


SECOND THOUGHT REQUIRED

Where on one hand, the Government has initiated a number of significant welfare schemes and projects, aimed for enhancing the socio-economic status of people, especially women, farmers, unemployed and downtrodden, besides ensuring provision of all basic amenities of life at their doorsteps, on the other hand, a recent decision of the union territory administration has sent a wave of shock and resentment among farming fraternity. As per reports, J&K Finance Department has asked the Irrigation and Flood Control (I & FC) Department to collect 'Abiyana'- an irrigation tax from farmers across J&K, pending from the last more than 7 years. It is worth mentioning here that this so-called irrigation tax was abolished by the PDP-BJP Government, led by Late Mohammed Mufti Sayeed in 2015, when while present the budget of the erstwhile state of J&K, the then Minister for Finance Haseeb A Drabu, made announcement regarding the same in Assembly. At that time, this decision was welcomed and appreciated by people, especially farmers as it was going to provide them a major relief. Accordingly, the I&FC Department stopped collection of the same and it became a thing of history. But during a recent meeting of the Finance Department, the I&FC Department was issued directions to start the collection process of 'Abiyana', including pending arrears, as it has not been collected for the last seven years. Clarifying its statement, the department said that although the then Finance Minister made a statement regarding abolition of collecting 'Abiyana' in Assembly, but no formal order was passed by the then Government in this regard, due to which it still exists and should be collected from the farmers. This decision definitely needs a rethinking as it would be quite hard for the farmers to pay the pending amount of 'Abiyana' due from 7 years in one go, as there are several peasants who are not well-off and living from hand to mouth. Moreover, if the then Government, even after the formal announcement of the then Finance Minister regarding abolition of this practice, failed to issue a formal order; then it is the fault of concerned officials of that time and poor farmers should not be made to suffer, without any fault of them. Still, if the Government wants to restart the practice, then some relaxations must be provided to farmers, as it would be hard for them to pay 'Abiyana' of the last 7 years together.

CRUSH TERROR

The government should maintain pressure on the terrorists and their supporters all the time as presently the situation is crucial with the start of Amarnath Yatra. The news coming in from different parts of the UT are indicative that already security forces are upbeat and have maintained pressure on those who want to vitiate peace. In this context, police has killed two LeT terrorists in a gunfight in Navapora Mir Bazar area of south Kashmir's Kulgam district. The terrorists neutralized have been identified as categorized local terrorists of proscribed terror outfit LeT. As the operation site was very close to Amarnath Yatra route, it could be said that a major tragedy has been averted as the slain terrorists could have attacked the devotees. In the same context, the police along with security forces have arrested a LeT hybrid terrorist near Papchan area of north Kashmir's Bandipora district. He was intercepted at a checkpoint near Papchan following which incriminating materials and arms and ammunition including 3 AK-rifles, 10 Magazines, 380 rounds, 2KGs IED Explosive substance and 1 Chinese grenade were recovered from his possession. The way the security forces have intensified their operations, it seems that the end of terrorism is near. It is good that the security forces have adopted a multi-pronged strategy to counter terror regime on all fronts and the recent successes in eliminating number of terrorists including today's encounter is the testimony to the fact that positive results have started coming out of the intensified efforts after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave free-hand to security forces to tackle terrorism on their own with all strategic help coming from the central government side like the additional companies of CAPFs for making Amarnath Yatra security foolproof and containing the menace of targeted killings which has lately spread fear psychosis among the people in the entire Union Territory of J&K. The responsibility on the security forces including the army is big as they have to take care of borders and the hinterland therefore people should cooperate with them in taming the terrorists and the violence mongers by acting as their ears and eyes and by providing all the required help as and when needed.



OFF 'D' CUFF

Can we be free from Karma?

As per the Law of Karma, what we give, we get. As we sow, so shall we reap.

Once we understand this, we try to live a life of good deeds. However, while we live with good Karma, most of us believe that we cannot escape from Karma, from action and so we submit our life to Karma. We surrender to whatever is unfolding as a result of our past Karma, and we try to do good Karma so that our deeds become seeds that will sprout as our 'happy destiny'. We all have heard 'nobody can escape from Karma' and so we spend our days doing good, knowing that the good we do will come back to us. But is there no escape from Karma?

