

SYNCRETIC CULTURE

Jammu and Kashmir, a region renowned for its stunning landscapes and rich history, boasts a vibrant and syncretic culture that reflects a blend of diverse traditions, religions, and ethnicities. This unique cultural tapestry is the result of centuries of interactions among various communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs, each contributing to the region's distinctive identity. The cultural syncretism in Jammu and Kashmir can be traced back to its historical context. The region's strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East made it a melting pot of various influences. Ancient trade routes like the Silk Road facilitated the exchange of ideas, art, and beliefs, which began to shape the local culture. The Mauryan and Kushan empires, along with the influence of Buddhism, left a lasting impact on the region. One of the most remarkable aspects of Jammu and Kashmir's culture is its religious and cultural synthesis. Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism coexist peacefully, with each tradition contributing to the region's cultural heritage. The region's Hindu heritage is evident in its festivals, rituals, and art forms. Traditional festivals like Shivratri and Durga Puja are celebrated with great fervor. Hindu architecture, including temples like the Shankaracharya Temple and the Amarnath Cave Temple, adds to the cultural richness of the region. Islamic festivals such as Eid are celebrated with vibrant gatherings and traditional feasts, reflecting the region's Muslim cultural heritage. Jammu and Kashmir's syncretic culture is also evident in its art and crafts. The region is renowned for its exquisite shawls, carpets, and papier-mâché products, which reflect a blend of various artistic traditions. The cuisine of Jammu and Kashmir is another testament to its syncretic culture. The food here is a delightful mix of flavors and techniques from various culinary traditions. Festivals and rituals in J&K exemplify the region's cultural diversity. Hindu festivals like Lohri and Navratri are celebrated alongside Islamic festivals like Eid and Buddhist celebrations such as Losar.

Time: An Unseen Watcher

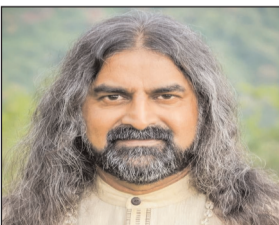
When a person's desires become excessively intense or he becomes overly ambitious, when he rises from the scratch and touches the skies, he may, out of arrogance, start considering himself invincible. This is the point where the pages of his downfall begin to be written. It is rightly said, "Fear time, for it is Almighty. It keeps an eye on everyone and takes note of everything. When the appropriate time comes, it takes account of all. In its realm, there might be a delay, but there is no injustice. As a matter of fact, human nature is such that once basic needs are met, the quest for more begins. This quest can lead to growth and progress, but it can also lead to an unquenchable thirst for more and more, known as greed. When an individual becomes consumed by greed, his actions are often driven by the desire to accumulate more wealth, power, or status. This relentless pursuit can make him override the ethical and moral boundaries he might be crossing. Ambition is often praised as a virtue that drives individuals to achieve great things. However, when ambition turns into an obsession, it can lead to one's downfall. Overambitious individual may start to believe that he is above everyone else, and this delusion can make him reckless. He may take undue risks or make decisions that harm others, believing that he is invulnerable to consequences. We should keep in mind that time is the great watcher. It observes everything silently, taking note of every action and every decision. Time has a way of its own to expose the truth and bring about justice. It may seem to delay, but it never denies. The reckoning may not come immediately, but it will come eventually. Those who have risen through unethical means or have let arrogance cloud their judgment will find that time has not forgotten their deeds. When the fall comes, it is often swift and unexpected. The very foundations that seemed so solid can crumble down overnight. The support systems that seemed unshakable can vanish. The individual who once soared high is brought back to the ground. This fall is not just a physical or financial one; it is also a fall from grace, a loss of respect and dignity and a disaster in the family, as well. The lesson here is clear: fear time, respect it, and understand its power. Recognize that no matter how high you rise, you are never above the laws of nature and the universe. Stay grounded, remain humble, and always be mindful of your actions and decisions. Time is watching, and it will hold you accountable one day. As already said, time, the silent mediator of justice, keeps a vigilant watch over the deeds of humanity. While corruption, irregularities, and unethical activities may temporarily escape detection, they leave indelible marks on the fabric of existence. These transgressions, though hidden from immediate view, are never truly concealed from the unerring gaze of time. The perpetrators of such misdeeds might bask in a false sense of security, believing their actions to be beyond accusation or discovery. They may even revel in the fruits of their illicit labors, unaware of the unavoidable forces aligning against them. But time, a patient and relentless watcher, hits at them when suitable and appropriate time approaches. Unlike human justice systems, which can be fallible or manipulated, time's judgment is absolute and inescapable. It does not announce its arrival with fanfare or warning. There are no sirens, no alarms to herald the approach of its vengeance. Instead, it moves with the quiet inevitability of a glacier, slowly but surely eroding the foundations of ill-gotten gains and unearned privileges.

