

UPLIFT TRIBAL VILLAGES

The Government of India has launched the 'Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan', a nationwide initiative focused on the integrated development of tribal villages, with the objective of improving quality of life, preserving tribal culture, and ensuring sustainable livelihood opportunities. Named after 'Dharti Aaba' Bhagwan Birsa Munda, the revered tribal freedom fighter and icon of indigenous pride, this campaign aims to empower tribal communities through focused government intervention and community participation.

Launched under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the campaign is aligned with the vision of 'Viksit Bharat @2047' and aims to transform Gram Panchayats with 50% or more tribal population into model villages. These 'Utkarsh Grams' will be developed through convergence of central and state schemes across sectors such as education, health, nutrition, sanitation, water, livelihood, infrastructure, and digital access.

Ensure saturation of basic amenities in tribal villages, including housing, electricity, potable water, healthcare services, and quality education. Promote cultural preservation and strengthen tribal identity through local art, language, and traditions. Facilitate economic empowerment through skill development, agricultural and forest-based livelihoods, SHGs, and tribal entrepreneurship. Improve governance through community participation, Gram Sabha empowerment, and capacity-building of local tribal leaders.

The campaign adopts a whole-of-government approach, with active involvement of ministries like Rural Development, Health, Education, Women and Child Development, and Jal Shakti. Local administration, NGOs, tribal research institutes, and civil society organizations are also engaged to ensure grass-roots-level execution. Digital monitoring tools and geotagged tracking will be used to measure progress and ensure transparency.

In its first phase, the campaign targets over 5000 tribal-majority villages across key tribal belts in states like Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and the Northeast. Villages will be assessed based on baseline surveys, and Village Development Plans (VDPs) will be prepared in consultation with the community.

This mission not only seeks to bridge the development gap in tribal areas but also to celebrate the legacy of Birsa Munda by fostering self-reliant and proud tribal communities. The 'Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan' reflects a significant step toward inclusive growth and cultural dignity, ensuring that India's tribal population becomes an active contributor to the nation's progress.

Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar: The Warrior Queen Who Redefined Indian Womanhood

■ PRERNA NANDA

In the annals of Indian history, where valor, governance, and devotion have shaped dynasties and destinies, the name of Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar stands tall as a symbol of extraordinary leadership and deep compassion. A rare blend of spiritual strength and political acumen, Ahilyabai was a visionary queen who not only protected her kingdom but also nurtured it with maternal care, ushering in an era of justice, infrastructure, and public welfare.

Ahilyabai was born on May 31, 1725, in the village of Chamdi, in present-day Maharashtra, into a humble Dhangar family. Her father, Mankoji Shinde, recognized her sharp intellect early and ensured she was educated-an uncommon practice for girls at the time. Her destiny changed when Malhar Rao Holkar, the brave Subedar of the Malwa region under the Maratha Empire, saw her potential and chose her as the bride for his son, Khanderao Holkar.

Tragedy struck when Khanderao was killed in the battle of Kumbher in 1754. Ahilyabai, then a young widow, chose to dedicate herself to serving the people. After the deaths of her husband and later her father-in-law, Ahilyabai assumed the reins of the Holkar dynasty in 1767, becoming the ruler of Indore.

A Just and Visionary Ruler

Ahilyabai Holkar's rule marked a golden chapter in the history of Malwa. In an age when women were rarely seen in public affairs, she broke all societal barriers to emerge as one of India's finest rulers. Her administrative policies were rooted in Dharma (righteousness), Nyaya (justice), and Seva (service).

She held daily public audiences, addressed people's grievances personally, and appointed capable ministers regardless of caste or background. Her rule was known for:

Efficient and just governance: Low taxation and fairtrade practices; Strict law and order; Support for agriculture and commerce and her capital, Maheshwar, on the banks of the Narmada River, became a center of culture and spirituality.

A Patron of Religion and Architecture

Perhaps Ahilyabai's most enduring legacy lies in her monumental contribution to India's religious and cultural landscape. A deeply devoted Hindu, she undertook a nationwide initiative to restore and rebuild hundreds of temples and religious sites destroyed or neglected over time. Some of her notable contribu-



tions include:

Rebuilding the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi

Renovating temples at Somnath, Rameshwaram, Dwarka, Badrinath, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Gaya; Constructing ghats, wells, tanks, and dharamshalas across India; Building schools and resting places for travellers and pilgrims

What sets her apart is that she spent the state's resources for

the cultural and spiritual rejuvenation of the entire country-not just her own region.

