

“Bondage is of the mind; freedom too is of the mind. If you say 'I am a free soul. I am a son of God who can bind me' free you shall be.”
-Ramakrishna

BOOSTING ADVENTURE TOURISM

India's North-East region has immense and so-far largely untapped potential for tourism especially the adventure tourism, a sector which can generate much needed local employment and sustain the local economy through an eco-system of tourism associated economic activities. While there are number of initiatives undertaken by the separate state governments of each state in this regard, a concerted, synergised and integrated effort was recently made by the Indian Army through a series of adventure activities across most of the border regions from Sikkim to nearly the Eastern most tip of Arunachal Pradesh.

Indian Army and its formations along Northern frontiers apart from their primary role have a stellar record in their nation building initiatives as were. The trans-theatre adventure activity along the line of actual control (LAC) this year was one such initiative in which adventure activities such as Mountaineering Expeditions, White Water Rafting, Mountain Biking and Trekking were conducted with very active participation from civilian enthusiasts and local talent from the region. The most heartening aspect of this was the unique Civil-Military cooperation in actively promoting the adventure tourism across Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in challenging places which were not very well known thus far. This roughly three-month long series of expeditions started in last week of August and included six mountaineering expeditions, seven treks of more than 700 Km (up to an altitude of 16,500 feet), six cycling expeditions over 1,000 Km on non-existent roads in six valleys, and three white water-rafting expeditions covering 132 Km along three rivers. Most of these routes along the LAC have never been explored by civilians, due to inaccessibility of these areas.

11 points along the LAC were contacted during the initiative, with the most prominent being the summit of Mt Jonsong, situated at the tri junction of India - Nepal & Tibet, for the third time in history. The campaign has generated a buzz in the adventure tourism circuit and has improved awareness about the potential of adventure tourism in North-East India. This event while showcasing the importance of Civil-Military synergy, also helped in highlighting the beautiful pristine landscape, flora, fauna, culture and traditions of these remote untouched border areas and will boost tourism into these locations. Inclusion of the local youth and the experience they have gained here is likely to encourage them in becoming entrepreneurs in the field, raising hopes of creating a sustainable eco-system of such tourism start-ups. Another important facet was inclusion of women in the activities. As a boost to Nari Shakti, approximate fifteen female members took part in these activities. Active participation and cooperation between state governments and the Indian Army and the inclusivity shown in this initiative, wherein both men and women, local talent as well as the enthusiasts from varied places took part for a worthy cause; is a sign of the changing times and a bright future for the North-East.

OFF 'D' CUFF A Sense of Accountability

One of the important teachings of Islam is the concept of accountability. According to the Quran, life is a very serious business, for which reason everyone ought to be imbued with a total sense of accountability. In the chapter Al-Isra' (The Night Journey) of the Quran, this concept is gone into in detail:

Give full measure, when you measure, and weigh with accurate scales. That is fair, and better in the end. Do not follow what you do not know; for the ear and the eye and the heart shall all be called to account. (17:35-36)

Everything we say is inevitably based on information that we gather from outside. Basically, there are three sources: what we hear, what we see, and what we think. These three senses give us what may be called data, but in each case there is the possibility of misunderstanding or miscalculation, so we have to be very careful to be precise in all of our utterances.

The expressions in the above verse concerning weights and measures are used symbolically. Here, measuring or weighing means intellectual measuring or intellectual weighing. We should be very accurate when we speak about anyone or about any issue. Our behaviour must be as precise as a scientific scale.

Right thinking and precise speaking are moral requirements: neglect of these matters can have very serious consequences. Since everything is known to God Almighty, everyone will be punished or rewarded according to how he speaks and behaves.

This being so, every man or woman must of

necessity be very serious. In the firm belief that one day he will be presented before the all-knowing God, everyone must conduct himself with a deep sense of responsibility.

Everyone will face an unavoidable judgement issued by God Almighty. This Quranic teaching is very important, for it provides a great incentive to the building of a person as a righteous and healthy member of society.

Experience shows that sermons alone cannot suffice. No sermon, however powerful, can change people; every good sermon needs one more thing: fear of punishment. It is only fear of punishment that guarantees that people will develop the right kind of character.

If you deliver sermons, people will find some excuse not to follow their teachings. It is only the fear of punishment that will make the content of those sermons of immediate personal interest. Such fear inculcates the right spirit. Even if you have a good excuse for wrong behaviour, don't use it. Because if you use it, you shall have to pay a heavy price and the law is the law: it brooks no excuses.

Living in fear of punishment is not a negative feeling. It is a completely positive feeling. It turns you into a responsible person; it inculcates the spirit of self-discipline. It makes you an honest person, building into your personality a welcome predictability. And it saves you from all kinds of deviation.

A sense of accountability makes you manage your affairs in the best possible way. It compels you to make the best use of your time, energy and resources.

-Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Schools & religious institutions in upliftment & improvement of society

■ DR SATYAWAN SAURABH,

Some religious institutions are useful in providing a forum for the modern mind to share a 'righteous' value system through discourses and publications. It helps society to collectively develop, share and practice the right value system. This in turn helps in the upliftment and improvement of society and essentially in the efforts of character and nation-building. All religions command a person to do good deeds, to care for others, and to do what is right or moral. We have a long tradition where individuals and industries in India encourage 'caring for society' as much as creating wealth for the future expansion of the business and economy. Values are beliefs that are rooted in usefulness or importance to the holder; 'or' reflect principles, standards, or qualities that are meaningful or desirable. Values constitute an important feature of the self-concept and serve as supervisory principles for the individual. Human life was very simple in the school era. In that era, knowledge did not grow as much as it has today. The reason for this is that in that era human needs were limited and they were fulfilled through family and other informal means. But due to the increase in population and multiplicity of necessities of life, the form of culture gradually became so complex that it became difficult to impart its complete knowledge to the child through family and other informal means. Here the parents also started getting trapped in the affair of earning a living. They neither had enough time to educate the children nor were they educated enough to teach them the complete knowledge of the language, geography, history, sociology, economics, anatomy, and scientific research.

Therefore, the need for such a regular organization began to be felt, which could preserve social and cultural property and develop it and transfer it to future generations. With this vision, the school was born. It is to be noted that initially, only the upper-class people took advantage of the schools. The establishment of schools for the masses is only a gift of the modern age. As the democratic outlook developed, the form of the schools also changed. India has been a religious country since ancient times. But in the beginning, ideal religion was seen in our country, in which there was no place for superstitions and superstitions. That's why the development of Indian society was also taking place according to healthy tradition. But with the arrival of foreigners, gradually the evils started entering the social and religious sphere and by the time British rule was established in India, these evils had reached their peak. After the establishment of British rule, the Hindu religion became a victim of many evils, which also affected society. The darkness of superstition and conservatism enveloped the whole country. Sati-practice, child marriage, polygamy, caste system, child murder, etc. many evils have spread in society. To end these evils, an organized religion and social reform movement started. Meanwhile, a social and religious reformer appeared on the stage of India, and he gave a comprehensive form to this movement. Among the social reformers, Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, etc. are prominent. There were many reasons behind the religion and social reform movement, such as the influence of European civilization, the rise of the new middle class,

social mobility, the influence of reformers, etc. The British government also cooperated with the Indian reformers in removing these evils. As a result of which our society became completely free from superstitions and evil practices. Religion today has taken a very institutionalized form. 'Religion is a system of sacred belief and practices both in tangible and intangible forms. Religion can play the dual role of an ideology as well as an institution. Religion plays an important role in giving cultural identity to an individual. Religion helps in creating a moral framework and is also a regulator of values in daily life. This particular approach helps in the character building of an individual. In other words, religion acts as an agency of socialization. Thus, religion helps in building up values like love, sympathy, respect, and harmony. Some religious institutions are useful in providing a forum or forum for the modern mind to share a 'righteous' value system through discourses and publications. It helps society to collectively develop, share and practice the right value system.

This in turn helps in the upliftment and improvement of society and essentially in the efforts of character and nation-building. All religions command a person to do good deeds, to care for others, and to do what is right or moral. We have a long tradition where individuals and industries in India encourage 'caring for society' as much as creating wealth for the future expansion of the business and economy. It has assumed various forms such as the construction and development of schools and colleges, hospitals as well as various religious and charitable institutions, which support a variety of religious and welfare activities on

an ongoing basis. Each religion promotes its philosophy and its essence has always been the welfare and welfare of the people. For example, in Sanatana Dharma, there are thoughts like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the whole world is one family), and Save Sukhinah Bhavantu (let everyone be happy) which nurture and develop love and compassion in society. Education is linked to values in its aims, curriculum, and methods. It is through education that society seeks to preserve and promote its nurturing values. Whatever is learned and imbibed will determine how the students will lead their lives in the future. Educational institutions provide a structured environment where children learn the values of cooperation, hard work, punctuality, commitment, honesty, sharing, caring, fairness, helping, independence, responsibility, humility, and pride needed to be inculcated in a child. Lessons of honesty, social justice, and sensitizing children with empathy towards the weaker sections of society. To inculcate gender equality, respect for elders, truthfulness, tolerance, peace, love for nature and mankind, positive attitude, spirituality, nationalist sentiments, patriotism, discipline, and many universal human values like truth, righteous conduct, peace, love, and Ahimsa practitioners are concerned with the physical, intellectual, emotional psyche and spiritual aspects of human personality. These are directly influenced by schools and religious institutions. There is a need and urgency to reinforce these values for a better and more humane society.

