

## 10 Change-makers Who Are Transforming Kashmir for A Better Tomorrow



Situation on the ground in Kashmir is changing for the better. (File pic: News18)

These are the people who have been cleaning up a system that had corroded over decades, re-establishing the rule of law, introducing innovations and winning the confidence of the public.

Jammu and Kashmir has seen three decades of bloody conflict sponsored by Pakistan, but two and a half years after the scrapping of special status under Article 370 of the Constitution, the situation on the ground is changing for the better.

Lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha has been pushing for development and dialogue as a way forward towards a political process eventually. With the Delimitation Commission completing its report within the next few weeks, Jammu and Kashmir could very well see elections in the near future.

In the past many months, however, there have been several silent change-makers who have been cleaning the system from within for better governance as it should be in a democratic system.

News18 profiles 10 such top change-makers in the system, some selected while others elected, who have played a crucial role in transforming Kashmir with their positive zeal and commitment:



The Chinar Corps Commander who understands the pulse of terrorism in the Valley and the beneficiaries of the terror conflict industry around it, Lt Gen DP Pandey, is the General Officer Commanding of 15th Corps with its headquarters in Badami Bagh Cantonment in Srinagar.

Lt Gen Pandey is credited with coining the term ‘white collar terrorists’ for those who encourage recruitment of youth into terror ranks and seek financial and political benefits out of it and yet have remained untouched until today by the system.

He is also known for giving a free hand to his boys during an encounter with terrorists and yet monitoring every move closely until the last terrorist is neutralised. The tenure of Lt Gen Pandey has also seen a record surrender of terrorists as well as national symbols getting their rightful respect and dignity in Kashmir after decades. With past experience of ADGPI at Army HQs in New Delhi, Lt Gen Pandey understands the importance of information warfare and hence has put a system in



place to motivate the aawam (public), especially youth, who drive the narrative of progress, prosperity, and peace.

Under his leadership, Lal Chowk has become the epicentre of activities led by common Kashmiris and tourists feeling more relaxed while travelling through the length and breadth of the Valley. Lt Gen Pandey is also known to have motivated and encouraged young Kashmiri sportspersons, artists, and creative minds.

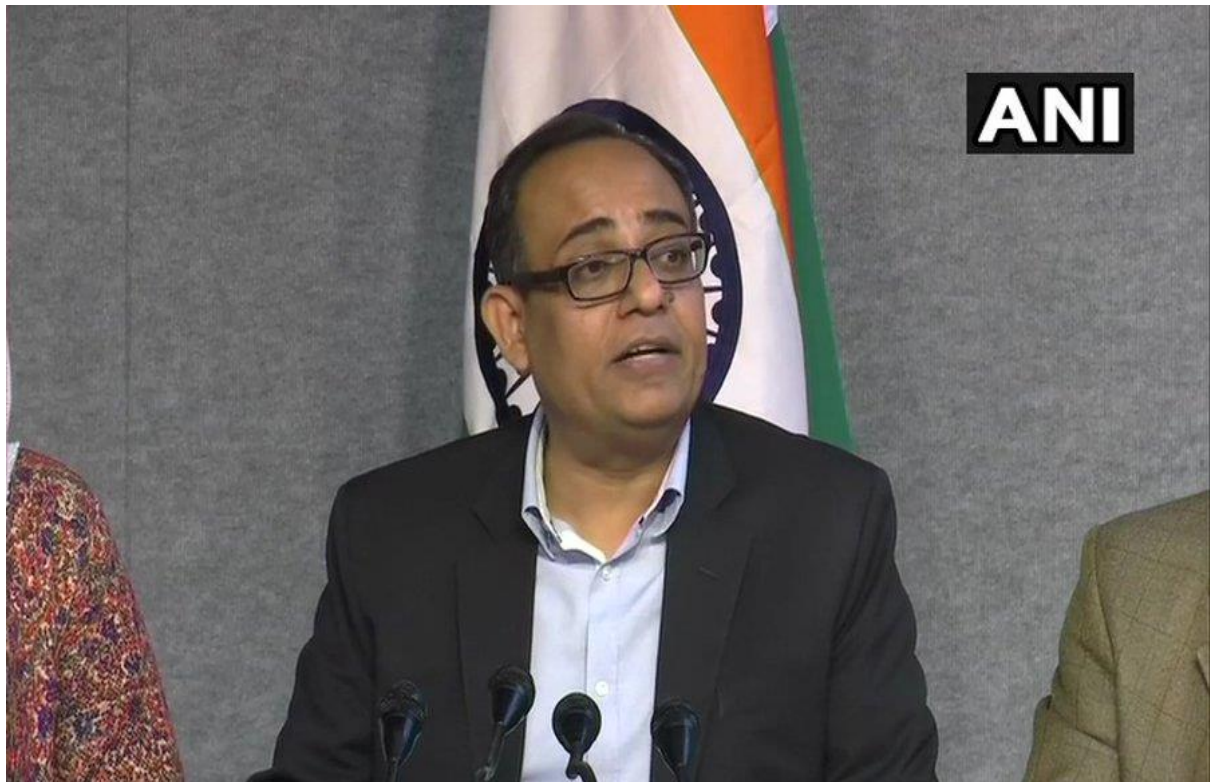
### **RASHMI RANJAN SWAIN, SPECIAL DGP**

