

# The South Asian Times

excellence in journalism

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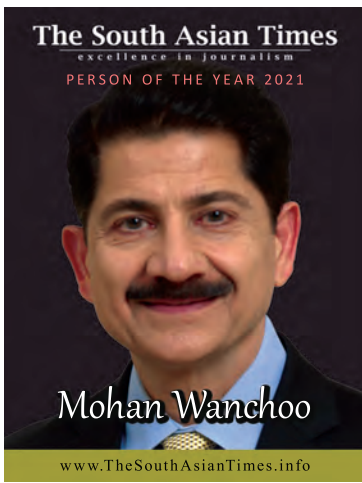
## MOHAN WANCHOO

An extraordinarily-accomplished Technocrat, Iconic Philanthropist & Humanitarian, and Inspiring Community Leader

THE SOUTH ASIAN TIMES  
PERSON OF THE YEAR 2021

TSA Times

NEWSMAKERS | 2021 ROUND-UPS | STATE OF US DEMOCRACY | TRENDS



**The more you come to know about Mohan Wanchoo by talking to him or by hearing others who know him closely, you discover how multi-faceted a man he is. Of course, the multi-millions he has raised at galas for Ekal Vidyalaya has brought him into the limelight, but not many would have heard of the big tech companies, EC Infosystems and Jasmine Universe he founded and runs from New York, which are pioneering solutions for the energy industry. And not many would easily discern that behind his smiling visage and affable demeanor is a man passionate about his charity work, his business, his home country and the exiled Kashmiri Pandit community, the hurt of which had hit closer home. How he dexterously and facilely manages to balance so many intense involvements and his personal life makes him a role model for the Indian community, the country and the world.**

*By Parveen Chopra*

Josh! Passion! Jumping for joy to see something accomplished you had worked hard for!

People who have attended Ekal galas arranged by him over the last few years were struck by his actions on stage. You can see pictures of him suspended in midair while holding an outsized check with many zeros

inspiration, he persuades other high net worth individuals, firms and foundations to join in to support a good cause, creating a multiplier effect. In turn, the charities get invaluable guidance and expertise from him, enabling them to make the best use of limited resources at their disposal.

He has created a model for other well-meaning and resourceful people in the community to follow. The least each one of us can do, he says, is do things to help at least

*At what point did you start taking part in philanthropic activities?*

**Mohan Wanchoo:** My father, Prof V.N. Wanchoo fought to root out corruption in India in the education sector. When he passed away here in New York in 1991 (victim of a road accident), I thought about what I can do to keep his legacy alive. Then, I heard about Ekal Vidyalaya around 2007. They ask you to sponsor a school for a dol-

standard of education in India.

How to help children to become good citizens of the world was a favorite topic of my father's and I thought Ekal Vidyalaya was a perfect answer. Through Ekal, we could take his dream to much larger sections of society and reach out to hundreds of thousands of children. Ekal is a story of social dreamers who believed that change is possible and education can be the medium to bring the change in the life of the last person in the

# MOHAN WANCHOO

## Philanthropist • Technocrat • Community Leader • Role Model

along with other luminaries who too were agog. Or his outstretched arm punching the air as he shouts, "We did it!"

That is Mohan Wanchoo for you in essence. His vision of philanthropy is broader and higher than just donating to a charity X, Y or Z. With his business acumen, he vets the organizations he would support, discerning the impact they can make. No passive donor, he throws himself body and soul into the charity. With his example and

one person not as fortunate as us. That can change the entire world, he professes.

**Excerpts from an interview with Mohan Wanchoo, The South Asian Times - Person of the Year 2021 held in his EC Infosystems office in Uniondale, NY. Sanjay Sura shot the photographs in Wanchoo's office and home in Old Westbury, both in Long Island.**

lar a day in India. I got curious how they managed to do that. The reason they can run a whole school at that low cost is that they do not have any buildings. They teach under a tree with one teacher in rural areas. I realized that it was a great model. We do not need a building to teach kids; we need knowledge. This was a perfect model to keep my father's legacy alive, who not only fought corruption in the education sector but also strived continuously to raise the

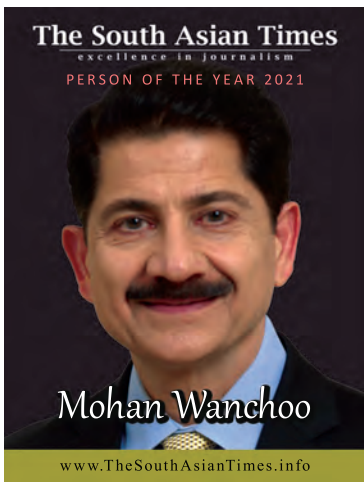
last row in the remotest parts of India.

*How did your involvement with Ekal Galas start?*

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Ekal people told me that they were not able to hold a gala event in the US since they established here ten years prior. So, I took the responsibility for holding the gala event for them. I spoke to Chirag Patel, Co-Chairman of Amneal



*More than the zeros in the check displayed at the 2019 Ekal gala Mohan Wanchoo arranged, it is his jumping for joy action that captures the essence of the man and his passion for philanthropy to alleviate suffering of mankind.*



Mohan Wanchoo

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Pharmaceuticals, who graciously agreed to share the responsibility with me to hold the gala event of 2016. The first gala event, a gift from our side, was held in Cipriani, NY. Around \$2 million were raised at this glittering gala through generous contributions from many individuals, companies, & foundations.

It was mainly the CEOs of these companies, who put their trust in our dream and the Ekal Model. I have personally contributed around a million so far and will

## Origins of Ekal – From Mohan Wanchoo’s speech at the 2017 Gala

We want to bring Ekal to mainstream America and spread Ekal’s message to the masses. And what better place to do it than right here in New York City.

The theme of our first Gala is the Future of India. Our distinguished speakers will describe their vision of the Future of India as they see it, how Ekal can help India move forward towards a brighter future, a Digital India where hundreds of millions of farmers will not only just grow apples but apps, and the role Ekal is playing in realizing this objective.

I would like to take you back 29 years. A young man went to a village deep in Jharkhand, Bihar, and wanted to help the

poor people there. So he asked his wife to go and talk to the women in the village. She found that they had nothing to eat.



While she approached one hut, she was stopped by the owner. When asked why,

the man told her that his daughter was playing outside and his wife was inside. He further explained that his wife does not have any clothes on because they have only one saree. When the daughter comes back, she will give the saree to her mother and only then the mother can come out.

