

HIGHWAY PROJECTS

In recent years, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has seen significant developments in highway infrastructure aimed at enhancing connectivity, facilitating economic growth, and improving the overall quality of life for residents.

One of the notable projects is the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44), which is crucial for the region as it connects Jammu, the winter capital, with Srinagar, the summer capital. Another significant project is the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel, inaugurated in 2017, which forms part of NH-44. This tunnel is the longest in India with a length of approximately 9.2 kilometers and has reduced the travel distance between Jammu and Srinagar by about 30 kilometers. Additionally, the Zojila Pass Tunnel project is of strategic importance. It will provide all-weather connectivity to the Leh-Ladakh region from Srinagar. Moreover, development of the Mughal Road has been prioritized to provide an alternate route between Jammu and Srinagar via Rajouri and Poonch districts.

The Udhampur-Katra-Banihal Railway Line is another significant infrastructure project aimed at improving connectivity in the region.

These highway and infrastructure projects in J&K underscore the government's commitment to enhancing connectivity, promoting economic development, and improving the overall socio-economic conditions of the region.

Intolerance Versus ‘Sarva Dharama Sambhava’

■ DR. SHIBEN KRISHEN RAINA

In recent decades, societies across the globe have been gripped by a disturbing trend of growing intolerance, fueling strife, wars, bitterness, and animosity. This intolerance poses a grave challenge to the fundamental values of humanity and threatens to loosen the fabric of our global community.

Tolerance is the foundation upon which a civil society is built. It creates an environment where individuals can fully exercise their freedom of religion, living by the faith and values they embrace without fear of persecution or discrimination. In a truly tolerant society, every person has the right to live freely according to his beliefs, whatever they may be. Tolerance fosters mutual respect, where diverse perspectives are not only accepted but celebrated as the rich heritage of human experience.

At its core, tolerance is rooted in the idea of treating all people equally, recognizing that our shared humanity transcends superficial differences. It nurtures universal values such as love, compassion, empathy, and kindness - virtues that bind us together as a global family. While all human beings are imperfect and prone to mistakes, tolerance encourages us to extend understanding and forgiveness, rather than allowing cynicism to aggravate into resentment and hostility.

Intolerance manifests in multifaceted forms - racial, religious, gender-based, and more. Its implications are far-reaching and treacherous. First, it breeds cynicism and distrust, creating fertile ground for the seeds of violence, terrorism, and other subversive activities that hamper human progress. Intolerance fractures communities, erodes social cohesion, and undermines the fundamental rights and freedoms that are the hallmarks of a just society.

Consider the tragic events of the Kashmiri Pandits who had to leave their ancestral homes and flee/migrate to various parts of the country due to the forced persecution by the frenzied people of the Kashmir valley. The number of these hapless and ill-fated Pandits is said to be around three to four Laacs.

Combating the menace of intolerance requires a concerted effort on multiple fronts. Education is paramount, especially for the younger generation, who will shape the future. By instilling in them the values of human dignity, empathy, and the virtues of tolerance, we can cultivate a generation committed to building bridges, not walls.

Equally crucial is the role of civil society - organizations, institutions, and individuals dedicated to upholding and propagating the principles of tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. When these standards are firmly upheld and championed, they become powerful forces for positive change, paving the way for a better future for humanity.

In this era of unprecedented global interconnectedness, the choice before us is clear: embrace tolerance or succumb to the divisive forces of intolerance. The path forward lies in recognizing the values of humanity, forgetting our differences, and fostering an environment where every individual can thrive without fear of persecution. Only then can we truly unlock the full potential of human civilization and create a world where peace, understanding, and mutual respect lay supreme.

Further, by learning from history and actively working towards a more tolerant and inclusive society, we can ensure that the rising tide of intolerance does not drown the values that define our humanity. Instead, we can build a future where diversity is cherished, and every person has the opportunity to live with dignity and peace.

It won't be out of context to throw some light on the priceless idea of Sarva Dharma Sambhava. The literal interpretation of the term 'Sarva Dharma Sambhava' is that all dharmas (truths) are equal. The term is said to be among the beliefs of Hinduism; however, it is attributable to Mahatma Gandhi. It is said that he first coined this adage. The meaning associated with the phrase is that all religions are equal. The etymology of the phrase itself clears the meaning, i.e., "Sarva - all"; "Dharma - reality or religion"; and lastly "Sambhava - equal". This has been India's Glorious Tradition of Religious Harmony. The need of the hour is to adhere to this Gandhian idea of 'Sarv Dharam Sambhav'(Looking at each religion with equal perception). This will take our country forward and rid us of the strife, mistrust and discord we are facing.

