

READING HABITS


Is reading dying or flourishing in the internet age? It's a popular saying that a room without books is like a body without a soul. But unfortunately, since the last few years, it is a sad reflection that the culture of reading has also persistently been declining not only in country but all around the world. As a result, we are growing more intolerant and biased in our social behaviours which is also indicative of our intellectual decay. The strength of people in libraries is decreasing with every passing day. Newspaper vendors are shutting shops, children are not reading anymore.

The habit of book reading is declining when we talk about reading physical books, newspapers, etc, but not digital reading. Reading isn't dying. People, in a sense, read all the time. Whether it be this prompt, social media messages, notifications and news reports, people are always reading. But the reading span has drastically reduced. We are now scrolling, not actually reading enough to hold our attention.

The root of the problem lies in our flawed education system that doesn't encourage students to read books other than their specified textbooks. Parents also do not encourage their children to read any more. The popularity of digital devices and the internet has also brought a decline in book reading habits. The truth of the day is that digital addiction is shrinking our memories and eroding our attention span. Fear is growing that unless we learn to unplug now, we will become the slaves of technology. According to a study by Microsoft, an average human being now has an attention span of eight seconds. This is a sharp decrease from 12 seconds in the year 2000. By the way, the attention of a goldfish is put at nine seconds.

The art of reading, the fundamental skill, which is the passport to all learning, is losing its charm fast. But it needs to be revived. We need to start from scratch. Capabilities of reflection, analogical understanding, critical inquiry, and empathy are developed by in-depth readings. Digital reading, especially if introduced in early childhood, encourages skimming while discouraging reflective interaction with the text. To revive the diminishing culture of reading, what we immediately need is to inculcate the love for books in our children. Besides, an extended network of public libraries coupled with readers clubs can rejuvenate this habit. Moreover, a media campaign can also play a vital role in rescuing this shredding culture. The importance of reading needs to be stressed and restored among children and adults alike. They should be told that spending time on something worth is never wasted and what's more worth than reading a book. Weaving the digital way of education with the old style of studying may go a long way in reviving the age-old learning tradition. Reading habits should never die.

OFF 'D' CUFF



The Ecstasy of Samadhi

Samadhi is the end of worldliness and beginning of the truth. From one perspective, samadhi is the last step and from another, it is the first.

Listening to satsang, contemplation and meditation can bear the fruit of samadhi. One can explain the process upto samadhi, but cannot explain the experience of samadhi; for it is beyond words. The seeker realises his true Self in samadhi. Before the realisation of the Self, he experienced sorrow, distress, pain, and affliction. But after having realised the supreme truth, he experiences supreme peace, relaxation, bliss, and stability.

Experience During Samadhi

The experience of samadhi is wondrous, unparalleled, boundless. Saint Kabir says the experience of samadhi is not like a drop of water merging into the ocean, but it is like the ocean manifesting in the drop of water; and the 'drop-ness' no longer remains. In the recognition of the pure eternal nature of the Self is the death of the egoic-existence. In physical death, only the body is dropped but mind, ego and impressions continue. How can this be called death? Death is cessation. In samadhi, everything gets dropped.

In samadhi, the mind goes to sleep, the intellect goes on leave, the senses cannot enter and so no experience is registered by the mind or intellect. After the state passes, when thoughts arise once again, the mind wakes up, the intellect is back at work, and the senses become active again, the seeker returning from samadhi can only infer what would have happened during samadhi. He does not remain the same as he was before samadhi. Now, he is no more a slave to the mind or outgoing senses. He is his master. The mind thereafter functions as per his will.

The three steps of listening, contemplation and meditation through which the seeker had raised himself to the states of samadhi, while returning from samadhi, he once again passes through the same stages but in the reverse order, manifesting his divine experience through them.

Meditation

The knowledge gained by the seeker by going into the subtle, profound inner depths during samadhi floods his conduct, activities, vision,

thoughts upon returning. At the stage of meditateness, he experiences an effortless, intense connection as though possessed by the divine nature of the Self. No activities can make him forget the Self, rather, the knowingness distinctly remains in every activity. He experiences a complete transformation in himself as though he has been reborn, so also the whole world appears completely different to him. He feels that the one who has returned from samadhi is not the same as the one who had entered that state. He experiences the mind in tune with and abiding in the supreme truth. That which used to happen rarely even with a lot of effort now stays constant and effortless.

