

President's Column

Namaskar!

This is my first communication with you as the president of the association. I am very delighted and feel honored for the trust and faith you have placed in me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank past president Shri Lalit Wanchoo and his team for doing a fine job for the last four years. I would also like to thank him and Ms. Shana Mattoo for continuing to take care of daily business after my election during my visit to India and especially for their guidance during the transition period, which has been a great help to me and my team.

During my personal visit to India, I took the opportunity to meet with office bearers of various KP social and cultural organizations, as well as check the progress on the some of the KOA sponsored programs at Jammu. I met with Shri C.L. Gadoo, president, Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi, Shri J.N. Kaul, president, All India Kashmiri Samaj, New Delhi, Shri P.N. Wali, past president, KP Association, Mumbai, and Shri T. N. Khosa, president, KP Sabha, Jammu. Our community is very blessed to have social workers and positive thinkers of such a caliber. My interaction with them was very encouraging in forging a bond to work together. Among the topics discussed included, how we can achieve closer co-operation and co-ordination in order to better serve our community in preserving our culture and social-heritage. Most people that I met expressed a need to develop a directory of community members world-wide and asked KOA-USA to take a lead in this regard. They along with many other KP associations in India, have pledged support and will make available their member information for this effort.

At Udhampur, I attended a meeting of the board of trustees of the "Sharda Peeth Rishi Model School" which caters mainly to the needs of students from Battal Ballian Refugee Camp. This school came into existence in 1995 and caters to more than 150 students. Currently, this school is being expanded to grade 8th. I assured them of KOA's continued support in helping them with their operating expanses.

At Jammu, I went to some camps to check progress on KOA's "Sanitation Project" for camp residents. KOA is coordinating this effort with Youngs India Social Organization; eighty percent of the work had been completed by then. At the KP Sabha, Jammu, I checked the performance of the group that coordinates KOA's "Educational Fund" and "Sponsor A Child" programs. I spoke with some children and their parents who were present there to collect their checks. They all appreciated the generosity of our members in helping them.

I have realized that our community members living in the camps are the worst sufferers of the ethno-religious cleansing as a results of which we are refugees in our own country. Their condition begs the question when and how will this plight of theirs end. I have come to the realization that the only way we can help them is by supporting their children through our "Sponsor A Child" and "Education Fund" programs. In my opinion, the only way these people can come out of these camps is when their children (with good education) find a job somewhere other than J&K State in India, and these children will take their parents with them, out of this horrible life in camps.

My team is working hard and making progress on achieving some of the goals that I have set for the organization. One area where not much has been done is the development and maintenance of our

web sites and also that we have not yet started an e-mail group of members for information exchange purpose. I am requesting community members to come forward and volunteer their time and effort for the community and the organization, especially in supporting our web activities.

We are putting in a major effort to put together latest member's directory. Its development is in final stages and will be published and mailed to paid members only before the end of this month.

KOA is currently coordinating with Mrs. Kailash Mehra Sadhu (a Kashmiri singer of repute) and Shri Virendra Qazi (a cultural activist with keen interest in Kashmir Shivism and the sayings of Lalleshwari) to come and visit the USA. Both will be present at the KOA National Camp at Hershey, PA. Virendra Qazi will begin his tour on June 13th and Kailash Mehra will begin her tour on June 29th, both will be here for one month and will go around the country to perform and present. This effort is closely coordinated with Zone Directors and Chapter Presidents.

Language may not be the only cohesive force to bind a community, but it certainly is the main cementing agent to hold the community together as well as to confer upon it a mark of identification. The religious and political persecutions for centuries has made our mother tongue to relapse into near oblivion. The only way we can save it is by speaking in Kashmiri at home and encouraging our children to do so. In order to promote our culture and language, KOA has taken two initiatives. One, we are coordinating with some young adults and offering a ten day Kashmiri language course in the month of August for the age group 16+. Second, we are planning to start Sunday schools in major metropolitan areas in this country with active help from community members. Boston has already taken the lead under the guidance of KOA's cultural secretary, closely followed by Northern California. Curriculum and course materials being developed will be shared with all the zones and chapters.

It is my desire for our youth and young adults to take interest and participate actively in the community affairs. I am inviting them to come forward and get involved in the organization and I would like all the community members to support this effort by involving their children in community projects.

I would like to draw your attention to two things. First, having correct member information is very important for the organization. Please provide KOA with address change if any. A form has been provided in this newsletter for this purpose. Second, if you have not paid your membership dues yet, then please take a moment of your valuable time to do so.

This year all KOA Chapters have celebrated Shivratri and Navreh and members attended these functions in large numbers. Congratulations to the organizers and many thanks to all the members for supporting and participating.

Please feel free to call any member of my team with your questions, suggestions or to simply express your support. Together we will make a difference. May God bless our community. Namaskar!

SHIVARATRI



The Biggest Festival Of Kashmiri Pandits

-G.N.Raina*

Shivaratri (literally meaning *Shiva's* night) is a festival of great significance for Hindus all over the world, especially for those of Kashmir. Esoterically, it is symbolic of the mystic union of *Jiva* (individual soul) with *Paramatma* (the Supreme Godhead) and it represents the high state of spiritual realization wherein the world of relativity fades away and perfect peace and calm prevails. On this phenomenal night, the seeker remains fully aware of his identity with *Shiva*, the source of perennial joy, and thus experiences eternal **Truth, Bliss and Beauty**. (*Satyam, Shivam. Sundaram*).

'Close to heart'

For centuries, the Hindus of Kashmir have been observing *Shivaratri* with utmost zeal and devotion. And the age-old traditions with its elaborate rituals covering three-fourth of the lunar month of *Phalguna* (Feb-March) are followed even to this day, modified, of course, to suit the changing times and circumstances. The 21-day celebrations are marked by the same excitement, exultation and euphoria as in the days of yore. The way our displaced and uprooted brethren have been observing *Shivaratri* in tents and makeshift tenements for the last eleven years shows how close this festival is to our hearts. Keeping in view its length and religious-cum-social over-tones, it may be compared to *Durga Puja* and *Ganapati* festivals celebrated with equal devotion and enthusiasm by the Hindus of Bengal and Maharashtra respectively.

Shivaratri/Hayrath

In Kashmir, *Shivaratri* is also called *Hayrath*, which is the corrupt form of '*hairat*', a Persian word meaning 'utter surprise'. The term, *Hayrath*, was coined during the Pathan occupation of the valley.

