

KATRA STAMPEDE

After tragedy at the revered Cave Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi on the first day of the year 2022, instead of mudslinging and playing politics over the unfortunate deaths of devotees it becomes necessary that the people sitting at helm of affairs should revisit the protocol set for the entire Yatra and come up with new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and other guidelines which are failsafe and ensure complete safety of the pilgrims at all times. Another thing which is to be ensured at the Cave Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi is that no one is allowed to flout the norms set up by the concerned authority. In case of a VIP movement in the premises of Bhawan or along the route, there is dire need that the procedure should be pre-defined and come what may the local authority should be asked not change the same under any condition. As the Lt Governor Manoj Sinha has ordered high level inquiry into the incident, it is matter of days that the exact cause will come to fore and the same will also help in forming new guidelines so that such kind of mishap never ever get repeated in this Shrine or any other in the country because it is advisable that managements of all such shrines be consulted before going in for new guidelines. The government and the police seems to be in a denial mood but going into the details which have been gone public till date to some extent there is an element of mismanagement also before and after the tragic incident and no one can deny this fact outrightly. The authorities are at work to find out the reasons which led to this tragedy and sooner than later things will become crystal clear. The people who are staging protest and creating lawlessness in Katra and other places should act sensibly because such kind of disruptions are not good for the revered Yatra because these send a wrong signal down the line changing the minds of people intending to visit the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. What the authorities can do now is to set-up new SOPs and the people on the other hand should pose faith in authorities instead of raising doubts.

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Protest Profitably

It is believed that in ancient times, gods and not kings ruled the world. Prayer was the means to request, protest, and communicate all needs. It was heart-to-heart. One prayed silently and earnestly, and this resulted in blessings. Heart was the centre of communication.

Now is the time of the mind. Having distanced from the heart, we have forgotten how to pray. The mind deals with logic and reason, so petitions once uttered in silence now take the route of the letter. So we lodge petitions, air our grievances, and have found many ways of seeking fulfilment. These don't work so effectively, as man now uses more of the mind than the heart. The nature of the mind is not to listen, it is to say and do.

When dissatisfaction increases, the natural response is violence. The answer to the rule of the might is the strength of numbers. Hence, we protest, not alone standing silently but gather in vast numbers on the street. It is alright. A revolution may take birth in a living room with one or a handful of people, but it succeeds by the strength in numbers. The means, though, is one of silence and prayers.

Strength in numbers is enhanced through poise. Imagine a big gathering of people wearing signs of protest, silently standing in front of the offices of the kings of our times and offering prayer for resolution. Agitation is like fire. It gives expression to anger and separates us, whereas prayer is like water.

It calms and brings us together. We need to breathe air into only one of them to succeed.

During the Independence struggle, great leaders worked hard for us, but the silent work of saints such as Swami Vivekananda, Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur, affectionately called Babuji, and other spiritual giants propelled and catalysed this ardent process. Their power of intention, spiritual fuel, and faith improved the awareness and consciousness of the leaders. Perhaps that is

why our Independence Movement was successful sooner than those in the rest of colonial Asia and Africa. And the protests were largely peaceful, moderate, and came from an altruistic space — from the heart. When that happens, the benefits of such protests go beyond just peace and calm, they extend to the future generations and help to promote the evolution of humanity. We see that the future belongs to the manifestation of the intention of the heart.

Heart's Intention

The power of intention or, as Babuji would say, sankalp, has much more potency than protests and lawsuits that happen on the streets. If we were to look at all the challenges in the world, how many would we protest against? How many would be heard? How many would find solutions and how many of those solutions would be executed effectively? All these questions lead us back to the heart; they lead us back to the power of intention, wisdom, and positivity of a prayer to be manifested as solutions. If all of us lead a life of altruism, then there would be no need for protests. If such a life of altruism is required, then peace needs to be birthed in the heart.

Babuji said, “It is, therefore, essential to find out means for developing within every individual a state of peace and contentment.

Thus, all that we have to do for the attainment of world peace is to mould the mental tendencies of the people individually.

