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# **THE VEDA IN KASHMIR**

## **Volume I**

By

Michael Witzel

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Dedicated, in gratitude, to  
Walter Slaje  
and my Kashmiri friends

*Asti svastimatām agryam  
maṇḍitam budhamaṇḍalaiḥ  
...Kāśmīramaṇḍalam*

“There is a region called Kashmir,  
the foremost of the fortunate (Brahmins),  
adorned by circles of learned people”  
(Kṣemendra, *Narmamālā*)

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## FOREWORD

*Habent sua fata libelli.* Though no longer a *libellum*, this book has existed for a long time, to quote Kalhaṇa, like the Śāhi kingdom, only in name.<sup>1</sup>

When, after a short visit to Kashmir in August 1973, I started to write down my observations on the present state of Veda tradition in the Valley, they soon turned out into a longer article (which, at one time, we wanted to publish in the Himalayan journal *Kailash*). Then, the original typed manuscript of this article was stolen from my car, along with a small bag of other Vedic materials, at Kathmandu.

In my last years in Nepal (1975-1977) I became very occupied with administration and other projects (such as filming the coronation<sup>2</sup> of the late King Birendra and other Vedic rituals, notably the curious Tantric Agnihotra of Patan).<sup>3</sup> That required me to put the work aside, except for collecting the materials for Ch. 4 during a bad bout of influenza. After having moved to Leiden in 1978, I made a new start, visited the Valley again for a month, in the summer of 1979 and subsequently went through my materials. But again, other work took precedence, notably the Paippalāda Saṃhitā, for which D. Bhattacharya came to Leiden in 1981-1982.<sup>4</sup> After 1983 persistent work in Holland was made impossible due to the ‘reforms’ (read: budget cuts) of the then Education minister Deetman and the machinations and intrigues that this provoked. Disgusted, I left for Harvard in 1986. During a year of Sabbatical leave in 1989-1990, and due to the generous support of the Institute for research in Humanities Studies of Kyoto University and the Japanese Ministry for Education I found time to pursue this project again. I organized substantial materials from my field notes and from further reading, and tried to bring it to a conclusion. However, again this was not to be. The book has been in my drawer since 1990.

As some colleagues have asked (or teased) me about it, I now endeavor to present it in whatever incomplete and imperfect form I can achieve at this time. Necessarily, some questions have remained open and in some cases only initial data could be presented, with suggestions of how to proceed in the future.

For example, this book would have been delayed even further by: detailed philological study of the remaining doubtful variants in the Kashmir R̥gveda ms., or the study of all accented passages in the Kashmiri PS, not to speak of a detailed investigation of all available ritual handbooks (R̥cakas) in public or private possession.

During two other Sabbaticals, in the Autumn of 2015 and the Spring of 2019, I have tried to finish this book, in whatever imperfect form. It turned out that many data

1 It was first announced on the back cover of the first volume of *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, Reinbek 1975, but its completion and publication had so far been postponed ever since.

2 Witzel 1987.

3 Witzel 1986, 1992, 2016.

4 See Ch. XIII.

had to be added, notably from the voluminous work on Kashmir traditions of my friend Walter Slaje (Halle, Germany). I also had to retrieve much that was present and obvious to me in 1990 (indicated then in rather sketchy notes) but which since has completely slipped from my memory, a quarter of a century later.

Thus, although the book has been advertised in *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* in 1975, nothing much could be done after 1976, when I collected the Nyāyamañjarī quotations, and after adding my field research notes of 1979. Even until now, I still did not find time enough to go through much of the voluminous medieval literature of Kashmir, — though not a prerequisite, at least a desirable requirement for writing a better history of the Kashmiri Veda tradition and its schools. That remains a desideratum, though not too many data can be expected in the increasingly Shaiva-oriented texts of the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that even the present long, but still fragmentary account will provide an idea of Veda tradition in the Valley. This account is especially important because copper plate inscriptions that provide such a large body of evidence in other parts of the subcontinent largely fail us regarding Kashmir.<sup>5</sup>

It is with all these imperfections and reservations that I finally present this book for scrutiny to my friends, colleagues and the interested public. As the medieval Japanese monk Kenkō said in his *Tsurezuregusa*:<sup>6</sup>

“It is typical of the unintelligent man to insist assembling complete sets of everything. Imperfect sets are better. . . . Leaving something incomplete makes it interesting and gives the feeling that there is room for growth.”