This my friends was the turning point in this man’s life and he was none other than one of the founders of Ekal, Madan Lal Agarwal. He asked the village Chief what he could do to help. The Chief said just give education to our children. The rest is history. Agarwal opened the first school in 1986, which grew to 2,000 schools by 1995 and today there are over 1,00,000 schools run by Ekal.

people’s lives as Ekal brings light into the life of the people through knowledge and education. Not having vision is unfortunate and sight is the noblest of gifts someone

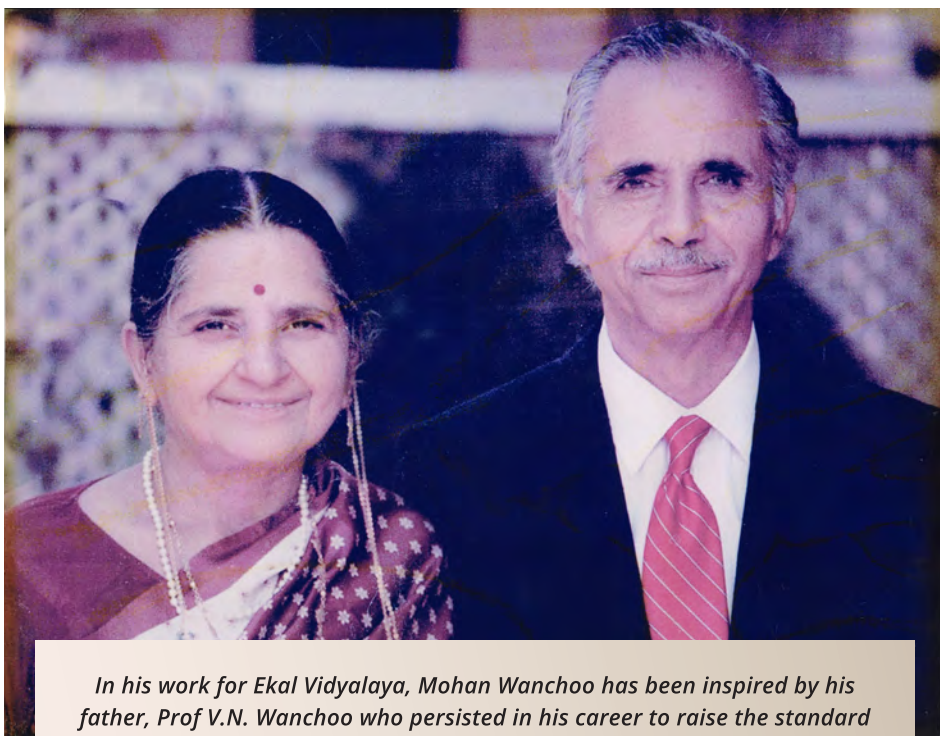
inequalities prevailing in India that are detrimental to inclusive development and also impede the growth of the nation as a whole.

**Any position you hold in any of these organizations?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** I have been offered positions, but I’ve declined. I like to do things where I can make contributions and make a difference. I would rather be involved in activities where I create an impact and output that can achieve the goal of the organization rather than holding a position.

After the departure of the CEO of Ekal Abhiyan, Bajrang Bagra, Ramesh Shah has recently been unanimously appointed as its new CEO. Ekal Abhiyan is the umbrella organization for all the Ekal bodies. Mr Ramesh Shah is the former president and chairman of Ekal-USA and he has now practically moved to India as it is not possible to run such a mammoth organization from the US.

*Continued on pg 10*



In his work for Ekal Vidyalaya, Mohan Wanchoo has been inspired by his father, Prof V.N. Wanchoo who persisted in his career to raise the standard of education in India. From his mother, Gauri Wanchoo, he learnt that we should always do things for people which bring happiness into their lives.

continue to give to Ekal in the future.

In 2017 we raised \$2.1 million for Ekal through the gala event. In 2018, we mustered \$3 million at the gala at Gotham Hall in NYC. But we could not organize the gala in 2019 due to Covid. So we took the event online and raised a whopping \$6 million through a virtual event. In 2021, we raised \$4.2 million for Ekal through another virtual gala event. I was either Chair or Co-chair for all the Gala events.

**Which other charities are you involved in?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** My mother, Gauri Wanchoo, use to say that we should always do things for people which bring happiness into their lives. I got involved in Sankara Eye Foundation in 2010 and their work is also very close to my heart.

Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF) is a not-for-profit organization in the US committed to providing quality eye care services to the poor and marginalized sections of society in India. Its roots go back to a small primary health care center started in the year 1977 by Dr. R.V. Ramani in Coimbatore.

Sankara Eye Foundation brings light into

can give to the person deprived of it. On the other hand, education gives them empowerment and the ability to fulfill their dreams.

I work with Murali Krishnamurthy who founded Sankara Eye Foundation, USA (www.giftofvision.org) in 1998 to raise funds for free eye surgeries for the needy in India. Each time they do a fundraising banquet in New York, I am the co-chair of the event. We were supposed to have a fundraiser on December 17, 2021 but canceled due to Covid.

**Any other charity that is close to your heart?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Yes, I also support another organization named Vatsalya Gram run by “Didi Maa” Sadhvi Ritambhara Devi. She is among India’s most respected spiritual leaders and distinctive humanitarians. From her vision has emerged a unique model of a societal system that no saint or reformer has ever envisaged in the past. Param Shakti Peeth, the parent body of Vatsalya Gram, has been tirelessly working since its inception in 1992 to mainstream the marginalized members of the society (prioritizing children and women) and mitigate other socio-economic

**How does Vatsalya Gram do it?**

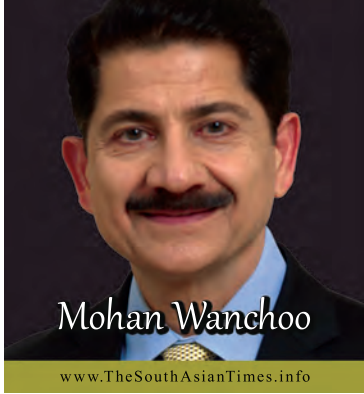
**Mohan Wanchoo:** They have a unique model to rebuild the lives of people shattered by unfortunate incidents or circumstances. Didi Maa puts these people together in order to rebuild their hopes by placing them in a conducive environment.

What they do is, they put a minor orphan with a widow and an elderly woman. So, they give the mother a child, and a child a mother and grandmother, and a grandmother a daughter and grandchildren. Didi Maa comes every year to the US to raise funds. Three years ago, we had the first fundraising event for her in Long Island.

Mohan Wanchoo receiving the ‘Pride of Ekal’ award at the 2017 gala from Subhash Chandra, Chairman of Ekal and Zee group chief.



Mohan Wanchoo has sponsored Ekal E-Shiksha Program, where kids are provided tablets for computer education.



Mohan Wanchoo

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**VHP seems to be a common thread among the three main charities you support...**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Not really. Ekal teaches children of all faiths without differentiating between them. Sankara performs free eye surgeries for all patients without ever asking them what religion they follow. Vatsalya Gram put orphans and widows together regardless of their religion.

I actually found these organizations to be good and so supported them wholeheartedly. Our Sanatan Dharma believes in the "Live and let live" philosophy, not only for human beings but also for every living creature on this planet – animals, birds, and insects. Sanatan Dharma requires us to have consideration for all living beings and I truly believe that it is the way we should be. Those who get involved in violence do not benefit anyone but bring misery and bad fortune to everyone. We should live a life that brings happiness to everyone. The basic teaching we have from Bhagavad Gita is that we should have compassion for every living being. That is what I am trying to follow through these organizations.