That means proper regulation of the mind so as to introduce into it a state of moderation. That's the only way to bring peace into the world. It is, therefore, essential for all of us to develop peace of mind within. But that being exclusively the scope of spirituality, one must resort to spiritual means for the purpose.”

With such a spiritual purpose in everyone's heart, where is the need for protest? Where is the question of right and wrong intentions? If life and our hearts were expressed in such natural ways, there would be no protests.

Kamlesh Patel

Go beyond science, into the region of metaphysics. Real religion is beyond argument. It can only be lived both inwardly and outwardly.

-Swami Sivananda

Biodiversity: Foundation of Human Health

■ DR BANARSI LAL

Biodiversity comprises the diversity, abundance and identity of species, their genes and ecosystems. It is inextricably linked to human health. It provides ecosystem goods and services that are essential for our health and well-being. It provides us food, water and various other resources as well as services such as recycling of nutrients, climate control, pollination and flood mitigation. It plays a significant role in survival of the life on the planet Earth. There are seven continents on planet Earth. Every human being has only one dream which is to live better, to eat better and to consume better. But majority of them do not care for the environment and the mother Earth. Presently there is more than 7 billion population in the world but we have only one planet to live and survive. We have limited food, limited place and limited shelters. If we keep on using natural resources as we are doing every day, a day will come when our future generation shall be forced to live homeless with full of hunger. So, we all need to utilize the natural resources with care and responsibility. We should stop the wastage of natural resources and use them according to our need not on our greed. Each of us knows the importance of nature. Every living being is dependent on plants and trees. All the living organisms on the earth are mutually interdependent on each other. But due to the excessive pollution caused by human beings, many species are becoming extinct and the global climate is also changing at a very rapid rate. The global warming is inversely affecting our health and can cause a long term impact on our coming generations. We know that millions of people on the Earth depend on forest for their livelihood. Only the plants and trees can make our food. But, we people are degrading the forests in a rapid rate. Every year, pollinators like bees help three-fourth of the world's flowering plants and reproduce about 35 per cent of the world's food. Human actions such as deforestations, intensified agriculture, encroachments on wildlife habitats and climate change have pushed the nature beyond its limit. If we continue our activities in the same way

then we can face the severe implications in future. The Earth has lost 68 per cent of its ecosystems and associated biodiversity in the last 50 years due to anthropogenic activity. It has been observed that around 25 per cent of all animals and plants species are threatened with extinction. Loss of over 35 per cent of the earth's mangrove forests has made us vulnerable to floods results in rising the sea levels. Deforestation with loss of multiple plant species is damaging the soil integrity and causing the landslides. Deforestation also increases the zoonotic infections by removing the protective boundaries between wildlife and human communities. It destroys the natural hosts of forest-dwelling microbes and offers them an easy passage in veterinary and human hosts.

India is one of the richest nations in the world in terms of biological diversity. India has about 15,000 species of flowering plants, 969 species of birds, 389 species of reptiles and 317 species of mammals. India has relatively large number of frogs, salamanders and their kith & kins. Brazil is the most biologically diverse nation in the world. India stands 10th in terms of biological diversity. Some parts of the country are very rich due to a variety of natural causes in biological diversity and some are less. The Loss of biodiversity across the globe has increased alarmingly and many wildlife and plant species are on the verge of extinction. Presently there is environmental crisis. Cyclones and floods create havoc and wash away many trees and infrastructure. Recently the bushfires in Brazil, the United States and Australia, global COVID-19 pandemic and locusts attack in India and Africa indicate that human health is closely dependent with the environmental health.COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the economy of almost all the nations across the globe. Present environmental crisis indicates that we must rethink for our relationship with the natural ecosystem. There is urgent need to think on biodiversity. Ultimately human health depends on the ecosystem products and services. Loss of biodiversity directly impacts the human health. Changes in the ecosystem services can impact our livelihoods, rural migra-

tion and may cause other conflicts among the human beings. Loss of biodiversity may limit the research for the potential treatments of many diseases.