This concept is defined in various literary forms. The phrase "the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine" speaks to this inevitable process. Similarly, the "Rod of God has no sound." (Uski Lathi mein Awaaz Nahin...) serves as a metaphor for this cosmic accountability. It reminds us that our actions have consequences, even if those consequences are not immediately apparent.

It is this understanding that gives hope to the oppressed and strikes fear into the hearts of wrongdoers. For while human systems may fail, and immediate consequences may be avoided, the ultimate judgment of time remains a reality. Virtuous and wise individuals heed to this silent warning. They understand that each action, no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential, is being recorded in the annals of time. This awareness serves as a powerful deterrent against moral compromise and unethical behavior.

(The writer is Former Fellow, IAS, Shimla)

Read the wisdom



MOHANJI
If you ever felt doubt about your Master's or Guru's power, you are requested to read this wisdom below to revive your faith!

Question: What will save you from disconnecting in times of doubt with your master?

Mohanji: "Only Grace! Earned by the accumulated past merits. So basically, the only thing you can do to save yourself from disconnecting is to accumulate good deeds while you are still firmly connected, while having full faith, and while the boat is steady."

When the storms come, there is not much you can do but stay calm, balance the boat, and pray for grace. The storm will either pass or you just need to stay put and hold on to the tiny thread that connects you to your master.

While the mind is active and doubts are high, you can do nothing since Tackling the mind with your mind does not work. Solving the problem from the place where it was created in the first place does not work. The solution is always found vertically.

Don't pray for a steady boat and life without doubt. Tests are unavoidable and guaranteed!

Instead... Pray for grace. And when this storm goes away, be wise and accumulate good deeds through relentless serving with burning Bhakti.

A flying start to PM Narendra Modi

OMKAR DATTATRAY

Due to the outcome of the Lok Sabha Elections, Narendra Modi was able to cobble a coalition government of NDA with its pre-poll allies especially the JD(U) and TDP. Though other smaller regional parties also allied with the BJP to form Modi government for the third time in succession. In fact Modi's anointment and swearing in ceremony on 9th of May Sunday at 7.17 Pm in a glittering function at Rashtrapathi Bhawan was attended by seven heads/leaders from the neighboring added grace to the function and it was really a flying start of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who in fact closed all doors for the opposition alliance of INDIA to form a government. The numbers also did not favor INDIA bloc to form a coalition government. However they tried a lot without any fruitful result. It is learnt and understood that INDIA alliance has also offered the coveted chair of Prime Minister to chief of JD(U) and the chief minister of Bihar and the opposition has tried to handover the olive branch of Prime Ministership to Nitish Kumar but he has declined the offer and has allied with BJP and has given this time unconditional support to Narendra Modi to form the government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a flying start in his third term as Prime Minister. The formation of the Union cabinet took place smoothly, as was the allocation of portfolios. It is pertinent to mention that TDP of Chandrababu Naidu has won 16 Lok Sabha seats and the JD(U) of the Nitish Kumar has got 12 seats and both these regional parties have a

significant and dominant role in the formation of the government at the centre and both these leaders and parties allied with the BJP's NDA and this catapulted Modi to the post of prime minister once again for the third record time as both the regional leaders pledged their unwavering support to Modi to form the government at the centre and thus all the plans of the opposition alliance of INDIA bloc failed to form a coalition government as both Nitish Kumar and the Chandrababu Naidu is understood to have declined to offer support to the opposition alliance and thus they were handicapped and could not forge an alliance to form a government. At present Prime Minister Narendra Modi is settled in his third term and launching his plans to make India third largest economy of the world. His advantage is that the industrial houses of India are totally with him in his efforts to make India into a developed country instead of a developing country. Forming his new government, Narendra Modi appeared to be in hurry so as to seal and block the efforts of the INDIA bloc to form a coalition government. Narendra Modi might justifiably have looked triumphant as he and his ministers were sworn in on May 9. The new prime minister's ceremony - a coronation, some said - was the grandest since independence. At Rashtrapati Bhawan, the president's red sandstone palace, 4,000 odd guests indulged Mr Modi's fondness since school for dramatics. Arrayed before him were his vanquished rivals, leaders of Congress and regional parties, and those sidelined by his own party. Instead Modi seemed preoccu-

