

Media Fellowship: Urban Faultlines and Violence

Proposal for Fellowship [500-1000 words]

How have human settlements been changing in the newly constructed/refurbished towns?

Title: Unbricking Srinagar: Urban Revival and Societal Shifts

Introduction:

The city of Srinagar, largest city and summer capital of the picturesque Indian administered Kashmir, has a rich history of heritage, architecture, culture & societal dynamics. Standing along the banks of river Jhelum and shores of Dal and Anchar lake, the urban settlements & architecture imagery of Srinagar has been synchromatic to its evolving kingdoms, religions, customs and trade practices while also being responsive or corresponding to its geography and climate. With the fluctuating turmoil in the region amidst increasing settler colonialism, the fabric of the city is also fast changing with modern constructions and urban development. While one can easily find both views of beauty and markers of conflict in Srinagar, what largely remains under the carpet, is the disharmony within the people of Kashmir. Behind the sanitized facade of Srinagar, lies a city in flux- with the transformative political forces, socio-economic disparities, and the lingering effects of conflict and colonization.

My proposal is to create a podcast supplemented with insightful photo essays documenting the changing social and cultural landscape of Srinagar in Indian-administered-Kashmir amidst the backdrop of new urban revamping initiatives especially the ambitious Smart City project undertaken by the Indian state.

Objective:

My primary objective is to unravel the layers of Srinagar's urban fabric to shed light on the often overlooked social structures and communal dynamics that shapes the identity of the city. The focus will be amplifying the narrative of one of the most overlooked marginalized communities of Kashmir, such as:

- *Sheikhs*- are considered to be the lower caste and class and often associated with the occupation of cleaners.
- *Hanjis*- known as the water people of Kashmir and were historically houseboat dwellers. They were also considered to be of the lower castes and over years have been relocated to land.
- *Gujjar & Bakarwals*- are the nomadic tribes of J&K who migrate from Srinagar to Jammu. They mostly dwell in tents during their journey and also live on high mountains/

forests, in threat of losing their access to forest thanks to the government's environmental policies.

- *Migrants from North India*- are mostly from different regions of North India, especially UP & Bihar who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds in search of labor in Kashmir.

Key Themes:

1. Unveiling the Hidden Social Structure: Uncovering the realities of people who belong to less acknowledged social class and caste, to understand their resilience in navigating urban spaces.
2. Modern Urban Revamping: Examining the extent to which the recent urban revamping initiatives align with the lived experiences of Kashmiris and how they have interacted with spaces.
3. Impact of Violence: Highlighting how ongoing violence and state imposition has shaped urban landscape , influencing patterns of migration and displacement.

Methodology:

1. Research: An extensive research will be conducted to understand Srinagar's urban layout, with an intention to map older settlements and trace transformation with modern development. With this, the history of the marginalized community will also be studied to understand where they were placed in the history.
2. Analysis: Contemporary urban constructions projects will be analyzed to assess their implication for societal transformation, community dynamics, and equitable access to spaces.
3. Interviews: Interviews with experts of the subject matter and people with lived experiences will be conducted to understand the essence of these developments from multiple perspectives.
4. Photography: On ground photography to supplement the discussions and the stories.

Expected Outcome:

By presenting Srinagar beyond its postcard imagery, I hope to bring a nuanced portrayal that sparks conversation about the intersection of urbanism, communal harmony and social justice. The podcast will serve as a platform for dialogue, reflection and advocacy to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities that come with urban transformation.