

SECOND THOUGHT REQUIRED

Here 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 down-trodden, 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 Nawapora 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?

the Law of Action and Reaction.

Those who Realize the Truth about the Law of Karma, go deeper to find out who the Karma belongs to. Does the Karma belong to the body? The body is just an instrument of action. While it does the action and experiences the result of the Karma by what happens in life, the body does not own the Karma. One day, the body will die, but the Mind and Ego, ME, will carry the Karma and be reborn in a new body. Karma is the cause of our rebirth on earth. But it is certainly not true that we cannot escape from it. Then, what is the Truth?

To be free from Karma, we need Enlightenment. We need the Realization of the Truth. When we realize that we are not the body that will die, and we realize we are not even the ME, the Mind and Ego that seems to exist but in reality, is an illusion, when we realize we are the Divine Soul, the power of life that makes us act, then, we can be free from Karma. We can own all Karma, by realizing that we are only an instrument of the Divine. This Enlightenment of who we truly are is a way of transcending all Karma.

Atman In Ravi

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

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

EDITORIAL

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 Shiva-dvaita, 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 scholars-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 Kashmireyat.

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 Ziyarat 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 Shama 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 find 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.

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), Panchayati 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 support 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, Nandeep 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".