Yes, there is a way to escape Karma. However, as long as we believe that life is Karma, and Karma is life, and there is nothing else beyond this, we will be caught in the cycle of Karma. We will be trapped in the cycle of action and reaction, of death and rebirth and we will return to earth, again and again. Everybody who comes to earth must suffer. But it is a myth to believe that there is no option but to return to earth. While there is no doubt that we cannot escape from action or Karma, there is a way to escape from

Air Atman In Ravi

Our duty is to encourage every one in his struggle to live up to his own highest idea, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the Truth. -Swami Vivekananda

Amaranth- Where 'Amar-Katha' was revealed

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

In mythology, Lord Shiva believed to be a living God, whose presence has been testified from the astronomy, Vedic myths and even some rituals, had narrated the truth about his immortality, which is called Amar Katha (the immortal story) to 'Mother Parvati' in Amarnath cave. In the holy cave at an altitude of 12,800 feet in the mountains of Kashmir, in between the period 'Amavasya to Purnima', a huge seasonal 'Shivalingam', spiritually people call it 'Barfani Baba', gets created naturally by the solidified snow that gradually melts with the moon's cycle and it becomes site of faith for erores of Hindus. If we look at it scientifically, the structure is just a stalagmite that is formed due to the falling freezing drops of water from the roof of the cave. For Hindus, the stalagmite is more than a natural phenomenon, it represents their belief, faith and their devotion to Lord Shiva, who embodies the ice shrine and blesses everyone who seeks for him. The tradition of this pilgrimage has been around for a very long time and has now become one of the most revered and holiest spots and one of the most sacrosanct places in India as considered by the followers of Hindu religion. Puranas, though, tell the story of the sacred cave but there are a number of modern stories related to the rediscovery of the holy cave. A story of the discovery of the shrine is that Brighu Muni was the first to discover the cave in the valley of Kashmir. Another local story relates that a poor Muslim shepherd named, Buta Malik found the cave in 1850. The descendants of Malik had been the custodian of the shrine. Priests from Dashnamis Akhada and Purohit Sabha Mattan had been taking care of the holy site. In 2,000, the Malik family and other organizations were evicted and the Amarnath Shrine Board was formed to look after the affairs of the shrine. It is headed by the governor of the state. Leaving aside all the legends about this cave, Amaranth Yatra is an incredible spiritual as well as an adventurous

challenging trail involving risks. Amarnath Yatra opens for a short period and this year it is permitted from 30 June to 12 August 2022 only for registered Yatris. As expected this year, a large number of devotees are expected to pay their homage and till time more than three lack people have registered themselves for this Yatra. Government had cancelled the Yatra midway in 2019 on pretext of huge threat of disrupting the Yatra from terrorist organizations. But actually it was cruel joke with devotees and faith of Hindus as this miss conception was created among devotees just to implement BJP's election Agenda of scrapping Article 370 and bifurcation of J&K into two union territories on August 5, 2019 (Why Yatra period was chosen for this decision, the present dispensation remained ever silent) and for next two years, Corona forced to disallow this Yatra. So the Yatra this year will remain focal point both for Yatris as well as for government in view of possibilities of disrupting the Yatra by anti-social & terrorist organizations. It's only the faith and the devotion towards God that makes this journey possible; else it's neither comfortable, nor secure & easy. As per the rules, visitors must have a registration card or permit. Without having one, travelers will not be allowed to proceed with the journey. The journey is not at all easy but with a deepening of focus, keen preparation, attention to the path below our feet, and respect for the destination at hand, it is possible to transform, even the most difficult journey into a sacred journey, a pilgrimage. The people with some physical disability or kids and even the elderly people are advised not to take on the journey: As such no one below the age of 13 years or above the age of 75 years, and no woman with more than six week's pregnancy is registered for the Yatra. We can avoid some odds by doing a few pre-preparations. Since the trek involves a lot of physical exertion, it is needed to improve breathing and enhance physical fitness. Before the actual date of

