

NEED FOR PEACE

The continuing conflict in West Asia has once again pushed the region-and the world-into a cycle of fear, uncertainty and human suffering. From the long-standing tensions between Israel and Gaza Strip to the broader regional rivalries involving Iran and several Arab nations, instability has become a tragic constant. The time has come for all stakeholders to pause, reflect and choose the path of peace over prolonged confrontation.

War has never delivered lasting solutions in this region. Decades of hostility have only deepened mistrust, displaced millions and devastated generations. Civilian populations-particularly women and children-continue to bear the heaviest burden. Cities lie in ruins, economies collapse under sanctions and blockades, and humanitarian crises multiply. Each fresh escalation not only destroys infrastructure but also erodes hopes for reconciliation.

The geopolitical dimensions of the conflict further complicate matters. External powers, including the United States and Russia, often pursue strategic interests that intersect with local rivalries. Meanwhile, regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey navigate a delicate balance between diplomacy and power politics. The result is a volatile landscape where a single miscalculation can trigger wider confrontation.

Yet amid the gloom, there remains space for diplomacy. Dialogue, not drones, must define the future. Ceasefires must be respected, humanitarian corridors ensured and meaningful negotiations revived under credible international mediation. The long-pending question of Palestinian statehood, Israel's security concerns and Iran's regional role cannot be resolved through force alone. Sustainable peace demands political courage, compromise and recognition of mutual rights.

Religious and cultural sensitivities also make West Asia uniquely fragile. The region is sacred to billions, and conflict often carries emotional resonance far beyond its borders. This is precisely why leaders must act with restraint. The world does not need another generation growing up amid rubble and resentment.

Peace in West Asia is not merely a regional aspiration; it is a global necessity. Stability would unlock economic cooperation, energy security and cultural exchange. It would allow the region's youth to dream beyond survival.

The Courage to Speak in Small Moments

POOJA RANI

In everyday life, we often believe that thinking deeply is enough. We reflect, analyze, and silently judge situations around us, assuming that awareness will somehow translate into change on its own. Yet, many times, thinking remains confined within us-safe, comfortable, and inactive. Real change, however small, begins not just with thought but with the courage to pause, breathe, and speak with sensitivity.

Morning walks are a quiet classroom of human behavior. Faces become familiar, routines predictable, and habits visible without intrusion. Among these familiar sights, I often noticed a fellow walker-steady in pace, committed to routine, yet consistently absorbed in her mobile phone while walking. Like many of us, I observed silently. I reasoned with myself: It is her choice. I worried: What if she takes it negatively? And so, day after day, thought replaced action.

Silence often disguises itself as maturity. We tell ourselves that not speaking is tolerance, that avoiding discomfort is wisdom. But silence can also be avoidance of responsibility, of connection, of care. In public spaces especially, we hesitate to speak, fearing misunderstanding more than we value mutual wellbeing. Over time, such hesitation becomes a habit.

On this particular morning, something shifted. There was no dramatic incident, no urgency-just a quiet clarity. With positive intent and calmness, I decided to speak, not as a critic but as a fellow walker sharing a concern. I gently requested her to avoid using the mobile phone while walking,



explaining nothing more than what safety and mindfulness demand. There was no resistance, no embarrassment. She smiled, agreed, and continued her walk-more present than before.

That smile stayed with me longer than the walk itself. It reminded me that communication, when rooted in respect, rarely offends. We often overestimate conflict and underestimate kindness. The fear that others will react negatively is frequently larger than reality. What truly matters is how we speak-our tone, our intent, and our willingness to treat the other person as an equal, not as someone to be corrected.

In a society increasingly shaped by screens, distraction has become normalized. We walk, eat, talk, and even rest while scrolling. The mobile phone, once a tool of convenience, has quietly claimed moments meant for aware-

ness. Walking, especially, is not just a physical activity; it is an act of balance, presence, and connection with the surroundings. A moment of inattention can lead to accidents, but beyond safety, it also robs us of mindfulness.

Yet, this article is not about mobile phones alone. It is about something deeper-the shrinking space for gentle human intervention. We have become hesitant to speak unless we hold authority: a uniform, a designation, or a formal role. Otherwise, we retreat into silence. But social responsibility does not belong only to officials or institutions; it belongs to ordinary individuals in ordinary moments.

Small conversations can shape public behavior more effectively than loud instructions. A polite reminder, a caring suggestion, or a shared concern often travels further

than rules written on walls. When spoken with humility, such words do not impose; they invite reflection.

This incident also reminded me that goodness is often mutual. The listener, too, carries openness that we fail to recognize. We expect defensiveness, but many people are willing to listen when approached respectfully. Perhaps they are waiting, consciously or unconsciously, for that moment of awareness.