India is a land of remarkable diversity, where people of various faiths and beliefs have co-existed harmoniously for centuries. This plural ethos is deeply rooted in the nation's spiritual traditions, which advocate the principle of "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" - an equal reverence for all religions.

This Indian wisdom upholds that truth is one, though the wise may describe it in different ways. It recognizes the inherent validity of all spiritual paths and encourages respect and understanding towards the multiplicity of faiths. Sarva Dharma Sambhava is not mere tolerance but a genuine acceptance of the legitimacy of diverse religious traditions.

Over the ages, this inclusive worldview has enriched India's composite culture and strengthened the fabric of unity amidst diversity. From the Sufi tradition of compassion to the Bhakti movement that transcended caste and creed, India's history brims with examples of inter-faith harmony and coexistence.

In contemporary times, when divisive forces seek to polarize societies on sectarian lines, India must remain steadfast in upholding its pluralistic ethos. Adhering to the sublime ideal of Sarva Dharma Sambhava can pave the way for mutual understanding, compassion, and solidarity among all communities.

This calls for a renewed commitment to secular values and a conscious effort to foster an environment where every individual feels free to practice his faith. Educational institutions, the media, and civil society must proactively promote interfaith dialogues, dispelling myths, and combating prejudices.

To end up, it is through celebrating our rich diversity and the unwavering spirit of inclusiveness that India can truly realize its potential as a harmonious and prosperous nation. By embracing the universal message of Sarva Dharma Sambhava, we can collectively shape a society where all religions find equal reverence and dignity.

(The writer is Former Fellow, IIAS, Shimla).

Celebrating Sustainable Gastronomy: Nourishing Tradition, Health and Planet

■ DR. ANIL BHAT & ROHIT KUMAR

Every year 18th June, the world unites for a delicious cause - Sustainable Gastronomy Day. The UN General Assembly adopted on 21 December 2016 its resolution A/RES/71/246 and designated 18 June as an international observance, Sustainable Gastronomy Day. Sustainable gastronomy means cuisine that takes into account where the ingredients are from, how the food is grown and how it gets to our markets and eventually to our plates. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN General Assembly work to facilitate the observance of Sustainable Gastronomy Day, in collaboration with Member States, UN organizations and other international and regional bodies, as well as civil society, to observe the Day in raising public awareness of its contribution to sustainable development. This year the theme for the Sustainable Gastronomy Day is "More Taste Less Waste".

This global celebration transcends mere indulgence in culinary delights. It's a day to delve deeper, pondering the impact our food choices have on the environment and our health. It's a call to action, urging us to explore ways to savor the world's flavors while safeguarding our planet for generations to come. Sustainable Gastronomy Day shines a spotlight on eco-friendly practices in food production. Organic farming methods, which promote soil health and minimize the use of harmful chemicals, take center stage. Reducing food waste throughout the supply chain, from farm to table, is another crucial focus area. This not only conserves precious resources but also reduces greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production and transportation. Additionally, the day

champions responsible consumption, encouraging us to make informed choices about the food we buy and eat. But the focus isn't solely on environmental impact. Sustainable Gastronomy Day celebrates the bounty of local produce, a treasure trove of fresh, seasonal ingredients bursting with flavor and peak-season nutrients. By embracing local options, we support our local farmers, ensuring they receive fair compensation for their hard work. It also reduces the environmental footprint associated with long-distance food transportation. This creates a win-win situation: consumers get fresher, more flavorful food, and farmers thrive in a sustainable food system.

