#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

t's true that the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation brings about both opportunities and chal-

While it's true that AI and robotics can disrupt certain types of jobs, they also create new opportunities. Tasks that are repetitive and manual in nature are more susceptible to automation, but this can free up human workers to focus on higher-level tasks that require creativity, empathy, and problem-solving skills.

AI has the potential to simplify various aspects of our daily lives. From automating mundane tasks to providing personalized recommendations, AI technologies can enhance efficiency and convenience.

Forbes highlights the boundless possibilities and applications of AI. From healthcare and transportation to finance and entertainment, AI has the potential to revolutionize numerous industries and improve outcomes in various

Bernard Marr & Co emphasize the transformative impact of AI on society, touching upon economic, legal, political, and regulatory implications. As AI continues to advance, it's crucial for stakeholders to anticipate and adapt to these changes.

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants are increasingly being utilized in customer service interactions. These systems can efficiently handle repetitive queries and provide instant responses, thereby improving customer experience and reducing workload for human employees.

### **Electoral Bonds-A sophisticated** way of political corruption

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

onations to political parties have remained a wellspring of political corruption in India. The fuzzy flow of funds that electrify politicians and political parties has remained the main impediment in eradication of corruption in India. The political masters skillfully manipulate the regulators and architect policies for easy collection of money as political donations from hoarders of black money. Such donors are financially protected by political parties in power by giving them relief by condoning off their bank loans, giving tax sops and relief from paying Income Tax. Many donors falling under Tax pavee's category have misused this methodology of political donations and have evaded tax and laundered money. We have Statutory Provisions for such political donations. Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) entitles parties to accept voluntary contributions by any person or company, except a Government Company. Section 29C of the RPA mandates political parties to declare donations that exceed 20,000 rupees. One supports a political party not only to express solidarity or shared beliefs with the party but also for a tax deduction. This contribution is eligible for an 80GGC deduction while computing total income provided a declaration is made by making a report and submitting the same to the EC. Failure to do so on time disentitles a party from tax relief under the Income Tax Act, 1961. was somehow a transparency to identify the donor and to find out whether the donation was not a part of black money. There would have been a more stringent and transparent system for such political donations but in 2017, the Modi-led government introduced the Anonymous Electoral Bond scheme in The Finance Bill, 2017. during Union Budget 2017-18. The scheme was badly lacking in transparency regarding the source of funds as the donor's identity was not to be disclosed to the public or the Election Commission, thus making it absolutely difficult to track the origin of these Electoral Bonds and legitimacy of the money. RBI responded by conveying its deep misgivings, arguing that the electoral bond scheme was vulnerable to money laundering, opacity, and potential abuse. ECI too objected to the proposed system of electoral bonds. The ECI argued its objections to the Government on multiple grounds: concerns about foreign influence, the further consolidation of a corrupt business-politics nexus, and legal loopholes that could allow for dodgy money to be routed through shell companies even ECIs concerns were suppressed before Parliamentarian. The Government obsessed with political trickery turned down the RBI's reservations levelling them as misguided and concern of ECI fell on deaf ears and the Electoral Bond was implemented in 2018. A traverse into the party-wise donation received through Bonds after the implementation of the Bond Scheme gives us a flashy picture: BJP: year 2017-18, 210.00 Cr. year 2018-19, 1450.890 Cr, year 2019-20, 2,555.000, year 2020-21, 22.385 (Corona Period), Year 2021-22, 1,033.70 Cr, Year 2022-23, 1294. 15Cr. Total somewhere Rs. 6566.00 Crore. Congress has received during the same period somewhere to 1124.00Crore (https://www.indiatoday.in). A sixpart series of investigative reportage (Electoral Bonds: The great fraud) based on government records into electoral bonds-their origins, design, and operations by Nitin Sethi, a Delhi-based journalist, for Huff Post India, has put out facts confirming some of the worst fears about the electoral bond scheme which the entire political opposition and most transparency activists and experts of electoral processes have expressed since the scheme was first announced in 2017. (https://www.deccanherald.com). The roll out of Electoral Bonds carried with it Amendments in Income Tax Act, Representation of People Act and Companies Act to make the