pied. He faces two difficult facts in national affairs. First, despite his party, the NDA, having 282 members of the parliament, most are insufficiently experienced or honest to be trusted as ministers. In theory that should be manageable, given Mr Modi's hands-on style - senior bureaucrats are already briefing him. He could have produced a small cabinet heavy with technocrats. The second difficulty, however, pushed against lean, efficient rule by experts. While having a BJP majority in parliament's lower house, Modi will need allies in the upper house. He also needs support for his plans from the states. Other parties, in other words must be wooed with ministerial jobs. The opposition parties were expecting that the JDU & TDP allies will exercise pressure to get any of the top portfolios of home, defense, finance and external affairs but nothing of the sort happened and the BJP not only retained these key portfolios but also allotted these again to the previous incumbents and this surprised one and all including the opposition. The INDI bloc also feels and were of the opinion that Modi will not be in a position to pilot the ship of his third term because he will not have the art of managing the coalition as in his previous terms he had the privilege of having a majority of his own and thus Modi was not dependent upon his allies any more. But the opposition proved wrong in their thinking and calculation. Modi has not only the art and aptitude of managing the coalition, but he has the will and capacity to re-model himself as per the new and emerging conditions and situations, given the fact that he this time depends on the

support of his pre poll allies especially JD(U), TDP and other smaller allies like LJPSP, IUHM and others though mainly he has this time to bank upon Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu. It seems that more than getting the ministerial berths in the new coalition 3.0 of Modi, both the allies and their leaders want their states to be developed instead of gaining portfolios in the coalition government. In due course of time both Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu will demand significant amount of funds from the centre for the development of their states and so both of them seem to be contented with the distribution of portfolios. Nitish Kumar may ask for a special status for Bihar and similarly Chandrababu Naidu will also demand enormous funds for developing new capital city as Hyderabad has become the capital city of Telangana. So for the Modi government 3.0 is functioning smoothly and there are no signs of friction between the coalition partners and this augurs well for the coalition government and in fact it can be said that Modi has a flying start as the new prime minister. It seems that in the new coalition government the main allies TDP, JD(U) and other smaller allies as well are keeping their ambitions under control as they are unlikely to demand favors of ministerial berths of key departments in future as well except they will press for enormous funds for their states for development. Modi will have to keep the allies pleased by agreeing to give them finances for the development of their individual states.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist)

Women and Religious Practices: Ancient, Medieval and Modern

DR. RAJKUMAR SINGH

Religious practices have been an integral part of human civilization, shaping cultures, societies, and individual identities. The role of women in these practices, however, has varied significantly across different religions and historical periods. They have been a cornerstone of human societies since the dawn of civilization. They shape moral values, social structures, and cultural identities. Understanding the origins of these traditions provides insight into the development of human thought and societal organization. The role of women in religious practices has evolved significantly over time, reflecting broader social, cultural, and political changes. While progress has been made in many religious traditions, ongoing efforts are needed to address the challenges women face. Embracing gender equality within religious practices not only enriches the spiritual life of communities but also promotes broader social justice and human rights. As societies continue to evolve, the participation of women in religious practices will remain a crucial aspect of the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity. The role of women in religious practices today reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. Significant progress has been made across various religious traditions, with women assuming leadership roles, advocating for equality, and reinterpreting sacred texts. However, challenges persist, and ongoing efforts are needed to address deep-rooted patriarchal structures, improve access to education, and reform legal and social barriers. The continued evolution of women's roles in religious practices is not only a testament to their resilience and agency but also a crucial aspect of the broader struggle.

Origin and development

Before the advent of organized religions, early humans practiced animism and the evidence of animistic beliefs can be found in prehistoric cave paintings, burial sites, and artifacts, indicating a rudimentary form of spirituality and reverence for

