

## ENHANCING AMARNATH PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE

The Amarnath Yatra is a significant pilgrimage in Hinduism, attracting devotees from all over India and beyond to the sacred Amarnath Cave in the Himalayas. This annual pilgrimage, known for its challenging terrain and high altitude, presents unique logistical and safety challenges. To ensure a safe, comfortable, and spiritually enriching experience for pilgrims, several initiatives have been undertaken, focusing on infrastructure, healthcare, security, and environmental sustainability. One of the primary initiatives for enhancing the Amarnath pilgrimage is infrastructure development. This includes improving road connectivity, constructing durable and safe walking paths, and establishing accommodation facilities along the route. The government, in collaboration with local authorities and organizations, has invested in building robust infrastructure to facilitate smoother and safer travel for pilgrims. Efforts have also been made to enhance the amenities available at base camps and en route to the cave. These include clean water supply systems, public toilets, resting places, and emergency shelters. Adequate signage and information boards have been installed to guide pilgrims and ensure they stay on the designated paths, minimizing risks associated with the rugged terrain. The health and well-being of pilgrims are paramount during the Amarnath Yatra. Dedicated medical camps and health centers have been set up at various points along the pilgrimage route. These facilities are equipped to provide immediate medical assistance, emergency care, and first aid services to pilgrims suffering from altitude sickness, exhaustion, or other medical emergencies. Medical teams comprising doctors, nurses, and paramedics are stationed at critical locations, ensuring prompt response to any health-related issues. Additionally, arrangements are made for air evacuation in cases of severe emergencies, ensuring timely transfer of patients to specialized hospitals for advanced treatment. Security is a crucial aspect of the Amarnath Yatra, given the challenging geopolitical and environmental conditions in the region. The pilgrimage route is closely monitored by security forces to prevent any untoward incidents or disruptions. Advanced surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras and satellite monitoring, are employed to maintain vigilance and ensure the safety of pilgrims throughout their journey. Security personnel are deployed at strategic checkpoints and sensitive areas to provide a secure environment for pilgrims. Coordination between local police, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies is streamlined to preempt and respond swiftly to any security threats. Environmental sustainability is a key focus in managing the Amarnath Yatra. The fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan region demands responsible stewardship to preserve its natural beauty and ecological balance. Initiatives such as waste management programs, eco-friendly practices, and awareness campaigns among pilgrims promote responsible tourism. Strict guidelines are enforced to minimize the ecological footprint of the pilgrimage, including restrictions on plastic use, waste segregation, and promotion of renewable energy sources. Efforts are also made to rehabilitate and restore areas affected by pilgrimage activities, ensuring the long-term preservation of the region's biodiversity. Beyond logistical and safety considerations, initiatives are undertaken to enrich the cultural and spiritual experience of pilgrims. Cultural programs, religious discourses, and exhibitions showcasing the history and significance of the Amarnath Yatra are organized at base camps and along the route.

## Political start-ups in J&K: A growing trend with limited impact

In a growing trend over the past decade, Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing a proliferation of "political start-ups" in the Valley but these outfits have failed to make a significant impact during elections, politicians and analysts said on Sunday.

The decades-long unrest in Kashmir has witnessed the rise of several political parties and fronts, including the Jammu and Kashmir Nationalist People's Front, Bharat Jodo Party, JK Peoples Movement, Jammu and Kashmir All Alliance Democratic Party, Jammu and Kashmir Workers Party, Jammu and Kashmir Peace Party and the Awami Awaaz Party.

Many of these have either refrained from contesting elections or have faced defeat in the recently held Lok Sabha polls.

Veteran politician and CPI(M) leader Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami said the leaders of these political start-ups often begin with a bang, enjoy patronage like security and other things, and then disappear like "lost planets when elections are held".

Instead of floating political start-ups, "we should concentrate on strengthening democratic institutions in the entire Jammu and Kashmir," he asserted.

Echoing similar views, PDP leader Waheed Para said these start-ups have a "negative impact" on the democratic space and highlighted their lack of popular support and legitimacy.

Para said these political start-ups only demolish and discredit the democratic space. "The recent Lok Sabha election has shown them the mirror clearly," he added.

