

## Youth and democracy

Young people often face stereotypes of political apathy, but in reality, they hold strong opinions and concerns about political issues that directly affect them. By actively participating in the democratic process-whether through voting, engaging in political discussions, joining advocacy groups, or running for office-young individuals not only express their views but also become more aware of the intricacies of political systems and policies. This engagement fosters a sense of responsibility towards their communities and empowers them to advocate for change. Additionally, as they gain knowledge and experience, they become more likely to stay informed and engaged throughout their lives, contributing to the continuous vitality of democracy.

Democracy thrives on the diversity of voices and perspectives it encompasses. Young people, as the future leaders and decision-makers, bring fresh ideas, energy, and creativity to the political arena. Their inclusion ensures that policies and decisions reflect a wide range of viewpoints, leading to more comprehensive and equitable outcomes. Moreover, the willingness of young individuals to challenge the status quo and propose innovative solutions to pressing societal issues injects dynamism into democratic processes, fostering adaptability and progress.

Overall, the participation of young people in democracy is not just beneficial; it's essential for the vitality and longevity of democratic systems. By engaging young individuals in political processes and decision-making, societies can harness their energy, creativity, and idealism to build a more inclusive, responsive, and forward-thinking future.

## Mother's concern for children

■ SURJIT SINGH FLORA

The motherly emotion is as superficially real as a mirage in the desert. It is as hard to believe as a shooting star streaking across the night sky, but it is meant to be crafted like a delicate butterfly fluttering its wings to spread unlimited love and care. The most affectionate and infectious form of love, which they, as children, get to take for granted intentionally or unintentionally at times out of a lack of understanding.

It is as hard as trying to catch a falling star to explain motherly emotion; they all experience love, either they love or get love, and out of all love, motherly love is as untouchable as a distant galaxy to express and as detailed as a finely woven tapestry in words.

But, being overprotective and shielding child like a fortress from the real world, where child can learn to navigate the stormy seas of struggle, like a sailor battling the crashing waves. Shielding child from conflict, like a knight guarding his castle from enemy invaders. Keeping him from the weight of responsibility, like a feather floating effortlessly in the wind. Sheltering child from disappointment, like a fragile flower shielded from the harsh frost. And depriving child of the chance to learn how to deal with the feelings that arise from those situations, like a musician without a melody to express their emotions. Yes, like a resounding yek.

Indeed! Sometimes children remain sick like a ship stuck in a storm, solely because of their mother's mental fear and doubt, which cling to them like a stubborn vine. Mothers who are quick to panic over the smallest of things have the suspicion that the child may not get any disease, like a butterfly fluttering in the wind, which would cause any danger to her child.

Hearing the news of an injury to a child in the neighborhood, such mothers immediately get upset and their hearts start beating like a wild drum solo. This affects their innocent children like a stone thrown into a calm pond, creating ripples that reach every corner of their young lives.

Due to these worries of the mothers, the children run, dance and play like a flock of birds scattered in the wind, their joy ruined for the day. They remain imprisoned in the eyes of their weak-hearted mothers, like birds trapped in a cage. If children are to be protected from diseases, then the solution is not to keep giving medicines all the time, but to keep them under control and to take care of them regularly, like a gardener tending to delicate flowers. It is as important as a shining sun that the fear of disease is removed from the minds of children, like a dark cloud disappearing from the sky. Only then can they remain as healthy as a strong oak tree and as fearless as a lion.

The most important thing is to teach them to laugh and smile, explain the importance of laughter and being happy, and tell them that laughter is life, like a bubbling brook that brings joy to the soul. If they laugh and smile like a ray of sunshine, they will develop not only physically but also mentally.

Children with such a mindset will blossom like flowers in a garden, radiating self-confidence like a shining sun. They will navigate their future like skilled captains steering a ship and embrace the joys of life like birds soaring through the sky. Their laughter and playfulness will be as delightful as a symphony of tinkling toys. Pleasant thoughts should be planted in the child's mind like seeds in a garden from childhood. When the influence of the mother's fearless and well-mannered life-style becomes firm in the child, then his future will shine like a bright star in the night sky, filled with hopeful lights like a field of blooming flowers. He will be able to emerge from the negative thoughts like a butterfly breaking free from its cocoon, leaving behind the heavy burden of eternal worry, despair, and pessimism, and dare to move forward fearlessly like a lion charging into the unknown.