Contemplation

The seeker returning to the level of the mind from the meditative state begins to think about what had happened or what was experienced in samadhi? He tries to weave it into thoughts and words. He who had reached the state of samadhi after reading and contemplating on the scriptures, upon returning from the divine experience composes scriptures in the stage of contemplation. However, it is a very difficult task to bring the wordless into words. Only those who have the ability, like the great Masters, can compose scriptures. Many people desire to enjoy a sunset, but not all can. Of those who do, very few have the ability to paint that joy in a picture or weave it into poetry.

Listening

The One returning from samadhi through meditation and contemplation, now, in the stage of listening, disseminates the knowledge by teaching others. In the journey towards samadhi, he was a disciple listening to discourses; upon returning, discourses are given by him as a Master.

As a disciple, on listening to the Guru's teachings, the seeker contemplates and meditates upon them and attains the supreme state of samadhi. Collecting information or only listening about water, writing or chanting "water" a thousand times cannot quench one's thirst. In the same way listening is important but by itself is not enough to accomplish the goal of samadhi. To attain the truth, one needs inner transformation.

-Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshji

Know about Harar (Terminalia Chebula Retz)

■ PROF (DR.) R.D GUPTA

Harar is a well known species of sub-Himalayan or Siwalik region and grows upto an elevation of 1500 m above mean sea level. It also abounds in the deciduous forest of Peninsular India.

It is an important associate in dry deciduous forests of Siwaliks, Kandi belt of Jammu (J&K) State, Himachal Pradesh and Uttranchal as well as Punjab and Haryana.

In Jammu region, it occurs in areas of Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua and Rajouri districts upto 1000 m. In Himachal Pradesh, it grows gregariously form on poor rocky sites upto 1050 m either pure or with Pinus Roxburghii in Kangra and Hamirpur districts. Whereas, in sporadic form, "Harar" is found in Bilaspur, Nahan and Nalagarh areas.

Harad is known to have laxative or purgative properties. Besides this, "Harar" possesses antiameobic, antitumour and cardiotonic properties. It has proved useful in diabetes and arrests the activity of HIV virus. "Harar" is a component of famous Ayurvedic preparation - "Triphala", and fruits are also used for drying cotton, wool and leather, and for tanning purpose.

MEDICINAL VALUES

The fruit is well known for its medicinal value as laxative, astringent as treatment for chronic stomach ulcers. It is main constituents of "Triphala" which is known for stomach disorders. Finally, powdered fruit is used as denitrifice in toothache, and considered useful in curing gum bleeding and ulceration. The fruit paste is used in burns and fruit extract as wash in watering eyes and also in asthma.

The main quality is to regulate the functioning of the body. The dried "harar" fruits are being exported in the form of preservative (murbha), preserved in honey or sugar syrup, since, it regulates body functioning.

It is also found useful in diabetes especially to pregnant and nursing mothers. It arrests the activities of HIV virus and is used as one of the ingredient in formulations against AIDS.

Other Uses: Fruit of the "harar" is the best source of tannin for tanning leather, and for dying cotton and wool. The fruits are extensively used as auxiliaries with other dye stuff. In combination with iron salts it gives black dyes and with alum yellow dyes. About 30 per cent requirements of tanning industry is met from the fruit of this species.

It is remarkable to note that collection and processing of "harar" fruit is a thriving business and has developed into a cottage industry in many areas of Jammu Siwaliks.

Botanical Description: "Harar" is a moderate to large sized deciduous tree, attaining a height of 15 to 24 m and a girth of 1.5 to 2.5 m. The girth of tree named 'Raja Reed' near a village Muthwar in Jammu as 3.44 m at breast height. It has a cylindrical bole of 4 to 9 m with round crown, spreading branches and a short trunk. Its bark is dark brown, often longitudinally fissured, exfoliating woody scales. Leaves are elliptic or ovate in shape, 8.16 cm in length and 4.8 cm wide. They become silky and shining and almost glabrous when mature.

Flowers are bisexual yellowish white in colour with terminal panicle spikes. Fruits drupe, ovoid from narrow base, usually 2.5 to 3.5 cm long, 5-ribbed on drying. Wood of the tree is very hard, fairly durable and is used for agricultural implements and other purposes. The tree is, however, important mainly on account of its fruit, which is the best of commercial myrobalans used for tanning in the Indian sub-continent.

Cultural Practices: Climatic Requirement: The tree shows fairly a wide adaptation to climate. Under natural conditions, it grows in localities with

maximum and minimum temperatures from 37 to 48 degree and 1 to 15 degree respectively.