**Your other philanthropic activities that are lesser known...**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Another organization I am supporting is in Delhi -- Guru Vishram Vridh Ashram managed by SHEOWS (Saint Hardy Educational and Orphan Welfare Society). They provide the destitute elderly who suffer from Alzheimer's and Dementia



With Ekal CEOs past and present - Bajrang Bagra and Ramesh Shah. (right) Vandana Tilak, Akshaya Patra USA's former CEO.

and are abandoned by their children and deserted on the streets of NCR with a place in their old age home. For the last 18 years they have been working to save the elderly who are dying on the roadside, footpaths, etc. as presently there are not many old age homes for paralytic, the disabled, and bedridden elderly which provide comprehensive support to them under one roof.

I am involved with many other organizations but I do not usually highlight my association with those as I am not giving too much time to them. I have instituted many scholarships in the name of my father in my high school, college, and other institutions in India which are associated with his memories. I donate regularly to organizations in India that support children and women suffering from no fault of their own. I also support Handicapped Children & Women's Aid that provides medical treatment to marginalized children and women. Another charity I support is SOS Children's Villages which provides a home and education for children that have been abandoned or are trapped in child trafficking.

The reason I focus on India is that there is so much poverty there. Here in the US, the state takes care of the poor but not in India. If we can take care of the people who have been forgotten otherwise, it will be a tremendous help and support for these people.

That is why my focus is on these organizations in India which help the people who would otherwise die or suffer immensely.

**What is so special about Ekal that appeals to you?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** My conviction is that education brings light into the life of human beings as they get empowered. They can do a job, set up their own business or industry with that knowledge. They can work to make their dreams come true with education. Education also broadens the mental horizon and enables human beings to accomplish their goals.

Ekal, in fact, is not just an educational organization, they have many different projects such as Gramotthan – rural development, Digital Ekal for the education of information technology, Sankara Shiksha – moral education aimed at building character and Ekal Aarogya – a telemedicine project aimed at providing health care to villagers in remote areas among others.

In the Gramotthan Project, they teach farmers scientific techniques to increase production, its quality and improve soil health. They empower women with tailoring centers where they learn

to stitch clothes and sell them for a profit. Ekal Aarogya is a telemedicine project in which village gram sevika, a woman volunteer, enters basic information of an ailing person on a phone or a tablet which is sent to the nearby doctor to prescribe treatment. The villager then can arrange to pick his medicine from the nearby designated pharmacy by himself or through someone else.

Under the Digital Ekal project, we provide tablets to kids for computer education. Then, there is Ekal on Wheels, a bus fitted with 12 computers, which goes to two villages every day to give computer education to children.

The Sankara Shiksha project is aimed at the moral well-being of the targeted villages. Drinking is a menace in many villages in India. The Kathakars (folk storytellers) use their skills of storytelling and anecdotes to encourage people to leave drinking and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Thus, Ekal does many things besides education and it's a well-rounded organization, which perhaps has a mini solution for most problems ailing rural India. They have covered over one lakh villages in India and run 6,000 schools in Nepal.

**How do you ensure that the charity you support wholeheartedly is worthwhile or making an impact?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** At Ekal, we have now engaged a firm in India to conduct impact analysis. Because many of the foundations we go to for support also like to see such analysis. Sometime this year, we should be able to get a report on the impact of the Ekal Foundation.

**How do you see yourself in the future?**

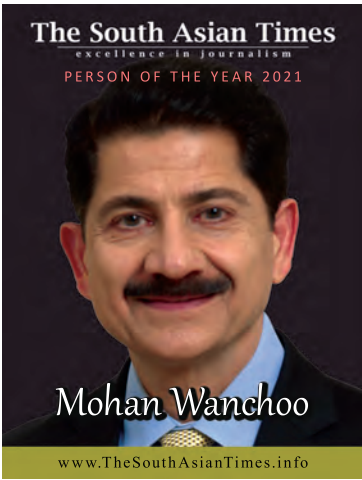
**Mohan Wanchoo:** I plan to do more philanthropic activities. Right now, I do not know what exactly but at some point I would know. There is a tremendous sense of fulfillment when we do something for people who are not fortunate enough as us. If we all start doing things for at least one not-so-well-to-do person, we can change the entire world. There are many successful people who can afford to help at least one person.



Mohan and Kavita Wanchoo with Sadhvi Ritambhara Devi in 2019. He supports her Vatsalya Gram movement to mainstream the marginalized members of the society in India.



Mohan Wanchoo co-chairs Sankara Eye Foundation's fundraising banquets held in New York. An avid singer, he is not averse to engaging audiences with Bollywood songs.



# Getting around for the good of Motherland and Community

Whether it is meeting dignitaries, celebs, or supporting politicians ranging from Congress members to presidential candidates irrespective of their party, Mohan Wanchoo stays focused on his aim – how can we get them to support India, the Indian community, Hindu causes and of course his charity work.



**With Anupam Kher**

Mohan Wanchoo met Anupam Kher at the Ekal gala in New York in 2018 as well as at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan where the film star had started his acting school.



**With Navtej Singh Sarna**

Wanchoo interacted with the then Indian Ambassador Navtej Singh Sarna at the Ambassador's residence in Washington DC in connection with a Nikki Haley event.



**With Whoopi Goldberg**

Mohan Wanchoo met Hollywood actress and humanitarian Whoopi Goldberg when she addressed a philanthropic conference.



**With Tulsi Gabbard**

Mohan Wanchoo supported Rep Tulsi Gabbard's campaign for President. A devout Hindu, the Democrat took the oath of office as Congress member on the Gita and has been a big supporter of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



**With Vivek Oberoi**

Mohan Wanchoo with actor Vivek Oberoi, who is the brand ambassador for Ekal Vidyalaya. The two met at the Ekal gala where Wanchoo was co-chair.



**With Nikki Haley**

Mohan Wanchoo supported Indian American Nikki Haley's campaign for South Carolina governor, meeting her at the Indian ambassador's residence in Washington DC. Later the US ambassador to UN, the Republican leader is now a contender to become the first woman President of the country.



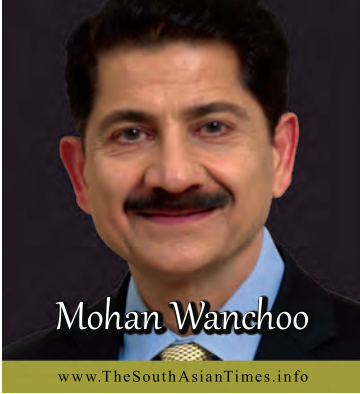
**With Manmohan Singh**

Mohan Wanchoo represented the Indian community in his meeting with the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on a visit to the US in 2011. Wanchoo also briefed the PM about his company Jasmine Universe that has pioneered energy management system to reduce carbon footprint.