Sughar and far-sighted mothers should continue to impress their healthy intellectual power on the minds of their children like a blazing sun illuminating the vast expanse of the sky, through the unflinching love that flows from the bottomless depths of their hearts like an endless ocean. It is like a beacon of light-the positive guidance given by the mother to her children from childhood, which continues to shine brightly and illuminate their paths throughout life.

As sure as the sun rises in the morning. Loving someone deeply can open your heart like a blooming flower, spreading immense joy and connection like a warm embrace, but it also leaves you vulnerable to potential suffering like a fragile glass shattering into pieces. When you invest so much of yourself in another person, their happiness becomes intertwined with yours, like two vines growing together, making the thought of losing them incredibly painful, like a dagger piercing your heart. It's a beautiful, delicate balance that can bring fulfillment as intense as a blazing sunset and heartbreak as sharp as a shattered mirror. Navigating the complexities of loving someone deeply is like traversing a treacherous mountain range, where one must embrace the inherent risks of vulnerability and emotional exposure, like a tightrope walker braving the heights. The depth of your love can amplify the highs of ecstasy like a roaring fire and the lows of despair like a bottomless pit. It's like a courageous act to give your heart so fully, as if it were a warrior charging into battle, knowing that it may also bear the weight of sorrow as heavy as a mountain. Yet, like a fragile butterfly fluttering in the wind, the vulnerability it entails is as delicate as a porcelain doll. However, the richness and depth of love are like a treasure chest overflowing with precious gems, worth every moment of joy that dances in the heart and every tear shed that falls like rain-drops from the sky.

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## Why local markets are losing business to online shopping? We need a strong consumer protection movement in J&K to curb unfair trade practices hurting consumers severely

■ SAJJAD BAZAZ

Let me share a personal anecdote before dwelling into the changing trends in shopping owing to the integration of advanced technology in business operations.

A few weeks back, my younger daughter asked me to purchase a particular book to support her in the ensuing NEET preparations. She had already done her exercise on the Internet to purchase the book online. As against the price tag of Rs.1575 MRP, the online seller was offering the book at a discounted rate of Rs.1200 and with no courier charges.

Before we could place the order with the online seller to procure the book, I asked her if the book was available in the local market and let us purchase it locally. She was affirmative. I immediately rushed to a prominent bookseller in the city centre to purchase the book. Luckily, the book was available with the bookseller. When I asked about the discounted price, he offered the book at a discounted rate of Rs.1400 as against MRP of Rs.1575. I told him that online booksellers were selling the same book at Rs.1200 and with no courier charges, the bookseller bluntly refused to accept anything less than Rs.1400.

I tried to make him understand that if the same book was available at Rs.1200 why should I buy it at Rs.1400. In fact, I told him the book should be priced lower than the online price tag as courier charges can be added further to the discounted component.

When I told the bookseller that they are losing the business by not aligning their prices to the discounted pricing available in the online shopping mode, the bookseller in a most disrespectful way said, We are comfortable with our pricing mechanism. Go and get the book from online. It won't affect us.

The above narrated incident reverberated in my mind when I came across innumerable unique posts on the social media platform appealing to the general public to shun online shopping habits and support local businesses/shopkeepers. Even some heads of the local trade associations are taking to social media channels to appeal to consumers to make local purchases instead of going for online shopping.

In a way, the appeal sounds genuine as there won't be a flight of money to outside markets. But the ground situation does not support their request. It is not rocket science to identify the reason. It is simple. Most of the local businesses in one way or the other resort to unfair trade practices. Here the markets are simply the sellers' market - a market where sellers (shopkeepers/business establish-

ments) dictate prices of commodities arbitrarily and that too under the nose of authorities.

Now coming to the changing trends in shopping. Today, we find a drastic change in spending and shopping patterns of the consumers. The most visible change in the consumer market landscape is the use of e-commerce and other digital platforms. A vast percentage of consumers, particularly the millennial segment are click-happy to make online purchases. The online shopping trend is catching up fast among the consumers not because it's convenient to make purchases while sitting at home, but because the discounts and other offers lure them to board the online shopping platforms. However, consumer behavior varies among different consumer segments.

Ours is a place where within one city, a particular brand of consumer products have different rates. In other words, all is not well with the consumers in J&K. For instance, it becomes very difficult for consumers to check whether retailers are actually charging the right amount of local taxes on the products they sell or they are overcharging. This has led to a situation where the confusion in respect of prices of the goods is natural for the consumer. The trader in league with the manufacturers of products most of the time arbitrarily fix the price and the consumers are forced to purchase goods at higher costs.