the Yatra, we must accustom ourselves to practicing a fitness regime and taking morning or evening walks at least a month before the trek. Before actually taking the trek, we must get ourselves medically examined to ensure that we are physically fit. En-route we should avoid trekking alone and stay with a group and we don't opt for any shortcut that can prove fatal for want of route locations and conditions. We will be comfortable during trekking this route if we carry some essentials in our carry bag such as: Warm clothing including woolen hats, gloves, water repellent coat, sturdy shoes, umbrella, supporting sticks for trekking, sunscreen and moisturizer, power bank and torch with extra batteries, first-aid kit with general medications and some ready to eat snacks. Since sabotage by terrorists and threat of sticky bombs is the biggest challenge during the Yatra, we require strict measures for conducting the Yatra in a peaceful atmosphere including deployment of sufficient numbers of security personnel, to launch awareness campaigns to sensitize the visiting pilgrims, especially drivers, about various steps which are required to be followed to avoid any untoward incident. The introduction of a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) system for pilgrims to track their movement en-route to ensure their well-being is a good step. The introduction of Heli-Service and Battery Car is a welcome step for easement to pilgrims but only if operated with honest intentions and not like that in Shrine Board for Mata Vaishno Devi, which is a nuisance for common pilgrims and is a baby fondled by Shrine Board according to its own whims & wishes (I have faced it during my recent visit to Mata Vaishno Devi Darbar even after having priority quota slip). In matters of pilgrimage, should you be more like a shark? Just keep moving forward, never back. I part with the words of Wayne Muller, "To pray is no small thing. It is nothing less than a sacred pilgrimage into the heart of the whole world."

PM package employees in dilemma

■ VIVEK KOUL

It is indeed very sad and agonizing that the government has turned a complete blind eye over the one point demand of relocation of PM package employees. These employees are agitating over the past 50 days with indomitable spirit but to the utter surprise the government is deliberately ignoring the PM Package employees' main demand of relocation outside the valley for the best reasons known to them. The situation in Kashmir is terribly volatile and tense since after the spurt in selective killing of Hindu minority employees at their workplaces by the radical brute forces. There is an unprecedented situation in Kashmir and thus PM package employees are in fear, distress and panic stricken. After the inception of the economic package for Kashmiri Pandits some 12 years back it has been seen that there is gross human rights violations as far as the PM package employees are concerned. It is also to be believed that this Job Package for KPs was implemented on the wrong lines. The reason behind its wrong implementation was that neither the accommodation was given to these employees nor any sort of security cover was provided by the government thus concerned authorities itself have indirectly broken the bond/agreement. Now, there is total confusion, turmoil and turbulence in Kashmir owing to the fear instilled by targeted and selective killings of minorities. It is also in place to mention here that there is no safe zone/place in Kashmir keeping in view the present security scenario. Each and every place has turned vulnerable for Kashmir Pandit Package employees as the intruders and radical forces are present everywhere. The Government can't provide security to all Package employees everytime and everywhere. Therefore, government's decision of posting the employees at district headquarters is only a futile step and will only add woes to the package employees. These PM package Kashmiri Pandit employees are the soft targets for the

gun wielding militants in Kashmir and therefore the government should not force these unfortunate employees to work in Kashmir. It will not be possible for these sons of soil to work under the fear of gun toting terrorists. The relocation demand of package employees is very genuine as well as authentic so the government should put aside their ego and prestige & must temporary order their relocation outside Kashmir in order to stop any further bloodshed. There is no denying the fact that these PM package employees are patriotic and nationalist to the core. Government should understand this fact that PM Package employees and other Hindu minorities were being massacred because of being patriotic and nationalist in nature. PM package employees have always followed the path of non-violence and are always hand in glove with the policies of the government. Now the government and policy makers need to understand the gravity and enormity of the situation in Kashmir as far as minority killings is concerned. The LG's administration should initiate talks with the protesting stakeholders of this agitation and must have to take all Package employees into confidence. It is high-time now that these Package employees need healing touch of the government but very ironically the centre government and LG administration is reluctant to redress the demand of relocation. The protesting Package employees are unequivocally demanding their immediate attachment in the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioners' Migrant Office Jammu till proper roadmap for their safety and security be chalked out by the government. The Relief Commissioner Migrants Office Jammu is the nodal office of all the PM package employees who are working in Kashmir. These employees are not demanding anything impractical but are only demanding the safety of their lives which is only possible if the government adjust these package employees outside Kashmir. But it is very unfortunate that the government

