

## TRAIN TO KASHMIR

The journey to Kashmir by train is nothing short of a mesmerizing experience. It not only takes you to one of the most beautiful regions in the world but also offers an unforgettable ride through lush landscapes, majestic mountains, and picturesque valleys. Whether you're traveling from the rest of India or exploring the state's unique train services, the journey to Kashmir is an adventure in itself.

The train route to Kashmir is part of the Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (JUSBRL) network, which is operated by Indian Railways.

This rail network connects the plains of Jammu to the stunning valley of Kashmir, and it provides a gateway to the region's scenic beauty. The journey starts from Jammu Tawi and heads towards Udhampur, eventually reaching the town of Banihal, and finally into the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar.

The stretch between Udhampur and Srinagar is considered one of the most scenic rail routes in India. The journey crosses over more than 100 bridges and through several tunnels, winding its way through steep cliffs, vast green meadows, and dense forests. Travelers can marvel at the lush landscapes of Ramban, Qazigund, and Anantnag, the perfect introduction to the verdant beauty of Kashmir.

One of the main highlights of this route is the Banihal-Qazigund tunnel, a marvel of engineering, which allows the train to pass through the Pir Panjal mountain range. The tunnel, nearly 11 kilometers long, helps bypass the treacherous mountain terrain, making the journey safer and faster. In the past, this journey would require traveling over the mountains by road, but the completion of the rail tunnel has drastically reduced travel time.

The views along the journey are breathtaking, with the train winding around mountains and valleys. The ride offers panoramic views of snow-capped peaks, flowing rivers, and rolling meadows. The train's slow pace allows passengers to soak in the natural beauty at leisure.

The final destination, Srinagar, offers an enchanting experience. Known for its Dal Lake, houseboats, Mughal gardens, and handicrafts, Srinagar has long been a favorite tourist destination. The arrival of the train from Jammu brings a sense of excitement, especially for those traveling from other parts of India. The Jammu to Srinagar train is not just a means of transport but a significant part of the experience, providing a seamless connection to Kashmir's rich cultural heritage and natural wonders.

## Preservation of Kashmiri shawls and its cultural heritage

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF



Valued for its warmth, light weight and characteristic buta design, the Kashmir shawl trade inspired the global cashmere industry. The shawl evolved into its high-grade, sartorial use in the 13th century and was used in the 16th century by Mughal and Iranian emperors, both personally and for honouring members of their durbar.

The production of Kashmiri shawls was greatly influenced by the Mughal and Persian cultures that flourished in the region during the 14th and 15th centuries. The Mughals, who were great patrons of the arts, encouraged the production of high-quality textiles, including Kashmiri shawls.

The Persian influence on the design and embroidery techniques of Kashmiri shawls can be seen in the intricate floral and paisley motifs, as well as the use of rich colours and gold thread. The influence of Mughal and Persian culture on Kashmiri shawls is still evident in the designs and patterns used by weavers and embroiderers today.

About Kashmiri shawls it is said "Of all Indian textiles none excels in beauty, colour, texture and design as the famous Kashmir Shawl". Shawls are produced by two techniques, loom woven or kani shawls and the needle embroidered or sozni shawls.

The basic fabric is of the three types - Shah Tush, Pashmina and Raffal. Shah Tush (King of wool) comes from a rare Tibetan antelope living at a height of over 14000 ft in the wilds of the Himalayas. Pashmina is known world over as cashmere wool, it comes from a special goat (Capra hircus) living at an altitude of 12000 to 14000 ft reared by shepherd nomads around famous pongkong lake in close vicinity of western Tibet. Raffal is spun out of marino wool tops and is a popular type of shawl.

The shawls are embroidered in floral motifs,

various designs available range from Neemdoor, Doordaar, Paladaar, Baildaar, Jaalid and Jammaas, with the help of needle. Where as Kani shawls are woven on looms with the help of kanis. Kanis are small eyeless bobbins used instead of the shuttle.