Perhaps the most heartwarming aspect of Sustainable Gastronomy Day is its celebration of diverse culinary traditions. These traditions are more than just a collection of recipes; they're vibrant tapestries woven from the rich history and heritage of cultures around the globe. Each dish tells a story, passed down through generations, connecting us to our past and reminding us of the resourcefulness and ingenuity of our ancestors. By exploring and appreciating these traditions, we not only expand our culinary horizons but also encourage cultural understanding and appreciation. We often take for granted the immense effort that goes into getting food onto our plates. Sustainable Gastronomy Day bridges this gap. From the farmers who sow the seeds and nurture crops through challenging weather conditions to the complex transportation and processing systems that ensure food reaches our tables, a surprising amount of work goes into every bite we take. By appreciating this journey, we become more mindful consumers. We make conscious choices about what we eat, minimizing food waste and ensuring a sustainable future for our

plates and our planet. While there's no official national celebration of Sustainable Gastronomy Day in any particular country, the United Nations encourages all member states to participate. Many restaurants, chefs, and NGOs are taking the initiative, holding events that promote local and sustainable food practices. This grassroots movement highlights the potential for wider adoption of sustainable food systems in India's future.

Observing Sustainable Gastronomy Day is important for several reasons:

1. Awareness of Traditional Food: It emphasizes the significance of traditional cuisines that are often deeply rooted in local culture and biodiversity. By promoting sustainable gastronomy, we encourage the preservation of traditional food practices and ingredients.

2. Care in Bringing Food to Plates: Sustainable gastronomy promotes mindful consumption by considering the entire lifecycle of food from production to consumption. This involves reducing food waste, supporting local producers, and using environmentally friendly practices in food preparation.

3. Comparison of Traditional Cuisine vs. Modern Packaged Food: Traditional cuisine often uses fresh, locally sourced ingredients which are healthier and more sustainable compared to heavily processed modern packaged foods that may contain additives and preservatives.

4. Impact on Gastronomic Diseases: Local and traditional cuisines often incorporate fresh ingredients and balanced nutrition, which can contribute to better health outcomes and potentially reduce diet-related diseases compared to diets reliant on processed foods.

5. Sustainable Food in Northern India: Northern India offers a variety of sustainable

foods such as locally grown grains (like millets), fresh vegetables and fruits, dairy products, and traditional recipes that use minimal resources and emphasize seasonal ingredients.

6. Role of Food Reality Shows: Food reality shows can indeed raise awareness about local cuisines by showcasing traditional recipes, local ingredients, and the cultural significance of food. They can inspire people to explore and appreciate their local food heritage.

7. Initiatives in Educational Institutes and Workspaces: Promoting sustainable gastronomy in educational institutes and workplaces can be effective in cultivating a culture of mindful eating, supporting local food producers, and reducing environmental impact through food choices.

8. Reducing Food Waste in Festivals and Celebrations: To address food wastage during celebrations, practices such as better meal planning, portion control, donating excess food to charities, and using eco-friendly packaging can be adopted. Awareness campaigns can also promote responsible consumption.

By appreciating and promoting sustainable gastronomy, we can contribute to healthier lifestyles, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. So, this June 18th, let's celebrate Sustainable Gastronomy Day! Explore your local farmer's market, delve into a new recipe featuring seasonal ingredients, or even spark a conversation about responsible food practices with your loved ones. Every small step counts in creating a more sustainable and delicious future for all. Let's savor the world's flavors while nurturing the planet that provides them.

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World Day Against Desertification and Drought

#United4Land: Our Legacy, Our Future

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Good health of land is an important prerequisite for the life to exist on this planet. Land not only provides us with food, but much more. It provides us clothes and shelter, provides jobs and livelihoods and protects us from weather extremities. Unfortunately due to various reasons, we are losing healthy soils. Every second an equivalent of four football fields of healthy land become degraded adding up to a total of 100 million hectares each year. Growing world population coupled with unsustainable production and consumption patterns, fuel demand for natural resources, putting pressure on land to the point of degradation. Desertification and drought are driving forced migration, putting tens of millions of peoples each year at risk of displacement.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) says that future of our land is at stake. Desertification, Land degradation and Drought are among the most pressing environmental challenges of our time with up to 40% of all land area worldwide already considered degraded affecting close to half the humanity.

'Desertification' refers to 'the process of persistent degradation of dry land ecosystems by climatic variations and human activities. Desertification occurs as a result of a long-term failure to balance human demand for ecosystem services and the amount the ecosystem can supply. As a result of Desertification, fertile areas become increasingly arid the biological productivity is lost. It is in other words, the spread of arid areas caused by a variety of factors, such as climate change (particularly the current global warming)

If we trace the geological history, we find that the development of deserts have occurred naturally. In recent times, the potential influences of human activity, improper land management, deforestation and climate change on desertification has become the subject of many scientific investigations. As recently as

2005, considerable controversy existed over the proper definition of the term 'desertification.' Helmut Geist (2005) identified more than 100 formal definitions of desertification. The most widely accepted of these was that of the Princeton University Dictionary which defined it as 'the process of fertile land transforming into desert typically as a result of deforestation, drought or improper/inappropriate agriculture'. Desertification and Drought have a bearing on each other. With less vegetation there is less transpiration and evaporation from the soil, causing less rainfall which ultimately leads to Drought like situation. Drought triggers the desertification and also the desertification can influence the drought by reducing the water soil content.

