

CONSERVE WATER

Three-fourth of the Earth is surrounded by water. But despite there being so much water, only a very small percentage of it is usable. Of this three-fourth water, 97 percent is salty water which is not suitable for human use. Only 3 percent water is usable. Out of this 3 percent, 2 percent is in the form of ice and glaciers on earth and only the remaining 1 percent is drinkable.

Gradually it is also decreasing by 3 percent. The impact of this decreasing water level is also visible on the environment. Nature is not doing all this on its own. Man is completely responsible for this. Man is destroying and contaminating this precious wealth for his own partial benefit. If this continues then man will yearn for water even for his important works.

We know that there are many countries in the world which are suffering from drought, that is, where there is no rainfall or where there is a lack of rivers and such places yearn for water. People have to go many miles away to arrange water for themselves. In many places this priceless gift of nature is purchased and used. Many people die due to its deficiency or due to serious diseases caused by contaminated water. Lack of water in rivers, decrease in underground water level, decreasing number of trees and plants, decrease in agricultural production, etc., these are some of the adverse effects that if you think about the future, you would shudder. Despite knowing all this, we use water carelessly without thinking that if we are not careful then the same situation will happen to us. The government will have to make such a policy that the water coming out of industrial units does not get into the rivers and drains. There should be some good arrangement for its disposal so that dangerous chemicals do not mix with potable water and contaminate it. Concrete steps should also be taken against the pressure of increasing population on earth. Small units for collecting and using rain water should be promoted so that rain water does not go waste.

Caring for the elderly senior citizens

G. L. KHAJURIA

The Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary defines a senior citizen (US) an elderly person over 65 of age who is retired and living on pension. In Indian context, the law in shrines a senior citizen any person, a citizen of India who has attained the age of 60 years or above. As per the population data of 2011 census there are around 104 million elderly persons aging 60 years and above. Out of this enormous numbers males count for 51 million and 53 million.

As per united nation organization (UNO) population fund and help India report, it suggests that the number of elderly person is expected to go upto 173 million ending year 2026. From year 1961 to 2011 (50 years span), the increased percentage has jumped from 5.6% to 8.6% which is astonishing and alarming too. The elderly report 2016 reveals that 715 of the population reside in rural areas whereas 29% inhabit in the urban areas. In rural areas 66% elderly are men and around 11% women working within 60 to 65 years age group.

The reports further reveal that 76% persons are quoted married while 22% are widowed or divorced per elderly in India ending year 2016. With the passing years viz a viz inadequate caring the elderly persons are prone to multihued diseases e.g Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Mentle ailments owing to anxiety and depression leading to the eventualities of death. At this crucial dilemma, more intensive caring is warranted for the elderly persons which, if so facto is not so. The scenario is painful and dismaying.

All through toiling life span, elderly persons scarily every bit for their siblings which ultimately go on diminishing and flicking and they have to the dead end of the tunnel. They have to face a multitude of challenges despite the fact that their siblings are well established and can look after them. The agony and pain they suffer stings them beyond imagination. This sad state of utter neglect follows their all hopes and aspirations and tears rolled in isolation and they have to solely solace themselves.

As per the policy of government, euphemism is warranted to the senior citizens are elders. These include physical, mental and physiological cares elevating from emotion stress else they are prone to anxiety, depression and age old ailments of multihued manifestations. But ironically, these grey citizens are facing a plethora of physiological and emotional distress, isolation and dependency thereby worsening the age old agonizing dilemma.

Compare to last century, there had been a steady rise in the population of elderly people owing to age longevity, decreased death rate and above all advancement in the field of medicines that way there had been an increase in the life expectancy. As per UN population report, number of elderly person above 60 years. In India will increase from 100 hundred million at present to more than 325 million ending year 2050. It has also pointed out that elderly person over 80 years of age shall be seven fold and India shall be second most age old country in the world. The figure reflect a gloomy scenario in the sense that 50 to 55 million people sleep as hungry stomach every night and around 10-15 million people in India are blind and out of those 80% are elderly. Moreover elderly population of 60 years and above account for 7.5%-8% in Jammu and Kashmir alone.

In the Changing social milieu, the younger generation is subject to search avenues for economic dependence for the elderly/ senior citizen when all doors seem to be shut owing due to inadequate Job Avenue despite having their higher qualification and claim both in the professional training and allied expertise. With mounting urbanization coupled with modernization in unison are abysmally eating human values in more than one way leave aside caring for the elderly are the senior citizens.