**With Raja Krishnamoorthi**

Mohan Wanchoo supported Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi's re-election campaign. The 3-term Democratic Congressman from Illinois is a consistent supporter of India, Indian community and Hindu causes.



Mohan Wanchoo

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# CONGRATULATIONS & ACCLAMATIONS

*The announcement of Mr Mohan Wanchoo as The South Asian Times Person of the Year 2021 brought in a flurry of messages from those who have known him and admired his accomplishments and philanthropic activities.*

Allow me to let you know that he is one of our East Coast luminaries, the likes of Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella of the West Coast.

a very down to earth, most amicable, most personable individual who steps in to lead when the cause is humanitarian, philanthropy or any mega enterprise. He has done wonders and turned organizations like Ekal Vidyalaya and Sankara Eye Foundation into beacons of repute, enabling them to receive large donations from leading corporates, established businesses, and wealthy individuals to serve the needy.

it is one thing to achieve professional and financial success, but to use that status and the sphere of influence for the betterment of the underprivileged is the mark of a truly exalted person, and that is what Mohan ji is.

of whose causes he supports. Best of all, he is great company and can transport one with the gift of his mellifluous voice which is truly a blessing of Goddess Saraswati. I am proud to be his friend and salute him for this justly deserved award. I am honored to write this note about a person who I personally admire as a selfless person who truly wants to help less fortunate fellow beings.

He leaves a legacy anywhere his name gets attached. His supporting wife and family stand right beside him everywhere as he continues to advance, fulfil and walk in the footsteps of his father who was an educationist and primarily a great supporter of education for all.

A man who has achieved phenomenal success professionally and yet is so humble and caring. His work for the underprivileged people in India has involved not only a lot of financial commitment, but also investment of valuable personal time and effort, year after year, to organize massive fundraising events for numerous nonprofits like Ekal Vidyalaya and Sankara Eye Foundation, to name a few. On top of that, he is the quintessential family man, a great husband, and an equally great father. Mohan ji is a "Karma yogi" in the true sense.



Adish Jain

*Former Corporate Director of Danaher, now working on charitable projects with his wife, Asha Jain.*

My wife and I are deeply involved with the Ekal Organization in a project in Jharkhand, India, where our goal is to help extremely poor tribals become self-reliant.

Four years ago, Mohan reached out to us to help organize an Ekal Gala to raise funds for various Ekal Projects. I was impressed by how he pulled many of us together in setting a very high goal and organizing an Ekal Gala event in New York to raise funds from a large number of donors.

That event was a great success as it was the first time Ekal was able to raise over a million dollars in a single day. It was repeated the following year with a bigger goal.

When we could not hold a Gala event in person, Mohan shifted to virtual gala to again raise millions of dollars in a single event.

When I look back, I realize that we were successful in raising large funds primarily due to Mohan's leadership. He set very high goals in each gala and then found ways to reach and exceed that goal.

During the gala, he shared his personal experience of how he and his family were touched by villagers when they were visiting an Ekal Vidyalaya in rural India.

Although he was the biggest single donor, he put other donors in the limelight during gala events.

I am honored to write this note about a person who I personally admire as a selfless person who truly wants to help less fortunate fellow beings.

Like many who settle in the US, he continuously strived to pursue his goals and dreams and today as a highly successful person he is the envy as well as the pride of the Indian community.

Having had firsthand experience of problems in Kashmir, his heart is also set to make things right for all who suffered as Hindus and he pitches in to alleviate their suffering wherever he can. A great friend and inspirational advisor in need, an amazing singer and an individual who truly deserves this recognition - Congratulations Mohan ji!



Rakesh Kaul

*Kaul has had a distinguished business career as CEO. He has contributed to India chairs at universities and is author of 'The Last Queen of Kashmir'.*

Simple living and high thinking is the first quality that comes to mind as one reflects on Mohan Wanchoo ji. In Kashmir, success is not defined as the presence of achievements though Mohan ji is blessed with many. Success is defined as the absence of failure. And failure is absent in even the smallest of actions that he takes.

His sensitive heart makes him responsive to the world for things big or small.

He is unfailing in his courtesy to all including kindness towards those who can be of no use to him. His thoughtful mind always seeks to do dharma even amidst great uncertainty. His spirit is universal and comfortably manifests itself in a multiplicity of identities, whether Kashmiri, Indian, American, and global, all



Dr. Anil Mattoo

*Chief of Pulmonary Division at Long Island Community Hospital, Patchogue, NY.*

I commend The South Asian Times for choosing Mr. Mohan Wanchoo as the Person of the Year 2021. I have known Mohan ji for two decades and I can vouch that the honor is well deserved, and in many ways, not surprising to the people who have interacted with him. In life,



Ravindra Goyal, MD

*President of Hindu Center, Vice Chairman, Indo American Festivals Inc. (NY chapter)*

Mohan Wanchoo graduated from Columbia University and New York Institute of Technology in 1986 in Computer Science and went on to found and grow the software company EC Infosystems Inc.

I have had the pleasure of knowing him for almost four decades. Mohan is involved with Ekal Vidyalaya and has raised millions of dollars to provide education in India for needy children. He is also associated with Sankara Eye Foundation to help poor and needy patients bringing light in their lives.

He is not only a philanthropist, educationist, technocrat and entrepreneur, but also a great community leader.

Less known is his deep passion for Indian art, music (yes, he can croon very well) and traditional values.



Nilima Madan

*Financial adviser, Rotarian, community leader*

Mr. Mohan Wanchoo is Chairman of ECI MW Holding Company Inc., yet, those people close to him know him as



Subhash Gupta

*Advisory Board Chairman, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA*

You have made the perfect choice by selecting my friend, Mohan Wanchoo "The South Asian Times-Person of the Year 2021". There are so many good things to say about him.

He is such a humble, down to earth person who is always ready to help people in need, whether it's in India or USA. Hailing from a family displaced from Kashmir, he has come a long way and embodies the true story of achieving the American dream.

As a philanthropist, he has educated thousands of tribal and the most backward children in India.

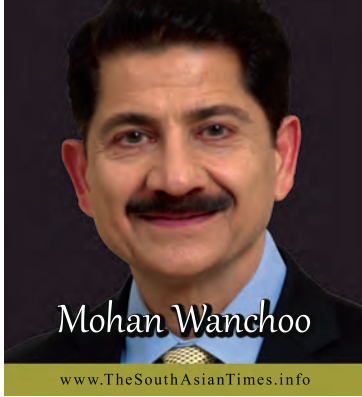


Arvind Vora

*Chairman of Long Island Multi Faith Forum and Shanti Fund.*

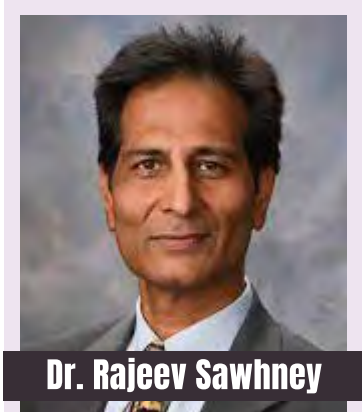
Over the years, The South Asian Times has developed into a consistent high value publication in which many of us take great pride. I have known Mehta family since the 1990's and the newspaper's hard-working staff since its inception. They all deserve our accolades as much as the Person of the Year.

