

## READINESS FOR AMARNATH YATRA

As the sacred Amarnath Yatra draws near, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has geared up with robust and comprehensive arrangements to ensure a safe, smooth, and spiritually fulfilling experience for lakhs of pilgrims. Security remains the top priority for the authorities given the strategic and sensitive nature of the region. A multi-tier security plan has been put in place, combining aerial surveillance, on-ground deployment of the Army, CRPF, BSF, J&K Police, and other paramilitary forces. High-tech gadgets such as drones, CCTV surveillance systems, and RFID-based tracking for pilgrims are being utilized to monitor movement and ensure safety. Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) and bomb disposal squads have also been stationed at key points along the twin routes-Pahalgam and Baltal.

Mobile bunkers and security checkpoints are active along highways and near base camps to prevent any untoward incidents. Special intelligence coordination is being maintained to pre-empt and neutralize potential threats.

Both Pahalgam and Baltal routes have undergone significant improvement in terms of road connectivity, landslide clearance, and surface strengthening. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has been actively involved in ensuring the timely repair and upkeep of the yatra tracks, including the installation of railings, steps, and safety walls at steep and slippery sections.

Temporary shelters and rest points have been set up at multiple locations, providing pilgrims with places to rest during the journey. These camps are equipped with solar lighting, clean water, toilets, and food facilities to ensure hygiene and convenience.

A comprehensive healthcare network has been established along the yatra routes. Base hospitals, mobile medical units, and emergency health centres with teams of doctors, paramedics, and ambulances are strategically positioned to provide immediate care in case of health emergencies, especially altitude-related illnesses.

Specialised teams from the Army's medical corps and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have been deployed for rescue and evacuation operations if required. Additionally, air ambulances will be available for critical emergencies.

Pilgrims are required to undergo mandatory registration and health screening. The Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) has also introduced an updated mobile application for real-time information related to weather, route status, and emergency helpline numbers. RFID-enabled Yatra cards have been introduced for digital tracking of pilgrims, ensuring better crowd management and real-time monitoring.

To avoid overcrowding, a daily limit on the number of pilgrims has been fixed, and pilgrims are being encouraged to choose staggered dates through online bookings. Health advisories, including dos and don'ts, have been circulated through media and social platforms.

To ensure uninterrupted pilgrimage, power, water, and sanitation services have been strengthened at all camps. The J&K Power Development Department has installed gensets and backup power systems to maintain electricity supply at high-altitude camps.

## The First Teachers: Crucial Role of Parents in a Child's Growth and Education

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF



Long before a child steps into a classroom, learning has already begun-at home, in the arms of their first teachers: their parents. From teaching a child how to speak to shaping how they think, behave, and relate to others, parents play a pivotal role in laying the foundation for not only academic learning but also emotional, moral, and social development.

In a country like India, where education is deeply valued and often equated with success, parents are central figures in guiding and supporting their children's growth. Yet, in today's fast-paced world, filled with competition, digital distractions, and growing mental health concerns, the nature of this role is evolving-and becoming more important than ever.

The first few years of a child's life are marked by rapid brain development. Research shows that 90% of brain growth occurs before the age of five. During this critical window, children absorb everything from language and behavior to values and emotions-and it is parents who serve as their primary guides.

Simple acts like reading bedtime stories, playing together, speaking regularly, or allowing the child to explore their surroundings can have profound and lasting effects. These activities foster curiosity, imagination, and self-confidence-skills that serve children well as they transition into formal education.

The home is a child's first school, and the parents are their first teachers. The experiences a child has in the early years with their parents significantly influence their ability to learn and interact with the world.

While schools are responsible for formal instruction, it is the support at home that often determines a child's success in education. When parents show an active interest in their child's studies-asking about their day, helping with homework, attending school meetings-it not only boosts academic performance but also improves the child's self-esteem and motivation.

Creating a learning-friendly environment at home, where education is not a burden but a shared experience, makes children feel supported and capable. This doesn't mean parents need to be experts in every subject. Rather, being emotionally available and encouraging helps a child navigate their academic challenges with confidence.

Beyond academics, the most valuable lessons children learn at home are those that shape their character-honesty, empathy, patience, resilience, and respect. These qualities are not taught through lectures but through consistent modeling by parents.

Children observe and imitate how their parents deal with conflict, express emotions, and treat others. A home filled with love, respect, and understanding nurtures emotionally strong



and socially responsible individuals.

Open communication is also key. When parents create a safe space for children to express fears, ask questions, and admit mistakes, it strengthens emotional security and trust-both essential for healthy growth.

It is common for academic achievement to be seen as the primary route to a successful future. While ambition and goal-setting are important, overemphasis on grades can lead to stress, burnout, and mental health issues-particularly when children feel pressured to meet unrealistic expectations.