Right from the day a child is born, the parents leave no stone unturned for the well beings and the best for their upbringings he or she should be left behind insofar as educational and extracurricular activities are concerned. And for such conscientious parents the hopes and aspirations do not make a stop. They put in the best of their efforts to make their famed brain to foreign drain; we call this as brain drain thus depriving their motherland and landing on foreign soil for better pay and perks with indelible stamp of being exported. The irony behind is that those who did all their dints in encountering all oddities and squabbles are their elderly parents or to say senior citizens. The so departed souls forget their culture, traditions and other rituals to the extent of their centuries old ethics and ethos.

Does our education system inculcate this sort of way out of demeaning of demeanor? Why those who fed and cared for are being fended and left in lurch at the mercy of god. This is much more of irony of any kind. The teacher and the taught should reciprocally interact so that out progeny picks up the thread for caring their oldies and for all in respecting and caring for senior citizens.

(The author is deputy conservator of forests)

Empowering Tribals, Transforming India

"India will prosper when our tribal communities prosper, the welfare of tribal communities is our foremost priority."

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Unity in diversity is one of the most spectacular features of the population of India. India has the second-largest tribal population in the world. As per the Census 2011, the tribal population constitutes about 8.9% of the total population in India. The tribal people throughout the country have rich traditions, cultures and heritage with unique lifestyles and customs.

Tribal movements like the Khasi-Garo movement, Mizo movement, Kol movement, etc. are integral chapters in India's history and struggle for independence. Be it the bravery of Gond Maharani Veer Durgavati or the sacrifice of Rani Kamalapati; the country cannot forget the same. The struggle of Veer Maharana Pratap cannot be imagined without the brave Bhils who fought shoulder to shoulder and made sacrifices. There are many Adivasi heroes who have sacrificed their lives in the struggle for the country's freedom.

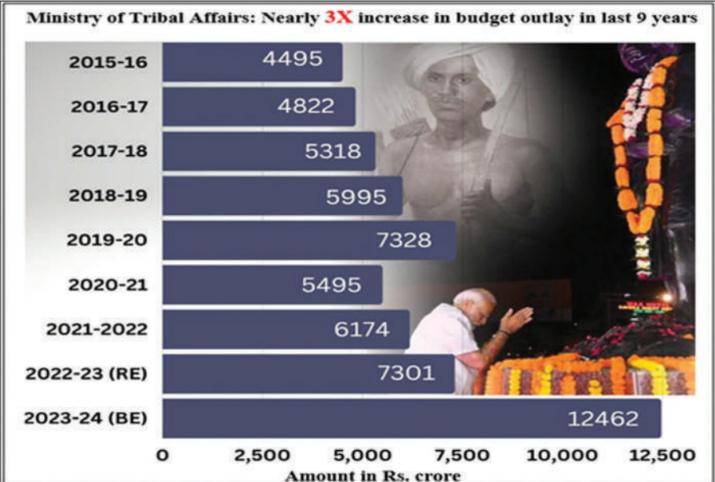
Commemorating the sacrifice of Tribal freedom fighters and marking their legacy, the Union Government decided to observe the birth anniversary of one of the great Freedom Fighters, Bhagwan Birsa Munda, as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas with effect from November 15, 2021. For the first time in the country after Independence, the art and culture of the tribal society and their contribution to the freedom movement and nation-building are being remembered with pride, and they are being honoured on such a grand scale. This declaration acknowledges the glorious history of tribal communities and recognizes their efforts towards the preservation of cultural heritage.

Moreover, PM Narendra Modi will visit Jharkhand on 14th-15th November 2023 on the occasion of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas. He will be the first PM to visit Ulihatu Village, the birthplace of Bhagwan Birsa Munda. Furthermore, the Prime Minister will launch the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission, with a budget of around Rs 24,000 crore. The Mission will be implemented through the convergence of 11 interventions of 9 Ministries.

There are 75 PVTGs across 18 States & UTs who are living in 22,544 villages (220 districts) with a population of around 28 lakhs. These tribes stay in scattered, remote & inaccessible habitations, often in forest areas and hence a mission is planned to saturate PVTG families and habitations with basic facilities such as road and telecom connectivity, electricity, safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition and sustainable livelihood opportunities. Empowering the Tribal Communities Recognizing the need to protect the socio-cultural fabric of tribal communities and underscoring their role in nation-building, the makers of the Constitution of India made special provisions for the protection of tribal culture and the development of Scheduled Tribes. These include the conservation of their language, script and other cultural elements, ensuring their educational interests, providing economic safeguards and taking steps for political empowerment.

