

CHALLENGES IN LIFE

Indeed, challenges are an inherent aspect of life, presenting themselves in various forms and demanding diverse efforts to overcome them successfully. From the moment of birth, individuals are confronted with a plethora of challenges spanning physical, psychological, emotional, and environmental realms. These challenges evolve and transform at different stages of life, shaping experiences and influencing responses.

While all living beings face challenges within their respective environments, human responses stand out due to the complexity of cognition and social structures. Humans possess the capacity for intricate thought processes, emotional regulation, and social interactions, which greatly influence how challenges are approached and addressed.

Moreover, human responses to challenges are often multifaceted.

New Faces in BJP for Lok Sabha

K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH

Many new faces have been introduced by BJP while issuing tickets to the candidates to contest in the Lok Sabha election. In every political party, it is usual that the aspirants denied of the tickets revolt and create fuss which would be of little consequence as the noise created by the rebels subsides in due course of time. New faces have to be introduced to pump in fresh blood but with circumspection. There is popular opinion among the people that BJP has been swerving to wrong path in the replacement of old faces with new ones. Two-time MP Prathap Simha has been replaced by the scion of the Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar. A photo of Yaduveer and his wife casting vote in the Karnataka Assembly election was published in the media. Some people have reportedly taken it in a lighter vein saying "He is also common man, what is there special to show it?" He is not a common man. Moreover, as scion of royal family he has earned very good respects among the people. As a citizen of India, he has every right to take part in politics. No one has been made special by the God. Speciality is earned by the dint of hard work and by being good with the people. In this regard, Yaduveer has not fallen behind. This is not the case for replacement of Pratap Simha by Yaduveer. Pratap Simha has done commendable work during his stint as MP for a decade. There was no reason to deny ticket to him. It is unfortunate that his name was dropped. Former minister K.S. Eshwarappa was unceremoniously sacked from the ministry on a charge of demanding 40 per cent commission from the contractors to pass the bill. But the charges were never proved. Top BJP leaders never came to his rescue. Now he was assured that ticket for Lok Sabha election would be given to his son K.E. Kantesh. But he was not considered. Eshwarappa is staunch loyalist of BJP. Despite not given the ticket to him in the 2023 Karnataka Assembly election, he never thought of crossing over to any other party unlike former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar who had defected to Congress. However, he was brought back. Again, he (Shettar) seems to have been cornered. It was not unanticipated that Ananthakumar Hegde would be denied ticket because of his controversial statement on the change of Constitution. Both late Rajiv Gandhi and the former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao had also voiced their opinion in favour of change of Constitution. But their views on Constitution did not make any dent on their political career. Every time Ananthakumar won the election with huge margin of votes. He is a charismatic leader and his winnability is beyond doubt. Former Chief Minister Basavaraja Bommai has been given the Lok Sabha ticket but he was not very serious to contest. He had won in the 2023 Assembly election. If he is elected as MP, the MLA seat to be vacated by him needs by poll. There was stiff resistance from the party leaders against fielding Shobha Karandlaje, but she was given the ticket to contest from Bengaluru north. Bhagavanth Khuba also faced with similar situation. He has been given ticket. By the experiments the BJP made in the Karnataka Assembly elections, BJP has burnt its finger. At least, in Karnataka, while issuing tickets to Lok Sabha elections, utmost care should have been exercised by the local leadership and high command. Dissenting leaders denied of tickets may try to play havoc. Damage control exercise is absolutely necessary before anything goes into the point of no return. Opinion polls are predicting that NDA would stage a come back in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. If it happens it is despite, not because, new faces have been introduced. If the opinion poll comes true, it is obvious that the charisma of Modi and other leaders at the top is intact. Even now it is not too late. At least in the remaining number of seats for which tickets have not been announced, tickets may be issued to those who have been dropped for no fault of their own.