As per WHO, health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is a fundamental human right and a key indicator of sustainable development. The impact of climate change, ecosystem change and degradation is increasingly recognized. Although modern technologies have made our lives comfortable but they have deteriorated the environment. When we destroy the nature, we destroy the system that supports us. Presently about one million species are facing extinction. We need to re-examine our relationship with nature. Although we are having numerous technological advancements but still we are completely dependent on healthy ecosystem for our food, clothes, shelter, health, water, medicines, fuel, energy etc. 2022 year can be said as the year of challenges, opportunities and solutions. It has been observed that there is dire need to conserve the biodiversity for the benefits of life on the Earth. Nature acts as the solution of our many solutions. Nature is closely associated with the climate change, food security and health. Biodiversity is badly affected due to our short-sighted activities including infrastructure development, chemical farming, deforestation, mining etc. All these activities have degraded the ecosystem and have created the pandemic like situations .Presently all the nations across the globe are endeavouring to end the COVID-19 pandemic. There is urgent need to work jointly for the resilient and sustainable global economy. The exploitation of renewable and non-renewable energy resources and rapid increase in the urbanization are severely affecting the biodiversity. Sustainable development is the only way to mitigate the needs of our present and future generations. It also ensures the health of the planet Earth.

Biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate threatening the quality of our lives.COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of public health across the globe in response to unsustainable biodi-

versity management. Biodiversity is the foundation for our food and health and plays a key catalyst to transforming food systems and improving human health. A wide range of events are organized globally to increase the understanding of the important role of biodiversity for our present and future generations. The biodiversity we observe today is the outcome of over 3.5 billion years of evolutionary history, shaped by the natural processes. Biodiversity is the foundation for the life and for the essential services provided by ecosystems. It plays as a key catalyst to transform our food system system and thus improves the human health. It underpins peoples' livelihoods and sustainable development in all realms of socio-economical activity, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism etc. Biodiversity is a global asset. Biodiversity forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we are fully dependent.

Biological diversity is the natural biotic capital of the earth which affects all of us. Human beings derive the supply of food, medicines, energy and many industrial products from biological resources. The environmental crisis is an existential threat. Pandemics are related to the environmental crisis, helping to nurture and host novel germs. Even in present era many people are not aware about some serious environmental issues-from air pollution to toxic dumps to pesticides to loss of biodiversity. There are enormous challenges but there are also opportunities on environmental action. Environmental protection is considered as the biggest challenge for the mankind. Serious efforts are needed to protect the biodiversity. We all need to understand that biodiversity is the foundation for our life and ultimately it ensures our livelihoods and sustainable development. We need to protect the environment by changing our lifestyles, by shunning the use of plastics, growing the plants and using the alternate sources of energy. We all need to join our hands together to protect the Mother Earth.

(The author is Scientist and Head, KVK Reasi (SKUAST-J).

New Year Resolutions

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

It has been rightly said, "Years pass but memories stay as near and dear as yesterday" and this postulate is appropriate and apt so far as the culmination of the previous year and the commencement of the new year is concerned. The year 2021 has passed into the annals of history and it was a mixed bag as it had plus and minus happenings which remind us of the challenges ahead which we have to face with fortitude and resilience and come victorious in the end. The year that passed had witnessed COVID-19 pandemic crisis which took a heavy toll of precious human lives as thousands of the lives have been lost and consumed by this disease. Not that we have only lost thousands of the lives but there had been a great setback to the economy of the country which is very hard to fill. We have welcomed the New Year 2022 with a big wish list which we will strive to achieve otherwise the dictum that if wishes were horses even beggar would ride comes to mind. Therefore there is no need for only wishes but the wishes should be converted into reality and the goals achieved and we resolve to make sincere efforts for the achievement of the goals. The year 2021 that has gone has passed with pros and cones in its kitty. Thus inflation and steep rise in the prices of the daily use goods and services which has broken the back of the commoner as well as the politicization of religion were the cones of year 2021 which we have given a good bye. The previous year had been hit hard by the accidents and many terrorist acts and the dance of death and mayhem is still continuing and threatening us and devouring precious human lives. But is also reality that many hard core terrorists were neutralised by our security forces and it is a commendable job for which we salute our security forces. Many Jammu and Kashmir policemen, CRPF Jawans, army personnel attained martyrdom