Shri Mohan Wanchoo deserves a place in the select group of highly accomplished persons named in the past as Person of the Year by the SATimes.



Mohan Wanchoo

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Dr. Rajeev Sawhney

*Distinguished Professor, Operations & Supply Chain Mgt., Western Illinois University*

Mohan was my senior in St. Xavier School, Delhi – a kind and soft-spoken individual who inspired me then and still is a source of inspiration 45 years later. If you have been floored by his looks and melodious voice, wait till you see his heart, which is even more beautiful.

Humble to the core, with deep-rooted values Mohan believes in sharing his success with others who have helped him in this journey and with the underprivileged who are less fortunate. His tireless work, both in terms of contributing numerous hours and providing financial support, in bringing education and health for the poor and needy in India is commendable.

Having travelled this path before me, he is instrumental in guiding me on this path. I pray that he continues to inspire people to give back to the less privileged – and make the world a happier place.



Bruce Germano

*Former COO of Jasmine Universe, LLC, founded by Mohan Wanchoo*

I began working with Mohan in 2013, running a technology startup company named Jasmine Universe, that he had created. Through the years our relationship grew as he has become one of my closest and



# Mohan, My Brilliant Brother

Mohan Wanchoo flanked by (from left) elder brother Dr. Maharaj Wanchoo, daughter Tapasya, sister-in-law Ranjana and wife Kavita.

## Maharaj Wanchoo, PhD

*Former Director, Missile Programs at Northrop Grumman*

I congratulate the South Asian Times for selecting my younger brother, Mohan Wanchoo as the "Person of the Year".

Mohan is an accomplished businessman, but his heart is given to philanthropy. He always thinks and talks about the next project to expand the scope of

philanthropy to help the needy.

Being the youngest of us 5 siblings, Mohan had a very special upbringing. Along with the regular schooling, he exhibited great interest in music such that he took formal music training for 15 years. As a budding artist, his fame spread far

beyond the school clubs, and he was invited as a guest artist at large functions. This exposure built his character, and he leveraged his contacts for raising money for different causes to help the disadvantaged sections of the society.

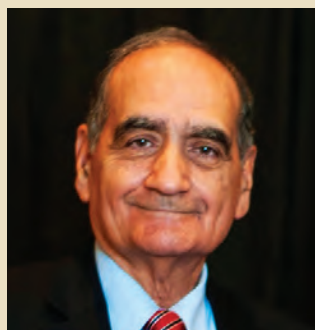
In parallel, he developed his technical skills and started his software business in the New York area. His dedication to the business turned it into a

multi-million dollar successful enterprise. During all this busy time, he did not forget his aim to help the society and has been very active in raising awareness and large funds for movements like Ekal Vidyalaya, Sankara Eye Foundation, Kashmiri Pandit causes and other needs of the society. He is the darling of our family and we wish him success in all his endeavors.

dearest friends. As a businessman, there are few people I have ever met who are like him; brilliant and hardworking, growing his business EC Infosystems from a dream and a challenge to the largest company of its kind in the energy industry.

I have personally witnessed his extensive commitment as a philanthropist to causes ranging from the underprivileged in India to local charities on Long Island. It is a commitment that is simply driven by his unparalleled desire to help the less fortunate, without looking for any recognition.

Mohan is truly deserving of this honor being bestowed on him as he is the consummate role model for the meaning behind the Person of the Year award.



Chand Bhan, MD

*Psychiatrist and Advisor, Kashmir Overseas Association*

I have known Mohan for over 3 decades. I remember his humble beginnings and the subsequent pursuit of excellence. He has been a hardworking, passionate, dedicated person with incredible energy and relentless fortitude in accomplishing his goals.

A true example of a self-made man, his success is attributed to his tireless work, sharp focus and determination. Mohan is a kind, soft spoken, compassionate, polite, caring, loving human being without any big ego. He has shown leadership qualities and done selfless service for the community.

Mohan has been a big philanthropist who has contributed to numerous causes over the years; his spirit of giving is unparalleled.

He is most passionate about Ekal Vidyalaya foundation to which he has been a great supporter as he believes in the value of education, especially for the under-privileged children in India and Nepal.

He is deserving of the honor of being chosen South Asian Times Person of the Year.

many lives with your philanthropic endeavors. It has helped innumerable kids receive education. With your beautiful heart, you are creating a beautiful world to live in for so many.

The value of a life is measured not by what we do for ourselves but what we offer to society. You stand very high in that scale and we are extremely proud of you. I am blessed to have you in my life.

## Uma Kapoor

*Mohan's friend, Executive Director at Morgan Stanley*

I am delighted to hear of Mohan Wanchoo's most deserved recognition. I have known him personally for 40 years and he has always stood out as a giving, caring and an outstanding humanitarian. Always ready to extend help and time to give solace to the needy, he is a living example of how to pay-it-forward unconditionally.

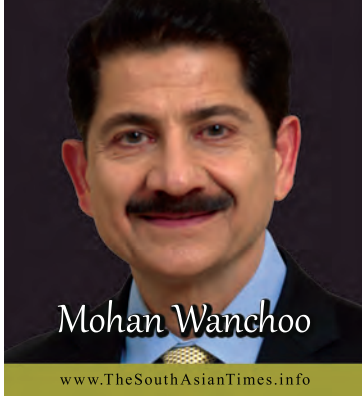


Mukesh Modi

*Entrepreneur, movie maker, community leader*

Mohan ji, you are an inspiration for all of us as you have shaped and transformed so

**Congratulations & Acclamations**



Mohan Wanchoo

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**Mohan Wanchoo had a Master's in computer science but no capital or business background. Starting from scratch, with persistence and hard work he built EC Infosystems brick by brick into a leading EDI software company for the energy industry in America. Here is how he described his journey to The South Asian Times.**



Mohan Wanchoo celebrating with his staff the "Innovator of the Year" award Jasmine Universe received from Innovate Long Island in 2017. Jasmine provides advanced energy efficiency solutions.



Mohan Wanchoo at the opening of his branch office in Pennsylvania. With headquarters in Uniondale, NY, EC Infosystems has offices in Allentown, PA, Houston, TX, and in Delhi-NCR, India.

**How did you get a start in the US?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** I was lucky that I landed my first job through the first interview I gave after immigrating to the US. Now I had means of livelihood and the company that hired me had a good tuition assistance program so they paid for my education also. I completed my Master's in Computer Science from Columbia University and New York Institute of Technology.

**How did you turn into an entrepreneur?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** I got laid off a few times so finally I thought of starting my own company to get over insecurity over jobs. I was into developing Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) software. I had been working on the idea since 1995 but founded my company officially in 1997.

