

PROMOTE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

In an ideal world, people would treat each other with kindness and consideration, and many problems we face today could be solved or mitigated by such an approach. The challenges such as conflicts over religion, greed, jealousy, and revenge, are indeed prevalent issues in society. History has shown us the consequences of such negative human traits, including wars and conflicts. To address these problems, it's crucial for individuals and communities to promote values like empathy, cooperation, and tolerance. Promoting the idea of a universal "religion of humanity" or a shared sense of brotherhood is a noble aspiration. However, it's essential to recognize that people have diverse beliefs, backgrounds, and worldviews. While a common commitment to humanity and shared values can bridge many divides, it's also important to respect individual differences and cultural diversity. Efforts to encourage empathy and kindness should start at the individual level, and educational institutions, communities, and governments can play a role in promoting these values. It's also important for leaders and influential figures to set positive examples and encourage unity rather than division.

The ancient Aap Shambu temple

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

The Aap Shambu temple located at Sathrian (Roop Nagar) Jammu is an ancient temple which is much popular and the devotees visit this temple throughout the year. But there is rush of pilgrims in the temple on Maha Shivratri. The temple houses a natural Shiv Lingam which is seen half and the other half is under the earth. This natural Aap Shambu temple is of much attention to the people and attracts the pilgrims throughout the year. The Shiv Ling is not manmade but is natural and thus is frequented by a large number of devotees especially on Mondays, Amavasya and Purnimashi.

According to a legend, in the times immemorial this entire place was an uninhabited jungle, the milky cows and buffalos used to come to the Lingam after grazing and shed entire milk on the Shiv Lingam. There is heavy rush of devotees on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. As the name indicates, there Lord Shiva appears as self manifested. The temple in the past comprised a remote, obscure and an ordinary shrine, but has been turned into a piece of good and pleasant architectural design. The Aap Shambu temple has an immense popularity among people and it turned into a shrine of great attraction being frequently visited by the people. The shrine is every year decorated with colorful bunting, pandals, Kanata before Shivratri and the temple gears for the thousands of people on this auspicious day for having a glimpse of the natural Shiv Lingam. A large number of devotees pay visit to this shrine on Maha Shivratri and even otherwise, people pay obeisance to Lord Shiva on the normal days and seek blessings from Shiva who is called as Ashtooosh for his being pleased with a small Bhakti. On the Maha Shivratri, there is great rush of the pilgrims and people are seen waiting in long queues for having a turn to have the Darshan of the Shiv Lingam. In good olden days, the devotees used to carry water with them from long distances and they traversed distances and traveled through jungles and bushes to finally offer water, flowers, milk to the Shiv Linga and seek blessings. In those days, the people from nearby Muthi, Paloura and other places used to come to this shrine to pay obeisance to Shiva and seek blessings from the Lord Mahadev. In those old days it was an arduous journey to travel to this place and have the darshan of Lord Shiva. But today with the efforts of the management committee, there is every facility at this shrine and people easily reach this place and have a glimpse of Shiv Lingam. The shrine has a picturesque location on the western side of Roop Nagar and the Channore locality is seen from this shrine. The main attraction of this shrine is the sacred spot where Pindi is manifested. There is a Svayambu Lingam and the popular belief is that it does not like to be covered and therefore the main shrine is open and there is no roof on it. It has on one side an old bush of Akk and on the other side Garana tree. There are other trees of various varieties which add charm and beauty to the temple. The management committee performs an annual yagya on Maha Navami in honor of goddess Durga and also on Maha Shiv Ratri to propitiate Lord Shiva and Prasad is distributed among the people. Kashmiri Pandits in large numbers visit this shrine, pay obeisance and seek blessings from Shiva. Some KP's are the regular comers to this temple. The additions of small temples had been made by the management committee and as such there are small temples of Ganesh, Goddess Durga, Hanuman and other Hindu deities. There is an idol of sitting Nandi facing the Pindi. There is also an Amar Jot which keeps burning all the time. The story goes that a Gujjar who was living nearby Sathrian, noticed that there was no milk in the udder of his buffalo which along with other animals went for grazing in the nearby jungle. He became suspicious, that someone was stealthily milking his buffalo, he followed the buffalo and was shocked when he found that while other cows and buffalos were grazing, his buffalo came to the particular stone, stood still, and started releasing milk on the pindi. The Gujjar became curious and angry and tried to break the stone with axe. The stone started bleeding and the Gujjar was terrified and turned blind. On returning home, his house turned into ashes. According to the flock lore, the Gujjar and his entire family suffered a lot and finally the Gujjar died and misfortune befell his family. On hearing this story, Maharaja Partap Singh came here and was very happy to see Lord Shiva in the form of Pindi. He wanted to shift the Shiv Lingam to some other place from the desolate place and he ordered that it be shifted, but the Linga could not be excavated. To the surprise of everyone, the area which was dug during the day got filled in the night. This went for some days and when the matter was reported to Maharaja, he taking it as a wish of the Lord decided to make a temple at the same spot. But in the dream Lord Shiva told him that jungle is the natural abode of Lord, the king decided not to build any structure and let the Pindi remain as it is. Since then the Aap Shambu Linga is being worshipped in its original form. Besides the regular comers, the temple witnesses a congregation of devotees during Navratri when Haven is performed on Navami and people partake Prasad. On all Sundays, all night puja is held to propitiate lord and seek blessings from the God. In short the Aap Shambu temple of Roop Nagar has become a people's shrine as it has been developed by the management committee without any help from the government and this shrine is a place of our great heritage and culture.