while fighting the enemies of humanity. The year 2021 ended on an unfortunate happening as towards the close of the year the air crash of the CDS Bipin Rawat's plane along with his wife and eleven other officers and army Jawans lost their precious lives in the tragic accident. It leads to a pall of gloom to the country as it was an irreparable loss to the nation which is hard to fill. It is a fact that many projects of national importance, roads and other infrastructure was laid during previous year. The country achieved many feats in space technology and it has given a place of pride to the country in the international community and its effect is that India is now heard in the world over. But as far as relations between India and Pakistan are concerned, there has been no headway in the relations as there was no thaw in the strained relations between the two neighbours. Thus the terrorism and dance of death continues and it is a serious concern to all of us. Many natural accidents took place in year 2021 as we heard the bad news of the accidents day in and day out which took a heavy toll of the precious human lives. We welcome New Year 2022 with great resolutions. We resolve to strive for the end of terrorism, terrorism and extremism in the New Year and we will try to work for peace and tranquility in the Indian subcontinent and the world at large. We also resolve to force the powers that be to bring the rising prices of the goods and services under control for the benefit of the consumers. Thus we will make efforts to prevail on the government so that it will control the rising prices of the goods of the daily use so that some relief is given to the consumers. We resolve to fight the war against the COVID 19 and its new variant omicron so that the lives of the people will be saved. Thus we resolve to provide a helping hand to the government in its fight with the monster of COVID-19 for the interest of the humanity and for preserving the

lives of the people. So we will strive and observe the COVID Appropriate Behaviour and help and take part in the vaccination of the people and we resolve to honor the front line COVID warriors and help and cooperate with them for the health and safety of the people. But unfortunately the new year 2022 began with a shocking news of the accident at Trikuta hills in Mata Vaishno Devi shrine were unprecedented stampede occurred which consumed the lives of twelve pilgrims and injuries to many others. The stampede, which took the lives of 12 pilgrims, shook country and it brought gloom to the countrymen. One fails to understand as how the stampede took place and why such a rush was allowed on the eve of New Year. When the coronavirus is still continuing and its new variant omicron has taken birth the thousands of the pilgrims should not have been allowed to proceed to the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and many pilgrims did not follow COVID Appropriate Behaviour and social distancing was not observed which resulted in the stampede and the consequent deaths which is very unfortunate and this should not have happened. It is a matter of satisfaction that the shrine board has announced the relief of rupees of twelve lacs for the next of those killed in the stampede and rupees of two lakh to those injured in the gory accident. The people allege that there was laxity on the part of the shrine board and there was mismanagement on the part of the shrine board. Therefore responsibility for the tragedy should be fixed and those found guilty should be prosecuted and punished so that such accidents will not recur again. The UT administration has constituted a committee to enquire the stampede and its cause. But there is urgent need for a judicial probe into the accident so that full facts will come to light. Since the government has constituted a team of officers to probe the sad happening at the

shrine and asked it to report in a week and put the findings before the public. The laxity of the shrine board cannot be ruled out and therefore responsibility should be fixed and those found guilty should be challenged in the court of law and the mismanagement should not be allowed to happen in future. We also resolve to avoid such rush at the religious places on the festive occasions so that accidents will not take place. Since, COVID-19 and its new avatar omicron is threatening us and so we resolve to work in the interest of the country so that the coronavirus will not spread its tentacles further and cause damage to the lives of the people any more. Let us resolve to observe COVID appropriate behavior and strive to fight the COVID and its new variant to finish by helping the government in its fight against the COVID-19. May we resolve to uphold the secularism and pluralism so that unity in diversity which is so dear to us is followed in letter and spirit for the flourishing of the communal harmony and mutual brotherhood. The list of resolutions can be very long but we should work for the interest of the countrymen in these trying circumstances .We should strive to keep peace and tranquility and mutual brotherhood in the country. Therefore we resolve to embrace the New Year with the solemn declaration to work for peaceful, strong, stable and prosperous India so that it will again become a Vishwa Guru and become a world power. But for this, all of us will have to pledge to work hard with honesty so that the country gets its respected place in the international community in the days to come. In brief we should resolve to work in the best interests of the country so that various vices with which our country is faced are not allowed to spread its tentacles and hinder our march to progress and prosperity.