Apart from the above constitutional safeguards, a separate Ministry named the Ministry of Tribal Affairs was set up in 1999 with the objective of providing a more focused approach to the integrated socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The programmes and schemes of the Ministry are intended to support and supplement other Central Ministries, State Governments and voluntary organizations and to fill critical gaps in institutions and programmes, taking into account the situation of STs through financial assistance.

In another initiative for tribal empowerment, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (In short FRA) was enacted by the Parliament to recognize and vest forest rights in the Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers who have been residing in forest land for generations, but whose rights on ancestral lands and their habitat were not adequately recognized resulting in historical



injustice to them. The Act came into effect on 31.12.2007. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Rules, 2007 were notified on 01.01.2008.

Under this act, total Community rights given up to May 2014 was 23,578 whereas during the period from 2014 to June 2023, 86,621 community rights have been given across the country. The total extent of land distributed during the period from the inception of FRA to May 2014 was 55.30 lakh acres whereas, during the period from 2014 to June 2023, 122.60 lakh acres have been given, which is almost double the figure during the period till May 2014. A total of 177.90 lakh acres of forest land (47.56 lakh acres individual and 130.34 lakh acres community) has been distributed up to 30.06.2023 across the country.

Educational Empowerment
Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) have been set up to provide quality education to ST students (Class VI-XII) in remote areas through residential schooling facilities. Presently, more than 1.2 lakh students are enrolled in 401 EMRS. It is noteworthy to know that the number of female students (60,815) in EMRSs exceeds that of male students (59,255). Moreover, a total of 38,000 teachers and support staff are being recruited for the Eklavya Model Residential Schools which will benefit 3.5 lakh tribal students.

A number of Fellowship and Scholarship Programmes have also been launched to provide financial assistance to ST students for studies ranging from pre-matric and post-matric levels to the pursuit of higher education and studies abroad. Notably, during the last nine years, a total of 3.15 Crore tribal students have received scholarships/fellowships of over Rs. 17,087 Crore (from April 2014 till September 2023).

Economic Empowerment
Prioritizing the welfare of tribal communities, the budget allocation of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been substantially increased from Rs.4295.94 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.12461.88 crore in 2023-24 i.e., an increase of around 190.01%.

Funds are released to States under Article 275(1) of the Constitution to enable them to meet the cost of such schemes of development as may be undertaken by the State for the purpose of promoting tribal welfare. Under the Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Vikas Yojana, a venture capital fund has been set up to promote entrepreneurship/start-up projects by ST youth. Minimum Support Price (MSP) is ensured for Minor Forest Produce, and marketing support for tribal products is provided through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission. Under this mission, the total number of Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) sanctioned is 3958 while an amount of Rs. 398.49 crore has been disbursed. A total number of 183412 tribal persons is associated with this scheme.

In addition, financial aid is provided to Voluntary Organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes for projects in education, health and livelihood.

TRIFED, (Tribal Cooperative Marketing

Development Federation of India) supports retail marketing for livelihood development among tribal communities of India. A provision of Rs. 288 crores has also been made in the annual budget estimate for the fiscal year 2023-24 to be implemented through TRIFED, specifically through the formation of Self-Help Groups and producer enterprises. Under TRIFED, a Central Sector Scheme 'Marketing and Logistics Development for Promotion of Tribal Products from North - Eastern Region (PTP-NER)', was launched for the benefit of Scheduled Tribes of the Northeastern Region, in Manipur on 18th April, 2023. Improved Infrastructure and Livelihood Opportunities

The Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) aims to provide basic infrastructure in villages with a significant tribal population. Under the scheme, 36428 villages having 50% tribal population and 500 Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been identified for providing basic infrastructure facilities in these villages, which includes villages in the Aspirational Districts identified by NITI Aayog. Out of the total Aspirational Districts, 86 Districts are common wherein 10509 villages are covered under PMAAGY.