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Modi's Civilizational Revamp

■ M R LALU

India, the world's largest and oldest civilization has been witnessing scores of initiatives by the Modi government since 2014. Many of them were largely indicative of a civilisational revamp that Prime Minister Modi has been unequivocally maneuvering and with the global acceptance, his government at the centre is upbeat about everything that it believes as a cultural necessity. While critics prefer to hoot from behind the fence on anything the government brings in its platter, the Prime Minister is seen unperturbed and busy and relentless on his cultural revamping mission. India's G-20 Presidency came at a point when the government enjoys all possible reasons to celebrate the global leadership that it was pacing forth in a post pandemic world.

The Vedic hymn 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' that the Prime Minister tried to set as the focal thesis for the global community under India's G-20 presidency was taken from the Maha-Upanishad. Modi's undisputable efforts to channelize the global attention towards the spiritual splendor that the Vedic traditions defined for humanity had received support from all the corners. This is again marked as a guaranteed significance as the human race is severely troubled by the harrowing effects of war and the highhandedness and hegemony that the superpowers deal with the rest of the world with. India's global reach through the new leadership of the G-20 would further strengthen its efforts to take the global community closer to knowing the Indic traditions and this should be seen as an occasion that the world would directly test the flavour of spiritual comitance that India has been actively advocating. Undoubtedly the presidency becomes more significant as India takes its strides through the Amrit Kaal, which the Prime Minister puts as a matter of pride and great opportunity. To see the world as a family has been a Vedic expression and India's efficiency in effectively communicating this idea of oneness in a post

pandemic world irrespective of the differences that humanity is engrossed in deserves admiration. The message 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' in itself is all encompassing and would probably break all the assumptions that have been keeping the global community on the edge of scepticism and surreptitious denial. Well before its G-20 presidency, India, under the leadership of Modi, was catapulting its agenda of Yoga heritage by highlighting the essence of the tradition and its global relevance. The world community tilting its mind in acceptance for Yogic life and declaring June 21 as the International Yoga Day was undoubtedly a victory that the Modi government could take the credit of.

India's civilisational revamp since 2014 has been hugely accepted and admired. But Narendra Modi's ideological interventionism has been forcefully painted as majoritarian by his rivals. The interconnectedness that the Vedic traditions had discovered centuries ago was transformed into a global narrative by the Indian state. With its multiplicity flourishing and expanding, India sets an example for coexistence while diverse views gain respect and resonance. Truth and non-violence and the Vedic means of Dharma would gain global acceptance and its inheritance such as Yoga, Vedanta and Ayurveda would be seen playing a pronounced role in bringing the global diversity under the Indic wisdom of oneness. Aspiring to bring a multicultural world together by stitching differences into amity and eradicating enmity, India's G-20 leadership is potential and holds vitality to speak for the entire world. The world being divided and disabled by political, ideological and geographical differences, India stands as a potential platform for the global community to lean on for peace and tranquility and experience the essential principle of oneness. Back home, Modi's civilisational leap in India has been termed as a scripted narrative and the efforts protruding in the direction of a significant revamp are lambasted as divisive. A deliberate denial that India's civilisational symbols

have been made a victim of have now been officially given a face lift, a titivation. You call it an ideological take-over that India never attempted for decades since independence. Modi's courage to redraw between the missing dots should be seen as an endeavour to retrieve the heritage of an erstwhile colony of the Mughals and the British. The colonial hangover is broken and the chain of servitude is unfasted.

The monumental statue of Subhash Chandra Bose installed in the Kartavya Path tells us stories of valour and sacrifice and the element of pride that the initiative injected in Indians is momentous. To speak about another initiative of the Modi government, with more visible changes put in place, the National Education Policy 2022 comes as a revolutionary step in the area of education. With its ancient glory restored, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor stands as an example for India's cultural revival and the Mahakal Lok Corridor in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh dances in tune with the spiritual jugalbandi of Ayodhya, Kedarnath, Somnath and many other spiritual places that received a refurbishment in the Modi era. Abrogation of Article 370 brought significant changes in Jammu and Kashmir too and a spiritual rejuvenation that the Himalayan region is witnessing through the restoration of temples and shrines, would be enlisted as a step towards India's spiritual renaissance led by a constitutionally elected government. India's global humanitarian interventions and its distinctive multilateralism and the ideals that it drafted for the global concomitance would redefine geopolitical aspirations of countries. Modi's spiritualised global diplomacy and the G-20 presidency seem to be emerging as an actual catalyst, cementing irritable differences in a world that is desperately seeking consensus to stay together peacefully and polarization kept at bay. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam would further illuminate the global community to stand in line with 'oneness' gaining momentum as a vision and a mission that it can probably cultivate for the future.