Let Aap Shambu remove all obstacles and bestow blessings to the people. May this temple awaken our real self and illumine our bodies and soul. Again may we keep visiting the Aap Shambu temple in future to seek His blessings. May Lord Shiva bring peace, tranquility and prosperity to Jammu and Kashmir and to the whole of India.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist).

Water-An Indispensable Resource

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 16th of October is commemorated as the World Food Day by millions of people across the globe to honour the founding date of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) launched by the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in 1945. This day is celebrated by various organisations concerned with the food security with full enthusiasm and people commit together to eliminate hunger and poverty from society. The objective of this special campaign is also to highlight the millions of people across the globe who cannot afford a healthy diet and access to nutritious food. This day reminds us that we should take action for the eradication of hunger and poverty. World Food Day was established by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) member countries at the Organization's 20th General Conference in 1979. The idea of celebration of World Food Day was given by Dr. Pal Romany, the then the Minister of Hungary for Agriculture and Food. On this day awareness on eradication of hunger and poverty are acknowledged. The celebration of this day also helps in increasing awareness on the effective agriculture and food policies to mitigate the food problem. This day is also celebrated as the food engineers' day. On this day several organisations guide the people about the use of safe and healthy food and avoid the fast food. The theme of World Food Day in

2023 is "Water is Life, water is food. Leave no one behind". This year theme aims to highlight the significant role of water for life on the Earth and water as the foundation of our food. It also aims to create awareness about the importance of managing water wisely as increasing population growth, economic development, urbanization and climate change threaten the water availability. This day spotlights the plight of 2.4 billion people in water-stressed countries and 600 million reliant on aquatic food systems who face pollution, ecosystem degradation and climate change impacts.

Water is a finite and irreplaceable resource that is fundamental to human well-being. It is indispensable for the existence of animal and plant eco-systems and is an essential element in the development of economic activities of any nation. It is the most vital resource for the existence of life on earth. No other natural resource is having such an overwhelming influence. Earth three-fourths surface is covered by the oceans. Freshwater constitutes a very small proportion of this enormous quantity. About 2.7 per cent of the total water available on the earth is fresh water of which 75.2 per cent lies frozen in Polar Regions and another 22.6 per cent is present as ground water. Rest of water is available in rivers, lakes, atmosphere water and soil and vegetation. India is having 2.4 per cent of the world's geographical area, 4 per cent of the world's water resources and 17.7 per cent of the world's population. It has been

observed that less than one per cent of the world's fresh water on earth is readily available for human consumption. As the human population grows, the demand on freshwater resources will also grow. Presently the world is facing a freshwater crisis. If per-capita consumption of water resource continues to rise at its current rate, humankind could be using over 90 per cent of all available freshwater within 25 years leaving just 10 per cent for the rest of the world's species. The availability of water is falling overtime and water crisis is the fifth highest risk to the society according to the 2020 edition of the World Economic Forum's Global Risk report. Valuing the multiple uses of water from agriculture to power generation, domestic use, industry, fisheries, ecosystem and livelihoods can help to transform this looming crisis into an opportunity for advancing crisis.

