

SUCCESSFUL AMARNATH YATRA

The Amarnath Yatra is one of the most revered pilgrimages in Hinduism, drawing thousands of devotees annually to the high-altitude shrine of Amarnath in the Himalayas. This journey, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is not just a test of faith but also a remarkable demonstration of human resilience and organizational success.

The Amarnath Yatra takes place during the summer months of July and August, coinciding with the Hindu month of Shravan. The shrine, located at an altitude of about 3,888 meters (12,756 feet) in Jammu and Kashmir, is famous for its natural ice Shiva Lingam that forms during this period. The pilgrimage is considered one of the holiest in Hinduism, embodying the spiritual quest for divine connection.

Successful execution of the Amarnath Yatra involves meticulous planning and coordination among various stakeholders, including the Jammu & Kashmir administration, security forces, medical teams, and volunteer organizations. The pilgrimage route, which can be treacherous due to weather conditions and high altitude, is carefully managed to ensure safety and accessibility for pilgrims.

The traditional 48-kilometer path from Pahalgam and a shorter 14-kilometer trek from Baltal. Both routes are equipped with facilities such as shelters, medical aid stations, and toilets.

The terrain can be challenging, with steep inclines and unpredictable weather, making the role of route management crucial.

Given the sensitive geopolitical location, security is a top priority.

The Yatra is safeguarded by extensive security measures, including deployment of paramilitary forces and local police. Surveillance through drones and regular patrols helps in maintaining order and addressing any potential threats.

Restraining Govt employees from using mobiles in office

SHIV KUMAR PADHA

Chandragupt Maurya had a minister named Chanakya who was known for his powerful leadership expertise. Fascinated by Chanakya's glory a Chinese traveler wanted to meet him one evening. He was shown a small home with a small entrance. After entering the house the traveler saw Chanakya writing some papers under the light of a lamp. Chanakya smilingly welcomed the guest and asked him to sit. He quickly completed the work that he was doing and extinguished the oil lamp he was using while writing and lit the one. The Chinese traveler was surprised to see and asked why he did so. Chanakya replied, 'well sir when you entered I was doing an official work pertaining to my empire and nation. The oil used in that lamp has been bought from the national exchequer. Now I am talking to you. This is my personal and friendly conversation not related to my nation, so I cannot use that lamp now. Oil for the lamp which I have just lit is paid by me as my personal expense.' As a part of ethical management, integrity and character are the foundation for trust. Trust is the currency for leadership. It is a common experience that the day once joins the government services comes at once under the protecting umbrella of the law, where the terms and conditions of the new entrant and not those of the employers are accepted.

A decade back the work in the government offices used to start one hour after the scheduled working hours where the employees used to resume their seats only after going through the news papers, taking small refreshment or a cup of tea over a small discussion or gossips about their families affairs while the crowd of the clients waiting for the employees to attend them. Such an attitude of the government employees, getting handsome salaries used to irk and disappoint the clients coming from the far of places returning their homes un attended or un responded.

With the advent of the internet and one can download or read any news paper of one's choice early in the morning sipping the bed tea. In order to ensure the punctuality and regularity and check the truancy among the government employees, It has been made obligatory for every employ to mark his/her attendance through the Biometric gadgets along with the location of their offices. It is wisely said, 'one can take the horse to water but cannot make it drink'. Though the governments have tried their best to regularize and streamline the arrival and departure of the employees yet there is no provision for checking their habit of remaining away from their tables or keeping an account of their time they remain glued to the mobiles discussing their own problems with the family members or the friends circle. The habit of our government employees, irrespective of the rank, remaining glued to their mobiles during the office hours is disappointing and condemnable because the clients attending the office are compelled to wait helplessly around the tables till the talks of the concerned employees come to the conclusions. The addition of the mobiles has taken almost all the government institutions/offices in its ambit. Whether it is a school, college, courts, hospitals the teachers, students, doctors and their allied staff can't help attending the call even if they are busy in the class rooms, dealing with patients in the OPD or in the operation theaters. The poor person coming a long way to attend the offices are not allowed to meet concerned employ with the plea the officer is busy with an important call. Such an attitude encourages dereliction of duties among the employees which ultimately results in the huge pendency which many times becomes difficult to dispose of easily. The habit of using and attending the personal mobiles brazenly during office working hours tells badly upon the completion of their daily assignments. The ultimate sufferer of this mobile menace is the common man, who, in order to get justice are summoned to the offices time and again and are compelled to return empty handed and disappointed for no fault of their own.