Known for his scientific policing, Special DGP (CID) Rashmi Ranjan Swain, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the 1991 batch, may be the intelligence chief of Jammu and Kashmir Police but could very well be the next Director General of Police of the Union Territory. Swain is an experienced Pakistan analyst who has had a noteworthy stint with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Credited with the creation of the State Investigation Agency (SIA) in J&K on the lines of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Swain is bringing much-needed finesse to policing and investigation to clean the radicalisation within and outside the system. His no-nonsense approach and incorruptible image has the separatists and their propagandists worried in Kashmir.

Swain, however, is a silent observer who keeps mostly away from the media glare. His tenure has seen action against Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Youth President Waheed Para as well as sons of Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist and Chief of United Jihad Council Syed Salahuddin. The biggest achievement, however, remains maintaining peace in the Valley even after the death of radical separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani. This officer, who hails from Odisha, may strictly go by the book but knows how Kashmir needs tweaking and twisting to put an efficient system in place.

Spoken of highly by both the people of Kashmir as well as in the J&K Police, Swain is responsible for internal cleansing and uprooting the seeds of anti-national elements within the system. Swain is a rare top officer who enjoys respect from all sections of the police force.



A senior bureaucrat known for his simplicity, understanding, and for remaining accessible to the public, Rohit Kansal is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the 1995 batch who is currently Principal Secretary of the Higher Education Department and Information in J&K.

Kansal was the face of the Jammu & Kashmir government after the abrogation of Article 370 clauses on August 5, 2019, and handled the sensitive cooperation and understanding between security forces and the civil administration as well.

Kansal's tenure in recent months has seen important and significant stints with the Power Development Department as well as the Planning, Development and Monitoring Department. Lt Governors and Chief Secretaries may come and go but Kansal remains a trusted bureaucrat with experience of working closely with all political families of J&K.



Charu Sinha is an IPS officer of the 1996-batch Telangana cadre, who was Inspector General of CRPF, Jammu sector before being transferred to Srinagar. Charu Sinha has earlier also worked as IG, the Bihar sector in CRPF and has dealt with Naxals during her posting.

Charu, right after being posted as IG Srinagar sector, has impeccably divided her focus between lending an impetus to mental well-being, welfare, living standards, modernisation, operational efficiency of ranks and file under her command.

An absolute no-nonsense officer with a flair for fighting against terror and its milieu concomitantly, Charu has certainly managed to shatter the glass ceiling and push the bar further up. As an experienced police leader, having served in and academically surfed through conflicts across the country, Charu firmly believes in the 'connect' with the public and has thus curated a very ambitious and promising programme for the improvement in the standards of urban governance and primary education between the UT government and Praja Foundation and Azim Premji University, respectively. The programme, experts believe, would empower the citizenry in terms of community participation in local governance and result in a spike in the standard of education at government-owned primary schools across Srinagar City.



## **VIJAY KUMAR, IGP, J&K POLICE, KASHMIR**



Vijay Kumar is a 1997-batch IPS officer of the Jammu and Kashmir cadre who has been the Inspector General of Police overseeing the Kashmir valley for more than two years.

Kumar was given the most crucial role of policing in India immediately after the scrapping of Article 370 sections in 2019, which was a challenging phase for law and order in Jammu and Kashmir. Even though Pakistani propaganda was at its peak, Kumar held a tight grip on the situation and didn't let any stone-pelting or mob violence happen in Kashmir.

Under his leadership, over 170 terrorists were eliminated in Kashmir in 2021, including the entire top leadership of Jaish-e-Mohammed. Over 400 terrorists have been killed in his tenure of 26 months so far.

Kumar is known for his simplicity but is a tough cop when it comes to dealing with terrorists and their overground support network. Earlier, he led the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) as Inspector General in the most-critical Maoist heartlands of Bastar, central India. No wonder he has been awarded three gallantry medals for anti-terror operations in Jammu and Kashmir.



Shahid Iqbal Choudhary is an IAS officer of the 2009 batch from the Jammu and Kashmir cadre and is presently Secretary to the Tribal Affairs Department and CEO of J&K Mission Youth, as well as the Mission Director of Skill Development Mission, J&K.

Shahid, who hails from remote Rehan village in the Rajouri district of J&K, is one of the most decorated bureaucrats of Jammu and Kashmir in the last two decades. He was the first Muslim from Jammu and the first from his community of Gujjars to become a civil servant. Early in life, Shahid had to trek 16 kilometres every day to school.

Under his leadership, tribal communities have been given their due under the Forest and Land Rights Act. He received the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration for outstanding contribution in 2014-15. Shahid has led several crucial districts as District Magistrate including Srinagar, Bandipora, Rajouri, Udhampur, Kathua, Reasi and Leh.