Electoral Bond scheme more murkier. On February 15, 2024, on petitions, filed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous donations to political parties and unanimously quashed the high-value scheme, holding that it violates the right to information and thus contravened free speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the constitution and ordering disclosure of the names of the purchasers, value of the bonds and their recipients. The court also revoked amendments made to the Income Tax Act and the Representation of People Act which had made the donations anonymous. It found the amendments to the Companies Act, which removed the condition that companies could only donate up to 7.5% of their profit to political parties without disclosing the details of recipient parties in their profit and loss account, as "manifestly arbitrary". The court also directed SBI, to stop immediate sale of Bonds and to submit the details of political parties which have received contributions through Electoral Bonds to the ECI by 6 March and ECI to upload the same on its website by 13th March 2024 for public consumption. There were apprehensions that the disclosures directed by the court may actually not happen and ways may be found to prevent them from happening. This will expose the BJP (in power) about its sources of such donations as it always resonates that BJP has obtained donations from those corporate houses whose banks loans in million billions have been waived off by the BJP government. And as expected, SBI has sought time of 30th June 2024 to submit the data so that disclosures could not put the BJP government in a face saving situation for its Donation scam in coming elections of Lok Sabha. Needless to mention here that the Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI) has alleged that public sector banks and its personnel are being utilized for "narrow political interest of the ruling forces" and said it opposes this. The State Bank of India should adhere to the deadline set by the Supreme Court to disclose to the Election Commission the names of contributors to the electoral bond scheme, a bank employees trade union demanded on Wednesday. A contempt petition has also been filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Common Cause against the State Bank of India (SBI) for alleged non-compliance with the Supreme Court's order to disclose details of electoral bonds. People are very much optimistic that the Supreme Court will come down heavily on SBI for shielding the political interests of such a party in power that is acting undemocratically and unconstitutionally.

# Doodhpathri-The Milky Way of Kashmir

oodhpathri, once a hidden gem nestled in the heart of central Kashmir's Budgam district, has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving into a must-visit tourist destination. In just few years of hectic efforts, this scenic spot has broken records, attracting highest astonishing influx of visitors from various parts of

Doodhpathri is a beautiful meadow with emerald grass that looks like a green carpet. A beautiful river dancing and reverberating with the wind flows in the middle of the meadow, lending it a splendid charm and vibrancy. The place looks very beautiful and pleasant. The green grass under the feet is really wonderful.

As Doodpathri turns into a snow-covered winter wonderland, it delights visitors with a beautiful scene. The magnificent scenery becomes more serene by the Doodganga River, which also serves as a pleasant atmosphere for the influx of visitors.

Tourists are loving the excitement of coldweather activities, such as the adventurous ATV rides over snow-covered landscapes and the joy of skiing down slopes, and also another popular activity is pony rides along snowy trails, which provide a more calm and scenic way to explore by the visitors as they glide between the snow-capped mountains while creating priceless memories.

It's great for local tourism that Doodpathri is seeing a spike in activity during the winter, as the tourists are opting to stay overnight is an obvious sign that they wish to discover the charm of winter snowfall in Doodhpathri destination throughout the

In the last year tourist influx, Doodhpathri received around 3 million visitors, including national and international tourists and this surge indicates that the place has rapidly become a must-visit spot in the Kashmir Valley as four films were also shot in this picturesque location recently.

Away from the trammels of mundane, Doodhpathri is abode to crystal-clear flowing water, sky-kissing pine trees and fresh air. This bowl-shaped valley is located at 8957 ft altitude from the sea level. The place gets its name on the grounds of its cold milky water. From the velvety emerald meadows and the snow capped summits which loom as the backdrop; every aspect and top-



ographical feature of this spot is jaw-drop-

The name "doodpathri" means Valley of Milk. It is said that the famous saint of Kashmir Sheikh ul Aalam Sheikh Noor din Noorani has prayed here and once when he was in search of water in the meadows, to offer prayers, he pricked the ground with his stick to search for water and milk came out. He asked the milk that you can only be used for drinking and not performing ablution. Hearing this milk at once changed its state to water and the meadow got its name Doodpathri.