Charging over MRP (maximum retail price) even in branded products pinches a common consumer but he is helpless to counter the retailers' profiteering practices. Even as manufacturing companies have consumer grievance cells in place to resolve such issues, they have proved toothless tigers. No manufacturer would like to see a reduction in sales by annoying a retailer. They turn blind eye to malpractice and don't take any action on consumer complaints.

Notably, we as consumers should know the difference between the maximum retail price and actual price of the goods. The maximum retail price is inclusive of all taxes and a retailer can sell at a price below the MRP. In fact consumers should always look for retailers who sell below the MRP because the MRP is the maximum retail price allowed for that commodity and not the actual price and a retailer can well reduce his margin built into the MRP.

Precisely, In J&K markets, it is an established practice, though illegal, where the manufacturer increases the price of a product and sells old stocks/products at new price rates. But this new price does not apply to the stock already with the retailer. And this is where retailers try to make a quick buck by trying to sell the old stock at

the new revised rate. So this is simply an unfair trade practice.

Now let's have a look at the exploitation of the inflation fears. Here the price control mechanism has been thrown to the winds as traders and merchants stamp their own prices on the commodities to rob the consumers of their hard earned money. It's more ironic that none of us, as consumers, is vocal to resist the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, be it grocery items, food grains or vegetables.

Let me explain. The rise and fall in prices has a lasting effect on the cost of living of the common man. Cost of living is the price of goods and services required for maintaining an average level standard of living and varies from place to place, and fluctuates from time to time. It has a direct bearing on the prosperity of an individual.

When the cost of living goes up, the social structure of a common man too takes a hit, exposing him more to complexes. As far as essential commodities are concerned, we have two categories. One is the traditional category of essentials and the second constitutes modern living essentials. The immediate impact of price rise is that it limits the access of common man only to necessities. Modern living essentials have become a luxury for him. While negotiating the situation, a common household engages more and more members of a family. Normally, the price rise is attributed to the factors like rapid growth of population, increase in incomes, rising non-development expenditure of the government and increase in money supply, on the demand side. And on the supply side inadequacy of agricultural output, inadequacy of industrial output and high-priced imports are listed in the price hike. But ours is a place where the hike in prices is not based on economics. It's the writ of the supplier which runs, pricing the commodities arbitrarily. We as consumers are left with no option but to pay the illogical prices of the essentials as we have no other option before us.

In short, we need a strong consumer protection movement in Kashmir to curb the unfair trade practices hurting common man's pockets severely. The local traders have no option but to fall in line with the changing consumer behaviour to stay afloat in the business. Their mechanism of pricing the products has to be competitive to drive the consumers from online shopping to offline (local) shopping mode.

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## Shakti is all Powerful and pervading

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

Shakti is all powerful, all pervading, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and inclusive and what not? Again Shakti is all pervasive, universal, above all is the energy, spirit and force driving us all including the God almighty. Even God is incomplete without Shakti and all great works in the universe are possible only through spirit called Shakti. It is the driving force in this universe and it even is important to God. It is all energy, knowledge and the force without which we cannot work and attain the highest in spiritual and the material world. Even the meditation of a devotee is not possible without the blessings of the Shakti which permeates all forms of manifestation. Thus even the atama, mahatma and Parmatma is incomplete without Shakti and so even gods propitiate and respect as well as revere Maa Shakti. The cause and basis of all creation is Shakti and so this universe is not possible without the driving force and energy of Shakti. Mother is also a form of Shakti and a mother is always great and her one eye stands for love and affection and the other eye stands for giving sanaskaras to her children. Every man has a woman behind him which propels him to action. Mother is the form of Shakti, creates the world and sustains it too. Shakti is the epitome of love, affection and care. Shakti permeates all living and creation and she should be respected and venerated in all her forms and manifestations. Shakti is one of the most fundamental concepts of Hindu tradition. It represents the divine feminine and is typically associated with the mother goddess. According to Hinduism, Shakti is responsible for the universe's creation, maintenance and destruction. Shakti takes the form of Mahakali to destroy the demons and to establish the righteousness.