A report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2022 showed a worrying number of student suicides, with academic pressure being one of the major contributing factors. Such tragedies highlight the urgent need for parents to adopt a more balanced approach-one that celebrates effort over outcomes and recognizes diverse talents.

Rehana Ahangar, a mother of two kids from Srinagar, shares her experience: "My elder son struggled with math and science, and I used to push him hard thinking it would help. Eventually, I realized he was more inclined toward art and design. When I stepped back and supported his passion, he became more confident-and happier." Parents must acknowledge that each child is unique, with different interests and abilities. The goal should be to help children discover their strengths, not force them to live out someone else's dreams.

One of the most empowering contributions parents can make is to nurture a growth mindset-the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence.

When parents praise a child for trying hard rather than

being "smart," when they encourage them to keep going after setbacks instead of protecting them from failure, they cultivate resilience and self-belief. These qualities are far more crucial in the long run than any exam score.

Today's parents face challenges their own parents never imagined-from managing screen time and social media to ensuring online safety and maintaining a healthy balance between technology and human interaction.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning, and while technology has created greater access to education, it has also widened the digital divide and brought new distractions.

Parents must now guide their children in using digital tools responsibly. This includes setting limits on screen time, supervising content, encouraging digital literacy, and promoting real-world interactions and outdoor play.

Equally important is the parents' own relationship with technology. Children are more likely to adopt healthy tech habits if they see their parents modeling them.

Education works best when schools and families collaborate. Teachers provide insight into a child's academic progress, while parents offer context about their behavior, challenges, and experiences at home. When both sides communicate openly and respectfully, the child benefits immensely.

Many progressive schools are now involving parents more actively-through workshops, regular feedback sessions, and family engagement activities. But the onus isn't just on schools. Parents must make an effort to attend meetings, stay informed, and treat teachers as partners, not service providers.

Not all parents have equal resources or knowledge to guide their children-especially in rural or low-income communities. Literacy levels, work schedules, and socio-economic barriers can limit parental involvement.

This is where community efforts, government policies, and NGOs play a critical role. Programs that educate parents on child development, offer parenting support, and provide access to resources are essential for creating equity in education.

Various organizations have shown that when parents are empowered-even with basic tools-they become strong allies in their children's learning journey. The growth and education of a child cannot be outsourced entirely to schools. It is a shared responsibility-and parents are at the heart of it. Their influence is constant, lasting, and foundational.

In India, where education is a vehicle for transformation, recognizing and nurturing the role of parents is essential to creating well-rounded, thoughtful, and capable citizens. Whether it is by encouraging curiosity, offering emotional support, setting boundaries, or simply being present-parents hold the key to unlocking a child's full potential.

In the words of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, "If you want to shine like a sun, first burn like a sun." And for every child to shine, there must be the quiet, steady glow of support, love, and guidance-starting at home.

## Corporate Social Responsibility for the growth of Tourism in J&K

■ PROF. K.S.CHANDRASEKAR



Corporate Social Responsibility is a company's voluntary consideration of its social and environmental dimensions which spans within the company activities and also within relationship with all stakeholders. This later by European commission brought out Corporate Social Responsibility as a concept where firms decide voluntarily to contribute to ensure a better society and a cleaner environment. There were researchers across the globe who ventured to find whether a consumer is ready to pay higher prices for products made from socially responsible companies and the findings have shown that indeed they are ready and consider such companies ethically right. In a study conducted at Mexico among 270 socially responsible agro food companies, people were willing to pay more. In a Spanish study, 89% of the total sample is willing to substitute an ethical product for another one only if it has the same or more features and the price continues to remain same. If the company is involved in corporate social responsibilities, it is capable of building trust bonds and commitment with the customers by

shaping desirable behaviors on the customers. India is the first country to make corporate social responsibility mandatory through the Companies Act, 2013. This has mandated companies with turnover or net worth basis to contribute a percentage to the corporate social responsibility activities.

Internationally there are many companies which have contributed to the corporate social responsibility as in the case of Ugmonk which ear marks certain portion of the profits for feeding kids in Honduras and Niearagua. Taylor Switch shoe manufacturers insist the customers endorsing fund now than buy now through their online site. Another company mentions that every bottle purchased provided families in India with at least 100 litres of clear water for drinking purposes. Carbon neutrality is one way of corporate social responsibility which can help the environment. Instead of cool confines of air conditioning, companies are resorting to a greener environment. In India, Tata group has been pioneers in this area. Community improvements, poverty alleviations are part and parcel of the corporate social responsibility programmes. Adopting villages is another one which the company involves. Ultratech Cement Company has adopted 407 villages across the country and makes them self-reliant. They train them on welfare

measures, education, environment etc. Mahindra and Mahindra contribute in a way of enriching education, livelihood training, and healthcare and water conservation activities. ITC group created e-choupal which provided the farmers with the right price for their produces and making them transparent. This has covered 40000 villages across India. Listed companies in India spent in education, skill development, social welfare, health care and environmental conservation as CSR initiatives. Reliance spent the most followed by NTPC and ONGC. Most of the companies spent in Swaahh Bharath and Digital India.