In earlier times, shawls were used as a warm protective garment against cold weather. By the 13th century, Kashmir shawls had risen in status and quality and were commonly used as fashion statements. Shawls were marketed towards the ruling elite and foreign markets.

Technically the shawl as a garment and as a word comes from 14th century Persia. They were woven rectangles worn over the shoulders and made from Kashmiri goat. That's significant I think because Kashmir was a major trade center.

All these early shawls were woven. They were made in whatever fiber was on hand; silk in the east, cashmere in the near east, wool in the New World. They were square or rectangular in shape and usually large enough to wrap and fold around the body.

Decorative lace shawls seem to have come into fashion in the early 1800's. The earliest styles were made on tambour or other netting with intricate designed stitched/embroidered on that base fabric. This seems to be when shawls became circular and triangular.

Kashmiri shawls have been an important part as they have been used in traditional ceremonies, weddings, and festivals. Kashmiri shawls have also been popular among the royal families of India and other parts of the world, who have appreciated their beauty and quality.

In terms of fashion, Kashmiri shawls have been embraced by designers worldwide, who have incorporated them into their collections. They have been adapted to suit modern tastes, with contemporary designs and color schemes being introduced. Kashmiri shawls have become a timeless and versatile accessory, that can add an element of elegance and

sophistication to any outfit. They are considered a must-have accessory in many fashion circles and are highly prized by collectors and enthusiasts.

Over time, the production of Kashmiri shawls evolved into an art form, with weavers and embroiderers creating intricate designs and patterns that were highly valued by royalty and the elite. The influence of Mughal and Persian cultures on the design and embroidery techniques of Kashmiri shawls can be seen in the intricate floral and paisley motifs, as well as the use of rich colors and gold thread. The use of fine materials such as pashmina and shahtoosh wool further contributed to the high value and prestige of Kashmiri shawls.

Shahtoosh shawls are even finer and more delicate than pashmina shawls, and are considered the ultimate luxury item. However, due to the endangered status of the Tibetan antelope, the production of shahtoosh shawls has been banned, and pashmina shawls have once again become the primary material used to make Kashmiri shawls. Today, Kashmiri shawls continue to be made using traditional techniques and materials, ensuring that the art of Kashmiri shawl-making is preserved for generations to come.

Kashmiri shawls are steeped in legends and stories that have been passed down through the generations. One of the most famous legends is that of the Jamawar shawls, which are known for their intricate patterns and designs. Another famous story is that of the Kani shawl weavers, who were said to have been gifted with supernatural powers. Legend has it that the weavers could see the designs in their minds and weave them into the fabric without the use of a pattern. The Kani shawl weavers were highly respected and were often sought after by royalty and the elite.

Due to the high value placed on these shawls, they often served as heirloom pieces and family treasures that were passed down through generations. Families would take

great care to preserve and protect their Kashmiri shawls, often storing them out in special cases and only taking them out on special occasions. These shawls became symbols of family heritage and tradition, and were often viewed as priceless works of art.

In recent years, there has been a growing concern for the preservation of Kashmiri shawls, and the importance of sustainability in their production. The demand for Kashmiri shawls, coupled with the increasing popularity of fast fashion, has led to concerns about overconsumption and the impact on the environment.

To address these concerns, there has been a renewed interest in traditional techniques and sustainable practices in the production of Kashmiri shawls. This includes using natural dyes, sourcing materials from ethical and sustainable sources, and promoting fair trade practices in the industry.

Preservation of Kashmiri shawls is also being addressed through initiatives aimed at educating the public about the cultural and historical significance of these shawls, and the importance of preserving them for future generations. This includes efforts to promote the use of Kashmiri shawls in modern fashion, and to support the livelihoods of local artisans and weavers who continue to practice traditional techniques.

Kashmiri shawls are not just beautiful and luxurious garments, but also represent a rich cultural history and tradition that dates back centuries. They have been treasured by people from all over the world for their exquisite craftsmanship and intricate designs, making them an important symbol of Kashmiri heritage.