In this spirit, there is much room for the work of current and future generations. . .

### About this book: a map for reading

The first two chapters set the stage with a brief description of Kashmir and its history (Ch. I), while Chapter II provides a more specific history of the Kashmiri Paṇḍits a people and of their typical religious rituals. (Some of them, the *Samskāras* from birth to death, are treated in more detail, according to current interpretation, in Appendix II).

Chapter III includes a detailed investigation of the four Vedas and their attestation during all of Kashmir history. Special attention is paid to the oral transmission and the increasing disappearance of Vedic texts. Then, the four Vedas are discussed individually, listing and analyzing the texts belonging to the prominent recensions (śākhās) of Kashmir. Chapter IV provides additional, detailed evidence from a late 9<sup>th</sup> century source for Kashmiri Vedic tradition at that time (Jayanta Bhaṭṭa’s *Nyāyamañjarī*).

5 See now B.K. Deambi (Kaul) 1985 and 2008, with a few inscriptions, not mentioning the Vedas; it is an open question why so few copper plates have survived; this can not only be due to the change to Muslim rule; however, note that in medieval Nepal the copper plates mentioned in Licchavi inscriptions are not preserved. The oldest one in fact is of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; a few later ones are found nailed to temple walls, just as in Chamba; note that many grants were made on palm leaf strips; in Kashmir this has been done on birchbark (*bhūrja*): cf. the story of Jonarāja of a forged document (Slaje 2005). It may well have been a combination of these facts that we do not have many land grants on copper plates. See further below on copper plate inscriptions (§ 1.6), and still mentioned by Akbar’s historians, Parmu 1969: 128.

6 Donald Keene. *Essays in Idleness. The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*. Columbia Univ. Press/Tokyo: Tuttle 1967/1981: XVIII.

The next few chapters (IV sqq.) deal with the main Vedic tradition of Kashmir, the Kaṭha school of the Black Yajurveda that is prominent in all rituals of Kashmir.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the Vedavratas, that is the observances a young student has to undergo when beginning and continuing to study the Veda, while including all its successive portions and text layers. It provides a good idea of what was supposed to be the normative curriculum during the many years of learning the Veda by heart. This evidence is reinforced by Chapter VI that is tied to the Vedavratas as it deals with specific rules for studying (dangerous) portions of the school curriculum, covered by the Vedic *dīkṣā* and *avāntaradīkṣā*. As additional information, in Chapter VII the two late Vedic indexes of Mantras of the Kaṭha Saṃhitā are edited and dealt with; and as an appendix parts of the little known Tarpaṇakāṇḍa are extracted and discussed as it contains the names of prominent teachers and texts.

Chapter VIII sums up and enlarges on this information about the Kaṭha school: it presents a very detailed account of all known texts of this long-isolated and now heavily endangered śākhā, its available commentaries and ancillary texts. Chapter IX is the first attempt at drawing up a detailed history of this recension of the Black Yajurveda. As an excursus, the brief Chapter X deals with the explanation of the name, Kaṭha, of this śākhā and its supposed promulgator, the Ṛṣi Kaṭha.

Chapters XI-XIII deal with the other, formerly prominent śākhā of Kashmir, the Paippalāda Atharvaveda. It had survived only in Kashmir and Orissa, where it still is found, precariously. To evaluate the garbled text of the only Kashmir manuscript of this school, written in 1419 CE under the famous Sultan Zayn ul Abidin (Zain al-'Ābidīn), some preliminary studies are necessary. First one must investigate modern and medieval Kashmiri pronunciation, notably that of Vedic texts (Ch. XI) that has generally been neglected by scholars. Secondly, a study is necessary of the Śāradā script and the typical copying mistakes in Kashmir manuscripts (Ch. XII).