As the story goes, a perverted alien ruler, *Jabaar* by name, forced Kashmiri Pandits to celebrate the festival in the hottest month of *Aashaadh* (June-July) instead of Feb-March. He knew that heavy snowfall always marked the great event as is evident from the following refrain of a song usually sung at *Shivaratri* time: "*Suna sheen volun daari daare: Maharaza raaza kumaar hai aav*" (Flakes of gold snowed slow and steady when prince *Shiva* arrived to marry princess *Uma*!).

Lo' and behold, snow did fall in July that year! The miracle startled the Pathans who expressed '*hairat*'. Hence the new name for *Shivaratri* celebrations.

However, untimely snowfall resulted in crop failure and famine. The valley faced untold misery. The forced alteration in the timing of the festival brought innumerable curses upon the ruler. The people cried out: '*Wuchton Yi Jabbaar Jandah, Haaras Ti Kurun Wandah!*' (See this wretched *Jabaar* in rage; he has turned summer into winter!).

Shiva Chaturdashi

Since the Hindus all over India and elsewhere in the world observe *Shivaratri* on 14th, a day later than their counterparts in Kashmir, it is also known as *Shiva Chaturdashi*. when *Lord Shiva*, the 'King of Yogis' and the 'Destroyer-Renovator of the Holy Trinity', is said to have manifested on earth to redeem his devotees. On this auspicious day, the Hindus of all castes and creeds observe fast, offer prayers and spend the whole night in worship of *Lord Shiva* in homes and temples.

Shiva Chaturdashi is observed by Kashmiri Pandits as well, but a month earlier in the dark fortnight of the lunar month of *Magha* (Jan-Feb), when they keep a 3-day fast, worship *Shiva* with great devotion and avoid non-vegetarian preparations in their homes on these days.

Puja and its significance

Kashmiri Brahmins perform *Shivaratri* puja on the 13th (and not on 14th) day of the dark half of *Phalguna*. For them, it signifies *Lord Shiva's* wedding with *Uma*, the beautiful daughter of the Himalayas. And in keeping with their hospitable nature, they offer even non-vegetarian food in *puja* on this day to entertain *Bhairavas* who formed the major part of *Shiva's* '*baaraat*'.

Shivaratri puja is also called *Vatuk Puja*. *Vatuk* is a Kashmiri word meaning 'collection or an assemblage of different objects'. Since the main puja on *Shivaratri* day involves collection of a large number of articles, it is being called by the name '*Vatuk*'. The name could also be traced to the term '*Vatuk Dev*' *Lord Shiva's* celibate form. In the fitness of things, Kashmiris worship *Shiva* in this form before solemnizing his union with *Uma*. They also worship *Vatuk Bhairav*, supposed to be *Shiva's* most trusted '*dwarpal*' (gate-keeper), in a bid to seek his favor for an audience with the Lord.

The divine marriage has a deeper, philosophic connotation. *Shiva* in His transcendental (*para*) aspect is inactive in creation. And His union with *Shakti* (energy or activating power), represented by His 'consorts', *Uma, Parvati, Durga* and *Kali* (variously named to signalize particular functions of the Divine Mother) make the infinite unfoldments in the cosmos possible. According to Kashmir Saivism, *Shiva* represents the eternal process of creation and destruction, and His nature has primarily a two-fold aspect—immanent which pervades the universe and the transcendental that is beyond the universal manifestation of time, space and form.

Preliminary Preparations

Year after year, the three-week celebrations begin on the first day of the dark fortnight of *Phalguna* (known in popular parlance as *hur ukdoh*) and end on the 8th day of the bright half of *Phalguna*. *Hur* in Kashmiri stands for both singing and whitewashing and the word is used as a prefix to the first nine days of the festivities.



The first 6 days (*hur ukdoh* to *hur shiyam*) are normally reserved for cleaning the entire house to give it a festival look and for collecting the necessary articles like walnuts, utensils and vatuk samagri for main puja on Shivaratri day. In olden times, the houses used to be white-washed with clay and fresh cow-dung.

The subsequent 3 days—*hur sattam*, *hur atham* and *hur navam* (the birthday of goddess *Sharika*), were devoted to congregational night-long prayers, preferably in temples at *Ganpatyar*, *Chakreshwar*, *Pokhri Bal* and *Kshir Bhawani*.

On the 12th, a day before the main puja, a new earthenware, freshly baked and specially prepared by the potter for the occasion (now-a-days a pot of steel), is ceremoniously brought to the house and placed on a small circular seat (*aasan*) made of grass in the room traditionally reserved for daily worship (*thokur kuth*). Called *Wagur*, the pot represents the priest who, according to one prevalent belief, acted as *Shiva's* messenger to the Himalayas to seek his daughter's hand and also performed the auspicious wedding ceremony of *Shiva* with *Parvati*.

Ritual Worship

Prior to the start of puja on the main day, *Trayodashi*, several pots, representing various deities, including the two larger vessels signifying *Shiva* and *Parvati*, are embellished with flower garlands tied round their mouths and dried walnuts deposited in them nearly to the brim. The smaller vessels, representing other deities, are similarly readied for formal worship. A couple of more vessels are also kept ready for lesser deities like the *Bhairavas*.

The ritual worship begins with traditional invocation of *Lord Ganesh*, the remover of obstacles, followed by sanctification of the various vessels representing different deities. *Abhishek* of the cone-shaped clay model called *Saniputul* is one of the main attractions. Being empty from inside, *Saniputul* represents the supreme Godhead that encompasses all the elements in the universe from *prithvi tatwa* (earth) to *shunya tatwa* (empty space). *Saniputul* appears to be the corrupt form of *shunya putul* (pot/idol).

The ritual worship continues till late into the night and concludes with *aarti* and singing of devotional hymns in praise of *Lord Shiva*.

Dunya Mavas

Ritualistic Puja of the sanctified vessels reaches its climax on the 15th day called *Dunya Mavas* (walnut amavas). On this day all the flower-decked vessels are taken to a stream or river for final ritual immersion just as the images of *Durga* and *Ganesh* are immersed at the close of *Durga Puja* and *Ganapati festivals*. Before immersion, the vessels are emptied of the soaked walnuts and brought back home after symbolic Puja at the river bank. On reaching home, the ladies would shut the main entrance of the house and not allow the head of the family to enter till he promised certain blessings and boons for all members of the family. The conversation would run as follows after the head of the family knocks at the door: Q: *kus chuva?* (Who is there?); A: Ram Bror (name of the person); Q: *kya heth?* (What have you brought?); A: *anna heth, dhana heth* (food, wealth etc).