No matter where we live, the consequences of desertification and drought concern all of us. According to the UNCCD (UN Convention to Combat Desertification), 25% of the world's land area is either highly degraded or undergoing high rates of degradation and is no longer productive. 75 per cent has been transformed from its natural state, mostly for agriculture. This transformation in land use is happening at a faster rate than at any other time in human history, and has accelerated over the last 50 years. Scientists say the evolution from one state to the next is so rapid and the process is only observable over very short periods. Everyone needs to know that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) have direct effect on their daily lives, and that everyone's daily actions can either contribute to, or help fight DLDD. To prevent further degradation and to restore the degraded soil by creating awareness and promoting practices which does not lead to desertification and drought, 'World Desertification and Drought Day' is celebrated every year on June 17 all across the globe.

History Of WDDD: This day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/49/115 on January 30, 1995, after the day when United

Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was drafted. The major objective for this day was to promote public awareness of the issue, to let people know that desertification and drought can be effectively tackled, that solutions are possible, and that key tools to this aim lay in strengthened community participation and cooperation at all levels and to strengthen implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

THEME: Avoiding, slowing and reversing the loss of productive land and natural ecosystems now are both urgent and important for guaranteeing the long-term survival of planet earth and for the people living on the planet. Keeping in mind the different factors that contribute to the reversal of desertification and drought, The 'World Desertification and Drought Day' is celebrated every year with a specific theme. This year the day is celebrated with the theme 'United for Land: Our Legacy, Our Future'.

Importance of the Day: The importance of celebrating this day can be gauged from the fact that about 99 per cent of the calories every human being needs for a healthy life still come from the land. Land that is healthy and resilient is the first point of defense against disasters such as droughts and flash-floods, which are becoming more frequent, long and severe. The loss of more and more productive land is thus a concern for all of us. Given the speed with which the process is going on, the next few decades will be the most critical in restoring land for sustainable future. The problem is man-made, which means humans are also part of the solution. Thus, sustainable land management should be everyone's business. Together, we can restore the productivity of over 2 billion hectares of degraded land and improve the livelihoods of more than 1.3 billion Peoples around the world. Land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss is intimately

connected and is increasingly affecting human well-being. Tackling these issues together is also a key to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A decade of land degradation may create irreversible damage, but a decade of land restoration may bring multiple benefits. If countries can restore the nearly 800 million hectares of degraded land they have pledged to restore by 2030, we can safeguard humanity and our planet from the looming danger, according to I. Thiaw, Executive director UNCCD'. The 2024 Desertification and Drought Day to be held on 17 June will focus on land stewardship. It will lay thrust on means engaging present and future generations to halt and reverse alarming trends and meet global commitments to restore 1 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030. The theme also seeks to mobilize all parts of society in support of sustainable land stewardship.

We have to make all out and immediate efforts to turn degraded land into healthy land. Restoring degraded land brings economic resilience, creates jobs, raises incomes and increases food security. The focus would be on smart land-based restoration initiatives would be particularly helpful for women and youth, who are often the last to receive help in times of crises. On this Desertification and Drought Day, let all of us pledge and others to push hard to restore our lands. We all have a role to play, because we all have a stake in our planet's future. The creation of a 'culture of prevention' can go a long way toward protecting dry lands when desertification is just beginning and even when it is ongoing. It requires a change in governments' and peoples' attitudes. The theme of this year also underscores the vital importance of collective action to preserve our planet's vital land resources for future generations. Land is our ultimate legacy and we need to secure it for our future generations.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues).

GREENING WASTELAND

■ G.L. KHAJURIA

There is no well accepted definition of wastelands but Bhumble has used the following definition for wasteland are those lands which are virtually unstable ecologically, whose top soil is completely lost, devoid of any vegetative cover. Such lands have developed toxicity in the root zones for the growth of most plants, both for growth of annual crops and trees". Further, this shall cover all lands affected by erosions, floods, soil salinisation and alkalisation, water logging and so on. On hilly terrain, wastelands on snow clad mountains bare and denuded fragile rock which over the years are geo- logically unstable.