"Harar" is an important species of the forests of Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Uttarakhand Siwaliks. It can withstand dry conditions prevailing in Kandi belts, where it is contributing a lot to the economic well being for the people by providing an additional income to the poor villagers ensures livelihood to the poor villagers.

Soil Requirement:"Harar" can be found on a variety of geological and soil formations. In Siwaliks, including Kandi belt, it grows on boulders and conglomerates having a thin soil layer. It grows on clay and sandy soils also. However, the best growth of the "harar" can be found on loamy sand, sandy loam and loam soils.

Plantation can be established through raised seedlings nursery during July-August. Generally, 1-2 years old plants with a ball of earth are planted for their better survival. Seed sowing in the nursery is done in the months of June or July. The fruit stones are sown after removing the hardened fleshy covering. Removal of hardened fleshy covering can be done by soaking the fruit stones in cold water for 24 hours followed by stratification in cow dung for about 5 weeks. Optimum spacing in nursery is 15 x 15 cm. Germination starts within 15 days after sowing the seeds and takes about 90 days to complete, with 60 per cent germination. The seedlings become ready for out planting after 1 or 2 years. The seedlings are raised in nursery with clay-loam or sandy loam soils.

The bud grafting technique has been proved successful, especially in "Raja Harar" species. For this purpose, bud material can be had from the superior tree grown in the nursery for further experimentation and multiplication. Vegetative propagation is the only alternative to achieve the twin objectives of quality yield and germplasm conserva-

tion. The plus trees of Terminalia Chebula can be multiplied through vegetative propagation and seed orchards can be established for producing genetically improved seed.

Harvesting of fruits is done when they become ripe i.e., when their colour turns yellowish or reddish. Generally, the harvesting starts from middle of October to middle of November and continues upto end of December depending upon the climate. In cooler climate, the ripening of the "harar" fruits can be prolonged upto March and they begin to fall soon after ripening. After harvesting, fruits are spread for sun drying in open.

Steps are involved in processing of the fruits include Sun drying: The harvested fruit are sun dried for 3 to 4 days to reduce the moisture content and to dry them; Grading: The fruits are graded according to their size, viz., small, medium and large; Roasting: The fruits are roasted in an iron pan (Karahi) having sand. The pan is kept over a "bhati", heated by burning firewood or brushwood. A wooden spatula is used to stir the fruits constantly in the pan while roasting process is going on. A sieve is used to separate the roasted fruits from the hot sand once they are sufficiently roasted. This stage is determined by change in colour of the fruit to golden brown. It usually takes 15 to 20 minutes to get roasted to the desired extent; Pressing with a gunny bag: The hot roasted fruits are pressed by hand with gunny bags. This helps in filling any holes on the surface of fruit and to provide a typical luster and strength to the fruit; Spreading under shade inside the house and storage:The roasted and processed fruits are spread on the floor in the rooms within the houses for 5 to 7 days, and, thereafter stored in gunny bags, are ready for dispatch to Amritsar market.

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ORANIC FARMING : future opportunity and challenges in UT J&K

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According to the proposed Codex definition, "organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity (FAO and WHO, 1999). Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects.

Organic farming system in India is not new and is being followed from ancient time. It is a method of farming system which primarily aimed at cultivating the land and raising crops in such a way, as to keep the soil alive and in good health by use of organic wastes (crop, animal and farm wastes, aquatic wastes) and other biological materials along with beneficial microbes (biofertilizers) to release nutrients to crops for increased sustainable production in an eco friendly pollution free environment

The key characteristics of organic farming include protecting the long term fertility of soils by maintaining organic matter levels, encouraging soil biological activity, and careful mechanical intervention; providing crop nutrients indirectly using relatively insoluble nutrient sources which are made available to the plant by the action of soil micro-organisms; Nitrogen self-sufficiency through the use of legumes and biological nitrogen fixation, as well as effective recycling of organic materials including crop residues and livestock manures; Weed, disease and pest control relying primarily on crop rotations, natural predators, diversity, organic manuring, resistant varieties and limited (preferably minimal) thermal, biological and chemical intervention; The extensive management of livestock, paying full regard to their evolutionary adaptations, behavioural needs and animal welfare issues with respect to nutrition, housing, health, breeding and rearing; and Careful attention to the impact of the farming system on the wider environment and the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats.