This prepares the ground for an evaluation of the history of text transmission of this rare Veda and its Paippalāda Śākhā. The history and reconstruction of the original Paippalāda text is given in Ch. XIII, based on my earlier papers of the Seventies and Eighties. Added now is an evaluation of D. Bhattacharya's edition of PS as it still lacks in philological rigor and execution. These sections will help in the ongoing effort, by several scholars, of editing this important text in a more scholarly manner than heretofore. This effort is important as PS contains so much new information, including on everyday life some 3000 years ago.

The final chapter (XIV) is an epilogue on the past and present situation, and about the persistence of the Veda in Kashmir. It includes an evaluation of the reimport of Vedic tradition under Zain al-'Ābidīn (1418/20-1470 CE) and it ends with a plea to preserve what can still be salvaged, both in written form as well as in ritual practice.

The Appendixes provide more detailed information on some topics that were not included in Ch.s I-XIV as they would have bloated certain chapters too much.

Appendix I presents the mss. of Kashmiri Saṃskāra rituals that have to undertaken from birth to death – and beyond.

Appendix II presents the current (traditional) interpretation of the Saṃskāra rites. Both Sūtra theory and actual practice (of 1979) are described. More data are added about the religious life in the Kashmir Valley: it is a list of festivals, similar

though often less extensive, to that given in the Nīlamata(-Purāṇa) more than a thousand years ago.

Appendix III discusses Kashmiri manuscripts and Śāradā script the knowledge of which is necessary for any study of Kashmir texts. It includes a list of past and (now regrettably lost) libraries of Pandits at Srinagar between 1875 and 1990, before their unfortunate exodus from the Valley. The question remains how much of them have been preserved, for which a detailed survey needs to be undertaken at Srinagar.

Appendixes IV and V build on this bibliographic material with a provisional list of typical Kashmir names and typical colophons used at the end of the Pandits' manuscripts. They may be useful for a desirable, future prosopography of authors and texts.

Appendix VI contains a detailed list of the Pandits' ritual handbooks, the Ṛcakas, as far as they are known now, both in manuscript as well as in printed form, and of their varied contents. Appendix VII is the unfinished *Habilitationschrift* (D.Litt.) of the late Hertha Krick (1979). It sheds considerable light on the Vedic and medieval bimonthly Pākayajña rituals.

### Transcription.

The transcription of Sanskrit words is the internationally agreed one: thus Chandas, not Chhandas, Rgveda not Rigveda; and similarly of New Indo-Aryan words, where only traditional spellings such as *Calcutta*, *Bombay* or *Benares* have been retained.

In the difficult case of the correct transcription of Kashmiri words and place names,<sup>7</sup> I give the 'traditional' ones, but then add correct phonetic transcription in [...] when available. Thus, Hari Parbat [*höri parvat*] from Skt. Śārikā-parvata.

Similarly, the "traditional" forms of Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Tibetan names are retained but updated in between [...]. Thus, I keep old, 'traditional' forms like Hsuan Tsang, Albiruni, Zain ul Abidin, and mention the currently accepted ones in parentheses (Xuan Zang, Bīrūnī, Zayn al-'Abidīn etc.).<sup>8</sup>

However, the medieval Kashmiri pronunciation of such names will have to be established by a study of historical Kashmiri pronunciation (Ch. XI), such as [ī] represented by [e] as in Zayn al-'Ābidīn, written *Jainollābhadena* or °dīna.

To facilitate comparisons with the older secondary literature I retain the older spellings used by previous scholarship, and I merely give the correct Arabic/Persian/Chinese forms when they are first mentioned.

### Use of earlier papers

As the research on and the assembly of the chapters of this book has stretched out over some forty years, I have made use of some earlier papers, in more or less adjusted or expanded fashion.

Thus, many parts, and some extensive excerpts of Ch. II have been taken from papers published in seminars and conferences dealing with Kashmiri Brahmins (Ikari 1994, A. Rao 2008, Franco and Ratié, 2016).

Some smaller sections of Ch. III on Veda tradition have likewise appeared in

7 See Kacchru 1981: 1; 1973: 18-58.

8 Cf. Slaje (2014: 49) on the unsystematic Kashmiri way of writing Muslim names, by following their contemporary pronunciation. — A typical example is the ritual handbook by Omkar Nath Shastri with a wide array of spellings of Kashmiri words in Roman script, see below and Ch. II..

various earlier papers. Earlier, unpublished versions of Ch. IV have been informally used by a number of colleagues, mostly in Japan.