The concept of Shakti has been a fundamental part of Hindu tradition for thousands of years. Archeologists have found the earliest mentions of it tracing back to the Indus Valley civilization ,where various artifacts depict the worship of the Mother Goddess. Shakti is also mentioned in Rig Veda, one of the oldest Hindu scriptures, describing her as the cosmic energy that permeates the universe. However, worshipping Shakti as a distinct form of divine feminine did not become prevalent until later in Hindu history. More specifically, the widespread worship of her as a primary deity emerged in the medieval period with the rise of Shakta sects. Based on Hindu tradition, the Goddess Shakti is generally associated with creative energy and is responsible for the universe's creation and destruction. Shakti also represents various goddesses who embody a broad set of elements and roles. Hindu mythology often portrays her as a powerful, dynamic force that drives the universe forward. One of the most significant ways Shakti manifests as a creative force as the mother goddess, an essential aspect of the Hindu religion, believed to represent the nurturing and life-giving aspects of the divine feminine. The mother goddess is often depicted as a powerful warrior who wields weapons to protect and defend her devotees. She is associated with birth, death and rebirth cycles. Her nurturing and protective qualities make her a symbol of compassion, love and strength, representing the ideals of motherhood. People worship the goddess for her power but also for creative energy, as is reflected in various cultural and artistic practices such as elaborate and beautiful Rangoli designs. These designs consist of patterns made on the ground using combination of colored sand, rice, and flower petals. Many Rangoli designs feature images of wor-

shipped goddesses like Laxmi or Durga. People consider these designs as a way to honor and welcome the divine feminine into their homes. Similarly, the celebration of Navratri is a festival dedicated to the worship of goddess Durga in her nine forms. Thus this festival is celebrated over nine nights and involves fasting, puja and other rituals to honor the goddess. The worship of Shakti is essential to many Hindu practices and rituals. As a spiritual force, Shakti is associated with kundalini energy, which according to Hindu teachings lies dormant at the base of spine and can be awakened through various spiritual practices. Yagna, on the other hand, is a way to worship that involves praying to the goddess and giving her offerings in a sacred fire. Another example is the practice of tantra, which is closely related to the worship of Shakti. Tantra is a spiritual practice that uses the divine power of the feminine to achieve transformation and self-development. The practice involves meditation, breathwork, and visualization to awaken kundalini energy and channel it towards spiritual growth. Shakti has significantly impacted popular media and culture, especially in India, where people embrace the divine feminine as a symbol of female empowerment.

The Bollywood film industry produces many films depicting the power and strength of feminine energy. One famous example is "Mother India" about a women's struggle to rise her children against all odds, which is praised for portraying the mother goddess as a symbol of resilience and strength. Shakti is seen as a symbol of female strength and resistance to patriarchy. The symbolic value of Shakti plays a vital role in India's culture. Shakti plays an integral part in Hinduism as a dynamic and powerful force. The influence

of Shakti exists ritualistically, spiritually, and within popular culture and media. By understanding Shakti's role in Hinduism, we can appreciate the symbolic value of a very powerful concept. In Hindu scriptures women is held in high esteem and many religious and spiritual rituals are incomplete without the participation of women. But despite all this importance and respect to Shakti, women in India are discriminated and atrocities are committed against them in homes and at work places. On one side we worship girls on Navratri and on the other side we heap atrocities on them. It is very unfortunate that in India, women are emotionally and even sexually exploited. The women are harassed and intimidated. There is discrimination with the women and all this should come to an end. We talk much about women empowerment, but do little in practical world to really empower women. Now Modi government has played a great role in passing of the legislation in both houses of the parliament to provide 33% reservation to women in Lok Sabha and the state legislatures and this is really a historical development in the democratic history of the country. It is hoped that with the passage of this bill, the glaring discriminations with the women will come to an end. Besides the women will have a great say and role in the governance of the country. We should learn to respect and revere the women who are the true forms of Shakti in practical world. Let me conclude this write up by quoting a verse from Vedas which is, 'Yatra Sitristo Samanata, tatra Ramantay Deva.' Which translates as, where women are respected, gods travel there.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist)

## Role of education in shaping India

■ VIJAY GARG

The significance of ethical education and interdisciplinary approaches in promoting societal change and nation-building cannot be overstated.

The lives of students are amidst a major transformation, largely due to rapidly changing value systems across the globe. However, this transformation, driven solely by acquisition, is unlikely to yield positive results. Instead, it risks turning education, a highly revered institution, into a mere business venture where success is measured solely by material possessions. Moral and ethical education stands as the key to success, enabling the new generation to embrace values and approaches that can nurture the creative urges of the student community within an environment marked by rapid change. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the challenges posed by this transitional phase. Keywords such as knowledge, wisdom, creativity, motivation and encouragement are prerequisites for a successful education system. A competent education system must possess an inner strength capable of deploying myriad strategies to tackle unforeseen challenges. Fostering the latest skills and transmitting new moral codes and cognitive thinking subtly are crucial areas that can lay a robust foundation for the development of India campaign.