nature. Its developmental aspects include: a. Shamanism: One of the earliest forms of religious practice, shamanism, involves mediating between the human and spirit worlds. Shamans, often regarded as healers and spiritual guides, used rituals, trance states, and symbols to communicate with the spirit world. This tradition is still practiced in various indigenous cultures around the world. b. Ancestor Worship: Many ancient cultures practiced ancestor worship, believing that the spirits of the dead could influence the living. This practice fostered a sense of continuity and respect for past generations, forming the basis for various religious rituals and societal norms. The transition from prehistoric practices to organized religions began with the development of agriculture and settled communities. As societies became more complex, so did their religious systems. c. Mesopotamia and Egypt: The earliest known organized religions emerged in Mesopotamia and Egypt around 3500 BCE. In Mesopotamia, the Sumerians worshipped a pantheon of gods associated with natural forces and city-states. Temples, such as the ziggurats, served as religious and administrative centres. Similarly, ancient Egyptian religion centered around a complex pantheon of gods, with the Pharaoh considered a divine ruler. The construction of monumental structures like pyramids and temples reflected the importance of religion in societal organization. d. Indus Valley Civilization: The religious practices of the Indus Valley Civilization (around 2500 BCE) remain somewhat enigmatic due to the undeciphered script. However, archaeological findings suggest the worship of a mother goddess, animal deities, and ritual bathing, possibly linked to later Hindu practices. e. China: In ancient China, religious traditions centered around ancestor worship, divination, and the reverence of natural deities. The Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) practiced oracle bone divination, a method of seeking guidance from ancestors and deities. These early practices laid the foundation for Confucianism, Daoism, and other Chinese

religious traditions. The origins of religious traditions are deeply intertwined with the evolution of human societies. From prehistoric animism and shamanism to the sophisticated theological systems of the major world religions, these traditions have provided frameworks for understanding the world, guiding moral conduct, and fostering community cohesion. As societies continue to evolve, religious traditions adapt and transform, reflecting the dynamic interplay between faith, culture, and human experience.

Theme of world religions

The role of women in religious practices has evolved significantly in contemporary times, reflecting broader societal changes, feminist movements, and reinterpretations of sacred texts. This essay explores the current status of women in various religious traditions, the progress made, the challenges that persist, and the transformations underway. a. Christianity: In Christianity, women's roles vary widely across different denominations and cultural contexts. Progress in Ordination: Many Protestant denominations, including the Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches, now ordain women as priests, ministers, and bishops. This progress is often attributed to theological shifts and the influence of feminist theology, which emphasizes gender equality. Catholicism: The Roman Catholic Church, however, continues to restrict ordination to men, citing theological and doctrinal reasons. Despite this, women play vital roles in Catholic education, healthcare, and charitable work. Advocacy groups within the church are increasingly calling for the inclusion of women in decision-making processes and leadership roles. Leadership and Scholarship: Women in Islam are increasingly taking on roles as scholars, educators, and leaders. In some Muslim-majority countries, women serve as judges, muftis (legal scholars), and in political leadership. Educational institutions such as Al-Azhar University in Egypt now admit women into advanced religious studies. Prayer Leadership: While traditional Islamic jurisprudence

often restricts women from leading mixed-gender congregational prayers, women do lead prayers in female-only settings and are active in religious education and community organization. Advocacy and Reform: Progressive Muslim movements advocate for gender equality, arguing that the Quran supports women's rights and leadership. Organizations such as Musawah and Sisters in Islam work towards reinterpretation of religious texts and promote women's rights within an Islamic framework. c. Judaism: Judaism has seen significant changes in women's roles, especially within the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements. Ritual Participation: In progressive Jewish communities, women participate fully in religious rituals, including reading from the Torah and leading prayer services. Orthodox women's participation is more restricted, but there are efforts to expand women's roles within the boundaries of Jewish law. d. Hinduism: In Hinduism, women's participation varies widely depending on regional and cultural practices. Spiritual Leadership: Women are increasingly recognized as gurus, spiritual teachers, and leaders of religious communities. Figures like Mata Amritanandamayi (Ammamma) and Sadhvi Bhagwati Saraswati exemplify this trend. Temple Roles: Traditionally, Hindu women have been involved in religious rituals at home and in the community. In some regions, women now serve as priests and perform rituals in temples, challenging traditional gender norms. e. Buddhism: Buddhism's approach to women's roles varies significantly across its different schools and cultural contexts. Leadership and Scholarship: Women in Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions hold prominent positions as teachers, scholars, and leaders. Figures like Pema Chodron, a respected teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, have gained international recognition.

(The writer is a youth motivator and former Head of the University Department of Political Science, B.N. Mandal University, Madhepura)

YOUR COLUMN

J&K Bank hosts HNI Customer Meet in Jammu and Katra
Dear editor

This has reference to the recent news items about the meeting of the senior functionaries of J&K Bank with its customers, there by glorifying its work and relationships with its customers at Jammu and Kathua. Apart from other senior functionaries of the J&K Bank, this meeting was chaired by the Chairman and MD of the J&K Bank himself.