seems to be less interested in resolving this issue of relocation. It has been widely observed that the government always uses these package employees as laboratory objects for experimentation purposes only. The LG administration and the centre government is least bothered as far as woes and miseries of PM package employees is concerned. However, there is an urgent need to delink this PM Job package with the Rehabilitation package. It was under a well-knit strategy and conspiracy of the then government that a bond/agreement was made to be signed by all PM package employees at the time of appointment. The bond was completely arbitrary and unconstitutional in nature. It is the height of injustice that these hapless Package employees are being used as bonded labourers in Kashmir and the Bosses treat them as slaves in the offices. This is the greatest human tragedy of the modern world where the employees are being treated as sacrificial goats by the authorities at the helm of affairs. Moreover, the successive governments linked this economic package with the rehabilitation policy of KPs. The government always hoodwinked Kashmiri Pandits in the name of 'Rehabilitation of KPs back to Kashmir' only to gain political mileage. It has been around 12 years now since this Job Package for Kashmiri Migrants was implemented but on ground zero not even a single family migrated back to valley. It is crystal clear that PM package employees are living in Kashmir on temporary basis for the Job purpose only. This in itself shows that Kashmiri Pandit youths out of compulsion, urge and need accepted and adopted this economic package of the then government. It is now urged through these columns of your esteemed newspaper that centre Government and LG's administration must listen to one point demand of 'Relocation of PM package employees outside Kashmir valley' and immediately attach them to the Relief Commissioner Migrants office Jammu till Kashmir be declared as total terror-free by the Government.

PROGRESSING J&K

KVIB establishing industrial ecosystem to nurture budding entrepreneurs

Jammu & Kashmir Khadi & Village Industries Board (KVIB) is establishing and nurturing an entrepreneurial ecosystem under micro and village industries sector across Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. KVIB has an important role in Employment Generation, through various schemes they are implementing in J&K. KVIB significantly improves sustainable development of Village and Traditional Industries by planning, promoting and organising Khadi, Village and Micro Industries Sector. They facilitate creation of employment opportunities for unemployed youth, artisans by helping them to establish their own village / micro industrial units.

As per KVIB artisans are empowered to produce customer-savvy products and foster a

strong rural community spirit by establishing a sustainable and dynamic village and traditional industries sector. He added that KVIB helps in improve design and productivity of Khadi and village industries sector. Government of India has approved the introduction of a new credit linked subsidy programme called Prime Ministers Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) by merging two schemes -Prime Ministers Rojgar Yojana (PMRY) and Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP) for generation of employment opportunities through establishment of micro enterprises in rural as well as urban areas. PMEGP is a central sector scheme administered by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME). The Scheme is implemented by Khadi & Village

Industries Commission (KVIC), a statutory organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of MSME as the single nodal agency at the National level. The Government subsidy under the scheme is routed by KVIC through the identified Banks for eventual distribution to the beneficiaries/ entrepreneurs in their Bank accounts. The Implementing Agencies, KVIC, KVIBs and DICs associate reputed Non-Government Organization (NGOs)/reputed autonomous institutions/Self Help Groups (SHGs)/ National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)/Udyami Mitras empanelled under Rajiv Gandhi Udyami Mitra Yojana (RGUMY), Panchayat Raj institutions and other relevant bodies in the implementation of the Scheme, especially in the area of identification of beneficiaries, of

area specific viable projects, and providing training in entrepreneurship development. Thirty-one year old Farida Akhtar had set-up Anna's Boutique with the help of KVIB which is considered as a trend setter in Dooru area of Anantnag. "I am happy that I am an entrepreneur; but it was not an easy task for me. I worked for several years under a local tailor, who taught me basics of dressmaking, but it was absolutely traditional tailoring," said Farida, adding that her passion in dressmaking motivated her to learn out of the way designing with the help of KVIB. Similarly, Nardeep Singh setup a unit 'Singh Hydraulic Equipments' with the help of KVIB to become self sufficient. He says, "Businesses that manage to stick with pains and gains last longest and shine brightest".

Lal Ded & Sufism-Torchbearers of Kashmiri identity

In the fourteenth century, a woman writing in any language was a rarity, but it happened in Kashmir. A voice which resonated in the valley and spoke directly to the people, was heard with all seriousness, and recorded in collective memory and later penned down as 'Vakhs' - meaning 'Speech'. This is the voice of the mystic of the Kashmir Shaivism school of Hindu philosophy - Lal Ded, whom Kashmiris, Muslims and Hindus alike venerate to this day as a prophetess, their North Star. The fact that Lal Ded was a rare diamond - both as a saint and as a poet - is an undisputable argument acknowledged by all Kashmiris. It is evident through the Vakhs, which she uttered as direct outpourings from her heart rather than intentionally shaped poetic compositions, that Lal Ded is the most powerful symbol of Kashmir's civilization ethos.

