

FOSTER PEACE - Inclusive Education: Home-Based Schooling for Children with Disabilities

Current state of the world indulged for self-destruction due to selfishness, competition in weapon development, and a general sense of moral decline. There is need of importance of turning to the principles and conduct of great philosophers and spiritual leaders to work towards world peace.

The concerns touch on various issues that have been debated for many years, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the impact of selfishness on society, and the need for moral guidance and ethical values to create a peaceful world.

Efforts to promote world peace often involve diplomacy, international cooperation, and the dissemination of principles and values that promote understanding and empathy among nations and individuals. Many organizations and governments work tirelessly to address these issues and find ways to foster peace in a turbulent world.

Chinar Trees turn yellow/Golden in autumn

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

The leaves of Chinar trees in Kashmir during autumn season turn into yellow ,red and fall from the trees and also turn earth below yellow and red .It is a sight worth seeing and beautiful and tourists and the local kashmiris take great pleasure in observing the chinar tree and the land beneath it turns yellow and is a good sight to see .For centuries the Chinar tree has attracted and inspired Kashmiri poets .See the Chinar garden at Dak Lake in Srinagar ,children are seen playing cricket on fallen Chinar leaves .In the same garden some people are seen collecting fallen yellow leaves of chinar trees and burning these to get charcoal for winter which is used in Kangri-the firepot during for warming purpose .The tourists in large numbers visit Kashmir during the autumn season as the climate is neither so cool ,nor so hot and the leaves of Chinar trees turn yellow and fall from the tree to cover the land beneath into yellow and golden color and it is a sight worth seeing .Tourists are busy in taking selfies to post these on social media .It is in October and November that ,the Chinar gardens are visited by large number of visitors and tourists as Chinar tree changes colors from green to blood-red ,mauve ,amber and yellow in two autumn months of October and November .Che Nar means what fire is a Persian name and Chinar trees are believed to be native of Persia .It is said that Mugual ruler Jahangir during his rule that is (1605 -1627) brought the these from Persia and got them planted on large numbers across Kashmir .However some say that the Chinar tree existed in valley before the Mugals .Kashmir has Chinar gardens in Srinagar ,Anantnag and Ganderbal which are frequented by the tourists more in autumn season .Moreover the Chinar trees are found across Kashmir valley from cities to villages .The Chinar trees provide its shade during summers and one finds calm ,peace and cool breeze under the Chinar trees .The Chinar tree -Platanus Orientalis is a species of plane tree native of the eastern Mediterranean region and western Asia .It is a deciduous tree that grows up to 50 metre-160 foot tall and has a wide ,spreading canopy .They are also long lived ,with some specimens living for over 200 years .The bark of the Chinar tree is smooth and pale grey .It is known for its large ,bright green leaves and stunning autumn color ,with leaves turning shades of orange ,yellow ,and red in the fall .The tree produces clusters of small ,greenish flowers that give way to round ,green fruit that turns brown when ripe .Chinar trees are known for their resistance to draught and extreme temperatures and are often planted as ornamental trees in gardens and parks .They are also used as shade trees along streets and other public places .In some parts of the world, the Chinar tree is considered a symbol of peace and prosperity .Chinar trees are popular ornamental plants often used in landscaping and public parks .There are several varieties of the Chinar tree ,including Morton circle .This variety is known for its large ,rounded canopy and is popular in urban landscapes .Blood good -this variety has dark red leaves and is prized for its ornamental value .Emerald Queen--This variety is known for its fast growth rate and deep green foliage .Liberty-This variety is known for its resistance to pests and diseases and is often used in commercial landscaping .Majestic Beauty-This variety has a paramedical shape and is known for its large size and attractive foliage. Autumn Chinar-The leaves of the Chinar tree ,with deep green shade in summer ,turn to vivid orange and red during autumn .The Autumn chinar makes for a breathtaking sight in Kashmir during the autumn season .The other varieties are Kashmiri icon-The Chinar tree has great has great significance in Kashmiri culture and represents Kashmir's natural heritage .The tree is often depicted in different forms of art ,poetry ,and literature .Besides its natural beauty ,the Chinar tree also provides shade to locals .The changing colors of the Chinar leaves marks the arrival of the autumn /fall season ,which is known as Harud in Kashmir .Some other varieties are Iconic foliage ,Giant canopy ,and Regal beauty .The Chinar tree ,also known as Chinese Banyan or Platanus orientalis ,is deciduous .It is known for its distinctive ,fan -shaped leaves and beautiful ,exfoliating bark .Chinar trees are valuable and beneficial to any landscape or community ,providing various environmental ,aesthetic ,cultural ,and medicinal benefits .It is known for its distinctive ,large ,umbrella -shaped canopy and deeply furrowed bark .Planting Chinar trees have several benefits to people .It has environmental benefit ,aesthetic value ,Historical and cultural significance ,and has Medicinal properties. The Chinar trees also provide a habitat for various wildlife ,including birds and small mammals .The Chinar tree is not considered toxic to humans or animals .It is generally safe to plant and handle ,and there are no known adverse effects associated with its use .The leaves of the Chinar tree ,with deep green shade in summer ,turn to vivid orange and red during autumn .The Autumn Chinar makes for a breathtaking sight in Kashmir during autumn season .It is towards the end of autumn in November ,the Chinar trees change their color from green through crimson to yellow .Children run around excitedly ,trampling leaves and playing cricket under the shade of the mighty Chinar trees which goes vibrant with colors of red ,golden yellow and combinations of both in this season .In brief the Chinar trees in autumn season change color of its leaves from green to yellow golden and red and its sight is very pleasant to the eye and attracts large number of tourists and other people.