We as customers of J&K Bank since last more than 25 years, do not agree with such a show of the J&K Bank. The press statement issued in this behalf by the J&K Bank functionaries appears to be true to the extent of the interests of J&K Bank with the customers' deposits of their hard earned money which makes the J&K Bank to earn hefty profits. When it comes to the losses of the customers the J&K Bank authorities turn their backs to such customers.

Myself and my wife aged more than 80 years of age, were defrauded, through fraudulent drawls, of huge amounts to the tune of Rs. 1.10 Lakhs from our pension accounts, which we are having with the J&K Bank branches located in New Delhi for the last more than 25 years. It is now almost the 4th month when such a loss has occurred to us. The matter was brought to the notice of the concerned authorities of J&K Bank immediately. The bank authorities reported our complaint to the cybercrime police, Jammu, with no follow up action. The Bank just performed its formality of reporting the complaint to cyber crime police. It is very much unfortunate for us to say that we had protracted correspondence with the concerned authorities of the J&K Bank including the worthy Chairman of the bank, for their lax security system, to protect the clients deposits, but to our dismay no response

was ever given to our such complaints and huge losses. J&K Bank through its Branch Managers took no immediate visible action nor guided us to seek remedies available to us as Banking Consumers. Upon insistence and personal visit of our son Mr. Sanjiv Khushu to J&K Bank Branch Prithvi Raj Road, a charge back was raised most unwillingly by the Branch Manager on 24-05-2024, after an initial delay of nine (9) days of the occurrence of the fraudulent drawls on 15-05-2024. Had it been done in time our hard earned money would have been saved? It sounds like a criminal act and the bank has no regrets.

The Bank does not have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to handle Cybercrime. Since the incident was brought to the notice of Bank Managers almost near instantaneously, no effort was made by the Bank to block the beneficiary accounts and retrieve the money in real time. It took them 9 days to accept a formal Charge Back request and more than a month to reply back to us pleading helplessness in the matter. This in itself is criminal negligence of highest order. The Bank does not have a Customer Grievance handling mechanism in such matters, with even the Branch Managers pleading ignorance of the Bank and RBI policies in this matter. There was no proactive official communication with us by the J&K Bank. No communication mechanism or any Contact Person details were provided to us for further updates. It is with regret to mention here that even we approached the worthy Chairman & MD of the J & K Bank, too through various mails and individual letters, yet, to our misfortune he never bothered to reply or respond to our complaints. Where is the clients interest being saved and looked after. It is a myth. Let the bank authorities not conduct hoax shows.

It needs to be made clear to the J&K Bank management that the J&K Bank is mostly sustained by J&K government transactions, which includes the salaries and pensions of the state employees. The bank should be more cautious about such clients, which it is not. The bank takes such clients for granted as such clients like government employees and pensioners have no other option but

to maintain their accounts with the J&K Bank, when there are very good other banks also available.

Reference to the clients being integral to the Bank's success and growth, the worthy Chairman and MD is referring to the deposits of the clients and not the banks responsibility towards its clients in the events of their losses. What has happened with us is a live example of a lax behavior with clients like us.

P. L. Khushu & Permishuri Khushu
Anath Lakanpur-Jammu Road

Dear editor,

Shri Nitin Gadkari, known as the "Road Man of India," has garnered significant support for the road network being constructed under his leadership. However, the Lakanpur-Jammu road appears to be receiving inadequate attention. Driving on this road is a nightmare, especially navigating the numerous bends around the under-construction pillars. It is remarkable that vehicles, particularly trucks and buses, manage to do so without accidents.

I traveled on this road approximately nine weeks ago from Lakanpur to Jammu and made the return journey a few days ago. I observed no noticeable improvements. I have been informed that the construction work occurs sporadically.

I urge the Honourable Minister to travel this stretch of road with the tender document. I am confident he will be appalled by the current condition.

Previously, the people of Jammu blamed Kashmiri leadership for neglecting its development. Now, with Jammu advocating for full integration with the Union of India, it is unclear whom to hold accountable.

There has been much excitement about traveling from Delhi to Katra in six hours. I challenge the completion of the Lakanpur-Jammu road by the end of 2025, as 2024 seems unrealistic.

Why should anyone pay at Lakanpur for a road that barely exists? Instead, the NHAI should compensate for the wear and tear and extra fuel consumed on this stretch.

Prof. Suresh Chander