Initiatives for Better Health Outcomes

Under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the National Health Mission has prepared a comprehensive guideline to control and prevent Haemoglobinopathies, including Sickle Cell Disease, and has disseminated the same to the states. The government has worked to ensure the near-total eradication of Sickle Cell disease, which is a genetic blood disorder affecting the tribal population in Central, Western and Southern India. In this regard, the Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission was launched by the Prime Minister from Madhya Pradesh on 1st July 2023. The Mission aims to provide affordable and accessible care to all Sickle Cell Disease patients, quality of care for SCD patients and reduction in the prevalence of Sickle Cell Disease through awareness creation, universal screening of 7 crore people in the age group of 0-40 years in affected 278 districts of tribal areas, and counselling through collaborative efforts of central ministries and state government. A total number of 58.6 lakh people has been screened under this Mission.

Other health-related schemes, such as Mission Indradhanush, aimed at ensuring full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women and provision of free vaccines against COVID-19, have laid stress on Adivasi communities. Another important scheme with special reference to tribal groups is the Nikshay Mitra initiative to ensure additional diagnostic, nutritional, and vocational support to those on tuberculosis treatment.

In addition to the above, the Support to Tribal Research Institute (TRI) scheme aims to strengthen TRIs to carry out research, documentation, training and capacity-building activities and serve as a knowledge hub catering to overall tribal development.

Other Initiatives for Holistic Welfare of Tribal



Communities

Apart from the schemes that are administered by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the focus is given to tribal welfare by initiatives under other ministries of the Government, cutting across sectors and domains. From housing and road connectivity under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, respectively, to financial empowerment through Jan Dhan accounts, formation of Self-Help Groups and MUDRA Yojana, various Government programmes have greatly benefited the tribal communities. Swachh Bharat, Gobardhan Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana are some other such schemes, as highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address on the occasion of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas 2022. The nation is moving with the energy of 'PanchPran' to realize the dreams of Bhagwan Birsa Munda and crores of Janjatiya brave hearts, as was also underlined by the Prime Minister.

Honouring and Celebrating India's Tribal Communities

10 Tribal Freedom Fighters' Museums have been sanctioned in States where tribals lived, struggled against the British and refused to bow down. On November 01, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for preparing a roadmap to develop MangarhDhamin Rajasthan's Banswara district. MangarhDham, situated near the Rajasthan-Gujarat border, is the site where over 1500 Bhil freedom fighters lost their lives in 1913 in a mass shooting by the British. The MangarhDham will be developed as a joint project of the governments of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, as a national memorial showcasing tribal legacy and their rich cultural heritage.

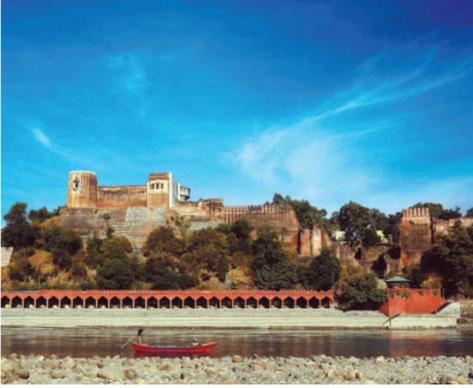
The focus of Government has been overall development of STs and to bring them in par with the other communities in the country. Government has taken various steps for the development of tribals under Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST), of the schemes of the obligated Ministries/Department. There have been considerable improvements in socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes (STs), for example, literacy rate for STs has improved from 59% (Census) in 2011 to 71.6% (as per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), July 2020 - June 2021), bringing down the gap between overall and ST literacy from 14 percent between 2001-2011 to 7.5 percent between 2011-2021. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at upper Primary level has improved from 91.3 (2013-14) to 98 (2021-22); GER for ST students at secondary level (IX-X) has increased from 70.2 (2013-14) to 78.1 (2021-22); GER for ST students at senior secondary level (XI-XII) has increased from 35.4 (2013-14) to 52.0 (2021-22) and GER for ST students at higher education level has increased from 13.7 (2014-15) to 18.9 (2020-21).

All these initiatives, along with other steps taken by the government, have paved the path of bringing the tribal communities into the mainstream while honouring their cultures, legacies and ways of life.