The water which is at present flowing through the meadows has a milky appearance from the distance and remains very cold throughout the year. The lush green grasses over the vast meadows and silver shining streams running over the large stones further increase its beauty. Doodhpathri is sloping grassy landscapes with a diversity of multicolored flowers up to change. The famous Tosamaidan lies in the west of Doodpathri.

The towering conifers, pearly milky water, fresh and crisp air, smooth scattered pebbles, sloping jagged and lush landscapes; all delight you and compel you to plumb in the depths of such charismatic views. The valley abounds in multi-colored flowers including forget-me-nots, daisies and buttercups. Doodhpathri has been used by nomads for ages and can still witness the mud houses of the inhabitants known as "Kotha".

It is a great place for Facebook and Instagram enthusiasts and those who love photography. The place can also be visited for camping and trekking. The roads which

pass through the forest have been macadamized now and more hotels are being constructed. You will witness a lot of ponies around in Doodhpathri and can even take a pony ride too.

Weather of the place remains moderate. The best time to visit is during the spring and summer months from May to September. The place is primarily for sightseeing as it has not been developed completely as yet.

Doodhpathri is characterized by its sloping grassy landscapes, surrounded by snowclad mountains. The meadows are adorned with a variety of colorful wildflowers, including daisies, forget-me-nots, and buttercups during the spring and summer

Alpine Valley is situated in a bowl-shaped formation within the Pir Panjal Range. It is enveloped by pristine alpine landscapes, with dense forests of pine, fir, and deodar trees enhancing its natural beauty. The famous Tosamaidan is located to the west of Doodhpathri. It is another stunning meadow that adds to the charm of the region.

Despite its remote location, Doodhpathri is accessible from both Srinagar and Budgam. Its relative proximity to these urban centers allows tourists to experience its natural beauty with ease.

Doodhpathri's climate is best characterized as nice in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter. It receives a lot of snow in January and February, and the temperature drops well below zero. March marks the beginning of snowmelt, and the weather shifts to a milder kind of winter. In April, springtime, a verdant blanket of grass cov-

One of the ideal periods to visit Doodhpathri is between April and June. When the monsoon season begins in July, it may rain at any time. After the monsoon season has ended, beautiful greenery may be seen throughout August and early September.

Kashmir treks are known for their meadows. Lying in the bowl shaped valley under the shadow of Pir Panjal ranges, the Doodhpathri meadows with the river Shaliganga cutting through it's green carpets is a gem in the region. Away from the eyes of tourist commercialization, these meadows and subsequently, the trek is a wonderful discovery.

The trek follows the river Shaliganga all the way to it's source in Ashtaar glacier, with views of lush green carpet-like meadows and mountains. The Ashtaar glacier is the birthplace of two rivers - Shaliganga and Doodhganga, a river you meet in the later part of the trek.

Not only does this trek take you deeper into the valley of Doodhpathri, it also takes you to the alpine lakes of Bhansar and Damamsar. The lakes are hidden behind ridges, making for a lovely surprise on this trek. Each trek we explore in Kashmir justifies it's title as the mythical heaven on

The rush of domestic and foreign tourists has also increased over the last few years. Tourists with high numbers from various parts of India and foreign countries are visiting the Doodhpathri on a daily basis and the rush of tourists in Doodhpathri also provides sources of employment to the thousands of the people who are earning a good source of income from this tourist destina-

The surge in winter tourism is giving a much-needed boost to the local economy. Hotels, restaurants and tea stalls alongside the road in the area are experiencing increased footfall, providing a positive flow effect throughout the public.

Doodhpathri's combination of legend, natural beauty, and pristine landscapes makes it a hidden gem in the Kashmir Valley. Whether you're interested in hiking, picnicking, or simply enjoying the serenity of the Himalavan meadows, Doodhpathri offers a tranquil escape amidst the breathtaking scenery of the region.