Each year, there are about 250 million cases of water borne diseases with around 5-10 million deaths. It is not only people who are threatened by water shortages and pollution, freshwater ecosystems which harbour the world's greatest concentration of species are among the most vulnerable on earth. Around half of the world's wetlands have been destroyed in the last 100 years. Two-fifths of the fish are freshwater species and of these around 20 per cent are threatened, endangered or have become extinct in recent decades. Presently the freshwater demand is increasing not only because of demographic

pressures but also because of improved living standards, urban and industrial growth. The world's thirst for water is likely to become one of the most important issues of the 21st century. Global water consumption raised six fold between 1990 and 1995-more than double the rate of population growth and continues to grow rapidly as agricultural, industrial and domestic demand increase. In some areas, water withdrawals are so high relative to supply that surface water supplies are literally shrinking and ground water reserves are being depleted faster than they can be replenished by precipitation. Due to overexploitation of ground water, water tables are dropping and some rivers often become dry before they reach the sea. Freshwater is available as rainfall, surface water, ground water and atmospheric moisture. All these sources vary over place and time both seasonally and from year to year. Over exploitation of water resources, degradation of water recharge structures, paucity of funds, depleting water resources due to failure of monsoon and competing demand on the available water resources are the factors that cause concern on the supply front. On the demand side, factors such as growing urbanization, increase in population, change in life styles etc. also increase the complexity of the problem. Presently many Indian cities do not have enough sources of water and in future, it would have to be transported over large distances as the water is found more away from the cities. The

country's present and future situation can be gauged by the trend in water availability. It has been observed that irrigation alone accounted around 83 per cent of the total water use in 1997-98 on the demand side and it is likely to slow down to 69.5 per cent by the year 2050 due to the impact of technological advancement in irrigation. Demand of water for domestic, industrial and thermal power generation is expected to increase sharply. The limited ground water sources have not been able to keep pace with recharge and discharge to renew the balance. The amount of water available per person in India has decreased steadily over a period of time. It is predicted that the world in the year 2050 will be largely different from what it is today. Water sector will undergo dramatic changes in the years to come. We have no option but to depend on the available sources of water and have the responsibility to save and conserve them without fail. The water crisis has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. We have glaring instances of water sharing conflicts not only between the states but also among the farmers or other water users. Urgent steps should be taken for drastic reduction of wastage of water in all sectors and protection of water sources from industrial pollution. There is need to frame an appropriate water policy and equally important indomitable conscience of water users to utilize water judiciously are necessary for sustainable utilization of water.

(The writer is Sr. Scientist & Head, KVK, Reasi).

Pipal A Sacred Tree

■ G.L. KHAJURIA

Pipal is a large deciduous tree with grey bark and is predominantly prominent of its religious affiliation in almost all the spiritual rituals. In Hindu families, the ladies are mostly ordained of this religious tree and worship it for the longevity of their husbands. Even otherwise also, the tree is watered in the morning by every Hindu and it showers blessings as poetized in our revered Vedas and Purana. It is exorcising and gives maximum oxygen and is of ample importance for shade as Lord Sudha attained salvation and spiritual enlightenment under Pipal tree at Sarnath situated barely five miles away from Varanasi. The place is now of ample importance due more so that most of the Buddhist pilgrimage are in existence, apart from the existence of Ashoka's pillar of remote past and subsequently adopted by the Republic of our country (Ashoka's Chakra) after the dawn of independence.