Organic farming status in J&K: Jammu and Kashmir's agriculture industry which is worth 1600 crores and is steadily growing every year has around 50 thousand hectares of land under it. The UT Economy is highly dependent upon agriculture as more than 65% revenue is obtained from it .

Directly or indirectly more than 60% ut population is employed in agriculture. In J&K there exist various agroclimatic zones, which results in cultivation of various agricultural and horticultural crops, Like saffron, basmati, apple, walnut etc. The Environment Sustainability Index of Jammu and Kashmir is deter-

riorating very fast due to various reasons including extensive utilization of fertilizers and other agrochemicals that have led to the worsening of soil health. As compared to other states, fertilizer and other agrochemical consumption is less in Jammu and Kashmir: The fertilizer consumption in J&K is 38.3 kg/ha as compared to 170 kg/ha in Punjab. The estimated quantity of nutrients mined by crops is 48 kg/ha. However, the scenario is changing as the fertilizer use in Jammu and Kashmir is increasing 10 to 15 % every year: Experts say that excessive use of chemical fertilizers could facilitate uncontrollable growth of algae and floating weeds that can have environmental repercussions and common utilization of Urea, Di-ammonium phosphate, Muriate of potash possessing serious side effects, Kashmir Monitor reported in 2020.

To overcome these concerns, experts are emphasizing to develop the culture of organic agriculture practices as it has the potential to address environmental, health and sustainability issues. Pertinently, organic agriculture is not new to Jammu and Kashmir as it is practiced on approximately 50 thousand hectares of land and the erstwhile state has organic certified area of 22,316 hectare area.

In the following years the central government launched a scheme 'Jammu Kashmir Arogya Gram Yojna' - initially, 1000 villages of Kathua, Jammu and Udhampur were planned to be covered under the scheme for growth of aromatic plants. The land for its cultivation was supposed to be identified by Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) scientists and aroma experts. While launching the scheme, science and technology minister Jitendra Singh claimed that farmers would be able to earn Rs 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh per annum per hectare through the programme. The central government vowed to initially spend over Rs 25 crore on this scheme. The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) institution was participating in the project. It was implemented in ten districts of J&K. The CSIR was supposed to help the farmers with expert guidance and provide them saplings of as many as nine varieties of medicinal and aromatic plants. The plant varieties, selected for J&K, include five different varieties of lemon-grass (Cymbopogon), Rose (Rosa), Mint (Mentha), Ashwagandha (Withaniasomnifera) and Phalsa fruit plant. Over 305 farmers across Ramban, Doda, Udhampur, Kishtwar and Kathua with cultivation across 152.5 acres of land have been identified as beneficiaries under the programme, Times of India reported in 2014.

The two schemes are Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) Under Union Ministry of

Agriculture, both the schemes stress on end-to-end support to organic farmers-from production to processing, certification and marketing to post harvest management support, including processing, which helps to bring down cost of organic products.

Under the PKVY, farmers are provided financial assistance of Rs 50,000 per hectare for three years out of which Rs 31,000 per hectare for three years is provided directly to farmers through DBT for on-farm and off-farm organic inputs. The government provide financial assistance of Rs 20 lakh per cluster of 1,000 hectares for three years is provided for value addition and infrastructure creation.

Under MOVCDNER, a sum of Rs 46,575 per hectare for three years is provided for creation of FPOs, support to farmers for organic inputs, quality seeds and planting material and training, hand holding and certification.

The need-based assistance is provided for post harvest infrastructure and value addition up to maximum limit of Rs 600 lakh for integrated processing unit, Rs 37.50 lakh for integrated pack house, Rs 18.75 lakh each for refrigerated vehicle and cold store components, Rs 10.0 lakh for collection, aggregation, grading and custom hiring centre and Rs 6.0 lakh for four wheeler and transportation.

Challenges for Organic Agriculture in J&K: Farmers in Jammu and Kashmir lack adequate knowledge and technical support required for organic farming. There should be more training programmes and awareness campaigns to provide those working in the agricultural sector with the technical know-how about organic farming. The information and training to farmers about making vermicompost from daily household waste is needed . With many people turning health-conscious and understanding the benefits of consuming organic food, the requirement for these foods is on the rise. However, organic cultivation of J&K does not reach the world market due to lack of marketing. So, organically grown fruits and vegetables of Kashmir should be promoted more effectively. To motivate more and more farmers from the Kashmir Valley to shift to organic agriculture, they should be given incentives and funding for organic farming practices and assurance about the sale of their organically grown food.