How romantic and fascinating!

Prasad

After the final puja on *Dunya Mavas*, the soaked walnuts and *tumul chut* (rice-cakes) are distributed as the main prasada among the family members, friends and close relatives.

The use of dried walnuts for both worship and prasada is something very unique in the observance of *Shivaratri* by the people of Kashmir. Possibly, it has some symbolic purpose inasmuch as dried seeds when soaked pave the way for renewal of life from objects that are supposed to be dead.

The process of distribution of prasada continues for a week till *Teela Atham*, the 8th day of the bright half of *Phalguna* when *Hayrath* celebrations formally come to a close. In good old days back home, a lighted earthen lamp would be placed on *ari* (seat made of grass) and allowed to float in the river (reminiscent of a similar scene in the evenings at *Haridwar*). On this day of glee and charm, the children had had the last laugh. They would burn unserviceable '*kangris*' (fire-pots) in the evenings, mostly on the river-bank. Known as "*jatun tuun*", in our native language, the festivity was symbolic of the end of severe winter in Kashmir.

Social Aspect

Shivaratri provides a wonderful and meaningful get-together for all members of the family. Every member of the house-hold is normally in a festive mood. It is a day of prayer and meditation for the elders and one of fun and frolic for the youngsters, particularly children in their new colorful attires. During the entire period of the 3-week celebrations, all the family members, men, women and children would play with cowries (sea shells). One and all enjoyed this fun-filled indoor sport, known as '*haara-baaz*'.

It is customary for the women-folk, the old and young alike, to visit their '*malyun*' (parental home) and return to their '*varyuv*' (in-laws) with *atagat* (money in token of love) and *kangri* (fire-pot), considered to be a good omen on this occasion. The newly-wed girls normally return from their paternal homes on the eve of the main *Shivaratri* function, preferably on the 10th day (*dhyara daham*), bringing with them, what in Kashmiri we call, '*hayrach bhog*' (*Shivaratri shagun*) in kind and cash.

In the days gone by, it used to be a crucial time for some in the event of their *Hayrach Bogh* falling short of the expectations of their mothers-in-law. The proverbial mother-in-law (not uncommon, perhaps, even now) would heave cold sighs, beat their foreheads and curse their luck. '*Karma Khandit Asam*', they would say.

Salaam

The day after *Maha Shivaratri* Puja is called "*salaam*", a Persian word for greeting. It is a day of fun and feasting, a sort of Thanksgiving Day when relations, friends and colleagues would exchange greetings. The singing bards and the poor would visit Hindu homes and take their share of *Shivaratri* presents in cash or kind or both as the case may be.

Hayrath Kharch

On *Shivaratri* day, the head of the family offers pocket money to children and other junior members in the family, including the new brides, sons-in-law and the newly wed daughters. Called '*hayrath kharch*', It is also sent to nearest relations, including their new born and newly married children.

**G.N.Raina retired from Indian Information Service (I.I.S.) in 1983 after completing 35 years as a distinguished editor, correspondent, commentator and administrator; Editor, AICC journal, Varnika, (Jan.'84-Dec.'90); Editor-in-Chief, Koshur Samachar (March'91-Oct.'95; Presently Editor, Sanatana Sandesh, an official publication of South Florida Hindu Temple, Miami.*

Kashmiri Overseas Association

KOA CAMP 2001

Dear Members,

KOA Camp 2001 will be held at Hershey Highmeadow Campground, Hershey, Pennsylvania, from June 30 to July 3 (Sat-Tue). The campground is centrally located for most of the campers of the east coast region, being about 30 miles southeast of Harrisburg. It is less than 4 hr. drive from NY, NJ, and Pittsburgh, less than 7 hr. from Connecticut and Boston, and about 2 hr. from Philadelphia and Washington.

Hershey is famous for the Chocolate world - the Chocolate factory and Hershey amusement park. Pennsylvania Dutch and Amish country and the famous outlet center shopping areas are just 45 minutes away. This place has something to offer for every taste. Even if you do not want to make any trips, socialization with your friends, relatives, and new acquaintances at the campsite itself can keep you busy all day and all night.

We have reserved a block of campsites and some cabins. Allotment will be strictly on first come first serve basis, especially for the cabins, which are very few in number. Therefore, I urge you to reserve your campsite as soon as possible. For those of you who would like to spend the night at a hotel/motel and still join us for daytime activities, please call the motels directly and make reservations for your room. Even if you prefer to stay at a hotel/motel, please do not forget to register with us, so that we may keep an accurate account of the campers and coordinate our activities better.

The reservation form is enclosed. Please fill it up completely and mail it back to me. Please do not forget to write the ages of children below 18. Charges for the campsite are \$100 per tent site for 3 nights (2 adults and 2 children). Each extra adults or child is \$12.00 extra for 3 nights to a maximum of 6 persons to one campsite. Three night minimum stay is required. You will therefore be paying the three nights minimum, whether you stay for one, two, or three nights. Since we have to make the payment in advance, the amount will be non refundable, once the reservation has been made. We have only a limited number of cabins and would like to keep them for campers with senior citizens or infants. However if those people do not take them, they will be allotted to anyone who is interested. Cabins are essentially a single room with 4 cots and mattresses and no other facilities. There are no bathroom facilities with the cabins. These will have to be shared with the common facilities at the campground and are nearby. Charges for the cabins are \$225 for three nights. Again a three night minimum stay is required.

Officially the camp will start on Saturday, June 30 till July 3, 2001. If you would like to come a day early as many families have been doing in the past, please let me know, as those arrangements have to be made separately.

For those of you who would like to make a trip to Hershey amuse-

ment park on one of the three days, we can get the tickets at a group discount of \$20 each (regular charge at the gate being \$29.95), a considerable saving. These tickets must be bought by May 1, 2001. We will therefore buy tickets for you in advance if payment accompanies the registration form.

If you intend to fly from a distant place, the nearest major airport will be Baltimore Washington International airport (about 2 hrs. drive) or Newark airport (3 hr. drive). Your best bet will be to book to one of these two major airports and rent a car.

In past years, the children's cultural and sports programs were a great fun for the kids as well as for the adults. We will continue to have those programs this year too. If your child would like to participate, please get him or her ready for it. We may be having some prizes for them this year. If there are any other planned activities you have in mind or would like to see, please let us know beforehand so that we can coordinate them better.