(The author is retired Education Officer and Columnist).

YOUR COLUMN

Unlocking future in Education

Dear Editor,

The future is about time frames. A year is a short time to experience the gravity of educational shifts, but large enough to spot the signals and drivers of change. The National Education Policy and its allied ideas of equity, quality and access remain popular forces for the future. But, there are less-debated subtle themes. Here are five such themes clustered from different signals and drivers, which allow us to align macro forces such as tech-innovations with tiny changes such as flexible curriculum.

Rise of alternative learning providers: Who is an alternative learning provider? Anyone from a YouTube teacher to a university offering an industry-partnered degree or an ed-tech venture. They come in different sizes, credibility, recognition, and cost. Quality standards range from good to bad to ugly. It is a shift from the traditional educational experience that operates around prescribed modules in specified sequence, with standardised evaluations and approval status. Such providers pioneer new models and innovations, and convert academic sessions into work-integrated learning. Their agile nature equips them to offer more affordable learning compared to most traditional institutions. Non-traditional providers impact changes in pedagogy and credentialing, though they are neither widespread nor quick. For example, learning can be more solution-

ary, an advanced form of problem-centered learning, and will be portfolio-targeted and outcome-driven.

Cohort-based courses and new credentials: The last two years have seen unprecedented enrollments in MOOC platforms. While it may continue to attract learners, cohort-based interactive courses will be on the rise in the current year. These carry and cherish an active learning community in hybrid spaces and serve fewer learners but with higher engagement levels compared to MOOCs. The employers' focus on learning outcomes over traditional credentials will push the need for real-life work experiences. This will question the value of classroom seat-time and probably see some institutions experiment by merging theory and practice and designing an entire programme around field experience. We may also see more collaboration among educational entities, businesses and civic organisations leading to new credentials and badges, particularly in technical courses.

Design your own degree: Designing individualised majors and minors has been around in many institutions abroad. Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), a proposed databank for accumulating and withdrawing learners' credits supported by multiple-entry and exit across institutions, carries the seed of a rich learning experience in India. At a finer level of practice, learners can customise their degrees by bundling credit hours and modules, matching their interests.

Eco-versities and sustainability: What if learners and communities reclaim the diversity of knowledge, ecologies, cultures and economies? The answer lies in Ecoversities, a movement and model that re-imagines

education through ecological leadership. The Ecoversity Alliance has more than a hundred learning spaces in the world and some are in India. They currently reside on the margins and mainly cater to independent and alternative learners. They may not come to the mainstream soon, but will endure as a reminder of the possibilities of education on a fragile planet. For the rest of the learning community, the educational response to the climate emergency is already delayed. Some progressive institutions will voluntarily opt for carbon-aware practices. But the majority needs a regulatory push.

Experiments ahead: The future of education is neither a one-step process nor a policy panacea. It is a path with ambiguities that simultaneously demand stability and innovation. Experiments allow us to balance this paradox. So, institutions, communities and countries that are open for experimentations will benefit in the future. Creating a preferred future is far different from preparing for the future.

Creating requires questioning the assumptions and opening to a series of micro-level education experiments to address the uncertainties.

The future is also about resistance. We will continue to talk about blended learning even as questions of digital inequity and pedagogical readiness are raised. The wish to protect the status quo of the physical campus and the monopoly over credentials will inhibit large-scale educational transformation. On the other hand, the larger narrative of education will maintain its obsession with competitive exams, quality-talks, and ranking-romance.

Vijay Garg.