If farmers in Jammu and Kashmir are equipped with the right resources and marketing techniques, they will be able to grow organic fruits, vegetables, and other food crops and sell them across India and abroad. Then, organic farming in J&K will surely have a bright future.

Legal weapons in quiver of oldies

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

A community is known by the way it treats its vulnerable section of society, the elders. Traditionally, in India, it has been a part of our culture for the society and the family to care for elders. Senior citizens are held in high esteem and given priority and respect in all matters. By virtue of the long experience, they carry; they can well be christened as treasury troves of society. But it is felt that owing to transformation in our attitude it is hard reality that between the broad smiles, behind the cheerful exterior and in those moist, rheumy eyes of our elders, lies an untold story - A tale of loneliness, anxiety, fear and uncertainty that senior citizens leave untold.

Senior citizens do not get the attention and help they deserve. All India Senior Citizens Federation estimates that seven out of every 10 senior citizens in the country live in poverty. Of the more than 100 million senior citizens, 70 million have retired from the unorganized sector and have no pension or social security. Help age India in 2014 estimated that every second senior citizen faced abuse from relatives. Senior citizens feel neglected. The cases of elderly neglect, abandonment and abuse are rampant across the country, most of which go unreported as a result of poor social and community support. If we traverse the pages of legal weapons available that can come to the rescue of abandoned parents, we find: Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act,

1956. Section 20 of the Act entitles parents to claim maintenance from their son and daughter; if they are unable to maintain themselves. Muslim Personal Law also speaks of bounden duty on son and daughters to maintain their parents if they are unable to do it. Section 125 of The Code of Criminal Procedure 1873, also provides relief for deserted parents to seek maintenance through Court. In 2007, the Parliament passed the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act.

The Act makes it a legal obligation for children and heirs to provide maintenance to senior citizens and parents, by monthly allowance. It also provides a simple, speedy and inexpensive mechanism for the protection of life and property of the older persons. The provisions contained in the Act are: Protection of Senior Citizens: Any person who is responsible for the protection and care of a 'senior citizen' and intentionally abandons the 'senior citizen' completely is liable to pay a fine of Rs 5,000 or be imprisoned for 3 months or both. Definition of Maintenance: Maintenance is defined in the Act as including "provision for food, clothing, residence and medical attendance and treatment". Who Can Claim Maintenance? Parents: Parents means biological, adoptive and step parents. The age of parents is irrelevant to claim maintenance. Grandparents: Grandparents include both maternal and paternal grandparents. Senior Citizen: A senior citi-

zen is an Indian citizen who is 60 years of age or older. (The only condition for claiming maintenance under this Act is that the persons must be unable to maintain themselves from their own earnings and property.) Who is legally obligated to pay maintenance? Adult children and grand-children, both genders, are responsible for paying maintenance to parents and grandparents.

Senior citizens who do not have children or grandchildren can claim maintenance from a relative who either possesses their property or who will inherit the property of the senior citizen after their death. Filing Maintenance Proceedings: An application for maintenance can be filed by the senior citizen or a parent himself, or if such person is incapable, then by any other person or any registered organization authorized by him before the Maintenance Tribunal in any district where the subject resides. The Tribunal may, during the pendency of the proceeding regarding monthly allowance for the maintenance under this section, order such children or relatives to make a monthly allowance for the interim maintenance of such senior citizen including parent and to pay the same to such senior citizen including parent as the Tribunal may from time to time direct. How much Maintenance must be paid? The Act mandates that the maximum maintenance paid will be Rs 10,000 per month. The maintenance amount is determined by the needs of the claimant and the aim

is to provide maintenance for the person to lead a normal life. Non - representation of Lawyer for filling maintenance proceedings: The Act states that no party to a proceeding before the Maintenance Tribunal will be represented by a lawyer. However; parents or senior citizens can avail the services of the State Government appointed Maintenance Officer to represent their interests during proceedings before the Maintenance Tribunal.

Responsibility of the state government: The State Government must ensure that all government hospitals and hospitals partly or fully funded by the government arrange separate queues for senior citizens and provide beds for all senior citizens. Additionally, every district hospital must have special facilities for senior citizens. Every district must have at least one old age home for senior citizens who are poor and needy. Here the Government has a responsibility to embrace, uphold and protect the rights of senior citizens, as enshrined in the Act. Come what may, we must strive for the inter-generational connection, so that younger generations can benefit from the experience, knowledge and wisdom of older citizens. Bridging the intergenerational gap also helps us to ensure that there is continuity in knowledge production.

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