I urge you to send in your registration as soon as your plans are finalized. Last year, we spent more than \$150.00 of your money on telephones and faxing these forms to people. I am sure that can be avoided by saving this letter as well as the registration form till the end of June, in case you decide late to join us. You can download this letter and registration form from our KOA website too if needed. If you have any further questions, please call me at (973)-628-1152 or e-mail at rohithkirond@netzero.net or fax at (973)-628-4740.

Please remember the last date for reservations is **May 15, 2001**. Any registration after this date will be \$25.00 extra and after June 20th it will be \$50.00 extra. If you must cancel the camping due to some unforeseen reasons or any emergency, you can get a full refund until May 31, 2001. After June 1, 2001, the total amount paid will be non-refundable.

See you all at the camp. Wishing you all good health, prosperity, and peace of mind.

Yours,
Rohit Dhar
(Camp Commander)

Hotel/Motel Information

1. Dutch Motel (717) 838-3751. About 10 minutes drive from the Campground. Contact Sunil Patel. He will book you either at this motel or at the Hershey Travel motel. Rates are ~\$55.00 for one double bed or ~\$70.00 for two double bed room. Two nights stay is minimum required.
2. Village Motel (717)-838-4761. About 10 minutes drive from the campground. Contact Mark. Two nights minimum stay required. Please show AAA card to get best rates. Rates are ~\$54.00 for 1 double bed or ~\$78.00 for 2 double bed room.

Note: You are responsible for reservation and cancellations for hotel rooms. Cancellations should be made 72 hours prior to date of arrival.

Kashmiri Overseas Association KOA Camp 2001 (June 30 to July 3)

Registration Form

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____
Address: _____

Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____ E-mail: _____

Names of Persons Attending:

Adults: (self) _____ Children: _____
_____ (<18yrs) _____

Total # adults: _____ Total # children: _____ **Total:** _____

Date of Arrival: _____ Date of Departure: _____ Day Camper: Yes/No
Will make own arrangement for hotel (Please pay Common Expense and for Hershey tickets)

| Reservation Request | Number | Rate | Amount (rate*Number) |
|---|--------|---|-------------------------|
| <i>Number of Camp sites</i> (s); (4 persons/site - 2 adults and 2 children; each campsite can accommodate two additional persons - \$12/person extra) | | \$ 100/site (3 nights minimum) | |
| <i>Number of Cabin</i> (s): (4 persons/site - 2 adults and 2 children) | | \$225/cabin (3 nights minimum) | |
| <i>Number of Hershey Amusement Park Tickets</i> at discount Price (by April 20) | | \$20 per person (age 9-54) \$17 per person (age 3-8) \$17 per person (age 55+) children < 3 yrs free | |
| Common Expense Deposit | | \$100 per party | \$100.00 |
| Total Amount | | | |

? **Last Date for Registration:** *May 15, 2001*. Cancellation date without any penalty: May 31, 2001.
\$25 extra for registration after May 15, 2001; and \$50 extra for registration after June 20, 2001
After June 1, 2001, total amount paid is non refundable.

? Please attach check payable to KOA Camp 2001 for the total amount and mail it to:
Rohit Dhar, KOA Camp 2001
12 Lowell Drive, Wayne NJ, 07470

Ph. # (973)-628-1152 Fax # (973)-628-7470 Email: rohitkiron@netzero.net

If you or any member of your family would like to participate in various camp activities including Cultural, sports, and debate programs, please provide the following details:

| Name | Activity | If cultural, specify duration of performance |
|------|----------|--|
| | | |
| | | |

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Cultural Celebration Reports

Report from Zone 4

This year we celebrated **Shivratri** on March 10, 2001 at our regular place in a magnificent church in Beltsville area. Dedicated people like our Ex-KOA President Mr. Lalit Wanchoo, Pravina Mattoo, and Sharad Dixit decorated the hall. In addition to our regular crowd, significant new additions to the Washington area were also present. The evening started with the introduction of people, followed by children's program, which was kindly arranged by Mrs. Nisha Kaul. She worked tirelessly to get the children and their parents involved. Thank you Nisha. Children of all ages participated and did an excellent job. Congratulations to all the children. Naeha Qasba and Sandhya Nakhasi treated us to an excellent Kathak and Kuchipudi dance, respectively. Congratulations to both of them. Among the adults we found new singing talent and were treated to an excellent vocal music both Hindi and Kashmiri songs. Our thanks to all who participated in the singing program including Rita Phawa, Nani Vaid, Saroj Dixit, Bharat Bushan Pandit to name a few. After the cultural program, we had a typical Kashmiri Puja, which was led by Mrs. Ratna Qasba and Mrs. Saroj Dixit. This reminded us all of the Puja at Hari Parbhat. Thanks to both Ratnaji and Sarojji. Hats off to Pravina Mattoo for doing a great job of arranging the settings of a Shiva temple in the hall. After the Puja we were treated to a delicious Kashmiri cuisine, courtesy of every body. Well that was the beginning of the long entertaining evening. As usual our talented dancers young and not so young hit the dance floor to dance to the tunes of our resident DJ Pankaj Qasba. The dancing went on late in the evening till our lead dancer Autar Mattoo got tired. Thank you Autar. I would like to thank Sujata and Ramesh Qasba for helping me out in carrying out this function. Constant support and help from Sujata Qasba, Inder and Kamini Bhat, and my dear wife Usha Nakhasi in arranging our local functions is highly appreciated.

Every year Lalit and Nina Wanchoo and their parents invite all the area women for the **Zangtri** function. Men are also invited too. This year was not any different. Even though the function was in the middle of the week, I was told that it was a full house. The invitees were treated to variety of snacks and were given a box of salt "NOON" to take with them. Our heartfelt thanks to Wanchoo family for keeping this tradition alive.

On April 8, 2001 we had our **Navreh** celebration at the home of Inder Krishen and Kamini Bhat, which they provide us graciously every year. This year the Kashmiri food was catered from India Grill, the same caterer who provided food at last year's KOA camp. I must tell you this guy is getting good in making authentic Kashmiri food. After the food and excellent desert (RasMalie), men took to volley ball court and had a good game for couple of hours. Meanwhile, ladies started the singing program and played "Anthak Shari". While this was going on children had ball watching the colorful fish in Bhat's of Muran pond in the backdrop of cherry blossom. All in all everybody had fun. I would like to thank both Inder and Kamini Bhat for making Navreh function a great success.