There was no polarization between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims in her time; the Vakhs made a remarkable impact on the collective psyche of the two communities. She was called 'Lalleshwari' by one community while 'Lalla Arifa' by the other, showing that both recognized her spiritual attainment in accordance with their religious perceptions. Lal's Vakhs suggest she belongs to the Trika school of Kashmiri Shaiva mysticism or devotional Shivadvaite, which originated no later than the eighth century CE. Shiva- Shakti worship in Kashmir dates to at least the second-century CE. This school, that came to be known as Pratyabhijna (Recognition) or Trika (triad of Shiva, Shakti and Nara), was represented in the works of great scholar-siddhas like Bhatta Narayana (eighth century), Utpaladeva (ninth century), Abhinavagupta (tenth to eleventh centuries) and Shitikantha (thirteenth century). Before advent of Islam in the medieval period, Kashmir was known as the Land of Parvati or Rishi Bhumi; and later was called Peer Vaer, an abode of Saints and Sufis. The Valley has offered fertile ground for the emergence of various Hindu (primarily Shaivites Saints) and Sufi Saints, who collectively knitted a culture called Kashmiriyat.

A fusion between Islam and Vedanta (Kashmir Shaivism in the Valley) gave rise to Sufism. The Sufi saints came to be known as Rishis. The most famous of them is Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, the founder of the Rishi Order, the Alamdar-e-Kashmir, is lovingly known as Nunda Rishi. Unfortunately his famous shrine at Char-e-Sharif was burnt down by the Pakistan-sponsored Islamist Mast Gul during the holy month of Ramadan in 1995. Nunda Rishi was largely influenced by Lalleshwari, his senior contemporary. Many Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims became Nunda Rishi's disciples. They renounced the world, dedicated themselves completely to meditation. On their death, these Rishis were buried in their Ziyarat. Kashmiris have great reverence for these Ziyarats and lovingly go there to place flowers on the graves. Due to their universal appeal, these shrines gained popularity as pilgrimage for both Muslims and Pandits, helping propagate a humanistic philosophy to build the Kashmiri ethnic identity.

Hindu shrines and Muslim 'Asthans' faced each other; and both communities visited the living Saints alike. Saint-worship was very common until the year 1989 - that marked the beginning of a new face of religion, fundamentalist in nature and based on hatred. Nobody could have imagined that the soil blessed with Rishis spreading the messages of spirituality and universal oneness would be one day soaked in the blood of its own, and one's own siblings would be forced to leave their ancestral land, all in the name of religion. Other important seers of the valley are Rupa Bhawani (1625-1721) who regarded Lal Ded as her guru, Parmanand (1791-1879), and Shams Faqir (1843-1914). Faqir extended a tribute to Lal Ded in his poems. For the Shaivite Kashmiri Pandit woman, he uses conspicuous Kashmiri words of Sanskrit origin, such as Praan (vital air), Jnaan (knowledge), Aakaash (ether), Karmavaan (meaning life's workshop).

Lal Ded's philosophy rejects the otherness of God and understands the world as an extension of one's own inner consciousness, and that is why she appeals to masses of all shades of religious thought. She questions dogmatic thought of today's world with Vakhs displaying her inclusivity where she not only break barriers between religions by shining the sun upon everyone without distinction, but uses the Islamic title of 'Saheb' to the apparent Shaivite reference to Shiva. The verses reveal, in their own idiom, the religious, mystic, and linguistic blend they support. She has indeed established a tradition of harmony and tolerance - a priceless heritage. But who will carry her message to the world today? Time will soon come, when the people of Kashmir, fed up by extremism and narrow fundamentalism, will rekindle this inter-religious faith that Lal Ded started and Nunda Rishi and others carried forward. Such a movement is shaping up once again which will help overcome the parochial minds and open up floodgates of harmony and love in Kashmir.

Indeed, Lal's Vakhs enable one on an individual journey through the woes of the human condition, disillusionment with the world, an anguished search for God, and, ultimately, to the realisation of the highest liberating truth. They take the reader on a journey from the superficial outer world to the inner world. It is worth mentioning, that Lal Ded did not found any movement or order of followers; she came and went unaccompanied, a wanderer-her message meant for the redemption, upholding the highest human values. In line with her school of thought perhaps lies the solution for rebuilding the society having mutual respect and trust that went missing during the last three decades. It is equally reassuring to find that some organisations in the Valley have started conducting seminars and conferences on Sufism reminding the masses at large, particularly the youth, of their glorious past. And this is why Kashmir is indeed a Peer Vaer - above the insignificant matters and bondage of society and focused on upholding of human values manifested by synthesis of Lal Ded and Nunda Rishi.

