away from the Valley. Many of our community members today may not even know that the road to the Aug 5, 2019, neutralization of Art 370 & 35A, has not been a bed of roses, but has been made possible by the sweat and blood of many committed nationalists like Amarnath Vaishnavi. Starting with the breaking of the permit system by the founder of Jan Sangh (the predecessor of BJP), Sh. Shyama Prasad Mukerjee to enter Kashmir, his eventual death in suspicious circumstances while under arrest in Kashmir, the Praja Parishad movement that galvanized the Jammu region against the anti-national majoritarian politics of Sheikh Mohd Abdullah and the subsequent removal of the permit system and arrest of Shiekh Mohd Abdullah, were all result of huge sacrifices made by the people of Jammu region in which Amarnath Vaishnavi played a significant role. In fact, he was one of the few Kashmiri Pandits involved in organizing the people of Jammu and its suburbs to protest against many decisions taken by Sheikh Mohamad Abdullah and his administration which were essentially anti-Indian and pandered to the majoritarian sentiment.

The book makes it abundantly clear that with every passing day it was becoming clear as day light that the continued presence of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir was becoming increasingly untenable. Sh. Amarnath Vaishnavi, having worked at grass root level throughout the length and breadth of different regions of the state, understood this and accordingly, made herculean efforts to not only warn his community of the impending danger but also made many attempts to caution the state and national leadership about it. Whenever opportunity arose, he organized public protests against the rising Muslim majoritarian sentiment which had pronounced communal overtones, fanned by Sheikh Abdullah himself.

The book contains a detailed account of the 1967-Parmeshwari Handoo agitation, in which Sh. Vaishnavi Ji emerged as a leader of the community in his own right. Those of us who took part in the agitation would clearly recall the slogan that Sh. Vashnavi Ji made immortal, before he started his speech – ‘Jai Kara – Har Har Mahadev’. In fact, the slogan got so deeply identified with him that he was known by the endearing name ‘Jai Kara’. The book contains several anecdotes of that period- some of them not known to many till now.

He recalls his meeting with the former Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the conversation his delegation had with her during this period. He also expressed his deep sense of resentment and disappointment on how Mrs. Gandhi reacted to their demand and what she said in reply to their requests. What he says does not reflect well on the former formidable P.M., particularly

in relation to the state of the microscopic in a predominantly Muslim majority area. In fact, what she told the delegation, as quoted by Amarnath Vaishnavi Ji, nearly reflected Nehru's views on Kashmiri Pandits.

Though Sh. Amarnath Vaishnavi was involved with his community's issues for many decades, it was only in 1987 that he took over as the President of the "All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC)". This prestigious organization, which had some prominent Kashmiri Pandits helming it on various occasions, came into being in 1931 as "All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference-Sanatan Dharma Yuvak Sabha". Prior to that its earlier avatar was "Dharma Sabha" under the legendary Hargopal Koul, which came into being in the first quarter of the last century, as the community witnessed with trepidation the rise of Muslim majoritarianism in Kashmir. After Hargopal Koul's death in 1925, Dharma Sabha lost its sheen and was replaced by ASKPC. Some of the community's outstanding personalities later headed this organization before Amarnath Vaishnavi took over its mantle.

Amarnath Vaishnavi's life story makes it abundantly clear that he was among the foremost Sangh Parivar Leaders in North India – From Golwalkar to Balraj Madhok and from Advani to Vajpayee, Amarnath Ji rubbed shoulders with top leaders of the Sangh Parivar.

There are instances in the book which show the high esteem in which Sh. Amarnath Ji was held by the leaders of the BJP and the RSS. Out of the blue, while attending a function or a public meeting, ministers and those holding high positions in the organization, would bow to touch his feet because he had initiated them into the RSS during his days as a Pracharak.

It remains without saying that in any other state, an organizational man of Amarnath Vashnavi's credentials, would have risen high in the party or in the government, particularly when BJP started tasting political power in many states and subsequently, at the centre. But, being a Kashmiri Pandit, he had no constituency to call his own. Like many Kashmiri Pandits who had contributed immensely to public life, this was a cross that Amarnath Ji had to bear

The book contains many conversations of Amarnath Ji, quoted Verbatim. These quotes reflect his deep insight into the political developments of the state. These also describe the dynamics and inter-play of political forces that influenced both the state politics as also the Delhi-Kashmir political equation. His reminiscences of the conversations he held with many leaders convey the

political inclinations of those who shaped the state's destiny over the many decades.

His relentless efforts during mass movement of "Shree Amarnath Shrine Sangharsh Samiti," contributed in a big way in galvanizing people against the lies spread by Mufti regime to appease his vote bank and Jammati supporters in Kashmir.

The last three decades of Amarnath Ji's life were entirely devoted to ensuring the wellbeing of the displaced members of his community in 1989-90. The book records in detail the relentless efforts put in by him during and after the exodus of our community in 1989-90; Sh. Amanath Vaishnavi organized the young volunteers under ASKPC to render succor to the displaced people in Jammu. No effort was too great for him to render assistance to the hounded out Pandits who poured into Jammu and other places with barely what they wore, having lost everything to the Jihadi violence in Kashmir that resulted in their ethnic cleansing from Kashmir. Vaishnavi Ji and his dedicated team of workers poured their heart and soul into registering the refugees, providing them shelter, first in Geeta Bhavan and later in hastily created camps, establishing camp schools and providing the fleeing refugees with the bare minimum wherewithal for immediate survival.

He met nearly all the important people in and outside the govt to make them aware of the degree of barbarity faced by a peaceful community and impress upon them the pathetic conditions they were living in various camps in Jammu and other places. Later, he fought many political battles to have the displaced community rehabilitated in Kashmir. It was while rendering this yeoman's service he breathed his last, having worked for the community literally till the last breath.

The book ends with many well-known KP-activists, prominent writers, intellectuals, artists and political figures, academicians, etc., paying tributes to Amarnath Vaishnavi after he passed away on July 1, 2012. Most touching is the one written by Sh. R L Shant Sahab.

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