Hira L. Nakhasi
Director Zone:4

Report from Zone 7

On Saturday March 10, KOA of Chicago held its annual Shivaratri function. Over 75 people attended what Became a fun, educational, and truly memorable day.

The program began in the afternoon with a beautiful puja organized by Bansi Pandit. This began in the traditional manner with prayer to all the deities. Children also participated by reciting a well-known, sacred Abhinav Gupta hymn to Lord Shiva, which was also translated into English. Bansiji then led us through chanting of the 40 verses of the Shiv sutras. This had a serene, soothing effect on all the participants.

One of the highlights of the puja was a bhajan performed by Priya Pandit, "Har Har Shiv Shankar Ji", with Vijay Pandit on harmonium and Rahul Pandit on tabla. Puja ended with aarti and distribution of prashad.

After a short snack break, it was time for the highlight of the evening - not dinner, but the cultural show. This was organized by Rajni Koul and Vijay Pandit. And here the children were truly the stars of the show.

Rushil Bakshi started things off with an appropriate bhajan "Ai malik tere banday hum." Charu Dhanda recited "Shivo Hum" shloka in Sanskrit and then translated into English for the audience. Sumip Wali entertained us with an amusing, lively dance. Dhruv & Disha Koul sang the Kashmiri bhajan, "Hal mo hal mo gulab." Rashi Bamzai danced to the catchy tune of "Bumbro." Eisha Wali MC'd for part of the evening and then performed a Kashmiri song & dance. Pallavi Bamzai followed with a bhajan. Lavannya Pandit did Bharat Natyam dance to Lord Shiva. Aditya Koul displayed his devotion to the violin with a beautiful piece. The cultural show ended with a musical piece, "Rind Posh Maal," performed by the Pandit family. At the end of the show, all the parents who had encouraged their children to participate in the cultural program were asked to come up front and receive a round of applause. Following this and in remembrance of our tradition of "Herath kharich," Jyoti Bhat was gracious enough to have donated a special Shivaratri coin for all the children present that evening. This was distributed to each child by respected Premnath ji Bamzai, affectionately referred to as Babuji by the children.

Sanjay Bhat, the current KOA Chicago president, then led elections for the next chapter president. Sundeep Kak was nominated and accepted this 2-year position. This was followed by an update of KOA activities and appeal for membership. Upender Kaul, director of zone 7 from Minnesota, had driven to Chicago for this program and also provided additional updates.

At this point the growling of our stomachs was becoming noticeable, which led us to the dining area where volunteers had warmed up and laid out the scrumptious Kosher potluck dinner.

The festivities continued after dinner with leela/chakri, led by Vijay Pandit on harmonium, and Rahul Pandit on tabla. Raj Koul started it off with the classic leela, "Myuj sharikuy kar daya." This was followed by "Jai Shiva jai Umay aiy aiy, Herath aiy." Another one was, "Soor muthiay aangun tschauv." Then there were the classic chakri tunes, "Ba chus matric paas hasa paas hasa hai" and "Hukoos bukoos

theil van tschukus.” Raj Koul was assisted in vocals by Basanti & Ramesh Wali, Sanjila Dhar, Rajni Koul, Sham Tickoo, Soman Dhar and many others. When everyone was singing, the sounds of chakri took us back to the summer nights of Srinagar.

The success of this program was entirely due to a core group of dedicated members, led by outgoing president Sanjay Bhat. His core group of organizers included Mohan Sapru, Naveen Dhar, Sanjay Gassi, Rakesh Kaw, Rabinder & Rajni Koul, and let’s not forget Sanjay’s wife, Jyoti Bhat. Ramesh Wali and Mohan Bamzai also played key roles in staying till the very end to close the doors of the hall, booking the hall, & obtaining the well-used musical/communication system.

Thanks to all those that participated in making this a wonderfully memorable event, especially those that I have not personally named such as the food preparers, and any other children that may have participated in the cultural show at the last minute.

Photos of the evening, as well as the live songs, were recorded and can be viewed on the web at: www.panditfamily.org/shivaratri

Upender Nazir
Director Zone7

Herath in Los Angeles, CA.

This year again, as in previous years we celebrated our Herath at the Colina Glen UCLA faculty-housing guesthouse. We happily recognize it that this venue is becoming smaller with every passing year. On Saturday (Feb. 24, 2001), the Shivratri pooja started around 4:30 PM followed by what has been our standard format of Kashmiri and Hindi devotional bhajans. This time Bel Tai Madal sounded even more authentic than usual. Either we have become adept at it or it was the weather! The weather in Los Angeles, this day, was not very cooperative but it did not dampen the drive of our extended family members from participation in this annual reunion that has become the hallmark of KPs living in Southern California.

We had young and old, and new and seasoned members, not only from the greater Los Angeles area but also from San Diego and Phoenix join the celebrations. We had “Dufflies” and “Tumbaknares” in rhythmic union singing Azhai Ha Jayee Jayee Herath Maej Aayaay Lo and Dhimita Dhimita Dhim – Nachay Bhola Nath. The bhajans were followed by children’s program - it was a pleasure to see our little kids sing and talk Shivratri.

After a brief business meeting under the gavel of Dr. Amrit Nehru, (Director KOA, Southern California), we had dinner. After dinner, we continued our post-dinner musical entertainment that continued till midnight. This was possible because of the enthusiastic participation, it was replete with variety and wit, perfect in its imperfection - one of the most enjoyable evenings that we have had.

This year, for the first time in this function, we had our food catered, commercially. Although we did not have Haak and Naduroo and Damaloo and Muj-i-Chatin, we had an auspicious evening of joy that rekindled the hope and reassured the soul - we know that we haven’t forgotten the Rishwari, the abode of our parents and grandparents and their parents - the Rishis.

Suraj Bhat

Report from Bay Area

Navreh Mubarak to all of you from KOA Bay Area Community. May god shower blessings on all of us and show us a direction to lead a very noble and peaceful life.

I am very pleased to inform you that recently we organized Shivratri 2001 and Navreh 2001 cultural functions in the bay area. Compared to previous years, this year we had completely changed the scope and organization of our cultural programs. From Shivratri to Navreh celebration we were able to increase the people attendance from 160 to 205. Specially, I would like to recognize the entire bay area community for showing greater interest and participating with lot of enthusiasm in our cultural functions.