I got the first opportunity to build EDI software for the shipping industry. I successfully developed EDI Software as a Service for my client that used the Port of New Jersey. The next year the energy industry also started opening up so I started customizing my software for the energy industry. Initially, it was used only by the state of California but today there are 22 states which are using this mandated EDI technology.

We are the largest provider of this Software as a Service to the deregulated energy

industry in the US. Our headquarter is in Long Island, NY but we have offices in Pennsylvania, Texas, and in India. 2014 was the year when we really started to take off and competition was not able to catch up with us.

**How is your experience of doing business in the US and how different it is from India?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** It's the difference between night and day. Here in the US, if you have passion and drive, you can carve out your own future. No doubt there are difficulties, but they are not insurmountable. In India, it's tough due to the level of difficulty one faces starting a venture. Before I moved to the US, once I applied for a telephone connection and the allotment was bluntly denied to me. One had to literally fight with everyone to do anything in India.

**Even in the US, isn't it difficult to start a business without capital?**

**Mohan Wanchoo:** I had zero capital to invest. Nowadays people look for capital to start but I did not start that way. I was just developing EDI software in my spare time

at home. When someone gave me the opportunity, they said I would be paid only if I solve their problem. They committed to me that if I solved their problem, they would terminate the contract with their existing vendor, which was GE (General Electric) and they would hire me as a vendor. I took on the challenge and continued to develop the software to meet their requirements. It took me a long time to develop a prototype and at the end I gave them a successful demo. They were not expecting that I would come back and show them a working prototype to solve their problem.

I had developed the software with my own resources. I started with no venture capital, no angel money. I didn't even know that stuff existed. But even after landing my first client, I was not making enough money. So, I did some consulting work alongside. In the first year, I was spinning like a top, working all by myself.

We are a large company now. I did hire more and more qualified people through the years and delegated responsibility to them.

**What are your future plans as a businessman?**

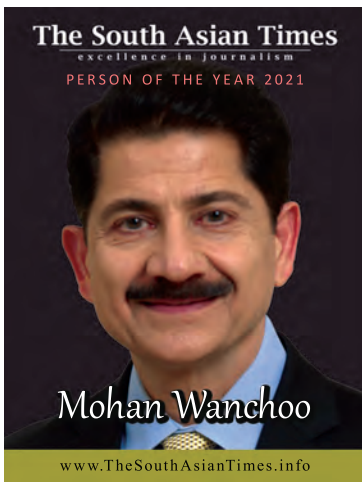
**Mohan Wanchoo:** I plan to work more on Jasmine Universe. This company was named after the Jasmine flower (Chameli in Hindi) as this product was aimed at reducing the carbon footprint on our planet. We wanted to give a name that gives the consumer a feeling of well-being. Jasmine is white and signifies purity and has a beautiful smell.

Business opportunities are always there to explore. But one-third of my time is now spent in philanthropic activities. There is a tremendous sense of fulfillment when we do something for people who are not fortunate enough in comparison to us.



EC Infosystems received the prestigious Lightpath Innovator of the Year Award in 2013. Lightpath, an enterprise fiber provider, rated the Mohan Wanchoo owned enterprise as the best from among 100 hi-tech companies in the Eastern United States.





Mohan Wanchoo

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By Parveen Chopra

Mohan Wanchoo's image of a down-to-earth, no-airs person is not just for public consumption. When you visit his home – it is in a decent neighborhood of Old Westbury, sure—you do not see any ostentation. Mohan and Kavita Wanchoo make you feel comfortable. They were their normal selves during the interviews and the photo session. In between, they had a video chat with their daughter, Tapasya, who lives in San Francisco, which gave more than a hint that they are a close-knit, affectionate family.

Kavita Ji treated me and photographer Sanjay Sura to a simple vegetarian meal of salad, dal and an exotic dish of lotus root cooked with green leafy vegetables, which she said was a staple in Kashmiri households. At dinner, conversation flowed freely from health tips to world affairs.

Kavita Wanchoo is an accomplished woman in her own right. A civil engineer by profession, she works as Project Manager in the Department of Environmental Protection of the City of New York. In her interview, she filled in with some lesser known aspects of Mohan Wanchoo's personality. (See her interview on next page).

**Excerpts from the interview with Mohan Wanchoo:**

*Tell us about your life in India and family background.*

Mohan Wanchoo: I was born in Delhi in 1957. I lived in India till the age of 23 before I shifted to the US for my studies. I was a physics graduate and had almost completed my master's from St. Stephen's College but decided to shift to the US. I got lucky with my first job in the US and then studied at Columbia University and the New York Institute of Technology to com-



plete a master's in Computer Science.

We lived in many places in Delhi including Model Town, Green Park, Probyn Road, and Ashok Vihar. My father, Professor V. N. Wanchoo, was the Additional Director of Education for the Delhi Administration. He was a professor of education

# Family Man

## and Multifaceted Personality

with NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) before he was made Additional Director in Delhi. He was also posted as Principal of Regional College of Education in Ajmer and also was the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Rajasthan University for a brief period.

My father was a man of lofty ideals. He fought corruption in India and was unwav-

of soliciting private tuition work in the evenings. He brought us up in the strictest environment and the ideals he stood for, remain with us forever. He followed the right path and went through difficulties and hardships but never gave up on his ideals. That had a very strong impact on all of us 5 brothers and sisters. (My two sisters are based in Delhi while two brothers are here in the US).



Photos: Sanjay Sura

Kavita Wanchoo is fully supportive of her husband's philanthropic and community activities.

ering in his pursuit. In fact, they shifted him to Regional College in Ajmer to root out corruption in that institution. He was posted as an Additional Director of Education in Delhi for the same purpose. Wherever he went, he rooted out corruption and made new enemies and they would finally create a situation for him to be transferred to his next posting.

But he stuck to his principles and never succumbed to pressure or threats. I remember an incident when hundreds of teachers gathered in front of our home as he had transferred them away from their locality so that they could focus on their job instead

I was schooled at St. Xavier's School in Delhi and then graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Despite my education in Catholic institutions, I was much grounded in our ancient scriptures. No matter what education system I went through, the Hindu tradition always prevailed because of the influence and ideology of my parents and their values.

My father, a physicist, always got attracted to STEM people turned spiritual. He followed Osho Rajneesh, and then Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Later he became a follower of Sant Darshan Singh ji of Radha Soami Satsang Beas. He used to meditate a

lot and asked us to follow him. I have been meditating and doing yoga since childhood.

*You went back to India to get married?*

Mohan Wanchoo: Yes, I went back in 1987 to get married to Kavita. The situation in Kashmir was normal at the time and we got married in Srinagar. Kavita had graduated from the Regional College of Engineering, Srinagar, and was working in the PWD department. She joined me in the US after a few months. She has been very supportive in my entire endeavor. Here in New York, Kavita works as a Project Manager for New York City. Our daughter Tapasya works for Tesla in San Francisco.

