

Kashmir reporter talks about border war

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post reporter

"Well how did I start?" Luv Puri asked himself that very question when reflecting back on how he began his journalism career.

In an interview with *The Post*, the Kashmir resident outlined three factors that led him to becoming a reporter. Puri admits that his love of writing, curiosity about how society functions and the violence in his native province prompted him to become a journalist. As he sits inside a quiet office at the University College of the Fraser Valley's Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies building, he states that most reporters do not have a life-long dream of entering the journalism field.

Puri graduated from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi, where he completed a journalism post-graduate diploma in 2000 and got his start in journalism with *The Business Standard* in New Delhi. He then moved on with the *Hindustan Times* before landing with *The Hindu*, an English-language daily newspaper in India, back in 2001 and has since worked there. The Kashmir journalist considers *The Hindu* one of the most prestigious newspapers in his country. The way Puri said "prestigious," one gets the impression that

he views his current newspaper as India's version of *The New York Times*. Puri not only considers himself a reporter, but he sees himself as a citizen of Kashmir. After seeing the violence in Kashmir escalate since 1989, Puri said he wanted to offer objective and fair reports to his readers. "I recollect what I'd seen as a child," Puri explained. "It was easy to an extent because of my background. I had to be objective and not take sides," he stated. If there's advice any aspiring journalist should take note of, it's to not follow government propaganda, suggested Puri. "Get the stories from the grassroots level instead of the Indian government. Without grassroots, any reporter doesn't do justice. The number-one lesson is that you can't escape hard work."

Puri's hard work covering the Kashmir conflict resulted in him becoming the first South Asian reporter to cross the "line of control," which is 720 kilometers long and divides India and Pakistan. His perseverance as a journalism has paid off with a couple of awards. In 2004-05, he received the Appan Menon Award for his work on nomadic tribes in Kashmir. Last year in Brussels, Belgium, the European Commission presented him with an award for human rights reporting.

Despite visiting all of Kashmir, he admitted that going to the Pakistan side of Kashmir was

the toughest part due to the stringent security at the border. Families have been divided along the India-Pakistan border and have suffered, said Puri. For instance, a mother may not see her son for more than 40 years and siblings may not meet face-to-face for years.

Recently, there has been a peace process to reduce conflict in Kashmir. Puri acknowledges two prominent political leaders in India and Pakistan for making it possible.

"The credit for the peace process goes to the efforts of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. It's the best development that has taken place in Kashmir. They have contributed a lot to try and end the conflict and both sides know it. It's a gradual process and it's a process that has to carry on," Puri said. To enhance the Kashmir peace process further, he said, there needs to be political and social institutions in place. Without those institutions, he believes Indians and Pakistanis will not learn each other's views. "We need to accommodate diversity through institutions. They need to exist. In Kashmir, no political institutions exist," warned Puri, adding it has contributed to the conflict. Before Puri leaves the office to give his lecture about Kashmir affairs, he marvels at how Canada is diverse and has so many different nationalities in one country. "Canada



Kashmir journalist Luv Puri speaks at the UCFV Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies about the Kashmir conflict.

has quite a multi-cultural society. Developing nations have to learn from the western countries like Canada. We need to learn from them," he said. He believes individuals wear several different hats. "We learn from you and you learn from us. Individuals are not one-dimensional. Every person has multiple identities. I'm Indian and I'm also a reporter."