While our education system is known for embracing values and approaches that shape the creative urges of students and academicians, it faces increasing challenges during this transitional phase. Efforts must be made to bridge the gap in existing knowledge regarding the contemporary importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies. Higher education institutions in India need to enrich each discipline with diverse content and ideas. Even science students should be exposed to international, national, socio-political and economic issues through multidisciplinary practices, as initiated by NEP 2020. Such policies serve as catalysts for innovation and foster academic collaboration across multiple disciplines and institutions of higher learning.

In recent years, there has been substantial change in the content and nature of various disciplines, with a focused approach to integrating real-life experiments of democracy, the environment, globalisation and governance into the new education system framework. It's crucial to demonstrate how new higher education approaches can drive change and instil confidence among the masses. The latest research and developments in education globally should be dis-

seminated to upgrade research and teaching accordingly. The strength of the higher education system lies in its internal dynamism, ensuring inclusive growth and contributing significantly to the developed India Campaign.

India's entrepreneurial skills have propelled us forward, overcoming tertiary constraints and fostering innovation. Remarkable initiatives have focused on connectivity and developing new connections, rather than relying solely on the market or cut-throat competition. As Lucy Larcom once said, "If the world seems cold to you, kindle fire to warm it." This sentiment rings true for our forgotten appreciation of traditional values and ethics. The vision of India can be achieved by nurturing creativity and responsibility among students, equipping them with moral knowledge and employable skills. This not only broadens ethical horizons and enhances decision-making capabilities but also clarifies what is ethically and morally correct. Practical approaches and workshops can help develop skills through critical thinking and diverse forms of expression.

Ethics transcends clichés, prompting a shift from what is to what ought to be. It's essential to instil a strong sense of responsibility alongside artistic and academic freedom. Despite years of efforts to eliminate major threats, terrorism, caste violence and class conflict persist. Blaming others for these issues is naïve; we must acknowledge our role in them. Preservation of identity is important, but efforts to preserve cultural, linguistic, regional or religious identities sometimes damage the socio-political system's fabric. The world also faces the spread of narrow-minded faith, but history shows that such faith seldom survives. A robust education system is needed to cultivate responsibility among the youth, playing a pivotal role in achieving our nation's development goals.

Sensitising students and society through low-cost, intense webinars can be highly effective in this regard, particularly in an era of rapid globalisation. Mass media can play a role in political and social mobilisation, with student participation facilitating mass sensitisation. Improving course content through academic discourse and introducing innovative mechanisms in social sciences can enhance the relevance of education. Academic programmes and services should provide supplemental support to teaching and learning, fostering community development both inside and outside the classroom. Research centres should be established to ensure academic excellence in social sciences.

Intellectual skills should prepare students to engage with socio-economic and political issues on a global scale, fostering collaboration with stakeholders from other institutions. Community education programmes should encourage lifelong learning. To enhance student standards, self-academic orientation and excellence should be developed, incorporating problem-solving and inquiry-based learning activities in a collaborative environment. A new syllabus should provide insight into the problem of terrorism and its causes, paving the way for a comprehensive strategy to combat it. Understanding the nexus between organised crime and terrorism is crucial. Cultural exchanges among students can promote harmony and creativity, transcending social divisions. It's imperative to focus on empirical and normative understandings to address societal concerns effectively. The Government's inspiring vision for the future is promising, positioning India at the forefront globally.

In conclusion, the transformative journey of education towards Viksit Bharat@2047 necessitates a holistic approach, emphasising moral and ethical education alongside academic excellence. The challenges posed by rapid global changes require proactive measures to bridge knowledge gaps and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. It is imperative to instil a sense of responsibility and cultivate creativity among students to address contemporary issues effectively. Efforts should focus on integrating real-life experiences into the education system and fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Embracing diversity and inclusivity in education will strengthen the fabric of society and contribute to national development goals. Moreover, initiatives like low-cost webinars and mass media engagement can amplify the impact of education, promoting social awareness and civic engagement among the youth.

As we navigate through complex socio-political landscapes, it is crucial to uphold traditional values while embracing innovation and progress. By nurturing a generation equipped with moral clarity and practical skills, we can pave the way for a brighter future for India and the world. In essence, the journey towards educators, policymakers and society at large. By prioritising ethical education, fostering interdisciplinary learning and embracing diversity, we can build a strong foundation for a prosperous and inclusive future. Together, let us embark on this journey towards excellence, guided by the principles of integrity, empathy and resilience.

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