Compassionate Leadership and Women Empowerment

Ahilyabai Holkar believed in inclusive governance. She supported widows, poor women, and oppressed communities, giving them dignity and opportunities to rebuild their lives. Her court was known for its openness, where even ordinary citizens could seek justice.

She led with a sense of motherhood, not monarchy. Unlike many rulers who expanded empires through wars, Ahilyabai expanded her kingdom's reputation through wisdom, peace, and public service.

In a deeply patriarchal era, her leadership became a beacon of women's empowerment. She never wore a crown, sat on a throne, or indulged in royal grandeur; yet her presence commanded more reverence than many male rulers of her time.

Ahilyabai passed away on August 13, 1795, after nearly three decades of remarkable rule. But her legacy lives on. She was posthumously honored with the title "Punyashlok", meaning the righteous one, a fitting tribute to her noble deeds.

In modern India, her memory is cherished through: Statues across major Indian cities, including Indore, Pune, and Mumbai, Ahilya Utsavs celebrated in her honor; Institutions and roads named after her; The Indore Airport is officially known as Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar Airport.

She is also remembered in poems and folk songs, symbolizing the ideal ruler-just, kind, brave, and wise.

Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar was far more than a queen; she was a philosopher-king, a spiritual builder, and a humanitarian. At a time when women were suppressed and monarchs were often tyrannical, she ruled with unmatched grace, empathy, and foresight.

As India continues its journey toward inclusive growth and women's empowerment, Ahilyabai Holkar's life remains a timeless source of inspiration, proving that true power lies not in wealth or warfare, but in service and righteousness.

"Wherever Ahilyabai went, she left the lamp of devotion burning bright."

- A popular folk saying.

(The writer is BJP State Secretary and Media Incharge Mahila Morecha)

One Country, One Agriculture, One Team Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan: May 29-June 12

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Agriculture sector since last decade has been receiving renewed thrust and a focused attention by the government. This is being manifested through various pro farming and farmer centric initiatives of the government. Today, there is no dearth of policies and programmes for the socio-economic upliftment of the farming community. The efforts of the government has already started paying dividend. Government's flagship programme of doubling farmer income by 2022 was also a step in the direction of farmers' welfare. The seven point strategy of the government to double income of farmers' was backed up with many new schemes and farmer friendly provisions. These included provision of assured quality seeds and planting materials, promoting diversification through ancillary activities, expansion of irrigation facilities, value addition and processing, warehousing and cold chains to prevent post harvest losses, adequate marketing infrastructure and facilities and crop insurance.

Although there are a no. of schemes, yet the truth is that many of these schemes have not yet grounded to the grass root level. Most of them remain on shelves ultimately defeating the very purpose for which they have been made. It is very disheartening that despite having the largest scientific men power working in the country, farmers' in the country even do not possess basic knowledge about scientific cultivation of various crops. They still are continuing with their traditional and crude methods which do not give sufficient yield, besides increasing their cost of cultivation and decreasing their net returns from the crop. The yield of almost all the crops in the country is low as compared to yield in developed and neighboring countries. This has put a serious question mark on our mission and vision of Land to Lab. One of the major factors attributed to this is the lack of information and proper sensitization of farmers regarding these schemes. There are also issues with coordination among different departments and agencies working in the

farming and allied sectors. To take care of all this and to ensure that the relevant information regarding scientific cultivation of different crops in the coming Kharif season and various government schemes reaches out to farming community, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Government of India has decided to start a fifteen days mass awareness and sensitization campaign 'Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan' for the Kharif season w.e.f May 29 to June 12.

Under Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan 2025, Government aims to reach out to about 1-1.5 crore farmers through dedicated 2000 teams comprising of scientists, officials and farmers. The campaign will run simultaneously in more than 700 districts of the country. Each day, the teams will conduct three meetings per district to educate farming community about farming innovations related to Kharif season crops and various government initiatives. About 10 to 12 lakh farmers will be daily engaged through these meetings. The objectives of this Abhiyan include sensitization of

climate resilient seed varieties, sharing monsoon forecasts to farmers to help them in timely sowing, promoting proper use of fertilizers, avail benefits of various government schemes and benefits of subsidies, managing soil health through regular soil testing, Soil Health Cards and organic manures, cards to improve understanding of soil health management, information about government schemes, bridging the gap between lab based research and field level practices and boosting crop productivity through best and sustainable agricultural practices. According to Mr. Shiv Raj Singh Chauhan, Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, this exercise will be fulfill Primeminister dream of raking technology from lab to land and will be an important step towards 'One Country, One Agriculture, One Team'. The Abhiyan will also address challenges like low crop productivity, uneven yield across states and poor adoption of agriculture reforms in India.