In a veiled reference to businessman-turned-politician Altaf Bukhari's JK Apni Party and the veteran politician Ghulam Nabi Azad-led DPAP, Para said almost three parties were created by breaking up the PDP which only led to demolishing the democratic space in Kashmir and discrediting those left behind.

"Results reflect that only people should be given the right to choose and elect. Parties created in hybrid form don't enjoy the popular support or legitimacy," he added.

Noted Kashmiri Pandit leader and lawyer Titoo Ganjoo said the aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 saw the emergence of top-down political start-ups in Jammu and Kashmir that lack organic growth and fail to resonate with the local populace.

"These new entities were predominantly composed of disenfranchised politicians engaging in exploratory efforts, ultimately doomed to fail in gaining significant political traction," he said, adding that these start-ups never pose a challenge to the established political order.

The leadership of these political start-ups, conceived to be driven by some government agencies, failed to reflect the genuine aspirations of the local populace, Ganjoo added.

These leaders exhibit a significant disconnect from the region's realities, focusing more on reclaiming their political relevance rather than addressing the core issues faced by the people, according to prominent social activist Firdous. Ganjoo argued that the behaviour and conduct of these leaders highlight their opportunistic tendencies and lack of substantial commitment to the region's long-term stability and development.

"Their efforts were perceived as superficial and self-serving, failing to foster genuine political engagement or meaningful change," he said, adding that the lack of inspirational leadership and substantive direction has left the region in a state of disillusionment with no coherent or compelling vision for the future emerging from these political start-ups. Dr. Tauseef Bhatt, a socio-environmental activist, said that despite representing a new wave of political innovation in a conflict-ridden region, political start-ups in Kashmir face challenges in making a meaningful impact due to their limited experience and resources. Their dependence on external funding raises concerns about their autonomy and long-term sustainability in a volatile political environment, he said. While these start-ups aim to engage young Kashmiris in the political process and address local concerns, questions remain about their potential influence on the existing political dynamics and the peace process in the region.

As Kashmir grapples with ongoing challenges and aspirations for change, the fate of political start-ups in the region remains uncertain, raising questions about their ability to effect meaningful political change.

## Lord Shree Jagannath Ji Ratha Yatra symbolize unity in diversity

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

This is one of the most important processions/yatra taken out annually in Puri Odisha which begins on Ashadha Shukla Paksha Dwitiya and ends on Ashadha Shukla Dashmi. Lord Shree Jagannath Ji Chariot Yatra is an annual procession which is mainly taken out in Puri. However Jagannath Ji Ratha yatras are taken in various cities of India including Jammu, though biggest procession is taken out in Puri Odisha for which the preparations begin months in advance. The Ratha Yatra of Puri, also rendered as the Ratha Jatra is the oldest and largest Hindu Chariot festival celebrated annually on the bright half of the lunar month of Ashada (June-July). The festival is held at the city Puri, in the state of Odisha, India and is associated with the deity Jagannath - a form of Vishnu or Krishna. Rath Yatra processions have been historically common in Vishnu-related (Jagannath, Rama, Krishna) traditions in Hinduism across India. Western impressions of the Jagannath Ratha Yatra in Puri as a display of unstoppable force are the origin of the English word Juggernaut. Rath Yatra is derived from two Sanskrit words, Ratha, which means chariot or carriage, and Yatra which means journey or pilgrimage. In other Indian languages such as Odia, the phonetic equivalents are used, such as Jatra.

A stunning example of Kalinga architecture is the famous Jagannath Temple, which was constructed in the 12th century by king Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva. The goddesses Subhadra, Balabhadra, and Lord Jagannath reside in this hallowed shrine.

The festival of Rath Yatra, which draws pilgrims, devotees and visitors from all over India and world, is closely linked to the history of Jagannath Temple. It is one of the biggest processions and congregation held in Puri Odisha and is famous throughout India and abroad.

Preparations for Rath Yatra 2024 is being planned months in advance, with artisans



building the enormous chariots for the Gods. Every year, each chariot is constructed from scratch utilizing particular wood species and customary blueprints. The largest chariot belongs to Lord Jagannath and is named Nandighosa. Taladhwaजे belongs to Balabhadra and Darapadalana to Subhadra.