The art of Kashmiri shawl making is a delicate and intricate process that requires a great deal of skill and patience, and is often passed down from generation to generation. As such, it is crucial that we take steps to preserve this art form and support the artisans and weavers who practice it.

## NATIONAL AGRICULTURE SUMMIT &amp; KISAN MELA: NOV 20-23

## 'Harnessing Innovations in Agriculture and Allied Sciences'

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Another groundbreaking initiative of Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST-J), the four days National Agriculture Summit & Kisan Mela commences today at its Main Campus, Chatha. Under the dynamic leadership of a visionary, Prof. B. N. Tripathi Hon'ble Vice Chancellor and humble guidance of Prof. Amrish Vaid, Director Extension; this four days long mega farm event of leading farm university of the country will culminate on Nov. 23.

Universities can't afford to be insensitive to changing local and global scenario, they have to take a leading role in societal transformation and especially those associated with agriculture need to take effective steps to ensure societal transformation. This is because agriculture is a vital component having major contribution in economy, employment generation and ultimately in ensuring livelihood security. New interventions and technologies in agriculture and allied sectors have to be disseminated among the farming communities for their subsequent adoption and ultimate benefit to the end users. A World Bank study reveals that agricultural development is one of the most powerful tools to end extreme poverty. Agriculture in 2050 will need to produce almost 50 percent more food, feed and bio-fuel than it did in 2012. Growth in agriculture sector is two to four times more effective in raising incomes

among the poorest compared to other sectors. Farm varieties have the mandate of research, extension and teaching. The output of research in the shape of various technologies is practically of no use until it is extended to those for whom it is being done. Extension thus plays a major role in carrying out research to the farmers' fields. The major extension activities of the universities include lying out Front Line Demonstrations, diagnostic visits, farm and weather related advisories, field visits and field days, exposure visits etc. Among all the extension activities, Kisan Mela is an effective and a potent tool for societal transformation. It is an organized educational activity, a mass communication method for involving and educating farmers, scientists, extension workers, input agencies, developmental departments, non governmental agencies and all other relevant stakeholders. The event is usually held at an agriculturally important educational, research or extension center.

Continuing with a very important and vital farm tradition, SKUAST-J is also hosting Annadatta (Farmers) and all other relevant stakeholders in its four days event scheduled from Nov. 20-23. The theme of these four days National Agriculture Summit & Kisan Mela 'Harnessing Innovations in Agriculture and Allied Sciences' focuses on the role of new technologies in development of from and allied sectors. At the same time, it also underscores the need of adopting sustainable practices so that the effect of

various factors which threaten the planet can be reversed or at least minimized. It will show case ground breaking initiatives, cutting edge solutions to most of the pressing problems the farm sector is presently witnessing. It will at the same time provide a platform to all the relevant stakeholders to come together, engage in discussions and gain insights about best farming practices and update their knowledge about various government policies and programmes. This national level event will witness the participation of farmers, farm women, students, youths, entrepreneurs, private players, and input dealers, officers/officials from line departments and financial institutions and of different agencies from all across the country. With the SKUAST-Jammu having important MoUs with leading foreign universities, international participation is also expected in the summit. Organized with the active collaboration of all its faculties, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, research institutes and all the constituent units of the University, it is expected that the mela will witness a footfall of many thousands.

The summit will focus on sustainable agriculture. Our traditional practices have already adversely affected our environment adversely. All the focus is now on sustainable agriculture practices. The four day event will specially focus on sustainable agricultural practices and approaches like Organic and Natural Farming. The present government is