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

■ MOOL RAJ

In a significant leap towards inclusive education, the government has introduced a groundbreaking initiative aimed at providing home-based education for children with disabilities.

Under the National guidelines and Implementation Framework on Equal and Inclusive Education (NGIFEIE), schools across the country will soon be required to implement specific inclusivity measures for Children with Special Needs (CwSN).

These measures will target not only CwSN students but also those with physical disabilities and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) has laid out a comprehensive plan to offer home-based schooling for students with severe disabilities during the early years of their education. This innovative approach has the potential to transform the lives of countless children who face unique challenges in accessing quality education.

Home-Based Schooling: A Transformative Approach

The core of this transformative initiative is the introduction of home-based schooling for students with severe disabilities. The program recognizes the need for a more individualized and flexible approach to education to ensure that CwSN can attain the required levels of learning. The move is a testament to the commitment of the Indian government to ensure that no child is left behind in the pursuit of education.

Itinerant Resource Teachers: Guiding Lights for CwSN

One of the most essential components of this home-based schooling initiative is the introduction of itinerant resource teachers. These dedicated professionals will visit the homes of students with severe disabilities to guide them with their schoolwork. The

presence of an experienced educator in the student's home provides a personalized learning experience and crucial support for CwSN. These resource teachers will not only teach but also guide students to help them with their studies. Their goal is to ensure that students achieve the desired learning levels. What's unique about this approach is that the number of days the itinerant resource teacher will visit the student's home is left to the discretion of the parents. This flexibility empowers families to create an educational plan that suits their child's needs, schedule, and progress.

Legal Framework and the Right to Education

It's important to note that homeschooling, which this initiative falls under, aligns with the legal framework of education in India. The Right to Education Act of 2009 does not prohibit homeschooling. This means that parents and students with severe disabilities have the legal right to choose this home-based education option, granting them a choice that best suits their circumstances.

Special Educators and Cross-Disability Training

To ensure the success of this initiative, DSEL is planning to appoint special educators who will play a pivotal role in facilitating home-based schooling. Additionally, regular school teachers will receive cross-disability training, enabling them to provide better support to CwSN and physically-challenged students. This training is crucial in preparing educators to address the diverse needs of these students effectively.