## Being Baptised in Political Delinquency and Insensitivity

Then political rivalries convert college campuses into hotspots of crime and criminal behavior, education takes a back seat. There has always been an epidemic of crime spreading exponentially in college campuses across the state of Kerala and I personally could witness many. It was on 17 September 1996, the state witnessed one of the most heartwrenching campus brutalities carried out by a mainstream political party. In an attempt to silence political rivalry, three young boys from the BJP's students wing ABVP were brutally chased and killed by students from the same college and goons from outside the campus that belonged to the left parties. This heinous incident of abrupt brutality had taken place in the Devaswom Board College in Parumala. When being chased and tortured by a violent mob from the Students Federation of India (SFI), the students' wing of the CPI (M), the three jumped into River Pampa. The idea was to swim across the river and escape. But the barbarous goons began to pelt stones from the riverbed critically injuring the boys in water and they had drowned. The local women who were busy washing clothes tried to rope out the hapless boys with their clothes. But they were chased away by the wanton brutes and all the three died in the river.

Campus politics has always been a parallel track played in tune with the dictums of parties that ruled the state. Most of the students gain merit for representing the ruling party and they are given a free hand by the police when chaotic skirmishes take place. There have been plenty of instances in which lives have been lost and many students have become victims of political insanity. The Kannur district of the state deserves a special reference here as it remained the most acrimonious landscape for the state politics where rivalries

between the BJP and CPI (M) destroyed a number of families. Both parties have had consistent efforts to steer their presence in this district which is in the Malabar region. Situation became turbulent when the traditional stronghold of the CPI (M) had shatteringly faced a systematic ideological invasion from the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. This had absolutely been leading the entire region to break into a huge political turmoil that gained notoriety for decades. Hundreds of party workers got butchered by the violence unleashed by the parties. Many people

died and many families perished. This narration was necessary here to elaborate the quantum of political acrimony prevailed among parties in the state. But the present scenario turned this tradi tional enmity and acrimony more inhuman. Campuses are no more centers of learning. Across the state they have now been turning into breeding grounds of goons. With the uninterrupted supply of drugs and being baptized in ruthless political indoctrination, a huge number of students have gone directionless. Kerala's universities have long been witness to violence and spine chilling horror of student politics. With the latest brutality of political indoctrination, the foot soldiers of Students Federation of India (SFI) have managed to kill J S Sidharthan, a 20 year old second-year student of veterinary college, Pookot, Wayanad, under the Kerala University. The punishment executed on the young boy by the brutal gang was beyond comparison and narration. It is reported that he was stripped naked and beaten up with belts and cable wires by his classmates and seniors in front of other students. His close friends were threatened and forced to beat him up when the show of cruelty was performed in broad daylight. The probe found the involvement of almost 31 students. This heartbreaking

trial-cum-torture continued for almost three days leading the boy to commit suicide. His body was later found hanging lifeless in the hostel. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has sus-

pended the Vice-Chancellor of the university ordering a judicial enquiry. Now, there is a crucial question that began to distressingly prickle the conscience of the people of the state. That why was the entire population of students and staff in the hostel silent on the inhuman torture of the boy? Why was the management of the college tight-lipped on violence inside its premises? This insensitivity indicates the depth of fear on this horribly rampant criminality that has been controlling the campus; it also finger-points at the failure of the education system. Evidently, the ruling class has been applying its political power to cripple the system with its notorious interference and the administration in universities and colleges have silently been forced to remain servile to their political masters. There has been a huge wave of violence infiltrating into the campuses with political groups and radicalized religious groups getting consistently active among students.

Should this incident be seen as a usual occurrence of ragging breaking all extremes of brutality or was there a terrible mindset emanating from the vacuum of organizations that the Government of India has recently banned? Could they successfully stretch their ugly claws into colleges and universities by systematically intruding into political parties? What was the real intent of the crime that the goons perpetuated on a hapless boy? Was this criminal justice system executed by the students motivated by the brutal depiction of cruelty being carried out by the Taliban or other outfits working in countries where the atmosphere is warm and fertile for barbarity? Violent means of murders in the state, especially among the youth, should have shaken the society long before, but there seems a lack of urgency and lethargy again and again dominating its value system. Trimming the aspirations of a state that once remained an excellent hub for quality education, its political system has certainly pushed it through the tunnel of hatred and inhuman retribution.