Empowering Rural Women for Agrarian Revolution

DR. BANARSI LAL

India is the home of fourth largest agricultural sector in the world. It has been observed that 84 per cent of the Indian rural women livelihood depends on agriculture. Women farmers contribute significantly to the Indian agriculture. Women are involved in seed selection, sowing, planting, harvesting, and other aspects of agriculture. They are actively involved in every farm activity. But their contribution is always marginalised. This has been proved by various researches. The results of these researches, however, could not get due recognition in the planning and implementation of agricultural related programmes. Despite their dominance of the labour force women in India still face extreme disadvantage in terms of land rights, wages and participation in agricultural programmes. It is estimated that 52-75 per cent of the Indian women engaged in agriculture are illiterate. Although they are playing a critical role in agricultural growth but even then they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints. Agricultural extension is one such effort taken by the government and non-government agencies that aims at reaching to farmers. The efforts include bringing about a positive change in knowledge, attitude and skills of the farmers by providing training and technical advice and also assisting them in taking decisions in adoption of new research results. Importantly, the clientele of such programmes and efforts is inclusive of both farmers and farm women. Managers of these programmes often consider men as farmers and women as farmer's wife thereby systematically marginalising and underestimating women's productive role in agriculture. The agricultural extension services in India has limited in its operations to a larger extent on male farmers only and it has failed to tackle the great structural problem of invisibility of female farmers. Women farmers are bypassed by male extension workers. It would be correct to state that women farmers in India have failed to get their due share in extension services apropos their contribution to the Indian agriculture. Extension services in India need to be refined, modified and redesigned so as to reach farm women effectively. The purpose of agricultural extension services can be achieved for sustainable rural develop-

ment only if sincere attempts are made to provide and improve farm women's access to the available extension services thereby leading to their technological empowerment.

The extension machinery in India can be classified in four heads namely (a) Extension services offered by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), (b) Extension services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation, (c) Extension services provided by the Ministry of Rural Development and (d) Extension services offered by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Out of four extension systems, training and visit is the major extension system operating in India under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation for more than 30 years. Although this programme is in operation for so long, it still lacks necessary inbuilt structural arrangements for reaching female farmers. Contact farmers involved in this very programme are mostly male farmers and the numbering of female farmers is very low. It was reported that the extension needs of women were often perceived by the extension agents to be in the disciplines of home science, nutrition, childcare, tailoring etc. The information regarding to new farm technologies was seldom passed on to them. Various rural development programmes were launched in India from community approach in 1950s to special target group approach in 1970s. Non of these programmes addressed to the specific needs of women farmers and remain concentrated on male farmers. In 1980s integrated approach was started that attempt to integrate women in the mainstream of development by structurally making them beneficiaries up to an extent of 40 per cent. A number of services supportive for women's socio-economic empowerment viz., Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojna, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Self-Help Groups etc. were implemented. These approaches were not directed towards fulfilment needs for agriculture-related services and concentrated mainly on the issue of employment and social empowerment. In 1993-94, a project aimed at gender-gap reduction among women farmers of the Northern India was launched by the government of India. The limited coverage of this project

shortens its impact. Such programmes need to be appreciated for being the pioneering one in this regard. ICAR is another important system for transfer of farm technologies all over the country. This system has operated through various frontline extension programmes, all of which now have been merged with the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) since April 1996. In KVKs, provision for special training programmes for women are made. These programmes restricted mainly in the areas like home economics and ignored women's productive role in agricultural operations. The efforts made so far in this direction appear to be localized and remain largely invisible. Involvement of women in agricultural development process by ICAR has been further strengthened when the concept of Farming Systems approach to research/extension was institutionalized by several ways including assessment and refinement of agricultural technologies through institutionalizing village linkage programme. Still these efforts are very limited to make a substantial dent on the overall agricultural scenario. From the very beginning Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have involved women component in their mandate. They too have given more emphasis on issues related to social empowerment of women. They also have given little attention on women's role in agriculture. Therefore, all the major extension systems in India, the participation and benefits accrued to women farmers are minuscule.