At Shivratri we had puja, bhajans, and, thereafter, we also enjoyed a sumptuous authentic Kashmiri dinner. It was a very well coordinated evening in which every member of our community participated with enthusiasm and excitement. To make the evening more interesting and involving, we awarded prizes for the best-dressed Kashmiri male and female. Along with them, we also took the opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the volunteers without whom none of this would have been possible.

Navreh 2001 was our cultural day during which we were entertained by a variety of breathtaking performances that made the Oscars take a back seat! The afternoon started with a video presentation entitled “Glimpses Of The Past” that took us down memory lane (video filmed and presented by Mohan Bhan). This was followed by a Kashmiri Drama entitled “Bhagwan Karetan Pardah” starring Rena Moza, Rajiv Sumbly, Amit Adality, Ravi Bhat, Monika and Naveen Dhar, Tara Chowdhury, Malvika Harsh, and Jyoti Sumbli. It was a very well scripted and performed play, which captivated the audiences who seemed to enjoy all the nuances and sarcasm of Koshur language. Thereafter, we were educated and informed about the importance and relevance of Navreh by Ravi Kaw. This was followed by Bharat Natyam performance by Bahar Thaploo, and variety of melodious songs played on keyboard and piano by none-other-than Kunal Bhan. Thereafter, we were transported to the bollywood dhamaka “Chunari Chunari” by the graceful and captivating Natasha Bhat that was followed by Neel Thaploo’s violin performance. Once again, we embarked on a journey to tinsel town while watching Bumbhro-Bhumbro performed by Vani Zutshi and Nidhi Bhat. Mohabatein came to real life with “Anken Khulin Hon Ya Ho Band” rendered in perfection by the talented trio of handsome Kunal Bhan, beautiful Neha Bhat and energetic Retesh Bhan (directed and choreographed by Mohan Bhan). The audience was completely enthralled by these wonderful items. This was followed by a melodious performance by Anurag Harsh who rendered a variety of Kashmiri songs. This tempo was further carried on by more Kashmiri songs sung by Vijay Chowdhury and her group (Surinder and Tara Chowdhury, Vinod Moza, and Inder Kaw). The evening came to an end with prize distribution by Ravi Kaw.

To increase the awareness of our Kashmiri culture among the youth and children, we have initiated new programs such as Kashmiri cooking and language classes. Many thank to Monika Dhar, Sunil Dhar for organizing and all volunteers for making this to happen.

Dr. Mohan Bhan
KOA Bay Area Chapter President

Report from Zone 6

The Kashmiri community of Georgia celebrated a Shivratri/Navreh on March 10. About 70 adults and children of the local community participated in the event. The event was kicked off with a prayer meeting where the community kids sang the devotional songs and **Shri Pyare Lal Raina** performed the Shiv Pooja as well as explained to the audience the true significance and the meaning of the Shivratri function. This was followed by dinner, which included the choicest Kashmiri delicacies.

The highlight of the evening was a variety entertainment program coordinated by Mrs. Veena Gouri, in which both the adults and the kids participated. The audience was given a guided tour down the memory lane by Mrs. Sus and Mrs. Dhar, who regaled the group with their mellifluous renderings of the classic Kashmiri songs. **Mr. Prem Sharma** played some delightful tunes on the mouth organ while **Mrs. Sunita Sharma, Mrs. Veena Gouri and Mr. Dijiottam Raina** entertained the group with some melodious songs.

Thanks to the efforts of **Mr. Subash Razdan** of the Atlanta group, the Shivratri cultural program was later on given extensive footage on one of the popular week-end TV programs for Asian-Americans in Georgia, Namaste Bombay.

Sidharth Ganju

Director Zone6

Shivratri & Navreh in South Florida

Shivratri was celebrated on March 2, 2001, by Kashmiri Pandit families of Florida in Miami with usual zeal and enthusiasm. **Ashutosh and Mrityunjay Kaul** family hosted the two-day celebrations. The cultural program this year was a curious mix of songs in Kashmiri by local artistes, a folk dance (ruf), a folk drama (machama), two skits in Kashmiri, one on eve-teasing in Kashmir colleges in the seventies and the other on 'Bush and Florida election results'.

Produced by Deepak Ganju, written and directed by Chandra Ganju, the three skits regaled the audience. Thunderous applause



greeted the one on "**Lori Dastar Trita Bush**" depicting stupidity of the ever fumbling-bumbling George Bush, played so ably by the 17-year old **Nihar Ganju**. The other characters in the one-act drama were **Deepak Ganju (Senior George Bush), Chandra Ganju (Barbara Bush), Ashutosh Kaul (Florida Governor, Jeb Bush), Rakesh Kamal Raina (Dick Cheney) and Neha Ganju (Lora Bush)**.



The skit on "**College Kori**" brought nostalgic memories of the good old college days back to many of the middle-aged members of the community. While **Chandra Ganju** played the key role, supported by **Geeta Shaykher, Renu Kaul, Vandana Kaul, Alpina Raina, Mala Shaykher, Anjali Shaykher and Neha Ganju**, the role of eve-teasing boys was played by **Deepak Ganju, Ashutosh Kaul, Mrityunjay Kaul and Nihar Ganju**.

The folk-drama "**Machama**" was enacted by **Deepak Ganju, Ashutosh Kaul, Mrityunjay Kaul and Nihar Ganju**. All our girls gave a superb performance in **Rouf** (Kashmiri Folk dance).



Participants spent many hours in preparation and gave a spellbound performance. We thank and commend **Renuka Kaul, Alpina Raina, Vandana kaul, Mona Aggarwal, Mala Shaykher, Neha Ganju, Anjali Shaykher, Meenakshi Munshi, Deepti Zutshi, Karishma and Namrata Kitchloo** for a wonderful dance.

Solo songs were sung by **Alpina Raina, Ravi Munshi and Deepak Ganju**. Tiny **Neena and Priyanka Shaykher** sang devotional prayers which made everybody spellbound, **Deepti and Ankush Zutshi** gave us insight into Shiva's Tandav Nritya.

Renu Kaul as M.C. was superb.

All children were presented gifts on the occasion in lieu of 'Hayrath Kharch'. At the conclusion of the two-day function, **Krishan Ganju** thanked all the artistes for putting up a wonderful cultural program. **Navreh**

Navreh function was held at Port St. Lucie, Florida. The two-day function was hosted by **Dr. Darshan and Santosh Aggarwal** on April 7, 2001. All the members of our community from all over Florida attended. The highlight of the program was river boating during the day and bon-fire in the evening in which almost every member sang in both Kashmiri and Hindi languages.