In the case of the tourism sector, there is a need to create awareness about tourism prospects. In fact CBSE has included hospitality and tourism education in about 70 schools across the country. Through the Corporate social responsibility activities, tourism has not been given due weightage. It would be ideal if companies came forth to adopt tourism sites for maintaining them under PPP arrangement. Companies could as well organize cultural events. There is a need for educating graduates in rural areas to be tourism entrepreneurs where it would become a revenue generation for them. Rural tourism must be promoted across the country. Not only foreign tourists will flock but there will be more domestic tourists who

will evince interest. ONGC on its part has adopted Taj Mahal, Ellora Caves, Elephanta caves, Red fort and Mahabalipuram for cleanliness activities. Similarly, ITDC has adopted Quitab Minar. Sulabh international has adopted 12 Ghats in Varanasi for cleanliness drive. To ensure tourists reach sanctuaries, companies have been advised to promote "Support the Tiger" initiative as the wholesome care could be given to each Tiger which is fast reducing in number. Indian companies could learn from European counterparts where they created 19 destinations across Europe for the elderly and people with special needs through corporate sponsorships.

After the Pahalgam tragedy, there is reluctance on the part of majority of the tourists visit J&K and instead they are moving towards Himachal. In order to regain confidence, there is a need for promoting J& K as a safe destination and nature's beauty, corporates have to support the government in reaching out to markets where more tourists flow earlier to J&K. Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) have coined the "Let's Visit J&K" or "Chalo Kashmir" initiative which seeks to restore traveller confidence and support the local economy severely impacted by the incident. Corporates can join hand in the cam-

paign through their CSR initiative. Recently, The Eco Tourism Society of Kashmir has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Bharat CSR Network to promote responsible tourism and generate employment opportunities in Jammu & Kashmir. As part of the agreement, the two organizations will collaborate on initiatives aimed at reviving the region's tourism sector through sustainable practices. The partnership includes hosting conferences, events, and campaigns that bring together influencers, celebrities, and stakeholders to encourage tourism in the Valley. The Kashmir Marathon, skiing, River rafting, Car Show in Kashmir, Sunburn Music Festival in Jammu could get CSR funding from those who consider the tourism potential of J&K. Pilgrimage tourism is really taking off in J&K and companies can sponsor stalls for drinking water and snacks, langar facilities for the pilgrims. The transit facilities for Amarnathji yatra, Sree Vaishnodevi Matha temple trekking can be considered in this aspect. Revamping the pilgrimage spots can provide more indirect employment for many in this region. J&K Bank donated five buses recently under its corporate social responsibility program to the Government Degree Colleges (GDCs) located in rural

areas of Kashmir Division. J&K Bank is providing ambulances to various medical colleges and these can be extended to the tourism corporations at vantage points where other vehicles will find it difficult to reach.

For promoting safety protocols for the tourists and the guides, awareness campaigns can be arranged and that can be sponsored by companies through CSR initiatives with JKTDCC. "Plastic free area" boards can be established at all tourist locations and the CSR funds can be tapped for the purpose. Corporate social responsibility in India was based on corporate philosophy and Gandhian trusteeship model. That has undergone sea change after 1991. This has changed the landscape and made Indian companies focus attention on stake holders. It is important to note that consumers like socially responsible companies and those who have partnerships with bonafide charities and organizations. One should always remember to be genuine, which will automatically attract customers towards companies. CSR initiatives on the part of the institutions in J&K only will help foster growth and overall development as envisaged in "Vikasit J&K, Vikasit Bharat".