In a time when public discourse is frequently harsh, polarized, and impatient, gentle communication feels almost radical. We either shout opinions or suppress them entirely. The middle path-thoughtful, compassionate speech-is quietly disappearing. Reclaiming it begins with small acts: speaking when silence is convenient but unhelpful, and remaining kind when firmness is needed.

That morning did not change the world. It did not demand applause or recognition. Yet, it reaffirmed a simple truth: meaningful change often begins unnoticed, in everyday interactions between strangers who briefly choose care over comfort.

As we move through shared spaces-roads, parks, institutions, and communities-perhaps we need to ask ourselves a simple question: Is my silence helping, or is a gentle word needed? Thinking is important, reflection is necessary, but sometimes, taking a breath and speaking softly can make all the difference.

Because awareness grows not only through grand speeches and policies, but also through small, sincere conversations-spoken at the right time, in the right way.

Scared Shine of Sukrala Devi

G.L. KHAJURIA

The Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is beset with a land of the Gods and Goddesses in the greater part of Himalayan and sub-Himalayan region of the Indian landscape. Mal Mata Sukrala Devi occupies its unique and prominent place of devotion and revelation.

The Devi Maa Sukrala is also most reverentially addressed as Jagat Janani, Rajarjaswari Mata where devotees Throng in thousand to have holy Darshan, pay obeisance for blessings.

Sukrala or Sukral is a small village located in Billawar in district Kathua. The spot is located amidst dense chirpines forest intermingled with other broad-leaved trees, bushes, shrubs and herbs. The village is located aside river Naaj where a big slab of rock of historic time exist which is having an engraving of Lord Hanuman which is regularly besmeared on every Tuesday and Sunday both by the locals as well as the outsiders who throng over this sacred spot. Sukrala Mata shrine is reachable by road around 80 Kms from Jammu and about 30 kms from district headquarter. It is situated at a height of about 4000 ft from mean sea level (MSL) and commands an idyllic view of mountains and cliffs all around of the vicinity of the Shakti shrine. Both the roads from Jammu and Kathua are well metalled and are conveniently approachable by regular buses, private or hired vehicles. The sacred shrine from other destination, Like Bani Basohli and other areas of the country are also reachable through these routes.

Through legends and historical record, the name of Sukrala is derived from Sharikalaya, the abode of Sharika which though, of course is another revered name of Mata Sharda. The historical records reflect the narration as to the origin of the sacred spot of Mata Sukrala Devi. The story goes that used to live a renowned saint at Basohli who had received his education in Kashmir and Kashi there he visited many shrines including those of Shri Amarnath ji, Sharda, Hari Partvati etc. He was a strong devotee of Gods and Goddesses. During his arduous penance and devotion, the mother goddess was very pleased and so he had holy dream. When



asked by Mata ji as to what he wanted. The devotee prayed that he wants that she should be at his place so that with locals can be relieved of the pains and agony and are blessed by her Shakti. Mataji granted him the boon that she will appear at the time of his grandson and so the devotee disclosed to the locals. The devoted Brahmin had number of sons amongst whom two most pious and learned were by name Amolak Ram and Mahadev Shiv Nandan. They preferred and adopted Billawar and Basohli as their residence.

Exactly in the time of Mahadev (Shiv Nandan), a shila (stone slab) miraculously started emerging out from a spring at Sukrala. The people of the area eftsoonly started realizing the prophecy of the grandfather as had earlier been disclosed. They (the inhabitants) accepted it as an emblem of the goddess and as such started worshipping it regularly. With the passage of time, a prince from Chamba by name



Madho Singh exiled by his elder brother was wandering desperately and reached Sukrala area. The story further goes that Sukrala village was having dense forest with abundant wild animals and birds, the prince started hunting wild animals and birds but with the passing days, the prince fell seriously ill.

Despite application of all treatments, the prince could never be recovered. Ultimately, as suggested by the locals, he approached Shiv Nandan who had a good spiritual reputation and so he asked one of the devotee (Chila in local parlance) of the goddess by name Hira Thakur to dance (locally spoken as Chauki) and when the devotee (disciple of goddess got into trance (a Shakti dance), He was asked to let know the malady of the prince Madho Singh. As a result, the disciple stated that goddess was very annoyed as the prince had hunted many animals and birds of the forest. Further, the disciple told the prince

that he would not recover unless a temple of the goddess is built with material from Chamba.

The exiled prince was perplexed as how he could manage to build the temple of Mata for he was ill and far away from Chamba, his native place. He expressed his inability to both Shiv Nandan and Hira Thakur. But the dancing devotee (disciple) replied exiled prince to proceed Chamba immediately and nothing on towardness would come in his way by the grace of the Shakti of Mal Mata.