On day one a custom known as Pahandi, the gods are ceremoniously taken out of the Jagannath Temple on the day of the Ratha Yatra. Devotees are dancing and chanting in the streets during this colorful and joyful celebration.

After that, the gods are mounted on their appropriate chariots and prepared to travel to Gundicha Temple. On day one of the chariot festival Ratha Yatra, the atmosphere is electrifying with excitement and dedication as thousands of devotees pull the chariots. There is singing, dancing and non-stop hymn chanting during the three-kilometer trek to Gundicha Temple. The yearly pilgrimage of Lord Jagannath and his siblings to their birthplace is represented by this procession. Thereafter begins the nine-day Sojourn. Upon reaching Gundicha Temple, the deities are welcomed with elaborate rituals. They stay at the Gundicha Temple for nine days, during which various religious ceremonies and cultural events take place. This period is known as the Gundicha Yatra, where devotees can offer prayers and seek blessings from the

deities. The return journey nine day later, the gods set out on the Bahuda Yatra, a trek back to back to the Jagannath Temple. Devotees drag the chariots back to their original abode in this equally magnificent event. For the devotees, the trip back is a time of great joy and celebration. The Golden attire at the Rath Yatra, the Suna Besha, where the gods are decked out in gold jewelry and decorations is one of the highlights. The day following the gods return to the Jagannath Temple is when this magnificent ceremony takes place. The finale of the Rath yatra celebrations is the stunning sight of the deities dressed in gold, drawing thousands of devotees. Besides, Puri, Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath are taken out in various cities across the country with great devotion and dedication as well as enthusiasm. The taking out of the Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra at various places unites whole India and it attracts pilgrims from far and wide. The biggest procession of the Carrying the Chariots of Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balbhadra is a magnificent and marvelous sight to see and it attracts the devotees and people drag the chariots and thousands take part in the Yatra. Some dance, play music and others chant nonstop hymn in praise of the three deities. This event is not only a religious and spiritual journey but it depicts our rich, diverse and vibrant culture and thus we can say that Lord Jagannath Ratha

Yatra is the manifestation and reflection of unity in diversity as the people of various faiths and cultures take part in the yatra and this is a spectacle to see and it is fascinating and soothing to eyes. The Jagannath Yatra is taken at various places in the country and it unites the people of various faiths into one and it is a big and marvelous sight to see and watch and the devotees and visitors take great pride to be part of this Yatra. Lord Jagannath Yatra has got religious, spiritual and cultural importance and it has economic significance as well. This Yatra transcends the religious barriers as the people of various faiths take part in this event of far reaching significance. Jagannath Yatra has the potential of uniting whole India and it is the best example of unity in diversity for which India is famous throughout the world. We should take part in such Yatras as they help not only in religious and spiritual awakening but also lead to national awakening and national integration. Jagannath Rath Yatra gives the message of love, brotherhood, communal harmony besides being a religious and spiritual sojourn. People of Orissa and other parts of the country eagerly and anxiously wait for this annual Yatra and they consider themselves very blissful and feel proud to be part of this Yatra. The people of India and the world watch Lord Jagannath Yatra in Televisions and radios. Such Yatras also brings the people of world together and it also makes the people of the world aware of the religious, spiritual, cultural aspects of this annual event. The Rath Yatra festival has become a common sight in most major cities of the world since 1968 through the Hare Krishna movement. Local chapters put on the festival annually in over a hundred cities worldwide and this way the people of the world come closer and also come to know about the culture of India. May Lord Jagannath, goddess Subhadra and Balbhadra remove terrorism from the Jammu & Kashmir and bring peace, prosperity and happiness to India.

