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Below us, the mango garden stood still except for the sudden rustle of a falling leaf or the lazy call of a belching cow.

These are moments I cherish the most from my travels to Shathkhira. They move me and remind me of Pico Iyer saying so appropriately, "Anybody who travels knows that you're not really doing so in order to move around—you're traveling in order to be moved."

There were many more such moments in this land of old temples, poets, and tidal rivers. Here, smack in the middle of Tala Bazaar, is a looming mosque, pinkish in tone, every time I cross it in the soft glow of the evening sun. It somehow still

stands in perfect sync with the modernish rural bazaar of Tala in the backdrop. On my way to the rest-house, one day I took a moment to just stand there and observe how this relic of the old comes to life after the call for evening prayers. It is a sight to behold; there is both a calmness and a frenzy to the process. The bazaar slows down, the men pull their shutters, many others emerge from the background and all walk-in unison towards the mosque. Some stop to perform ablutions in the small pond right at the footsteps of the mosque. Locals tell me this is Tetulia Shahi Mosque, also known as the Khan Bahadur Salamatullah Mosque. It was founded by Khan Bahadur Maulvi Qazi Salamatullah Khan, the then Zamindar (feudal-lord) from the Qazi family of Tetulia,

which lends it the name. Built in Mughal style in between 1858 to 1859, the mosque feels like a portal through time.

A visit to this place, even if for a day, feels like a time vortex. Time slows down here. One fine summer evening, I found myself sitting at an empty Hindu burial ground, while the sun shone with an odd determination, creating mirages in the fields in front of me. Children played in this heat, some even tried to lift off their kites. Yeah, time indeed slows down here. And it is a wonderful feeling, even for a grand few minutes, to feel each moment so intensely, like how Iyer said, "Travel, for me, is a little bit like being in love, because suddenly all your senses are at the setting marked 'on'."



These students are making efforts to connect in this time of struggle. Left without their lifelines, they meet at their colleges and across campuses and discuss rumours of killings—taking care to do it in person, never online. This community has leaned on each other in more ways than one, supporting each other not just financially, but emotionally.

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Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has dubbed the abrogation of Article 370 "an internal issue of India", advocating that as a matter of principle, maintaining regional peace and stability should come first. The statement comes one day after India's External Affairs Ministry held meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the head of the MFA.

Dhar says he never thought of going to his university for financial support. For him, the institution means the government, and therefore has little to offer in terms of protection. "They don't support us. They didn't give any response," he adds, referring to the MFA's statement. "(The university) just said, don't (protest) here. This is your final warning."

All three students have participated in protest efforts from Bangladesh, but have seen it is to no effect. "I saw the report from some minister saying it is an internal matter of India. We tried to protest here, but we could tell that the ministers were uncomfortable. You could see it from their faces," Shafi said.

Despite the government's neutrality, Dhaka has been a stage for protest in the past month. Four hundred Kashmiri

students gathered at Dhaka University on August 8, not only to peacefully demonstrate against Indian oppression, but also call on Bangladesh for explicit action and solidarity. The students chanted slogans and carried banners calling for the immediate restoration of internet, landline, and mobile networks, marching in the rain all the way to the Shaheed Minar.

Even before August 6, Rashid and Dhar missed the comforts of home. Though they were quick to extol of the virtues of Bangladeshi people, they said they had a difficult time adjusting to the food, city life and temperature. At college, they mix with both Bangladeshi and the 50-odd Kashmiri students studying with them, finding solace in their friendships. Lots of people are childhood friends who come here, knowing each other from Kashmir, Rashid says.

These students are making efforts to connect in this time of struggle. Left without their lifelines, they meet at their colleges and across campuses and discuss rumours of killings—taking care to do it in person, never online. This community has leaned on each other in more ways than one, supporting each other not just financially, but emotionally. Enrolled in vigorous programs, missing their families

and worried about their homeland, this period of unrest has taken a severe toll on their mental health.

"From that day, (the killings) are all we can talk about. We are disturbed. Depressed," Dhar says.

"It's complete mental torture," Rashid adds. "We can't talk because we are afraid. We are far from home, in a random place."

The state of fear and insecurity these students face are in our country's jurisdiction to, if not fix, then to at least mitigate. There must be space for this conversation to be had. Other than the first gathering in front of the Shaheed Minar (after the troops were first deployed in Kashmir), there has been no other noise from local Kashmiri students, even though the situation is ongoing, and for them, increasingly dire. As the tension wears on, they are growing more afraid to speak out about their struggles. It's not safe, both Dhar and Shafi echo.

"I want to go home to Srinagar, work as a doctor in Kashmir. In Indian-occupied Kashmir," Dhar clarified, laughing slightly. "We are waiting for the day we can go back. Kashmir is like heaven on earth. It's mountains, it's nature, it's water, it's fresh air. It's sacred."

*Names of the Kashmiri students have been changed.