In a brief speech at the end of the day, **Dr. Aggarwal**, who is married to Santosh, a Kashmiri, was all praise for Kashmiri culture and philosophy. Dr. Aggarwal has read a lot about Kashmir Shaivism and is a great devotee of Bhagwaan Gopinath Ji.

Deepak Ganju
Miami, Florida

Report from Zone 2

KOA Zone II celebrated Navreh function on evening of Saturday March 24th at Chelmsford Village Club House, Chelmsford, MA. Evening started with folks trickling in slowly but steadily. They were served with yummy appetizers and steaming tea. Once everybody was comfortable, I welcomed all the participants at the gathering and gave a quick update about local activities. I also introduced and welcomed new faces in our local KP community. It is heartening to see our extended family grow. Next Arti Kaul, Cultural Secretary of KOA gave an update about the Koshur Sunday School in Boston Metro area, which was followed by KOA update by Sanjay Kaul, President, KOA.

This year, we have started an initiative under which youngsters research and write a paper about various Kashmiri Rituals and Customs. The first topic in this series was "Significance of Navreh" and local youngsters were requested to research and write a paper about this topic. One of our youngsters Akshay Ganjoo read his research paper on this topic at the function.

Akshay's reading of research paper was followed by nice dance presentations by our budding artists Aakansha Ganjoo, Iha Kaul and Varsha Kaul. One could easily see great dancers-in-making.

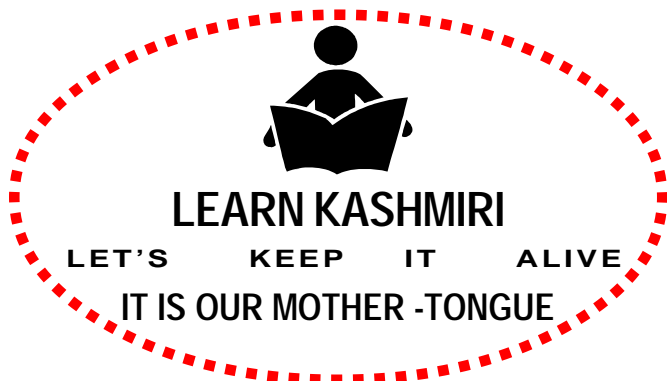
By now, everybody was ready to jump into the delectable authentic Koshur dinner. While enjoying palatable entrees, one could hear folks discussing hot topics ranging anywhere from Kashmir Politics to Stock Market crash. And just to cool down and sweeten the hot discussions, folks were served with mouth-watering Gulab-Jamuns. While all this was going on, dedicated volunteers were very quietly doing what they do best. They were making sure that everybody is served properly and all the necessary things are taken care of. (Many Many Thanks to all you Volunteers. Without you, things just would not move and/or happen.).

Finally, it was the turn of our adult entertainers. Unlike past gatherings, this time it was decided to forget "Balle Balle" and instead have a sitting musical performance. The whole atmosphere was made musical by a nice collection of Geets, Ghazals and Bhajans by one and all.

Nobody wanted to leave but I guess all good things have to come to an end. ...And so did our Navreh gathering, ...

Navreh Mubarak to all of you !!!!!

Lalit Koul
Director Zone 2



MEMBER INFORMATION UPDATE

For new members, and those members who have moved recently to a new area, please update your information for our records. Please provide the following information to us for the KOA mailing list and future directory updates.

last name: _____

First name: _____

Spouse Name: _____

Current Address:

Old Address:

City: _____

City: _____

State: _____ **Zip:** _____

State: _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone # _____

Date Moved: _____

E-mail: _____

New Member: ___ Yes ___ NO

Mail to: **KOA**
24 Sartell Road
Waltham, MA 02451-2986



Dear Readers,

From this newsletter, we have started to include articles about our cultural heritage, news and other important relevant issues concerning our community. We invite Members especially Senior Citizens to come forward and give us their valuable input.

KOA also wants to encourage Young Adults to write on issues concerning them in this country. We would like to dedicate a column in our forthcoming Newsletter for Youth. We need a volunteer in our Editorial Board from our youth to coordinate this assignment.

Deepak Ganju
Member Editorial Board

e-mail your feedback:
deepak.ganju@hotmail.com, skaul@ctps.org

KOA LAUNCHES KOSHUR SUNDAY SCHOOL

Dear Biradari members,

On 1st of April, a new chapter was written in the history of KOA. For the first time, a Kashmiri language/culture school was started for the children of Mass.in the Trustee's room of the Waltham Public library.

We had a participation of 11 children ('kah naiv sinza Kah') ranging between the age group 6-15. I started the class, by describing the significance of this school, which has been named 'Kashap Vidhyalaya'. Then our President, Mr. Sanjay Kaul, who was invited as the guest speaker, gave a short talk on the history, geography and origin of Jammu and Kashmir region. In the last part, we introduced some kashmiri words (about 11) and had each child practice in the class.

We also talked about Haereth and Navreh in depth and demonstrated the 'Thal Barun' and the 'Vatukh'. The kids were excited and felt happy to learn something about their 'roots' The next class will be held on the 29th of April. As planned we will be having at least two classes per month, and each session will have a guest speaker to talk about various subjects and experiences. We urge all the parents to take part in this activity and for those who have not been able to get their kids, should do so in the next class. This is a new experiment for us and we expect to learn with experience too.

If anyone has any questions or suggestions please send e-mail to me or call me.
A_Kaul@msn.com
Phone: 781-687-9787

Thanks,
Arti Kaul
Cultural Secretary, KOA.