*Tell us about your multifarious extracurricular activities.*

Mohan Wanchoo: I exercise regularly. I have been doing yoga since childhood. We used to follow a TV program by Swami Dharendra Brahmachari on Yoga. I was a prolific runner. I run occasionally now. I played cricket and badminton in India. Hobbies I had aplenty.

I represented my college at IIT Bombay in an All India singing and instrumental music competition. Famous music composer duo Kalyanji-Anandji was the chief guest at the function. They gave me the first prize for Sitar and first prize for singing and offered to take me under their wings. However my father did not allow me take up music as a profession. I learned sitar for 14 years and even passed "Sangeet Visharad", a proficiency exam. I learned Sitar from Pt Panna Lal Chaurasia and Pt Babu Lal Ji. But I do not have any for-

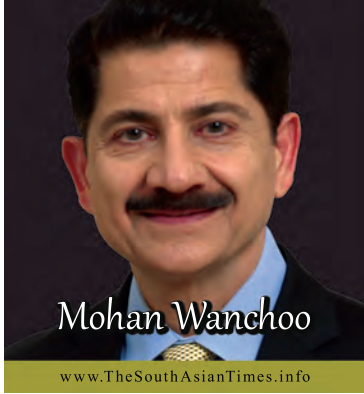


Mohan Wanchoo has proficiency in playing the sitar but is more in demand to sing Bollywood songs at charity and community events.

mal education in vocal music. I continue to sing Bollywood songs at charity events, at Ekal Galas, and banquets of the Sankara Eye Foundation, at KOA annual events etc. At the opening of Ekal events I sing the Indian National Anthem – Jana, Gana, Mana.

I loved photography and became secretary of the Photographic Society of my college. I loved nature photography and my photo features used to be published in the Morning Echo supplement of Hindustan Times.

I was also very much into theater. I performed at Triveni Kala Sangam, Indian National Theater, and Sapru House in Delhi. I did plays like 'Pagla Ghoda' and 'Vaah Re Vigyapan' by legendary dramatist Badal Sircar.



Mohan Wanchoo

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Our people have it in them, all they need is opportunities which we can provide through education. That is the best way to give back.

I am by the side of Mohan when I can. I attend the Ekal galas, Sankara banquets, Vatsalya Gram events, etc.

he hires more Americans and is not fixated on just hiring Indians. This is because the US has given us so much, we should reciprocate by giving back. His programmers are people of all ethnicities. He has been a good boss to his employees, they find him

and American cultures. She used to go to Kathak school. She speaks Hindi and Kashmiri at home. We used to take her to India every two years. She has good values and is a smart girl. She graduated in Industrial Engineering from Northwestern Univer-

## Mohan has acted well in all the roles

*Tell us about some qualities and personality traits of Mohan Ji that only you will know.*

Kavita Wanchoo: He is very hardworking. That is a great quality - when we came to this country, he used to do two or three jobs to make ends meet. Slowly he started his own business and came up to where he is today. He is a good father, a good brother, son - he has acted well in all the roles.

I have also been working all along, serving in New York City's Department of Environmental Protection for almost 25 years.

But most of all, he likes to help people to the best of his ability. Even during Covid, he sent a lot of funds and resources to India.

Here in the USA, he has been contributing to the Red Cross.

*How is he as a boss in his company?*

Kavita Wanchoo: Having his office here,

friendly and approachable.

*You had to flee Kashmir, how do you feel about it?*

Kavita Wanchoo: It is very sad, I grew up in Srinagar, had my school and college education there. To see my parents who had built their business and everything, who had to run away one fine morning, with nothing in their pocket. For two years they were living in Jammu where they had to live in cramped quarters. I saw my father literally going from riches to rags. As a civil engineer, he had a construction company. They lost all contracts because they could not go back to finish the projects. He had to start from scratch late in his life. It was very hard for my family.

My marriage to Mohan in 1987 was the last wedding in my family. Things had started unraveling and by 1989-90 all Kashmiri Pandits were driven out.

*What kind of upbringing you gave your daughter, Tapasya?*

Kavita Wanchoo: Tapasya has been raised by me, my parents and Mohan. She is a good blend of both Indian

**- Kavita Wanchoo**

sity and then did her MBA from MIT. She worked with Deloitte, The New York Times, and is now with Tesla. She works very hard and is a perfectionist -- like her father.



Excerpts from an interview with Kavita Wanchoo:

*The South Asian Times: How supportive are you of his philanthropic activities?*

Kavita Wanchoo: Very much. It is great work to help people of our great country -- where we came from, where our roots are. Growing up, we saw how our parents had to work hard for our upbringing, to give us the best of education, etc. India is our motherland, and America being our breadwinner country, we always like to go back and help so that we can uplift our own people, so they come up to par and India also rises to become one of the best countries in the world.

*Kavita and Mohan did a pilgrimage to the sacred Mount Kailash five years ago. To prepare for the last part of the journey, a trek high up in rarefied air, they practiced walking miles from Long Island to Queens for months altogether.*



## Papa sets an incredible example for me to live by

**- Tapasya Wanchoo**

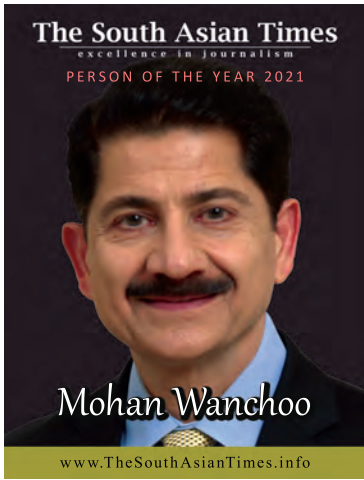


It's often hardest to put into words what the people closest to us truly mean, and this is certainly true of my dear Papa. If you'd asked me when I was a kid, I'd have said Papa was the most hardworking man in town — sleeping four hours a night while working two, sometimes three jobs, just to support us and our extended family in India. Though he's never said this to me, I suspect his motivation to start his own company stems from his deep sense of responsibility to those around him.

As I've grown older, though, I've seen my dad in a much fuller context. I've watched how he's a magnet in every room he's in. I've observed how he has remained humble despite his many accomplishments. I've witnessed how he is committed himself to his community after having taken care of those around him. And I've learned from how he handles life's biggest challenges with grace. Papa sets an incredible example for me to live by, and for that I love him and will be forever grateful.



Tapasya, who prefers to spell her last name as Wancho, is an MBA from MIT and works as Product Manager, Tesla in San Francisco.



Mohan Wanchoo

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# AIRING THE FORGOTTEN KASHMIRI PANDITS ISSUE

**M**ohan Wanchoo is a true-blue Kashmiri Pandit. He also carries a stab wound inflicted on Kashmiri Pandits forced to flee the Valley and become exiles in their own country. It happened with his father in 1947 and his wife in 1990. As New York Coordinator of the Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora, he has tried to bring the issue on the front burner. He has helped Vivek Agnihotri's 'Kashmir Files' movie disseminate the message in America. He himself made a documentary with TV anchor Ashok Vyas on the forgotten genocide titled 'Untold Stories of Kashmiri Pandits', which is available on YouTube.