Ch. XI and XII on medieval Kashmiri pronunciation, as well as Śāradā writing habits and mistakes, have been expanded from my paper in Ikari 1994.

Ch. XIII is a corrected reprint of my heavily misprinted paper on the Paipalāda Saṃhitā published in the G. Jha Journal 1973/76. They are followed by translation into English of my paper on Atharvaveda tradition given at the Tübingen Oriental Conference of the DMG in 1985 (*ZDMG* 1987). Some recent updates, notably on Bhattacharya's edition of PS, are appended.

## Reminiscences and acknowledgements

Coming from my place of work (NGMPP) at Kathmandu, I first visited Kashmir for a short 10 day, holiday-style stay in August 1973; we comfortably stayed in a houseboat on the western side of the Dal Lake.<sup>9</sup>

Even before my first visit to Kashmir I had met Dr B.K. Deambi in Hoshiarpur (Panjab) in Febr. 1973; we then decided on a visit to Srinagar, in August 1973, where he helped me in innumerable ways.

That first visit in August 1973 was greatly furthered by several persons:

Shri P.K. Chopra, New Delhi, showed me his collection of Kashmiri mss. and helped me in many other ways.

Shri S.L. Shakder, Minister of Parliament Affairs, New Delhi, who, most importantly, facilitated my brief visit to Srinagar.

Shri M.K. Fotedar, Minister of Law, kindly introduced me to eminent scholars and Pandits of Srinagar.

Dr. Fida Moh. Hassnain, then Director of Archives, Libraries, Research and Museums, Srinagar, helped me in many ways within his jurisdiction.

I also thank Dr. Lokesh Chandra, New Delhi, who kindly allowed me to film many Kashmir mss. of the collection made by his father, Dr. Raghu Vira, who had collected several hundred Kashmiri mss. in the 1960s (including some Ṛcakas and KGS mss.).

Likewise, I thank the authorities, including the late Vishwa Bandhu, my late friend Dr. B.R. Sharma, Dr. K.V. Sharma and Dr. S.L. Dogra, of the VVRI & VISIS, Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur, for allowing me to film the many mss. I was interested in, both in February 1973 and again in August 1974.

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<sup>9</sup> Next to us stayed a Midwestern senator and his family, who had (unfulfilled) ambitions to become the US president; they had come by jeep all the way from then peaceful Afghanistan.



#1 B.K. Deambi (August 1979)

In Srinagar, I had the opportunity to meet several Pandits and to visit institutions such as the Archives, where Dr. Fida M. Hassnain was extremely helpful and kindly gave me permission to film some important mss. of the S.P.S. Museum and Research Library. They have collected some 8000 items since c. 1950 CE, and an alphabetical catalog was already then ready for printing (see now: Yech & Kaul).