The tree is spoken in botanical parlance as 'Ficus religiosa' belonging to the family 'urticaceae of plant kingdom. In the olden days, the people have had an extensive interest in the propagation of these trees to provide shade to all travelers

over long distance when the national highways were scanty and road connectivity was very poor. The tree is having its habitation commonly throughout India in tropical zones and mostly cultivated alongside road near ponds (Talab) and temples and other religious places as it is mostly watered after having bath in the pond over the ages. It as well find its existence in the tropical and sub-tropical forests amongst other trees, bushes, herbs, shrubs and plants of lower strata.

The morphological characteristics of the tree are quite exuberant and share its own importance unmatched other broad-leaved species. The trunk of the tree is irregularly shaped having alternate leaves on the twigs and the leaves are orbicular - ovate, thinly coriaceous but tough, shining above, reddish when young, white tubereled when mature; undulate; main lateral nerves are 6-7 pairs, joined by prominent closely reticulate veins; base is shallow chordate rounded or truncate.

The tree is prominently a sanctimonious one and is held with much veneration by Hindus especially near temples and wells, oftenly catching a

height upto 900 ft in the outer Himalayas. Being a sanctified tree, its felling or axing is considered sinful, second only to the Killing of a Brahman that is why the tree is regularly watered after early bath in the morning by men of all hues and ladies usually worship this tree for the longevity of their husbands. Wood of the tree is greyish-white, moderately hard, not so mottled as of its relative species viz. Ficus arnottiana and when the trees get old and dried; the firewood is used in cremation as its wood is considered as sanctimonious.

The tree finds its existence in Sub Himalayan tract and outer hills, ascending to greater height from Chenab eastwards to Marwara, Assam, lower Bengal. In the eastern part of India. The tree is vernacularly Spoken as Pipal or Pares. The trees Of pipal found in the Jaunsar catches a lower heights up to 60ft as elsewhere in Garhwal, Ajmer, Bihar, Central provinces, Nagpur. Western Peninsula in the Deccan and near the coastal areas in the south tips of the Indian Ocean up to bay of Bengal.

The branches and leaves find it their usefulness as the best fodder for elephants and its leaves are also used on all ritu-

als and other ceremonies amongst Hindu families. The milky juice or sap of the tree is hardened into a substance resembling that of 'Guttapercha'. It is rather a fast growing tree and finding its importance in the 'arboriculture' (avenues plantations) and further it is of ample importance in its propagation through- branches-and cuttings. However, of course, the tree is an epiphyte and prove to be destructive oftenly- when it grows by sending its roots down through the crevices of big buildings and monuments.

A large shrub or a small trees also find its existence oftenly as epiphyte creeping over rocks having the characteristics of broad ovate base corbate and densely clustered basal branches with bracts being membranous. Flowering of the tree usually-take-place in April - May

The tree is of immense importance amongst all-other trees in the biological ecosystem as it exudes maximum oxygen into air and at the same time absorbing CO2 and other Poisonous gases emanating from industrial emission coupled with enormous pollution off shooting from multihued vehicles which by every day's turn dilutes pollution into the

air. So, it becomes more pertinent for the extensive plantation of this tree all over the globe most suited to site, preferably along National Highways, canals, railway tracts, around ponds and wells and many other wastelands.

But it is no longer a simple man's show we all have to join hands irrespective of age and gender and perhaps the youth have had a far reaching role to play within the plantation drive. It is no doubt a self-speaking fact that Forest Deptt. along with its associate wings are doing yeoman's service in the inculcation of this species and abundant stocks are available in our nurseries and it is unambiguously the ripe time when we can take in hand advance work like that of pit work and trenching so that with the onset of Monsoon we are in a position to carry out massive afforestation work of suchlike trees mentioned in the body of the-write up and further let us take a pledge for mass movement in making this mission a success oriented ensuring greening of the globe and sustainability of all form of biolife and its ecosystem - which is the clarion call of the day.

(The author is former Dy. Conservator of Forest, J&K).

'The Pen's Profound Impact'

■ AUBAID AHMAD AKHOON

The age-old adage that "the pen is mightier than the sword" holds a profound truth in its simplicity. It suggests that the power of the written word and the ideas it conveys can have a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on individuals, societies, and generations. In this short article, I aim to explore the concept that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, as it has the potential to penetrate the psyche, shape mentalities, and influence the destiny of societies and generations.