## Excerpts from an interview with him on the topic:

*TSAT: How did you get involved with the Kashmir Files movie project?*

**Mohan Wanchoo:** This is one issue – forced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland - that India and her government have forgotten for the last 30 years. Even the common people do not know about it in full as it was never covered in the mainstream media. 'Kashmir Files' writer-director Vivek Agnihotri has done a lot of research on this slow-burning topic.

Vivek and his wife Pallavi Joshi had come to the US two years ago and had met many Kashmiri people living here. They planned to make a movie on the subject and asked for help which we happily agreed to provide.

The movie had many screenings in US cities over the last 2 months before its official release on January 26, 2022. It is spreading the message of what exactly happened to Kashmiri Pandits in 1989. How

they were slaughtered and made to flee their own homes overnight in dire circumstances.

The 'Kashmir Files' team toured 13 cities in the US and held town halls at many places including Harvard and universities in California and Washington DC. They disseminated an urgent message to the public as well as to politicians.

As New York Coordinator of Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD), I helped them hold screenings in New York. The tour started with the screening at Bombay Theater in Queens.

I became a member of GKPD around three years ago and we have sent hundreds of oxygen concentrators and other relief material to India during the Covid-19 pandemic. The original and oldest organization named Kashmiri Overseas Association (KOA) has also done a phenomenal job in sending relief supplies to refugee camps in Kashmir and to other non-Kashmiri populations in other parts of India.

## What moved you to join GKPD?

**Mohan Wanchoo:** There is a lot of hurt, agony, and bad memories associated with what had happened to Pandits in Kashmir. Thousands were slaughtered and half a million were forced to flee, leaving behind everything they possessed.

My wife was a victim of this exodus. Her family had to flee overnight as they were told that they were next on target. They ran and managed to reach Jammu somehow and then migrated to Delhi in 1990. There are many such families in the US who had gone through the same agony and ordeal of being displaced from their homeland while the world never came to know about all this.

## How is the situation in Kashmir now?

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Article 370 has been abrogated making Kashmir fully integrated with India. Now all the laws of India are fully applicable to the whole of Jammu and Kashmir. Now they are working on delimitation of constituencies in Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh. Earlier, the representation was heavily tilted in favor of the Valley, but now Jammu and Ladakh would also get their fair share. It is expected that Jammu would get more seats as it has a bigger population than the Valley. Many infrastructure projects are being undertaken in the area. Rome was not built in a day and these things will take time to shape up but they have started for sure.

## What about the resettlement of Pandits in Kashmir?

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Around 600-800 people have gone back to the Valley but local Muslims do not like it. They connive to target Kashmiri Pandits so that no one dares to go back to their homes. Many people have given the greatest sacrifice and we hope that eventually, the government will prevail and slowly Hindus will start moving back into their homes in Kashmir.

There are around 500 families of Kashmiri Pandits in the USA and all feel very intensely about the situation over there. Most of them live in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut and some are in California, Texas, and Chicago.

## You call Kashmir a cradle of civilization...

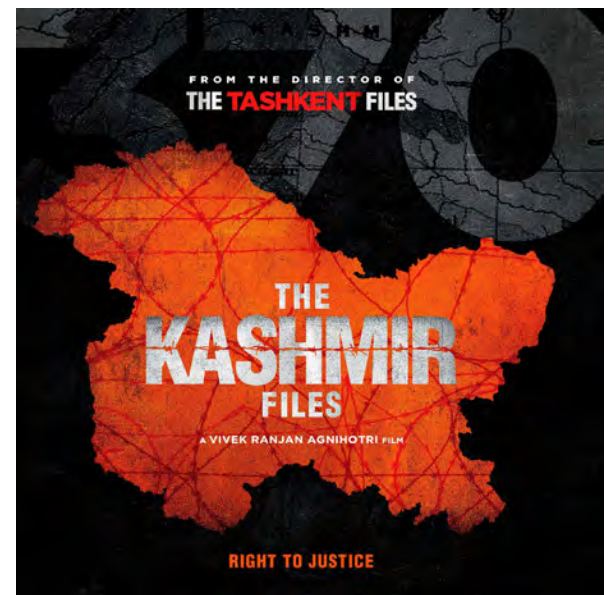
**Mohan Wanchoo:** Yes, Kashmir indeed was a cradle of civilization, a fountainhead. Panini wrote his treatise on Sanskrit grammar here, and Patanjali wrote his Yoga Sutra in Kashmir. Adi Shankaracharya had his permanent seat and math in Kashmir. It has been home to many of the great scriptures of Hinduism. Sharda University, now in ruins in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, was the biggest institution of higher learning even in comparison to Nalanda, which was a Buddhist center.

Lalitaditya Muktapada, the great emperor and maker of the famous Martanda Sun temple, ruled a territory in the 8th century stretching from Iraq to Thailand, but there is no mention of

him in history books. It is surprising that all the contributions of Kashmir in the fields of literature, culture, drama, and mathematics have been wiped out of the history books. Thus, Kashmir was truly a cradle of civilization that produced both warriors and the learned. Even today, most Kashmiri are inclined towards education (as my father was) and related fields instead of doing business. Many in my community looked askance at me when I turned an entrepreneur.

## What is unique about Kashmiris?

**Mohan Wanchoo:** Kashmiri Pandits usually put their children through rigor to



Mohan Wanchoo has helped Vivek Agnihotri's 'Kashmir Files' movie screenings in America to disseminate information about the issue of Kashmiri Pandits.

Mohan Wanchoo is New York Coordinator of Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD), which has held many protest demonstrations in America to expose the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits in their homeland.



make them study. They are also remarkable in other fields such as arts, acting, theater, journalism, and music. Education attracts them more than financial affluence. They are supposed to carry the baton of our scriptures and lead a life as per the scriptures. At least, it is expected from them, hence they are called "Pandit". They have a higher responsibility on their shoulders that Sanatan dharma is propagated and eventually, "dharma" wins over "adharma".

Kashmiri Pandits follow a lunar calendar called "Jantri" (called Panchang elsewhere in India). We had our own knowledge systems of astronomy, astrology, natya, yoga, Sanskrit language and grammar from Hindu scriptures. Though they were 10,000 years old we never felt the need to adopt the changing concept of education as the knowledge we possessed was self-contained.

## What is Kashmiriyat for you?

**Mohan Wanchoo:** My father used to teach at St Joseph's College in Baramulla in Kashmir when Kabalis raided the valley in 1947. Later he left Kashmir for Delhi. Thus, we were thrown out of our homeland in 1947.

But wherever we lived, each tradition of Kashmiri culture was followed ritualistically by my parents. We used to celebrate all festivals. We Kashmiri Pandits are orthodox and even for our birthdays till today we follow the lunar calendar "Jantri". My mother used to make Kashmiri food at home though she picked up a few Punjabi dishes from the neighborhood in Delhi. With my parents we used to speak in Kashmiri and in Hindi among the siblings.