In the district Ramban of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, sow-

ing of Maize has already picked up, so KVK-Ramban under the leadership of Prof. B. N. Tripathi Hon'ble Vice Chancellor and instructions of Prof. Amrish Vaid Director Extension SKUST-Jammu has already started awareness, sensitization and training of farmers of this district. Various training programmes in different Panchayats covering many villages have already been conducted wherein farmers including farm women and youths are being trained and sensitized on a host of issues related to cultivation of Kharif season crops as a part of mandated activities under the 'Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan'. The farming community in the programmes is being updated about how to prepare the fields, seed rate and its treatment, seed sowing, plant to plant and line to line spacing and depth of seeds, irrigation schedule and appropriate dose and dosage of fertilizers and also how to control insect pests and diseases through chemical as well as natural means. As Maize is a crop which can be intercropped with vegetables, pulses,

oilseeds as well as flowers, farmers are also motivated to intercrop their maize with pulses and vegetables. This will not only increase the productivity and income of farmers but also contribute to health of soil. The farming community is also being sensitized on climate resilient agriculture and various government schemes related to entrepreneurship and empowerment, soil health and sustainable agriculture, crop insurance and farm mechanization.

Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India Shiv Raj Singh Chauhan while releasing the guidelines of this Abhiyan applauded the efforts of all in achieving an all time high food grains production. Agricultural minister also called upon for more coordinated efforts by all stakeholders in a single direction and this fifteen days 'Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan' will provide the much needed platform for all to work dedicatedly to further strengthen agriculture sector, backbone of country's economy.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues)

The Silent Crisis: Fading Mother Tongues of J&K

■ AYAAN SAROORI

In several states of India, several voices have gained momentum to preserve the mother tongues from eradication. This is silent issue which need more individual, political, organizational and community level support to survive. As in many states, the teaching of mother tongue with its 'Qaida' has been eliminated and damaged linguistic culture with high risk of increased fading in the smart era. Similarly, in the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, there are several languages which are suffering from the hazardous extinction in future. In Chenab valley-where Kashmiri, Urdu, Kishtwari, Baderwahi, Sirazi, Bhallesi and other local languages speakers still persist. But among these languages spoken in different parts of the region, Baderwahi, Kishtwari, sirazi and other less speaking local languages alarms for early revival.

While an organization namely "The Chenab Times foundation" has raised its voice regarding preserving the mother tongues-that fall under Chenabi identity such as Baderwahi, Kishtwari, Sirazi and others. In terms of language revival, they mentions for the preference of these languages at state level in schools especially from the kindergarten level. Meanwhile, we are in dire need to maintain and preserve our language heritage throughout the region as it will not only preserve our identity but also reflects some legacy of our ancestors. Our mother tongue in the UT varies differently-some speaks Kashmiri, Dogri, Gojri, Urdu, Hindi, Sirazi, Baderwahi, Kishtwari. However, some dialects are not in use at large and fading gradually. While



exclusively Kashmiri, Dogri and Gojri languages are in use as speaking medium but less speaking languages such as Baderwahi, Kishtwari, Sirazi need more preference and revival as they are fading with crisis.

Kashmiri language: A Young Kashmiri's Perspective on Mother Tongue Loss

While interviewing and discussing this issue with a Kashmiri youngster (17) on the basis of anonymity, I found several alarming points which need to be entertained. As languages are part of our culture and our environment-family as well as friend-play an important role in our cultural boundaries. But the Kashmiri language has been taken into jeopardy by masses as Many parents don't allow their children to speak in their respective mother tongue that is Kashmiri in front of relatives and society. Excerpts:

Why don't you speak Kashmiri as you are local and it's your

mother tongue?

I don't have much exposure to Kashmiri languages so much. Whenever I try to speak Kashmiri, my Urdu language ascent gets worsened. So I don't speak in Kashmiri with my family but can understand the language.

Do your parents allow you to speak Kashmiri ?

No! They don't allow me to speak in it before family gatherings and relatives. As reason behind this is; a children who speaks Kashmiri in these events is seen as a "Chapri" [It has become as a gesture of lowness].However, both the parents and the society may contribute for its easy revival but it is replenishing so far.

What is your own Preference: Kashmiri, Urdu or English?

Urdu is often seen as the language of formal education and religion, while English is associated with success, intelligence, and global opportunity. This makes Kashmiri seem "less useful" to

families like me. Moreover many people, especially in urban areas, associate speaking Kashmiri with being "uneducated" or "rural". As a result, parents discourage their children from using it in order to appear modern or elite.