The Sword and Its Limited Reach: The sword, a symbol of physical force and violence, is undoubtedly destructive. It can inflict immediate harm, causing physical wounds and sometimes leading to death. However, its power is confined to the physical realm, often leaving psychological and ideological wounds untouched.

The Pen as a Mind-Altering Weapon: In contrast, the pen, representing the written and spoken word, possesses the unique ability to penetrate the psyche. Through the dissemination of ideas, knowledge, and perspectives, it can influence, shape, and mold the way individuals think, perceive, and understand the world. The power of the pen lies in its capacity to challenge preconceived notions, provoke thought, and spark intellectual growth.

Shaping Mentalities: When wielded skillfully, the pen can shape mentalities, not in a harmful way, but in a transfor-

mative one. It encourages critical thinking, self-reflection, and the exploration of new concepts. The written word can challenge dogmas, break down mental barriers, and ultimately lead to the growth of individuals' intellectual and emotional capacities.

Consider, for example, the influence of historical documents like the Declaration of Independence or literary works such as George Orwell's "1984." These texts have significantly shaped the course of history and have prompted generations to reevaluate their understanding of freedom and totalitarianism.

The Pen and Its Impact on Society: The power of the pen extends beyond the individual. It has the capacity to shape societies by influencing collective thoughts, behaviors, and values. Through literature, journalism, speeches, and art, the pen has played a pivotal role in social and political movements. It has ignited revolutions, advocated for human rights, and exposed societal injustices.

Think about the role of journalism and the power of investigative reporting. Journalists have often exposed corruption, inequality, and social injustices, driving societies to address these issues. The pen has also played a significant role in advocating for civil rights, women's suffrage, and LGBTQ+ rights, contributing to more inclusive and equitable societies.

Generational Influence: The pen's influence is not confined to a single generation. It can transcend time, shaping

the beliefs and values of generations to come. Literary classics, philosophical treatises, and historical documents continue to shape the minds of individuals long after their authors have passed away. These texts serve as a bridge between the past, present, and future, ensuring that the pen's influence endures.

Consider the enduring influence of ancient philosophical texts like Plato's "The Republic" or religious scriptures like the Bible or the Quran. These texts continue to guide and shape the moral and ethical foundations of societies worldwide.

Challenges of the Pen: While the pen's power to shape mentalities and influence society is undeniable, it is not without challenges. With great power comes great responsibility. The misuse of the pen can lead to misinformation, propaganda, and the manipulation of minds. It is imperative that writers, journalists, and educators wield this power ethically, with a commitment to truth and integrity. Bottom Line: In a world where ideas and information are more accessible than ever, the pen's impact is more pronounced than at any point in history. Its ability to penetrate the psyche, shape mentalities, and influence societies and generations is a testament to the enduring power of knowledge and ideas. As individuals, we must be discerning readers and critical thinkers, and as creators of content, we must wield the pen with a profound awareness of its potential to

shape the world. The pen is not just mightier than the sword; it is, indeed, a force that can shape the essence of humanity itself. Influential writers throughout history have shaped the way we think, perceive the world, and understand human nature. Their works have not only endured the test of time but have also left an indelible mark on literature, culture, and society. William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, George Orwell, Chinua Achebe, Maya Angelou, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Harper Lee. In India Rabindranath Tagore, R.K Narayan, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Chetan Bhagat, A.P. J Abdul Kalam, Alama Iqbal, Munshi Premchand, Ismat Chughtai, Sadat Hassan Mantoo, Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Krishen Chander, Javed Akhter, Nida Fazil, Qurratulain Hyder

These writers have not only produced exceptional literary works but have also had a profound influence on social, cultural, and political conversations. Their writing continues to resonate with readers, providing insights into the human experience that transcend time and place. Whether through the beauty of language or the power of their ideas, influential writers have left an enduring legacy. Their works continue to be celebrated and cherished by readers and scholars alike.

(The author is a renowned Columnist & motivational speaker).