Shahid is known for touching the lives of people and making a difference. Having strived hard early in life, he understands the problems of the common man in J&K. He is famous for making bridges in remote areas and constructing bunkers for people in border villages so they wouldn't fall victim to Pakistan Army shelling.



Rakesh Balwal, a 2012-batch IPS officer, was moved from the Manipur cadre to the AGMUT cadre recently. Balwal as the Chief of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in Jammu and Kashmir led the investigation in several high-profile terror-related cases and cracked the brutal Pulwama suicide bombing in 2019 in which 40 CRPF personnel sacrificed their lives. He personally worked night and a day on the 13,800-page chargesheet in the Pulwama terror attack case. The Union Home Minister's medal for excellence in the investigation for 2021 was awarded to Balwal for his hard work in the Pulwama case. Balwal's role has been well-documented in the book *The Loverboy of Bahawalpur* by Rahul Pandita.

Balwal, who is known to have an honest image, has been instrumental in shattering the backbone of terrorists in South Kashmir and exposing their hawala links across the border in Pakistan. Hailing from Udhampur and a son of the soil from a well-respected family, Balwal is known to have entered the police force with a sense of unparalleled passion and a deep sense of commitment to bring a change.

At present Balwal has been posted as the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Srinagar in Kashmir, which is one of the most important and critical roles in the J&K Police. Immediately after taking over, Balwal has worked silently on midnight counter-terror operations based on human and tech intelligence to eradicate terrorists from Srinagar.





Dr Piyush Singla is an IAS officer of the 2012 batch of Jammu & Kashmir cadre who is presently posted as Deputy Commissioner of Anantnag in South Kashmir. Singla, who has degrees of MBBS and medical law, is known for being accessible to the common people and having a spirited personality to develop an instant rapport with common Kashmiris.

Under his command, Anantnag won the best district award in the country for the Nasha Mukti Bharat Abhiyan implementation in Jammu and Kashmir by the Ministry of Social Justice in 2021. Earlier, Singla also won the National E-Governance Award for Project Sakoon in 2020 for his work in Udhampur. In Udhampur he also won the National Water Award for Project Jeevika. During the

parliamentary elections in 2019, Singla won the State Award for Best District Election officer.

Singla has also represented the Shrine Board and presented a paper on District Risk Reduction in the UN Conference at UNDRR, Mexico Cancun in 2016. In 2018, he won the National Award on World Toilet Day in District Ganderbal of Central Kashmir among the top 10 collectors in the country. Having led three crucial districts across Jammu & Kashmir, Singla is seen as a bureaucrat with hands-on experience on the ground and is slated to make it to important roles in the near future.

#### **JUNAID AZIM MATTU**



One of the youngest Mayors in India and arguably the suavest, Junaid Azim Mattu has traversed an exceptional personal and political journey from being a young financial analyst in the United States, an American Permanent Resident, in 2009 to a serious challenger to the political monopoly of the traditional mainstream that persisted in Srinagar for more than seven decades.



A hands-on administrator with a distinguished academic background and the heir of an illustrious Srinagar family, Junaid Mattu is as comfortable drafting an urban governance policy in the company of technical experts as he is in the midst of his political workers — a growing tribe in areas which were traditional bastions of the National Conference in Srinagar. His recent public rally in Srinagar, in Hazratbal (an assembly segment he is expected to contest from), is widely believed to be the largest Srinagar has seen in the recent past.

In his second successive tenure as the Mayor of Srinagar, Mattu has helmed various landmark policies that have transformed the Srinagar Municipal Corporation from a government department to an urban local government. He has worked intensively to liberalise the city's laws and regulations, upgrade the infrastructural and institutional capacities of the Srinagar Municipal Corporation and decentralise the delivery of public services. Under Mattu's leadership, SMC has now entered into knowledge and capacity-building collaborations with prestigious institutions across the country. More recently, the central government invited Mattu along with a select group of Mayors from across the country to suggest recommendations to reform the 'Urban Governance Architecture' in India. Among his more prominent achievements, Srinagar is now ranked exceptionally well in various urban governance rankings in the country.

#### **ATHAR AAMIR KHAN**





Athar Aamir Khan is an IAS officer of the 2016 batch who is presently the Commissioner of the Srinagar Municipal Corporation and CEO of Srinagar Smart City Ltd. Khan was the topper in the 2016 civil services examination and is known for his soft yet efficient work life.

Lt governor Manoj Sinha had specially selected him to work in Jammu and Kashmir and requested for the transfer of his cadre temporarily to J&K. After Shah Faesal, young Khan has inspired a generation of youth not just in Kashmir but across India.

Khan, known to have a huge social media following among the youth and civil services aspirants, keeps focused on his work diligently. Khan, who was earlier posted in Rajasthan, is of the belief that education can transform lives significantly and is implementing it on the ground. He has transformed Srinagar through beautification in the last year of his tenure and is working each day to restore the glory of this heritage city.

Under his leadership, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Srinagar as a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Srinagar City was also amongst the top 50 cleanest cities in India under the Swachh Survekshan 2021 Awards.

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