There is a need to delineate and discuss the reasons attributable to poor access of farm women to extension services in India. The causative factors found were-lack of approach of farm women to extension centres, less communication channel of farm women, less income to purchase farm inputs by farm women, lack of land, inconvenient time and location of meetings, gender biasness by extension staff, lack of gender-appropriate technology and lack of authority to them. The other factors were low farm women literacy, lack of tendency to innovate and make decisions in farming, less women workers in extension services and lack of structural arrangements for women farmers in extension programmes. Indian women despite playing an important role in agricultural production, processing and storage, generally lack the right to

property and the control of resources usually pass on from men to men keeping women out of the chain of inheritance. This makes them the largest group of landless labourers.

Certain structural changes need to be done in the existing extension machinery of India. Changes in attitude of professionals towards women need to be done. In order to improve the access of farm women, it is prime importance to sensitize the concerned extension workers, extension managers, development administrators and policy makers with the realities of farm women, so that they can be considered as an equally strong force for agricultural and rural development on the same footing as men. Attitudinal changes of extension workers, extension managers and all other concerned with agricultural development efforts cannot be ruled out in order to bring significant improvement in the women's access to extension system in India. In India, where these functionaries are mostly males, gender sensitization training can be one of the methods to bring out these attitudinal changes. The efforts for improving the women's access to extension services need to be directed towards bringing out some institutional changes in the present machinery of extension in India. Farm women should be provided with greater access to credit facilities and other inputs by simplifying the existing procedures suiting to the educational levels of women folk. Flow of credit, inputs and marketing facilities to farm women can be done through women's cooperatives and mahilla mandals. Different extension agencies are focusing on a limited scale to integrate farm women in mainstream of development efforts. The efforts of these agencies need to be managed more efficiently so as to have a synergistic effect to solve the problem of poor women access to extension services. The planners should give due recognition to women farmers in designing the development programmes. There is also the need to recruit more female extension functionaries in all levels of agricultural extension system. Certain institutional adaptations in the present extension system should be made for a positive step in this direction.

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Sportspersons serve the nation through their dedication, perseverance, and teamwork. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to wear the national colours, whether at home or abroad. But as sportspersons, and young Indians, a part of the world's most vibrant democracy, there is another privilege we aspire to - that of voting.

Elections are the bedrock of democracy, granting citizens the vital privilege to elect their representatives. However, this right is not passive; it is a duty, especially incumbent upon the youth, to actively engage in the electoral process. Historically, young people have spearheaded societal change, and their involvement in elections is crucial. Strengthening democracy requires the active participation of youth at every stage, from voter registration to grassroots campaigning.

The first-time voters bring fresh perspectives and champion ideals such as transparency and inclusivity. The energy and tech-savvy nature of a young voter inject dynamism into the electoral landscape, fostering accessibility and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Youth play a pivotal role in holding elected officials accountable, utilising social media to amplify voices and advocate for issues that resonate with the public, thereby safeguarding democracy's integrity and vitality.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The future depends on what you do today." As the wheels of democracy turn once again, gearing up for the upcoming general election in India in 2024, it is imperative to underscore the pivotal role that the youth play in shaping the destiny of the nation.

In his monthly radio programme "Mann Ki Baat," Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the importance of youth participation in the electoral process, highlighting

First Time Voter Youths



the Election Commission's "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" campaign aimed at first-time voters. He lauded India's youth for their vigor and enthusiasm, urging them to actively engage in voting as it directly impacts the nation's future.

Urging first-time voters to participate in record numbers, he stressed their crucial role in shaping the country's destiny. PM Modi called upon influencers across various sectors to join the campaign and motivate young voters, recognising their influential role in driving societal change. Amidst the electoral fervour, he urged the youth to not only participate in political activities but also stay informed about ongoing discussions and debates.

The Election Commission of India is spearheading "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" aimed at fostering universal enlightened participation of youth in elections. Union Minister Anurag Thakur launched the campaign anthem, symbolising the nation's commitment to encouraging young voters to exercise their democratic right. The anthem, a part of the voter awareness initiative, embodies the spirit of PM Modi's call for greater youth participation in the electoral process. Youth across the country are embracing this anthem as a clarion call to encourage their young friends to pledge to

vote.