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

## Accelerating Agricultural Growth through KVKs

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

India's agricultural growth depends on the research and dissemination of knowledge and information to the farmers and other stakeholders in agriculture and allied sectors. Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) are innovative grass root level organizations that are known nationally and internationally for agricultural growth. They are also known as Farm Science Centers are the agricultural knowledge providing centres from where the farmers can obtain latest agricultural information and assistance to solve their day-to-day agricultural problems. These centres act as means of transfer of new agricultural information and technologies from lab to land. Many Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) collaborate with these centres to disseminate the information to the farming community. Needless to say that these centres act as the nodal agencies of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and are playing a crucial role in the implementation of modern agricultural technologies. The KVKs are bringing the modern package of agricultural technologies at the farmers' doorsteps. The KVKs are mitigating the scientific agricultural needs of the farmers. The KVKs are playing a pivotal role in transformation in rural areas by creating the awareness among the rural people about the latest agricultural technologies. The KVKs are playing a pivotal role in farmers' prosperity. The KVKs empower the farmers through need-based farmers/vocational trainings and helpful to change the socio-economic conditions of the farmers. The Krishi Vigyan Kendras conduct on-farm testing, identify the location specificity of agricultural technologies, lay out front line demonstrations to establish the production potential of various agricultural technologies at farmers fields, impart need-based and skill oriented training for the farmers, in-service extensional personnel, to those who are interested for self-employment to update their knowledge and skills in new agricul-

tural technologies, create awareness on improved technologies through various extension methods, produce and provide improved quality seeds, planting material, livestock, poultry, fisheries etc. to the farmers and work as agricultural knowledge centers for the public, private and voluntary organizations.

KVKs are putting in an incredible efforts to upsurge farmers income, creating self-employment and attracting youths in agriculture through development of agricultural and allied sector enterprises. They are striving to empower the farming community through capacity building programmes, by creating entrepreneurial avenues and hand holding to farmers. KVKs have accelerated agricultural growth and have improved the socio-economic status of the farming community by acting as the agricultural knowledge hub centres. KVKs have extensively scaled up potential technologies to the farmers and other stakeholders in the district. KVKs cater the needs of those who wish to be self-employed or those who are already employed. The programmes and syllabus (action plan) of the Krishi Vigyan Kendras are tailored according to the needs, resources and potential for the agricultural growth in a particular area and are finally decided by involving the districts heads, Panches/Sarpanches and also progressive farmers of the area. The major objective of the Krishi Vigyan Kendras is agricultural growth. Priority is given to the weaker sections of the society like small, marginal, tribal farmers, agricultural labourers, drought prone areas, hilly areas, forest areas, coastal areas etc. and work-experience is the main method of imparting training. With E-linkage the KVKs are interconnected with each other and also with the ICAR and thus disseminate the agricultural information to the end users quickly and effectively. With the introduction of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) the adoption rates of new agricultural technologies have been increased. KVKs aware the farmers about the hybrid/improved/high yielding varieties

of maize, paddy, wheat, pulses, oilseeds etc. KVKs are diverting the farmers from subsistence farming to commercial farming. Mushroom cultivation, sericulture, floriculture, horticulture, dairy farming, vermiculture, food processing, milk processing entrepreneurship are developed among the farmers by the strenuous efforts of KVKs. KVKs are proving as the agricultural knowledge hubs for the farmers.

The first objective of ICAR is to cover the entire country with one Krishi Vigyan Kendra in each district and priority is given to the backward areas. As there is a great demand for the improved agricultural technologies by the farmers so there is great demand of Krishi Vigyan Kendras throughout the country. Farmers need not only the knowledge of the technologies but also more skills in the agricultural operations for adoption. Now the effectiveness of Krishi Vigyan Kendras has been increased by the addition of On-Farm Trials (OFTs) and Front Line Demonstrations (FLDs) on the agricultural technologies. The four major functions of Krishi Vigyan Kendras are (i) To impart need based trainings to the farmers and extension functionaries. (ii) To organise long-term vocational training for the rural youths in order to generate the income and self-employment. (iii) To layout Front-Line Demonstrations (FLDs) at farmers field to generate the production data and also to get feedback from the farmers. (iv) To conduct On-Farm Tests (OFTs), refinement and documentation of agricultural technologies. Needs based trainings are designed for different types of farmers. The training courses are designed on the basis of information received from village survey through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methods and characterise the human and physical resources. The farming system of the farmers is taken into account while designing the courses of the programmes. All methods and means to develop the skill among the farmers in their areas of interest are taken into account. Basically the

trainings starts from the farmers production units such as farmers fields, dairy units, poultry units, goat units, sheep units etc. and conclude with discussion. After imparting the trainings the follow-up of the programmes is done and impact is assessed by the KVK scientists. No certificate or diploma is awarded to the farmers for the trainings.