Recognizing Diverse Disabilities

The guidelines under the NGIFEIE initiative acknowledge the diverse range of disabilities that students may face. The 2016 Act on the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities recognizes 21 disabilities, including blindness, low vision, hearing

impairments, intellectual disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, and many others. All of these conditions are considered severe disabilities among students. By recognizing the spectrum of disabilities, the initiative ensures that support is tailored to the specific needs of each student, acknowledging their unique challenges and strengths.

Alignment with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The NGIFEIE initiative is not in isolation but is closely aligned with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP emphasizes inclusivity and the creation of a strong early childhood educational ecosystem in the country. By ensuring that children with disabilities are included in the educational system, India takes a significant step towards fulfilling the promises of the NEP.

Benefits of Home-Based Schooling for CwSN

The introduction of home-based schooling for CwSN and other students with severe disabilities offers a range of benefits: Personalized Learning: Home-based schooling allows for personalized learning plans tailored to the specific needs and abilities of each student. This individualized approach can significantly enhance learning outcomes.

Flexibility: The flexibility of the program, with parents deciding the frequency of itinerant teacher visits, allows families to adapt education to their child's unique circumstances.

Reduced Barriers: Many students with severe disabilities face physical, sensory, or emotional barriers to attending traditional schools. Home-based schooling removes these barriers, creating an inclusive environment for learning.

Transition to Regular Schooling: The initiative recognizes that the ultimate goal is to help students achieve the desired learn-

ing levels, after which they can gradually transition to regular schooling. This transitional approach ensures that students are not isolated from mainstream education but are gradually integrated when they are ready.

Empowerment: By giving parents and caregivers the choice to opt for home-based schooling, the initiative empowers families to take an active role in their child's education.

The Way Forward

The introduction of home-based schooling for children with disabilities in India represents a significant step forward in the realm of education. It reflects the government's commitment to inclusivity and equal educational opportunities for all, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. This innovative initiative recognizes the diverse needs of students with severe disabilities and offers them a chance to excel in their education.

As this program is implemented and further developed, it is essential to monitor its progress and assess its impact on the lives of CwSN, physically challenged students, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The success of this initiative will be measured not only in terms of educational outcomes but also in the broader social and economic integration of these students into society.

In conclusion, the introduction of home-based schooling for children with disabilities in India is a remarkable and progressive step forward. It embodies the principles of inclusivity, flexibility, and empowerment, ensuring that no child is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge and personal development. It is a testament to the country's commitment to providing equal educational opportunities for all, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, and a move that can help transform the lives of countless children and their families.

From Yamadeepam to Jack-o'-Lanterns: Tracing Halloween's Hindu Origins

■ JAHNAVA NITAI DAS

Unknown to many is the fact that Halloween is actually descended from the ancient Hindu worship of the god of death, Yama, and a festival called as Yamadeepam, held each year on Dhanteras day, which falls roughly in the same week as Halloween.

Since the Vedic calendar is calculated based on the moon, the exact date varies each year, between the last week of October and the first week of November. On this day every house keeps a ghee lamp outside of their front door for Yama (the god of death), and this has eventually transformed over thousands of years into the modern pumpkin jack-o'-lantern light we see today in the west.

Prior to the use of the famous orange pumpkins of today, the Celtic traditions of Ireland were to use turnips and other vegetables to make the lanterns. After carving them, they would place burning embers or a candle inside, and this was supposed to provide light for the deceased spirits to be able to return to the earth during a special time when the veil between the netherworld and earth was thin enough for them to travel - provided they had light to cross the darkness.

In the Vedic tradition, on the day of Dhanteras a sacred lamp is placed in



front of the house and kept burning the entire night to please Yama, the God of death. This is also called as Yamadeepam. Following Yamadeepam (which is held on trayodashi, the 13th day of the moon), is Bhuta ("Ghost") Chaturdashi (also called Naraka ("Hell") Chaturdashi) where one worships the deceased forefathers. On this day one shows fire lights to guide the souls of the departed back to earth, and delivers them from hell through offering of pinda danam (spiritualized food offerings).