Some three decades back, the consultative committee of Parliament chaired by the then Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi on August 23rd, 1985 stated that India has a land mass of about 329 million hectares and estimates are that approximately degraded whose productivity is far below its potential. The broad sub-divisions of degraded land resources are in Agriculture (out of 143 million hect; atleast 40 million ha or so are degraded) and in forestry sector; out of 75 million hac; 30 million hac have barely, some shrubs only, apart from the pasture and grazing and other uncultivated lands which are almost largely degraded. As, such we are having only 175 million of degraded lands in toto Amongst the major uses of land- Agriculture, forestry and grazing lands have been the most neglected and perhaps the

most degraded areas."

In such an inexplicable situation1 wastelands are formed by misuse or overuse and the large livestock population, far beyond the carrying capacity of pasture lands has probably been the major factor in the formation of wastelands. Besides, impeded drainage due to the construction of embankments, roads, canals, railway tracks and other multihued development have created new wastelands, The denudation and decimation of forest covert have ushered in large scale erosions resulted into big nallahs and ravine formation in the most degraded hills side down-below the plains. Water-lyng is another glaring aspect accruing from canal seepage which de-facto attribute the major part of degraded and wastelands.

Greening methodology: Greening or so to say afforestation of all such wastelands is the paramount need of the hour and - covering of all such lands with suitable vegetative species prevents soil erosion, water conservation, removal of salinity from soil, restores soil microbiological activity apart from lowering soil temperature increase in water percolation and above all increase the agricultural productivity of adjoining lands. The methodology of afforestation is, however, site specific and some of the mostly degraded wastelands are usar lands, ravines, hill slopes, coastal areas, areas subject to seepage, river banks and other areas of blackish water and as such different cat-

egories of wastelands demand different ways of treatments.

User lands: Such lands which 2onstitute a part of wastelands include saline, sodic and alkaline soils and such soils are met with on hard clay as well as on sandy tracks However, intermediate stages can also be met.

Sandy soils with high PH Value 1 can be found alongside major rivers and such soils are characterised by PH range from 9 to 10 severe L drought during summer and heavy frost during winter with temperature going down to 0oC preceded flooding , fire hazards and sand drifts, On such soils popular at 5 m interval in rows, 4 m apart is best suited. Introduction of certain species in between is of ample importance and such suited species are 'Syzgium cumini, terminalia arjuna' and Dalbergia sisso.

Denuded hill slopes : Hill slopes in Himalayas Shivaliks have their own sad stories to tell as in such areas, most of the top soil has been badly eroded to the extent of its total wash away which hinders planting on such barren and denuded areas So, in treating such areas, introduction of shrubs is the first step to go ahead and every precaution is to be ensured to avert biotic pressure. The shrubs should be preferably be nitrogen fixing and of the few are vitex negund Banica), Athatoda vasica (Brankers) wood fordia fruticosa etc. After the soil is reclaimed, the most suited plants needs planting (local species) supplement-

ed and supported by soil conservation measures.

Ravines: The major problem with such areas is that these occupy vast tracks and further such areas I are prone to soil erosions, scarce moisture ,fast run off, low precipitation, uncontrolled grazing, high temperature during summer and severe cold/frost during winter. Here, on such areas the main thrust should be on gully-plugging and once the gullies are plugged. Root cuttings are strongly recommended. After this being done, the most suited local spp. to site should be planted out to reclaim the wastelands and some of the most suitable viz Bamboos, grasses need preference at places for soil binding apart from introduction of Acacias, Syzygium cumini Dalbergia sisso and caesia siamea on flat top areas. Nothing can be achieved unless their depredations are controlled and insofaras aerial seeding on such areas is concerned as a method of greening the wastelands, the operation has proved to be costly one, apart from a futile exercise.

As a corollary, all out attempts have been made over the years in greening/afforestation of wastelands, of which successful results have been achieved to varying degree. The moot point to emphasize is to protect such wastelands from grazing, lopping and above all illicit cutting. Once the area is afforested it should form a permanent feature of the landscape. The system as such should be that the ground always remain covered.