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## Budda Amarnath: The Eternal Flame of Devotion in Poonch

■ BAIRAJ CHAWALGAMI

Jammu and Kashmir and to be specific Kashmir has been a land where Shivism flowed and rituals and traditions of Shivate philosophy thrived. So, there are many Shiv temples and natural shrines and caves found in the length and breadth of Jammu and Kashmir and Shree Budda Amarnath temple in Poonch is one of the famous temples which is frequented by a large number of devotees especially on the auspicious days which are dedicated to Lord Shiva. Budda Amarnath, also known as Swami Budda Amarnath Ji Mandir, is an ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. It is situated in village Rajpura, near Mandi, and is known for its scenic and natural beauty and also for natural white stone Shivalinga and annual Raksha Bandhan Mela [Budda Amarnath ji Mela]. The temple is considered older than the Amarnath cave shrine in Kashmir. The temple is nestled in the Pir Panchal, mountain range, about 25 Kms northeast of Poonch city. It is located on the banks of sacred river Pulsata and pilgrims often bathe in it before entering the temple. The shrine is important for Hindus, with the legend stating that Lord Shiva narrated the secret of immortality =Amar Katha to Goddess Parvati here. It believed that this temple is older than even the Amarnath cave shrine Kashmir and hence the name "Buddha Amarnath." The main attraction is the natural shivling of white stone inside the temple. A major festival, the Budda Amarnath mela is held during Raksha Bandhan attracting thousands of devotees. The temple is known for communal harmony it fosters, with members of all communities participating in the arrangements for the yatra. The temple has four doors meaning that the temple is open for the people of all faiths and backgrounds. Poonch is the nearest major



city, located 20kms from the temple. Many devotees undertake the yatra on foot, following a route that passes through picturesque landscapes. In essence, Budda Amarnath is a significant pilgrimage site for Hindus, known for its natural beauty, religious importance, and the communal harmony surrounding the annual yatra. This holy place [Budda Amarnath] has a great religious and spiritual importance for Hindus. As per Hindu mythology, at this very place, the Lord Shiva had started narrating the Amar Katha to Mata Parvati ji which ended at Swami Amarnath cave located

near Pahalgam Kashmir. This temple is considered older than the Sawami Amarnathji of Kashmir. That is why the shrine is known as Swami Budda Amarnath. As per Hindu mythology, one must visit this sacred place before performing the yatra of Amarnath in Kashmir. A number of legends are famous in and around Poonch city regarding the eruption of this ancient temple. As per one legend, Mahatma Pulsat -the grandfather of king Ravana of Shri Lanka mediated at this place for a pretty long time. He was a devotee of Lord Shiva. There are a number of references in Neel Mat Puran about Pulsat Rishi. As per these references, Pulsat was also an artist and sculptor. He carved a number of images of God. One of the references in Neel Mat Puran says, "By seeing the Goddess erected by Pulsat, one is free from all sins and gets highest knowledge and the temple erected by him gives one's merit of the gift of cows and also releases from the diseases." Since the Pulsat was a great Rishi, a sculptor and very popular among the inhabitants of this area, therefore, after his death the people converted this small temple into a shrine. Later on, this shrine was named as Swami Budda Amarnath. Even now a number of idols of ancient times are available in this area. It is possible that these idols may have been installed by Pulsat Rishi. Swami Budda Amarnath Yatra is a centuries old yatra. However, it was regularized during Dogra rule of Raja Moti Singh and Jagat Dev Singh in between 1852 to 1939. Swami Budda Amarnath temple is situated in between the main belt of Pir Panchal range in Rajpura Mandi which is 23 kms on the North East of Poonch town. The sacred place is located on the confluence of two gushing streams namely Nallah Gagri and Pulsat Nadi. This place is surrounded by snow bound lofty mountains, thick belt of forests in the eastern side, lush green pastures and crystal,

clear streams and nallahs. The climate of this attractive and charming spot is very pleasant and cool. At present Swami Budda Amarnath temple is connected with a motorable road and it is 244 kms away from Jammu. The original temple has been constructed with one big stone. There are four doors in the temple on northern, southern, eastern and western side which indicates that the doors of this shrine are open for all four varnas. There is a natural Shivaling of white stone -chakmak inside the temple. A number of ancient idols collected from nearby villages are also installed in the premises of the temple where there used to be four holy springs near the temple in past. At present, the water of three springs has been diverted to fourth one which is on the southern side of the temple. The water of these springs is considered as holy from the religious point of view. The pilgrims first take bath in this spring and then enter in the temple for darshan and prayers. The procession of Chari Mubarak starts from Dashnami Akhara Poonch amid chanting of bhajans and religious slogans. A guard of honour from police contingent is also paid to Chari Mubarak at the gate of akhara. The Swami ji is carried in a palki by the devotees, along with sacred mace. Thousands of devotees and hundreds of Sadhus accompanying the procession which leads towards Swami Budda Amarnath on foot. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, the Budda Amarnath temple in Rajpura village in Mandi Tehsil of Poonch district is one of the oldest shrines of Jammu region and has been attracting devotees in large numbers during Budda Amarnath Yatra every year. May Lord Shiva shower his blessings upon the people of Jammu and Kashmir so that militancy is eliminated forever and people of various faiths live in harmony and brotherhood. We hope so and in near future peace and normalcy will prevail in J&K and people will live like brothers.