Traditionally special grass reeds are used to make a bonfire, and this is known as ulkahasta or ulkadana. It is believed that this giant bonfire of burning grass reeds will be visible

to the spirits of the forefathers and show them the way to come back to earth to visit you.

On this particular day the two worlds become aligned, allowing communication and interaction between the living and the dead - provided they are shown light to cross the vast darkness in between the two realms. This tradition of burning grass reeds for the forefathers still exists and is followed in many villages in India, though people in the larger cities have forgotten it. You can see an example of ulkadana (burning grass reeds for the forefathers) in the video above.

A similar tradition was followed by the Celtic people during a festival known as Samhain, where giant bon-

fires were lit on the night of October 31st. It is believed that this festival of Samhain later evolved into the modern festival of Halloween. The importance of this festival to the spirits of the forefathers is illustrated by the fact that some Neolithic tombs in Ireland were aligned to the position of the sunrise on the morning of Samhain. During the festival of Samhain the burial mounds were opened, and offerings of food and drink were made to the spirits of the forefathers, just as we offer pinda danam (spiritual food offerings) to the forefathers on the day of Naraka Chaturdasi.

In the Christian religion on November 1st or 2nd they observe "All Souls' Day", wherein they pray for the departed souls of the forefathers by lighting candles on their graves and offering food. They also pray for those who are in purgatory for deliverance, similar to Naraka ("Hell") Chaturdashi, where Hindus deliver their forefathers who may be in hell by offering them sanctified food (pinda danam) after guiding them to it with lights (ghee deepams and burning of grass reeds).

Even the use of the pumpkin and turnip has its origins in Hinduism. White ash gourd deepams (oil lamps) are a traditional offering in South Indian temples, especially for ferocious forms such as Bhairava

and various goddesses. The white ash gourd is also used as a type of "ball" (animal sacrifice), offering it in the place of real animals (thereby causing no violence), with the pumpkin often being painted with the face of an asura (demon), and red sindhur smeared after cutting it to represent blood.

The ancient Vedic worship of Yama (the god of death), the forefathers, the spirits, etc., through the offering of sacred ghee lamps and bonfires of grass reeds to guide the spirits of the forefathers, has transformed through thousands of years to become the modern festival of Halloween in the west.

If we look at some of the older rituals of Halloween in various places, there have been the same customs of lighting candles and bundles of hay to guide the dead souls with light, as well as leaving plates of food for the dead relatives. These are the same customs as ulkahasta (burning jute reeds to show light), yamadeepam (keeping a ghee lamp burning in front of your house the entire night), and pinda danam (food offerings for the dead to deliver them from hell) held during the same period by Hindus going back thousands of years. All of this shows that originally in ancient times there was one spiritual culture spread throughout the entire world.

Is It Time to Change the Name of India to Bharata?

■ J.N DAS

The name of this country "India" is a word with no meaning. We have accepted the name given by foreign invaders, and consider that fine. But if someone says we should restore the ancient name of this land, people will say it is "communalism" (religious fanaticism).

India is a mispronunciation of the Greek Indoi, which means people who live near the Indus river. First of all, we don't even have access to this river, as it runs through Pakistan. Secondly the river's correct name is Sindhu. Thus we have a series of mispronunciations piled on top of each other by various invaders, resulting in our present national identity.

The Sindhu river was mispronounced as Indhu by the Persians, then the Greeks took that mispronunciation and further mispronounced it as Indos, and created the name of the country as Indoi. Later the British mispronounced this and created the modern name "India", a word with

no actual meaning and no connection to the local population. All of these names are names imposed by outsiders and invaders. Even the name Hindustan is a name imposed by invaders.