also focusing a lot on Natural farming as is evident from the Union Budget 2024. In the next 2 years, one crore farmers will be initiated into natural farming supported by certification and branding. The summit will focus on technologies demonstrating the organic inputs like Bio fertilizers, Bio-control agents, bio organic nutrient management, organic waste treatment and microbial preparations like Bijamrita, and Jeevamrita. The mela will have all kinds of inputs and farm implements which can be purchased by all. Many input dealers and private agencies will be there displaying their products and inputs. Farmers of the region including farm women and youths who have earned a name through development of various products/technologies/practices will also be a part of this mela depicting and showcasing their innovations. Shri Anna i. e Millets called as 'Super Foods' and 'Food of Future' will also be an important feature of this summit. This Mela will specially focus on this aspect wherein various ethnic value added food products made from different traditional crops including millets will be at display. The country has become the Startup capital of world with so many startups coming up in agriculture and allied sectors. The startups have an important role in employment and income generation. This mela will also give an opportunity to the young entrepreneurs to depict their business models and prototypes.

Lack of awareness about different

government schemes is an important constraint for the farming community to avail the benefits of these schemes. SKUAST-Jammu has taken special care of this. To ensure that the farming community becomes aware of all schemes related to them, different development departments as well as financial institutions like NABARD, J&K Bank, SBI, JKEDA and many other organizations will be there to guide and aware all. The farming community will be able to avail the benefits by on spot registration.

Today agriculture is undergoing a digital revolution. The Mela will focus on smart farming tools and technologies by displaying smart agriculture technologies like precision farming and agricultural drones. The Farmers-Scientist interface will provide an opportunity to the farming community to interact with concerned expert for immediate redressal of their queries. Hybrid and high yielding livestock including cattles, goats and sheep will also be star attraction of mela. Different collective organizations i. e Self Help groups/Farmer Producer Companies and Farmer Producer Organizations will also participate in this event with various kinds of niche products they have developed. Students from different educational institutes of the region will also be attending the mela to learn more about agriculture. The innovative farmers/farm women/young entrepreneur/students who have made significant and tangible contributions to the society will be recognized in the

Mela through various awards. The health check up services will also be a part of the mela.

There will be sessions on Agri Startups and Agri-preneurship, Farm Mechanization, Digital Agriculture, Precision Farming, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Agriculture, Livestock management, Use of Drones in Agriculture, Empowering women in Agriculture, Hi-Tech Agriculture, Industry-Academia Linkages, Post-harvest processing and Value addition, Marketing opportunities and Development of Market linkages. Besides dog show, cattle show, flower show, vegetable show and poultry show will also be an added attraction of this event wherein animal lovers can participate with their pets and win exciting prizes.

Research studies reveal that despite various ICT tools for information dissemination, melas continue to be a significant mode of transfer of technology owing to many advantages. The main purpose of organizing such Kisan Mela is to create awareness among farming communities and their sensitization on important issues so as to enhance technology adoption rate. The four days event will be a unique opportunity for all where in SKUAST-Jammu will be demonstrating sustainable technologies/practices and products; the others stakeholders will have the opportunity to come and learn, engage, update, build and expand their business through this platform.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues).

## One Nation One Education policy is the need of the hours

■ ER. PRABHAT KISHORE

The "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009" was implemented on 1st April 2010 with the objective of ensuring quality education to all children in the country. In the light of the provision of the Act, rules & regulations were promulgated by the State Governments regarding grant of approval to private schools and minimum criteria and conditions were prescribed for all schools. Within six months of the implementation of the rules, all private schools had to submit self-declaration, before a three-member district committee, regarding compliance of the standards and norms mentioned in the Act and fulfillment of the conditions. The norms fixed includes school to be operated through a legitimate society/trust, not to be operated for the benefit of any individual or group, to work by the values enshrined in the constitution, to use the building/structure/ground etc. only for education and skill development.

There are some minimum standards, norms and conditions for schools in the law, such as one class room per teacher, drinking water facility, toilet, playground, kitchen, barrier free elements, boundary wall, provision of teachers on the

basis of number of students, prescribed minimum qualification in the employment of teachers, enrollment of children from disadvantaged and weaker sections on at least 25 percent seats in first and early childhood classes, enrollment of children in age-relative classes and special training to make them skilled, relevant courses by educational authority, teaching in the mother tongue, neither any test nor donation for admission etc. Commission for Protection of Child Rights has been constituted at national as well as state level.