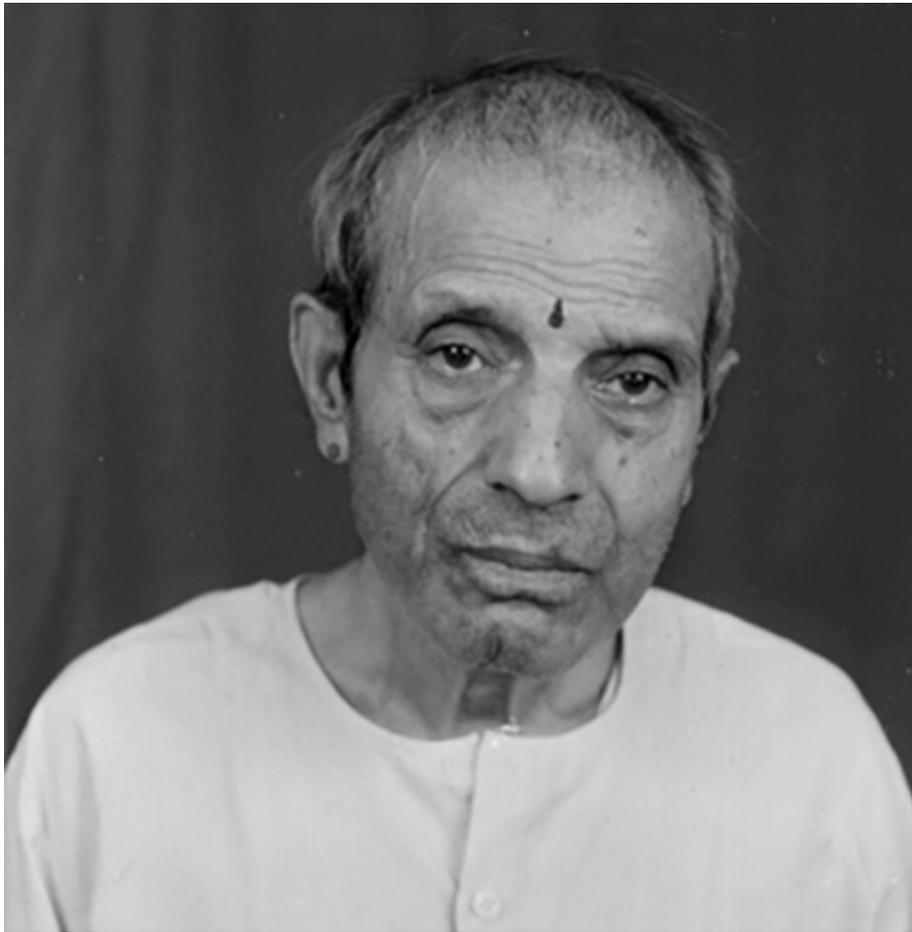
The late Pt. Dīnanāth Yech Śāstrī, then Librarian at the S.P. Singh Research Library,<sup>10</sup> was equally most helpful. He also recited several texts for recording, and very kindly allowed me to film several mss. of his personal collection, among them an early copy of the important AV (Paippalāda Saṃhitā) and a unique SV (Grāmageyagāna) ms.

Dr. B.K. Deambi of Rainawari allowed me to use his - then still unprinted - dissertation on Śāradā script, and helped me at Srinagar in many ways.

At the same time Trailokyanāth Bhaṭṭ recited, in Kashmiri style, several passages from the Veda that I could record.

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<sup>10</sup> See now his commemorative vol., ed. by Mrinal Kaul.



#2 Pt. Dinanath Shastri (2003)  
Srinagar, June 12, 1921 — Jammu, Oct. 4, 2004

In the spring of 1974, I visited Hoshiarpur again. The authorities of the VVRI & VISIS unhesitatingly allowed me to film many of their (Kashmir) mss. and helped me in many ways.

The then Union Minister of Tourism, Sadr-i Riyasat, Dr. Karan Singh, whom I had met in New Delhi, likewise allowed me to film some mss. in the Library of the Raghunath Temple, Jammu, established by his royal ancestors.

Dr. Lokesh Chandra, New Delhi, again allowed me to film several of his mss. related to Kashmir.

In August 1979 I could visit Kashmir for the second time while on a long Summer leave from Leiden University. By gracious invitation, I could stay for one month in the house, at Rainawari, of Dr. Bhushan K. Kaul Deambi and his very friendly family, including his athletic son Vineet, with whom I climbed the Shankara Hill for the Sāvan Puñim festival, at night, against backdrop of Muezzins' calls. The family now lives at Haldwani in eastern H.P.

Dr. Deambi allowed me to take part in some of their rituals, including one elaborate Śrāddha at Prang, at the confluence of the Sind and Vitastā rivers. We also did several excursions nearby, and visited, on horseback, the hill station of Gulmarg,

home to many Bhūrja trees. Up there, I accidentally met a Japanese colleague and his son, and also Ali A. Jafarey, an Iranian scholar of the Avesta who had published in 1975 the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*, with a restoration of the meter and a Persian translation (Iranian Cultural Society no.8; Tehran, Naderi Ave. Kudeh Shahrokh, POB 14-1262). We met just when the Islamic Iranian revolution began. He was enthralled that the old Zoroastrian deities like Mitra were still invoked in Kashmir ritual.