Schools and colleges have lost their lessons of empathy and the value system that we cherished once got deeply dispelled. The state of Kerala has lost its sheen of being one of the most empathetic societies. Often being applauded for its socio-political awareness and excellent performance in various socio-economic indices, Kerala has maintained its status of being a good example for the rest of the country. But its terrible failure and inability to understand the need of maintaining values that would nurture its existence as a society is a reality. Irrespective of it being a society with good living standards, the state has grown into an insensitive terrain for moral values. With bigoted cries for free speech and scientific thinking being heard louder; the campuses in the state have lost the essence of a learning atmosphere well knit with compassion, tolerance and mutual acceptance. Overwhelmingly misguided by different political ideologies, religious radicalization and social media, young minds in the state have lost their purpose. Political parties being purposefully partial and supportive of regimentation in the society have further deepened the malaise. Mostly, the crisis was the artificial creation of the ruling class that kept dismantling the minds of young generations by viciously squandering their imaginations of progress. The crisis is deep as the malice is emerging thicker threatening the existence of the state. At this juncture, how sincere and action oriented is the government? Let us grieve for Sidharthan, with this question reverberating in our minds repeatedly.

#### **Mudslinging** Season

K V SEETHARAMAIAH

he general elections date is going to be announced shortly. Political leaders will be up in the arms to attack each other. Attacks and counter attacks will be going on all the days. Attacks reach crescendo on the eve of elections. Like water flowing in river all the time but inundating during rainy Politicians feel that the Constitution has given carte blanche to them to be free-for-all. It is said "War is politics with bloodshed and politics is war without bloodshed". There is no war without bloodshed. At the same time, blood-stained hands can also be seen in politics. Murders and half-murders occasionally mark political landscape. Hospitals, police stations and courts get more work to do. Victims may or may not come out of hospitals. Perpetrators of crime find their way to police stations. Surviving victims and accused see each other in courts. Delayed disposal of cases is boon to the perpetrators of crimes and bane to the victims.

Elections are countermanded in the constituencies when the candidates in fray of those constituencies die.

Election time is the season for Aya Rams and Gava Rams. Turncoats change the parties. Aging politicians will be busy to prop up their children and grandchildren to fill the 'vacuum' likely to be created by them when they are unable to contest the election due to denial of tickets. Dynastic politics has taken deep roots. It can never be uprooted. With the exception of fewest of few, even the critics of dynastic politics are not free from promoting their heirs. Power and position are cementing forces to bring the rivals together, and the same power and position separate political friends. This suggests and reiterates that there are no permanent friends or permanent foes in politics. Every party accuses the other of witch-hunting.

Accusers have no past when they have not tried to victimise their rivals. Soon after election dates are announced, code of conduct comes into force. New developmental works cannot be taken up. New developmental works have to wait till a new government is formed.

If the opposition parties come to power, they will be more busy with prosecuting and persecuting the leaders of previous ruling party. Next is to undo the policies and programmes of previous government even when they are good.

Caste politics has been playing destructive role. Seers of the respective communities control the government. They can make or mar the situation. Politics of appeasement has been gaining ground. Divide and rule policy with leaders having divisive agenda has been creating fissures among the people. Reservation in education and employment that started with just 18 per cent has touched 69 per cent in some states. The Supreme Court

directive that reservation should not exceed 50 per cent has been conveniently defied. Citizens of the country are enjoying equality only in respect of voting in the elections. For reaping the government benefits, caste has been the determining factor. Providing infrastructures to the people must engage the attention of the government. Unfortunately that is not happening to the level of expectation. Rate of conviction for wrong doings by the people at the helm of affairs is miserably low because of which corrupt activities are continuing unabated. There is no political will to check if not eradicate the political and bureaucratic corruptions. Politicians exchange heated words and indulge in mudslinging on the issues of corruption. It does not mean that corruption is abominable to them. Leaders deprived of opportunity for making money through unfair means give vent to their anger. Victims are innocent voters.