Jia Pota Ghat of Akhnoor

OMKAR DATTATRAY

Akhnoor is a picturesque and beautiful town with the river Chenab in the front and the hills of the Shivaliks in the back. The distance between Jammu and Akhnoor is 55 kms. The place has the historical significance and it is mentioned that it was the last Harappan city from where the Harappan's used to collect timber. The Jia Pota Ghat situated on the banks of sacred river Chenab has much significance and got its name from Jia Pota tree. The then government had established a park in 1999 in which there were Jia Pota trees. The history reveals that a significant event took place at this spot and that is that Raj tilk of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu was solemnized by the then Punjabi ruler on June 17, 1822. A commemorative mural had also been installed by the then ruler at Jia Pota Ghat, exhibiting the historical event. Jai Pota Ghat is witness to the march of civilization from the very ancient times. This Ghat is witness to rise and fall of Kushans and Buddhism. There is a Buddhist monastery and Stupa, one kilometer upstream and it is very important so far as the research is concerned. Just as Akhnoor finds a place of pride in the history for its antiquity and historical significance, similarly Jia Pota Ghat on the right bank of Chenab is the glory of this ancient town. Any senior citizen of Akhnoor will reveal that Jia Pota Ghat is one of many ghats situated on the right bank of Chenab. Moreover historians consider Akhnoor as the northernmost point of Indus Valley Civilization. Akhnoor, popularly known as Virat Nagri in the olden times, has a place of pride in the history for its splendour, beauty, antiquity and historical importance. As the Jia Pota Ghat has derived its name from Jai Pota tree and it is believed that in 1957, the original Jia Pota tree was uprooted by the floods of river Chenab and finally got washed away. It is also believed that in medieval times it was a notable trading post where exchange of goods from planes and adjoining hill regions was undertaken. It is also believed that Vedas were composed by Arayans and Jia Pota Ghat and its neighborhood may have seen the coming and spread of Aryans. Recognizing the strategic importance of the place, Raja Mian Tej Singh got con-



structed the fort made exclusively of bricks of different sizes overlooking the Jia Pota Ghat. It has become a pilgrim tourist spot and is frequented by large number of tourists who visit this place and enjoy its beauty. The park at Jia Pota is of immense attraction for tourists and visitors. The fresh water of the Chenab is very icy particularly in winter months. The Jia Pota Ghat and river Chenab has become much significant and is considered no less than Ganga. Ever since the unfortunate migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir and their temporary settlement in different places of Jammu, the Jia Pota Ghat of Akhnoor assumed greater importance because the Kashmiri Pandits immerse the ashes of their dead relatives in the clean waters of Chenab at Jia Pota Ghat in Akhnoor and thus this Ghat has become very important and popular especially among the Kashmiri Pandits. The Kashmiri Pandits also perform the 10th day Shradha ritual at the Jai Pota Ghat and thus this place is frequented by the Kashmiri Pandits who observe many death rituals at this Ghat. The Kashmiri Pandits consider

the Jai Pota Ghat as the alternative of Ganga and perform the ritual of immersing the ashes of their dead ones at Jai Pota Ghat in river Chenab and many Kashmiri Pandits also perform the 10TH day ceremony at Akhnoor at the bank of Chenab river and consider this river and Ghat as most sacred for performing various ceremonies relating to the dead ones. Generally the local inhabitants of Jammu do not perform the ritual of immersing of ashes of their dead relatives in Chenab river at Akhnoor. The people of Jammu prefer to immerse the ashes of their dead relatives in Ganga at Haridwar. Since it is the Kashmiri Pandits who after their unfortunate migration in early 1889-90 were forced by the circumstances to opt for the immersion of the ashes of their dead relatives in river Chenab at Jai Pota Ghat in Akhnoor. This Ghat and place has become a sacred and holy tirtha - the pilgrim spots. Many tourists visit Jia Pota Ghat and the nearby fort and enjoy its beauty and splendour. The UT government is required to develop this place and include it in the tourist map of Jammu and Kashmir so that more and more tourists visit this Ghat and place and carry its pleasant memories back home and suggest others also to visit Akhnoor and have the glimpse of this place and the temple situated at this place. Jia Pota Ghat has become an emerging tourist destination. This Ghat remained a foremost centre of pilgrimage. It has a Devsthan of Baba Kahi where on a platform holy Sonuglas that is symbolic chains of the Devta are kept. According to a legend, Kahi Devta, one of the most renowned son of Vasuki Nag brought the waters of river chandrabhaga to the barren land of Akhnoor and it became cultivable. It has become a pilgrim tourist destination. Devotees bath in the holy waters in the month of Magh at Jai Pota Ghat in Chenab river and wash their sins. In short the Jai Pota Ghat has become an important pilgrim centre and is frequented by a large number of people throughout the year and especially in the Hindu calendar month of Holy Magh in winter.

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