Political Gatherings or Meetings

Zone 6

CARE Event in Atlanta on April 2nd:

The international relief agency, CARE, which is headquartered in Atlanta, had organized a get together on April 2nd to thank the Indian American cultural Association (IACA) of Atlanta and Kashmir Overseas Association (KOA) and others for their help with the Gujarat Relief effort. The following people from the local Kashmiri community in Atlanta were at the event - Mrs. Leela Kaul, Mr Subash Razdan, Mr Brij Razdan and me. Mr. Atul Shunglu and Mr. GK Reddy from CARE/FICCI, India were at the event and described the activities of CARE towards earthquake relief and rehabilitation. Both these gentlemen did an excellent job of describing the initiatives taken by CARE and FICCI in coping with this disaster and the ambitious targets and standards they have set for the relief work. We were pleased to see that CARE has pledged to rehabilitate several villages in the

Bhuj area of Gujarat by building 10,000 earthquake proof homes, schools and water facilities in the communities it has adopted. The images from the earthquake were disturbing and a lot of work remains to be done in Gujarat. However, it was satisfying to see that KOA had picked an excellent and dedicated organization to act as a vehicle for its earthquake relief and from everything we saw, CARE is doing an excellent job of providing relief and rehabilitation to the earthquake victims. At the end of the function, Marshall Burke, the Vice President of CARE thanked and praised KOA for its support. **It is also noteworthy that Shri Avtar Kaul of Kashmiri community in Atlanta is a very active member of CARE and was a catalyst for KOA's choice of CARE as its partner for providing the earthquake relief. Besides KOA's direct donation to CARE, a number of Kashmiris in Atlanta and all across North America, raised and distributed significant amounts of money for Gujarat relief through various other charities.**

**KOA
Encourages
Young Adults
To
Write on issues
Concerning them in this country.**

**KOA
Invites
Community Members especially Senior Citizens
To
Write on issues
Facing our community**

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

All Community Members are requested to be dues paying members. Please renew your membership for the current year. Community members are requested to please join KOA and participate actively in community affairs and organizational activities.

Membership dues are:

\$15/yr. for a single person,
\$30/yr. for a family,
\$15/yr. for a senior couple and
\$500 for life membership

Mail membership dues to:

Mrs. Prana Kaul
Treasurer, KOA
15 Ardmore Road
Burlington, MA 01803

Payable to: **KOA**

ACHIEVEMENTS BY OUR YOUTH

Zone 2

- **Congratulations to Akshay Ganju !!!** From Brookline, MA and his team, "NU-Trons" who won National Title 2001 First Robotics Competition at EPCOT Center held in Orlando, FL. Congratulations are also due to Akshay's proud parents, Ramesh and Neeru Ganju and his little sister Akansha for providing necessary guidance, inspiration and support.

For details, please visit:

http://www.masshightech.com/displayarticle/detail.asp?Art_ID=47341

- **Congratulations to AnjaliWali !!!** Daughter of Dr. Anupam and Neelam Wali of Billerica, MA, for ranking at the top of the nation as an 8th grader who took the SAT as part of the John Hopkins Center for talented Youth.
- **Congratulations to Ambica Wali !!!** Daughter of Dr. Anupam and Neelam Wali of Billerica, MA, for placing 1st at the state DECA competition and advancing to the National/International DECA competition in Anaheim, CA. DECA is a business club, which promotes marketing and business principles among the youth of America.

Zone 6

- **Congratulations to Nihar Ganju !!!!** From Miami, Florida who was named a semi-finalist in the 2001 Intel Science Talent Search (STS) for his project titled "Vitamin D Expression in Human Prostate Tumor Cells". He received an award of \$1,000.00.

He is also one of the two students selected from each State to represent in this year's National Science Service Camp being held in Charleston, West Virginia from June 28 to July 23, 2001.



CAMP HIGHLIGHTS

Participation from **Kailash Mehra** and **Virendra Qazi** (both coming from India), and two skits by the Florida group will be among the highlights at this camp in addition to our regular great attractions.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the camp.

COME JOIN US AT HERSHEY

JUNE 30 TO JULY 3, 2001

NEW MEMBERS

Zone 6

KOA Zone VI welcomes

- **Autar and Uma Kaul** from Arkansas to Atlanta, Georgia **KP Biradri**.
- **Dr. Sanjay and Dr. Shashi Razdan** to warm Miami **KP Biradri**.

Zone 2

KOA Zone II welcomes

- **Natasha Warikoo**
- **Sunil Tankha**
- **Vishal and Pooja Ganjoo**
- **Randhir and Hina Bhan**
- **Sidharath Garoo**

to New England **KP biradari**

NEW ARRIVALS

- **Congratulations to Divya and Rakesh Raina of Georgia on the birth of Baby Boy Rithik on March 10.**
- **Congratulations to Vipin and Minu Kaul on the birth of their son Krishna.**

MARRIED

- **Congratulations to Pawan Raina and Sonu Koul of Atlanta, Georgia who got married in March 2001 in India.**
- **Congratulations to Mrityunjay Kaul and Vandana of Miami, Florida who got married recently in India.**

THEY LEFT US

- **Condolences to Rakesh Raina of Miami, Florida for sad & untimely demise of his grandfather Jaganath Siboo in Bombay. He was one of the few noted Sanskrit Scholars of the last century and has many books to his credit.**
- **Condolences to Sidharath Garoo on sad, tragic and untimely demise of his dear father.**

KOA sends heartfelt condolences to the members of bereaved families.

LAL-VAAKH

“Swamana gaarun manz yath kande”

Should you, in this body, seek The Supreme Self that dwells within, Greed and Illusion soon removed, A halo of glory will surround this very body of yours

Kashmiri Overseas Association
24 Sartell Road
Waltham, MA 02451-2986

KOA Executive Committee:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| President | Sanjay Kaul, MA (781) 893-4982 |
| Vice-President | Vijay Dhar, CA (408) 252-4382 |
| Secretary | Anupam Wali, MA (978) 667-1695 |
| Treasurer | Prana Koul, MA (781) 221-0350 |
| Cultural Secretary | Arti Kaul, MA (781) 687-9787 |
| Media Secretary | Vijay Parimoo, NJ (732) 418-1471 |

Directors:

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------|
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| Zone 3: | Sarla Warikoo (732) 727-6972 |
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| Zone 5: | Kamlesh Moza (281) 421-7521 |
| Zone 6: | Sidharth Ganju (770) 409-1200 |
| Zone 7: | Upender Nazir (952) 893-2390 |
| Zone 8: | Hira Lal Koul (517) 732-1606 |
| Zone 9: | Vijay Dhar (408) 252-4382 |
| Zone 10: | Amrit Nehru (714) 626-0251 |

KPI Newsletter - Editorial Board:

- Sanjay Kaul, MA
- Deepak Ganju, FL

Kashmiri Overseas Association
24 Sartell Road
Waltham, MA 02451-2986
(781) 893-4982

REMINDER:

Please renew your KOA membership
Annual Dues: \$30/family, \$15/single,
\$15/senior couple, Life member: \$500

APPEAL

Please donate generously to KOA
(Donations are tax deductible)

e-mail:

koausa@koausa.org

Web Site:

<http://www.koausa.org/>

<http://www.kashmir-information.com/>

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