The concerned district committee had to do a site inspection within three months and give approval in case the schools met the standards and norms and in case of non-compliance, three years' time was to be given to complete them. Some private schools in the states openly challenged the government's regulations and called it interference in the autonomy of the school.

The Provision and fulfillment of the standards and norms cannot be termed government interference. In fact, according to the law, the standards, norms and conditions set for the school are not in the capacity of 90 percent of the private schools. They neither have adequate physical infrastructure nor teachers with

prescribed qualifications. Each school has its own cumbersome & irrelevant curriculum and ropey English has been forcibly imposed on children instead of their mother tongue. The admission test of children for enrollment is going on fearlessly. They are finding themselves naked in the mirror of the law. For them education is just a business and school is a shop. How then can they declare that their school is not a non-profit institution?

As per rule, 75 percent of the members of the school management committee will be parents. But the parents, who in the name of the future of their children pay the huge amount with their blood and sweat, are being termed as outsiders by the school administrators. Minority missionary school managements see a dent in their religious freedom, but will they not hesitate to tell what percentage of children in their schools belong to the minority community? In fact, they are doing educational business taking advantages set for a minority institution.

It is a self-evident fact that since the schools have been governmentised, the intimate relationship of the society with the school has been disappeared. The community char-

acter of the school has vanished and the teachers have been turned into a government servant instead of guides/path-shower. They are being engaged in all kinds of non-educational works. Due to good service conditions and salary, instead of mission-mode spirit, the domination of the people only for livelihood has increased in this pious profession of teaching. The government education system has collapsed due to limitless powers of education officers and their plundering policy. People have lost their faith in government schools. Taking illegitimate advantage of the flaws prevailing in government schools, private schools have established their empire, where on one hand there is the monopoly of managers, while the children are victims of financial, physical, mental & linguistic exploitation.

If we look at the routine of private schools, it is found that from the first day itself, huge amount is taken in the name of examination and fees. Every material from pencil to copy, book, dress has to be purchased from the school's prescribed shop at arbitrary expensive price. The order of not opening the school before 8 a.m. fixed by the administration has been overruled and the young child has to get up at

5 a.m. in a semi-sleep to prepare for the school. Instead of the mother tongue, they are forced to converse in English, otherwise they are either punished or ridiculed. Less class work and more homework are provided in the name of studies. Since parents pay huge amount in the form of fees, they make their children proficient either by themselves or through tuition. If the parents do not pay special attention to the children from their own level, then the education system of these schools will totally collapse. Under the burden of redundant courses, private schools have killed the childhood of children. A 5-6 year old child is left entangled in 30-40 books & notebooks. They have neither time to play nor proper sleep. After all, how would all round development of the children be?

How ridiculous is the demand to allow a separate seating arrangement for the children from 25 percent depressed and weaker sections of the society? In the name of globalization and modernity, their heart, mind and thinking have also been adapted to the British Era mindset. If this is not the irony of independent India, then what is it that a child from a poor section is being openly declared as a second class citizen! On the one hand, we

chant the melody of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" and "EkDeshEkVidhan", while on the other hand we do not shy away by making provision of separate education system for the resourceful citizens negating "EkDeshEkGyan".

A decade has passed since the enactment of the Right to Education Act, but no action has taken against the schools, which did not meet the prescribed criteria. Due to the corrupt, sluggish and careless educational management; the graduates, on whose shoulders future of the country rests, are bound to bear the brunt of the derailed education system.

Quality elementary education, full of all resources, is the foundation of a nation and children of all strata are its future. The private schools must not be allowed to do arbitrariness in the name of education, to mock the law, to keep the spirit of untouchability to poor children, to spoil children's childhood and to establish a parallel empire. The government should come forward with a "One Nation One Education" policy, so that all sections of the society may have same education and opportunity.

(The author is a technocrat & academician).