In Srinagar, I could observe many domestic rituals (see App. II). Along with Pt. Dīnanāth, we could observe an elaborate Homa at Utrusu/Umanagri near Anantnag that lasted several days (I made some tape recordings and films). This happens to be the village where T.N. Madan researched his thesis (1965, 1989). I could still meet one member of his, by then aged, “train” who always followed him around in the Sixties. He was quite distressed as his adopted daughter, sadly, had died in a fire. We visited some areas in the adjacent ‘*aranya*’ where rituals were carried out in secret during the **persecutions of the Pandits during the Afghan period** but in our superficial search we could not find any traces. We also visited the Achabal pond, and went on to Mattan to see the remnants of the famous Mārtāṇḍa temple, where we noticed a minor altercation between Muslims and Hindus at a small adjacent shrine.

At Srinagar I met daily with my teacher of Saṃskāra rituals, Keśav Nāth Handoo; he was a *jotsi*, but worked, in daytime, as a Government official (see App. II); I took extensive notes and made some recordings of his teachings.

I visited many Pandits, along with Pt. Dinanath and Dr. Deambi, who kindly accompanied me to their various places in town. Pt. Dinanath, however, strangely never told me that he was a specialist of grammar (see now his Commemoration Volume, ed. by Mrinal Kaul 2008). In one Brahmin’s house in Rainawari I saw a very large birchbark volume, dealing with Śaiva death rituals. Pt. Dinanath also took me on a memorable visit to the late Tantric Pt. Laxman Joo (where I also met a young German scholar, Joachim Deppert).

**During this stay I could film many mss. in several public and private libraries, notably at the Research Library at Kashmir University in Hazrat Bal, where there are some 8000 items,** formerly kept in the J & K Archives. At the time, there existed only a written hand list. (Now we have a catalog, even online). Pt. Dīnanāth Yacch and his assistant, Ms. Rupa Kothedar, generously helped me in accessing and filming many ms. that seemed of interest to me.

A visit to the house of the late Shyam Sundar (Lal) Jatoo (see frontispice) and his family was especially impressive. They lived in a grand house (n. 98, Parśuyār, Reshi Mohalla, at Kanya Kadal, behind the fire station, near Habba Kadal). He graciously allowed me to film some of his mss., among which the only small Kaṭha Brāhmaṇa collection known, and the 900 page Ṛcaka of his grandfather. He also explained some details of Kashmir rituals, notably the use of Kaṭha texts in the marriage, *upanayana*, etc. ceremonies and wrote a short memo for me (see Ch. II, and App. II).

**Like so many thousand others, his family sadly had to move out of Srinagar abruptly in 1990.** Much later, in 2009, I met Sushma Jatoo, the wife of his grandson; she works at the Delhi IGNC (and we met again in 2014 at the Veda conference at Calicut), so we could reestablish contact with her family.

To all of them, and many more, here unnamed, I extend my sincere thanks!

Unfortunately I had lost contact with many of the Srinagar Pandits, first after the University “troubles” in Holland in 1983-86, then after moving to the USA in 1986, and finally after the **exodus of Pandits from the Valley in 1990**

**As the great Kashmiri anthropologist T.N. Madan lamented in his recent essay:<sup>11</sup> “... two Kashmiri Muslims, one in his late 70s, the other much younger, recalled the old times of amity and camaraderie... This is the world we have irretrievably lost, the Muslims no less than the Pandits.”**  
**We too lament with him...**

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I thank my friends Jeffrey Smith and **Nataliya Yanchevskaya** for proof reading large sections of this book. Last, but certainly not least, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my friend Walter Slaje (now Prof. emeritus, Weimar, Germany). He has extended so much help over the years that I cannot mention in any detail: he is referred to multiple times in the present book. Since the early Nineties he has enormously contributed to the study of medieval Kashmir, much of it now conveniently collected in his *Kleine Schriften* (2019). Like his famous predecessor, M. Aurel Stein, he has also undertaken many trips to the localities mentioned in the texts to verify the data, — not always without danger, including his recent ascent to A. Stein’s summer camp at Mohand Marg. To him, and to our Kashmiri friends, this book is dedicated.

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11 “*Old Memories and Recent Encounters from a Kashmir We Have Irretrievably Lost.*” <https://thewire.in/17639/old-memories-and-recent-encounters-from-a-world-we-have-irretrievably-lost/>.