Krishi Vigyan Kendra plans and conducts survey of the operational areas to identify the training needs of the farmers. It compiles all the recommendations for the district to utilize in the training programmes. KVK conducts need-based, production oriented short and long-term training courses both on and off campus. KVK maintains the farm on the scientific basis for the demonstration purpose in order to provide the work experience to the farmers and also to disseminate the latest agricultural technologies. The seed produced by the KVKs are ultimately provided to the farmers. KVK also imparts some general training to the rural illiterates and school drop outs in order to convert them as the good farmers. KVK also provides trainings to the women for home making and nutrition education for rural community and also on other areas like cottage industries home crafts etc.

The women empowerment is always taken on the priority and they are guided to form and manage the SHGs. KVK undertakes on-farm testing of the agricultural technologies and allied aspects for their suitability and also to identify the constraints. KVK helps to implement all the schemes of the ICAR and other related organisations. KVK demonstrates the various technologies to recommend for their adoption for maximizing the yield or income per unit time in different resource conditions.

Presently India is having 731 KVKs all over the country. The Krishi Vigyan Kendras are really proving to be the tools of rural transformation.

(The writer is Chief Scientist and Head of KVK, Reasi SKUAST-J)

## Effective study habits are essential for cultivating lifelong learning skills

■ VIJAY GARG

Whether you're a student preparing for exams, a professional pursuing further education, or someone looking to enhance your knowledge, adopting effective study habits can significantly boost your productivity and retention of information.

Developing effective study habits is a journey that requires dedication, self-discipline, and a willingness to adapt. By implementing the strategies outlined above, time management, active engagement, organisation, and effective study techniques, you can enhance your learning experience and achieve your academic and personal goals more effectively. Remember, developing these habits takes time and effort, but the rewards in terms of improved understanding, retention, and overall academic success are well worth it.

**Understanding effective study habits:** Effective study habits encompass a range of practices that optimise learning and understanding. These habits are not just

about spending hours with your books but also about how you organise your time, materials, and environment to maximise learning outcomes. Key components include:

Allocate specific blocks of time for studying each day. Consistency is crucial, as regular study sessions help reinforce learning and prevent cramming before exams.

Define clear, achievable goals for each study session and for the long term. This helps you stay focused and motivated, knowing what you want to accomplish.

Actively engage with the material by taking notes, asking questions, and discussing concepts with peers or mentors. Passive reading is often less effective than interactive learning.

Keep your study materials organised. Create a designated study space free from distractions, and ensure you have all the necessary resources at hand.

Use proven study techniques such as summarising key points, creating outlines,

practising retrieval (quizzing yourself), and teaching others. These methods enhance understanding and retention.

**Practical steps to develop effective study habits:** Plan your study sessions in advance, considering your peak productivity times. Break larger tasks into smaller, manageable chunks to avoid overwhelm.

Find a quiet, comfortable study environment free from distractions like phones, social media, or noisy surroundings. Consider using productivity apps or website blockers if needed.

Instead of passively reading, engage with the material actively. Take notes, highlight important points, and quiz yourself periodically to reinforce learning.

Regularly review your notes and materials to reinforce learning and identify areas where you need further clarification or practice.

Don't hesitate to ask questions or seek help from teachers, classmates, or online resources when you encounter challenging concepts.

Maintain a balanced lifestyle with adequate sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Physical well-being directly impacts cognitive function and learning ability.

**Tips for long-term success:** Develop a consistent study routine that fits your schedule and stick to it. Over time, it becomes a habit that enhances your overall learning experience.

Be flexible and willing to adjust your study methods based on what works best for you. Experiment with different techniques to find what maximises your understanding and retention.

Regularly assess your progress towards your study goals. Celebrate achievements and adjust strategies as needed to address challenges.

Keep your long-term goals in mind and remind yourself of the benefits of effective study habits, such as improved academic performance, career advancement, or personal growth.

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