The initiative is also witnessing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) conducting comprehensive voter awareness activities nationwide and stressing the value of voting for a more representative democracy. Whereas HEIs are hosting physical events, online competitions are also being organised on the MyGov platform, including blog writing, podcasts, debates, and more, to encourage creativity in content creation. Workshops, seminars, flash mobs, and voter pledge drives are further engaging and educating students on the electoral process, with NSS volunteers and institution clubs actively participating in the campaign.

Responding to Prime Minister's appeal, influencers from across various platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and the entertainment industry are actively supporting the campaign, motivating the first-time voters. Prominent names from across all corners of the country, who have made a mark in spheres like Sports, entertainment, business and industry, have come together to spread the message far and wide.

My fellow sportspersons like Jasprit Bumrah, Ravichandran Aswin, Mohammed Siraj, Avani Lekhara, Saikhom Mirabai Chanu, film personalities like Anil Kapoor, Prosenjit Chatterji, Raveena Tandon, Rana Daggubati, Kailash Kher, Shreya Ghoshal, industry leaders such as Ritesh Agarwal, B. V. R. Mohan Reddy, and several Padma Awardees have participated in this campaign, turning it into a 'national movement' of voter awareness.

This 'people's movement' underscores the collective power of voices of the youth and the importance of their active participation in shaping the country's democratic landscape. Let's unite in embracing this responsibility and celebrating the strength of our collective voices. Let us rise to the challenge, let us raise our voices, and let us empower others to do the same.

(The writer is Indian track and field athlete and reigning Olympic and World Champion in Men's Javelin Throw).

Social Challenges to Kashmiri Society

There is a need to make our social fabric neat and reload it full of human values

SAJJAD BAZAZ

It is heartening to learn Mirwaiz-e-Kashmir Umar Farooq, one of the most influential personalities of Kashmir, has emphasized on making mosques effective centres of social awareness and reform, in the wake of constant social challenges faced by the society, besides being places of worship.

This is exactly what Kashmir direly needs as the place during the three decades of violence became a den of social aberration which remained unfocussed. Neither the society atlarge, nor the authorities during the period were attentive to the growing menace of social turmoil. Actually, the intensity of violence was so high and widespread that the moral breakdown of Kashmiri society continued unnoticed.

Amid this social turmoil, Kashmiri society witnessed gradual loss of human values and during the process the society lost civilized tag and got engulfed in the whirlpool of moral degradation where inhuman incidents are surfacing at regular intervals. Most of the moral degradation stories remain hidden as such incidents are not reported. In fact a look at various criminal acts which took place (and continue to take place) here indicate 'total criminalization' of our society. This situation is basically a deep scar left by the three decades of violence where criminal acts were the order of the day and it had become a distant dream to make criminals accountable.

Unfortunately, generally speaking, the crimes during the period of three decades of violence had the backing of society, wittingly or unwittingly. We observed generations growing amid this total criminalization of the society and resultantly, the present social set-up is in disorder.

Here National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data of the year 2021 is worth mentioning. It reveals that J&K's crime graph went up by 24.6% in 2 years. The cognizable crimes jumped to 31,675 in 2021 as against 25,408 in 2019. The data shows that the year 2020, which saw the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, recorded 28,911 cognizable crimes in the UJ of Jammu & Kashmir. It further reveals that 136 people were murdered in 2021, 30 lost their lives due to extremism or insurgency, two to political reasons, one to

honour killing, 10 to love affair and three to illicit relationship.

According to the latest report of the NCRB, the region reported over 3700 cases of crime against women in 2022, which is the second highest among UTs after Delhi, the latest report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has revealed. Jammu and Kashmir recorded 3,716 registered cases of crimes against women, behind Delhi in this regard. The NCRB report reveals that Jammu and Kashmir has registered nine cases under section 304B (Dowry Deaths) of Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 2022. Additionally, 42 cases under section 305 (Abetment of suicide of child or insane person) and 306 (Abetment of suicide) of IPC were also registered in the region.

Besides, as per the report, the region has also registered 500 cases under section 498 (Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives) of the IPC along with two cases under IPC's section 326A (Voluntarily causing grievous hurt by use of acid). Notably, the report sums up that Jammu and Kashmir has not been too far from Delhi in the cases pertaining to kidnapping and abduction of women.