Soil health & sustainable agriculture

■ DR BANARSI LAL

Soil provides living space for the living organisms as well as the ecosystem services which are essential for the water regulation, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration etc. Presently the soil is under tremendous pressure due to increase in population at an alarming rate and higher demand for food. Problems like deforestation, bad agricultural practices and soil pollution have degraded soil. It has been observed that around 33 per cent of global soils are degraded. Soil is the basis of food, fuel, feed, fiber production, for services of ecosystems and human well-being. It is the greatest reservoir of biodiversity. It is the critical component of the natural system and as a vital contributor to the human commonwealth through its contribution to food, water and energy security and as a mitigator of biodiversity loss and climate change. It is the top layer of the earth which is familiar to everybody. It is a finite natural resource. It is non-renewable in nature. Although soil plays an essential role in human livelihood but there is worldwide degradation in soil due its inappropriate management practices, population pressure and inadequate governance over this essential resource.

The nutritional value of the food we eat is directly associated with the soil health. Soil high in organic carbon content enables better rainfall infiltration and retention and provides greater resilience to drought. Soil helps in food production, biodiversity and energy maintenance. Soils are vulnerable to carbon loss through degradation but regenerative land management practices can build and restore soil health. Soil is

constituted of organic remains, clay and rock particles found on the earth's surface. Soil health is being deteriorated by the unhealthy agricultural practices, deforestation and pollution. There is urgent need to create awareness among the farmers on soil health and technical and scientific advice should be provided to them. The International Union of Soil Sciences in 2002 adopted a resolution proposing the 5th of December as World Soil Day to celebrate the importance of soil, a critical component of the natural system and as a vital contributor to the human well-being. It was firstly celebrated on December 5, 2012, which corresponds with the birthday of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who officially sanctioned the event. A healthy soil is a living ecosystem in which the dead organic matter forms the base of a food web consisting of microscopic and larger organisms. Soils supply nutrients and water which are vital for plants and are home to organisms that interact with plants. Healthy soils are needed to produce the healthy food and zero hunger. Healthy soil is the key to sustaining life and the adoption of sustainable land management practices are becoming more and more important. It is estimated that natural processes take more than 500 years to form 2 centimeters of top-soil. Soil stores around 10 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. Microbial activities controls and manipulates the chemistry of the soil. Living organisms in the soil control water infiltration, mineral density and nutrient cycling. Fungi and bacteria help to break down organic matter in the soil and earthworms digest organic matter, recycle nutrients and make the soil surface richer. In a handful of fertile soil, there

are more individual organisms than the total number of human beings that have ever existed on the earth. Although soil plays an essential role for the human livelihoods but there is worldwide increase in the degradation of soil resources due to inappropriate management practices, population pressure driving unsustainable intensification and inadequate governance over this essential resource. Increase in the soil carbon builds a precious reservoir and helps to offset greenhouse gas emissions. Soil improves our resilience to floods and droughts. It also contributes in the fertility of the soil, the foundation for all land-based natural and agricultural ecosystems which provide a major part of the world's food supply, natural resources and biodiversity. More than 10 million people have abandoned their homelands because of environmental issues including drought, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation. Majority of the known antibiotics originated from soil bacteria including penicillin. Soil pollution affects food security by reducing the crop yield and food quality. Soil holds three times as much carbon as the atmosphere and can help us to meet the challenges of a changing climate. About 815 million people are food insecure and 2 billion people are nutritionally insecure but we can mitigate this through soil. About 95 per cent of our food comes from soil and about 33 per cent of our soils are already degraded. Soil acts as the filter for many contaminants but its buffering capacity is finite. If the latter exceeds then contaminants can seep into the environment and enter in the food chain. The government has initiated a number of developmental schemes and programmes which have the

potential to immensely benefit the farming community by strengthening the roots of agriculture. On 19th February, 2015 the Prime Minister of India launched the nationwide Soil Health Card Scheme from Suratgarh, Rajasthan. Soil Health Card Scheme is a national movement across the country. Under this scheme the soil sample is taken by the experts from the farmer's field and tested in a soil health laboratory. Then the soil health card is issued to the farmers regarding the ingredients and deficiencies in the soil. On the basis of the results of the soils of respective farmer field, he can add the plants nutrients in the soil accordingly. This scheme may not only maintain the health of the soil but will also reduce the cost of cultivation. This will also help to identify the best crop suited in the respective field. Soil conservation programmes are organised by the Government and also Non-Governmental agencies in our country. Major objective of soil conservation is to keep everything in the soil in its place. It manages the soil erosion and process of sedimentation. Soil fertility needs to be restored in order to allow a satisfactory and early return on the capital and labour invested. Most of the soil conservation programmes emphasize on soil degradation than on the top-down approach in recommending and disseminating practices. Soil conservation programmes that aim to reduce soil degradation problems need long-term bottom-up approach. There is urgent need to promote the practices for maintaining the healthy soils. Healthy soils are the solutions of our many problems.

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