Hindustan is the Persian name for India. If you look into the Avesta (the sacred texts of Zoroastrian religion), you can find they have borrowed many Sanskrit words but have replaced all 's' letters with 'h'. For example hapta-hindu is used instead of sapta-sindhu. "Ahura" is used instead of "asura".

Why was the Sindhu river used to define the sub continent? Because all the invaders were initially stopped there. If you look at Alexander the Great's invasion of India he turned back just after crossing the Sindhu river. That region doesn't define the country, it defines the limit of their invasions. We do not even have access to the Sindhu river today, so why should the country be named after that landmark which no longer exists for us?

As different groups invaded from the

west, the first geographic layers of the "country" they encountered were along the Sindhu river. Since they could not penetrate deeper to the heart of the subcontinent at the time, they named the entire subcontinent after the outer boundary they first encountered (at the Sindhu river).

Traditionally this land has been glorified in shastra as having sapta-sindhu (sapta-sindhavah), seven great sacred rivers. Naming the entire country after just one river located at the outer boundary would be like naming the entire United States as New York.

We need to restore the traditional ancient name of this country, Bharata, as has been in use for more than 5,000 years by the ancient risish, the indigenous residents of this land and forefathers of all modern Indians.

This is not communalism or religious fanaticism, this is simply truth and history. People should be called by the name they themselves choose, and the name

their ancestors chose, not the name imposed on them by foreign invaders.

In modern times, many neighboring countries have restored their ancient names or chosen the name they want to identify with (freeing themselves from their British colonial past). Ceylon was changed to Sri Lanka. Burma was changed to Myanmar. Siam became Thailand. It is time for India to break free from its colonial past and restore the ancient name of the country, Bharata.

As a side note, it is my personal opinion that it would be best for the name to remain as Bharata (the Sanskrit version), and not Bharat (the hindi version that drops the final "a"), to be most acceptable to all states, and especially the southern states that are against imposition of Hindi. The original Sanskrit name is the oldest and thus best name to adopt, and it would make it clear that it is not an imposition of Hindi on them, as the name exists in all of the local languages in this form.

YOUR COLUMN

Lighting/ Power Meter reading

Dear Editor,

All is well if the meter reading of lighting or power installations is taken by the meter readers exactly on the same day when it is due and also more less at the same time. When uniform rates are fixed for all the units, it makes no difference if the meter reading is taken at a different point of time. It matters little even if one or two days are delayed in taking the reading in such cases. Electricity tariff is replete with slab rates. If the reading is not taken in time, there is all the possibility of the consumption passing on to next slab for application of rates.

All slabs subsequent to first slab will be incrementally on higher side. If the meter reading is not taken in time and if the consumed units of electricity go to next higher slab, it would have financial implications resulting in the consumers to shell out more money. Some consumers may accept the higher slab without raising any dispute. But some rule-minded consumers may not accept. Some consumers may raise dispute because payment in higher slab for no fault of their own makes (big or small) hole into the pocket. Some consumers not willing to deviate from the established rule may raise dispute. It would be no wonder even if such an issue knocks at the door of courts. It is well-nigh impossible to expect the meter reader to take the reading in all the months on the same day and at the same time due to impracticability for various reasons. In such a case, the remedy is to allow the meter readers to note the reading and

raise the bill by assessing the consumption conforming to the prescribed day or time in the month. The assessed consumption for a very few units should be deducted from the recorded consumption when the meter reading could not be taken at the stipulated date and time. The need for raising the bill on pro rata basis arises only when the consumption exceeds the lower slab by only a very few units like 5 to 10 units. If the meter reader takes wise decision at the time of taking the reading, many a dispute in courts or outside the courts can be avoided. For this, the meter reader must be given the liberty to adjust the reading if the need arises. Any power or authority given to anybody is amenable for misuse or abuse. If the authority or power given to the meter readers is abused to harass the consumer, they should be strictly punished.

K.V. Seetharamaiah