Undoubtedly, the increasing trend of crime rate in our society is a horrific reality, with far-reaching possibilities.

Precisely, in the past three decades, criminalization of our society has been deep rooted and scant attention has been given to nip the evil in the bud. At the moment, our approach to the criminal acts has been reactive and we have been poor learners from these incidents as we lack a hedging approach to this menace. If we have a serious look at the growing criminalization of our society, we would find our socio-economic structure reaching an advanced stage of rot during all these years. With the advent of Internet and social media platforms, the situation is further worsening as the technology is being misused more than put it productive use. Mostly the young ones surrender themselves to the glittering offers of the social media platforms, advertently or inadvertently, to satiate their enthusiasms.

Even as J&K has come out of the violence cycle and unprecedented economic development is taking place on large-scale, the social disorder in Kashmiri society refuses

to die. Why is our society still receding deeper and deeper into this abyss with each passing day? Is it on the verge of spreading beyond all manageable proportions? Let's have a look at some of the factors responsible for turning our society into this era of criminalization.

J&K has always remained a region gripped in unemployment crisis. We have seen a huge army of youth who have no jobs or avenues to earn a respectable living. This segment of our society has always remained the priority of vested interests who lay hands on them in lieu of some bucks and use them for their own petty interests. Then there's the poverty factor. It needs no elaboration, as all of us are aware that poverty exposes a person to high risk of taking to illegal and unlawful routes for survival. It's here corrupt people in society rob the common people of their moral character.

Misuse of Internet and social media platforms has been rampant and assumed dangerous dimensions. Everyone and everything in the cyber space is emerging as an evil era taking toll of our youth - where some turn out as oppressors and some as oppressed. So elders are duty bound to keep a track on the activities of their young ones while roaming in the cyber space and continuously hammer lessons to them about the multiple risks associated with it.

Then comes to the impact of television on society vis-a-vis social change. Gone are the days when television was a medium which used to get all members of a family to sit as a full unit to watch programmes full of family content. But following tremendous advancement in the medium, which saw unending expansion of TV channel networks coupled with revolution in programme production, the families started disintegrating. This disintegration owes its origin to falling moral values promoted through programmes telecast from these television channels.

The changing pattern of television programmes today promoting immoral values has brought embarrassment to the responsible parents as watching a TV serial or a reality show with their kids is as good as sitting on a live time bomb. The themes of the programmes, serials (obviously not all of them) etc. today don't fit in a family where parents and kids jointly can watch the TV.

I still remember one of my acquaintances stating that the television channels have put us to shame. "They have made our position awkward as our kids ask us questions which we are not able to explain," said my acquaintance. Basically, his kid while watching a programme asked him a shocking question - 'what is a porn star?' He lost speech and couldn't utter a word in response to this innocently asked question by his innocent kid.

Why does 'porn star' strike the kid's mind? Actually, the channel had run a film teaser in which Sunny Leone was the lead female star and the background narrator proudly described Leone as a famous porn star.

Precisely, even as the television and social media platforms have revolutionised the medium of entertainment, vulgarity and obscenity seems to have been embedded as a permanent feature in the content of the programmes. These channels of entertainment over a period of time have also contributed to the criminal upsurge in our society. The content on these channels of entertainment through serials glorifies falsified life-styles and criminal tendencies. This way our young minds are exposed to the blatant glorification of crime and brazen propagation of the philosophy of 'success at any cost.'

Now, there are two major challenges which every one of us irrespective of our positions needs to negotiate for the protection and welfare of every strata of our society. One is to immediately stop criminalization of our society and another is eradication of this gangrene. Both need political and social will. If we fail to focus on the issue, it would irrevocably lead to the decay of our whole society. We can grow as a civilized society only if we are more organised, and have a better understanding of our role in the development of society. The key to successful eradication of criminal factors from our society lies with the attitude of our younger generation. Their response to the menace can only make or break our nation-building process.

In this context, the call for making use of mosques for social awareness and reform is timely. Such an initiative can go a long way to make our social fabric neat and reload the Kashmiri society full of human values.

(The author is a veteran journalist/columnist).