A few days later, the prince was well and after vowing before Mal Mata footed towards Chamba, while waying towards the desired destination, he came to know enroute, about the demise of his brother who had exiled him. Reaching Chamba, all the inhabitants of the vicinity embraced the prince and accepted him as the ruling prince. In due course of time, the prince became obsessed with the routine care tak-

ing and administration of his kingdom and in the process, he forgot the promise he had made before Sukrala Mata to build a temple there. One night, when the prince was comfortably sleeping, he felled down from the bed and remembered the promise he had made before Mal Mata and so as such he resolved to make good the promise.

On the next day, the prince started for Sukrala with a large entourage carrying all short of building material. The temple was as such constructed and an image of Mahishasurmurudini was installed in the spacious temple Chamber in later stages a temple was constructed by Raja Brajraj Singh, son of Ranjit Singh Dev around 1755 AD and so such the promise made by the prince redeemed. Later onlot of springs and baolies were constructed in and around the temple complex.

Mal Mata Sukrala Devi is very benign goddess who fulfills the wishes of his true devotees. According to a popular belief, all wishes to the extent of the birth of child, securing Job for livelihood and for the curing of chronic diseases are fulfilled by the shrine Shakti of Mal Mata.

The images of Mata Jiis a Shila (Piece of rock). It is seated on a brass lion with a silver mounted head. And in its backdrop is a figure of Mahishasurmurudini (Maa Durga) standing on Mahishasur. The goddess is chaturbhuja, the goddess with four arms with a sword in one of her hands. The eyes are of silver inlaid with dark vermilion.

Lord Vishnu is shown reeling under the hoods of Sheshing with Maa Lakshmi pressing Lords lotus-like feel. From the navel spring a lotus, on which is seated a four headed Brahma and a five-faced Shiva and the lord Ganesh. There are two images of the lion in front of the temple complex. Mal Mata Sukrala Devi is an important Shrine being revered and venerated by almost all over the state, particularly being a Kul Devi. The devotee across the state also visit this sacred Shrine of Shakti around the year, particularly during Navratras on both occasions. There are huge Bhandaras and langars arranged by the locals and other devotees and the social activists.

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Women as Global Leaders, Pillars of Families, and Voices Against Injustice

GOURAV SABHARWAL

International Women's Day is not merely an occasion for celebration; it is a moment to recognise the transformative role women play from global leadership to the intimate sphere of family life - and to confront the inequities that continue to limit their potential.

Across the world, women have emerged as decisive leaders in politics, science, economics and diplomacy. From heads of government to grassroots reformers, they have demonstrated that leadership is not defined by gender but by vision, resilience and integrity. Institutions such as the United Nations have repeatedly emphasised that sustainable development and lasting peace are unattainable without women's equal participation. When women lead, governance often reflects greater inclusivity, social investment and long-term thinking.

Yet leadership is not confined to high office. Within homes and communities, women perform the foundational work that sustains society. As mothers, they are the first educators - shaping language, values and curiosity long before a child enters a classroom. As daughters and sisters, they nurture bonds of solidarity and mutual support. As grandmothers, they transmit cultural memory and wisdom across generations. In countless households, women manage finances, organise daily life, care for the elderly and ensure children



remain in school. Their labour - both emotional and economic - is the invisible architecture of stability.

Education, in particular, stands as one of the most powerful arenas of women's contribution. An educated woman is more likely to educate her children, participate in the workforce, and contribute to informed civic life. Research consistently shows that when girls receive quality education, communities wit-

ness lower poverty rates, improved health outcomes and stronger economic growth. Thus, investing in women's education is not an act of charity; it is a strategic imperative for national progress.

However, the narrative of empowerment must not obscure persistent challenges, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. Early marriage remains a serious concern in many areas. Girls are often with-

drawn from school and married before reaching adulthood, curtailing their aspirations and exposing them to health risks and economic dependence. Such practices perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, denying young women the opportunity to realise their full potential.

Raising a strong and sustained voice against early marriage is essential. Laws prohibiting child marriage exist, but enforcement requires

vigilance, community awareness and social transformation. Families, educators, local leaders and policymakers must collaborate to ensure that every girl can complete her education and make informed choices about her future. Silence in the face of injustice only strengthens regressive norms.

At the same time, urban progress should not breed complacency. Gender disparities in wages, access to resources and representation persist across sectors. Women continue to shoulder disproportionate domestic responsibilities, limiting their professional advancement. Genuine equality demands not symbolic gestures but structural reform - equal pay, safe workplaces, accessible healthcare and shared household responsibilities.

Women today stand at the intersection of tradition and transformation. They are global leaders shaping policy, educators moulding future generations, and caregivers sustaining families. Recognising their contribution requires more than praise; it demands action. International Women's Day should therefore serve as both tribute and turning point - a reminder that empowering women strengthens families, communities and nations alike. The call is clear: protect girls' education, end early marriage, ensure equal opportunity and amplify women's voices. Only then can society claim to honour not just women's achievements, but their rights.

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