While discussing the issue of faded languages as Kishtwari we found that there is a need to include educational courses on the faded languages. Moreover, there is also a need to translate some interesting texts in these dialects to upgrade the interest of groups in these mediums. It also is applicable for all other dialects which are fading.

"Courses must be introduced in Kishtwari language and there is need to engage some intellects to translate important books in the mother tongue [Kishtwari]. While, a team of linguist should be formed by the regional government to eradicate the chances of fading of our mother-tongues", Burhan Ahmed Mir, a local from Kishtwar, revealed during the discussion.

In conclusion, we have sidelined the usage of mother tongue. The revival of mother tongue cannot be achieved at an individual level but contribution of regional government along with society is necessary to subvert the revival. Policies regarding it should be inculcated in our education curriculum. Perhaps, it is a tough time as many children have lost their real taste of tongue due to non serious parental exposure towards their mother tongue. While the above interview of a young boy shows that generations have loses its hold over mother tongue-a part of our fading culture. Hence, we need to save the linguistic mediums to save our cultural identity from vanish.

(The writer is a freelance writer and columnist)

COVID cases climbing again

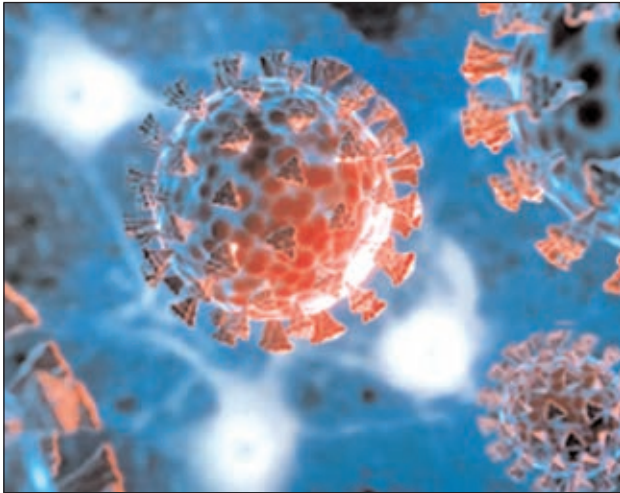
■ VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

Currently, India has 257 active COVID-19 cases, and our country is monitoring the situation with increased vigilance. As per the health officials the cases are mostly mild, not associated with unusual severity or mortality. The new JN.1 variant and its related descendants, which belong to the Omicron family, are believed to be the driver behind this surge in Covid-19 cases across Asia. COVID virus seems to have a made a comeback with cases being reported in different parts of the country, but scientists insist that there is nothing to be worried since those affected are only showing mild symptoms of low grade fever and cough while hospitalisations too have been less. Most infected individuals experience mild upper respiratory symptoms. Some common symptoms include fever, runny nose, sore throat, headaches, extreme fatigue, muscle weakness, exhaustion and minor gastrointestinal problems. In some cases, the new variant may also present with a loss of appetite and persistent nausea.

Expert doctors says that most cases are mild and can be managed at home. However, high-risk individuals-such as the elderly, people with diabetes or heart disease should remain extra cautious. As the cases are rapidly increasing and the authorities are closely monitoring the situation. Though it's genetically clever, doctors say it's not necessarily more severe. Still, its ability to evade immunity is what makes it tricky.Covid-19 hasn't disappeared. It has become endemic and will likely cause periodic spikes. What important is to monitor these carefully, especially through genomic surveillance.

Although there is no uniform or coordinated environment surveillance for COVID across the country, there is a need to keep a close watch on the developments. We have to

keep a watch on the severity of the symptoms lest we are caught unawares if there is



a rush for hospitalisations due a more potent strain that could arise. Let us maintain "physical distancing" keeping at least 1 meter. This distance helps to avoid direct contact with respiratory droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. In order to protect ourselves from COVID, we have to continue to do the hard, albeit tedious, work of keeping ourselves safe and healthy-by wearing facial coverings, keeping our social distance, practicing good hand hygiene, and staying home. People must celebrate festivals, Birthday, Wedding Anniversaries at their homes, as this would help in breaking the Covid-19 chain and preventing a fresh wave of the pandemic. Let us make sure that we are well sanitized and follow all the necessary steps before you approach an elderly person to help. Wearing a mask, washing hands and maintaining distance are a must if one wants to protect oneself, If one is careless, walking out without a mask, then we are putting ourselves, our family, our children, the elderly in trouble. ? This is the time that we have to show the true value of our education and listen to experts and behave responsibly. Your sanitizer and your mask are like your shield. Why not to use It?.