On the contrary the work culture in the private sectors is totally reverse of it because the habits and attitudes of the employees working there are well monitored and are strictly under surveillance. The perks, allowances, promotions are always subject to their daily performance, conduct and dedication to their duties and the benefits of the concerns they work, whereas the promotions and the perks of employees depend upon the frowns and favors of their immediate employers and not on their performances in the public sector offices. The employees of the private sector are seldom allowed to use their mobiles so long as they are on their seats.

In order to ensure that this mobile culture renders more harm to the working of the public sector concerns the habit of frequent use of the mobiles for the personal use must be discouraged rather made an offence because the handsome salaries which our government employees get do not come from the mints but from the poor man's pocket who is badly hit by the mobile menace in the offices. To waste the office time merely to attend the personal calls tantamount to the dereliction of duties and is punishable under criminal laws.

Dear friends, let us be inspired by such an example of Chanakya and transform our lives based upon these principles/

(The writer is a social activist Basohli)

Reviving composite culture-A Dogra colony for Kashmir

DR VARINDER SHARMA

Since the government agencies responsible for fulfilling housing needs of people of Jammu and Kashmir are unable to cope up with the rising housing demands, the Lieutenant Governor administration must invite private colonisers and builders to set up new housing colonies and high rise apartments in Jammu, Kashmir as well as other districts especially in Srinagar City where there already was a plan to set up a Sainik colony for our soldiers who had been guarding our borders or sacrificing their lives for the nation.

Since the departments like J&K Housing Board (JKHB), Jammu Development Authority (JDA) and Srinagar Development Authority (SDA) are unable to develop new colonies or haven't done enough in past 30 years to fulfil rising housing demands. Private players must be encouraged to make their presence felt in Jammu and Kashmir in a big way especially when the controversial Article 370 stands abrogated and people across the length and breadth of country especially from Jammu intend to see a Dogra colony - comprising of people of all religions and sects being set up in Srinagar to restore town's secular and composite credentials in days to come.

Earlier the J&K administration was believed to have identified 25 acres of land in Budgam district to set up Kashmir's first Sainik colony but the project seems to have been abandoned or lying in cold store. Though the move was resisted by separatists during the regime of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, yet there were many takers of this proposal who wanted to see such colonies

coming up in Kashmir region. This added with return of Kashmiri Pandits could have restored the composite culture of Kashmir which was eroded after exodus of minorities from time to time.

Political leaders like Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah had always remained a strong advocate of secularism and this is the high time they during their Jammu visits also assure the people about setting up Dogra colonies for every section of society in Kashmir to prove their secular credentials rather the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) must put this move in their manifesto for the coming assembly elections. These colonies will while encourage people of all sections of life to live and enjoy live collectively, they will also discourage colonies that are set up on communal lines like some have come up in Jammu or its suburbs.

This is not a hidden fact late chief minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was an educated leader who also sought his education from schools set up by erstwhile Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors. It was during the Dogra regime that each and every part of Jammu and Kashmir flourished and people were living happily with multiple reforms brought by Maharaja Hari Singh during his regime. However, ever since Sheikh Abdullah revolted, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was domed and a bad omen started for its people.

Many colonies have come up on forest lands which now can't be reversed but once the organised housing colonies by various government departments are developed, everyone will become partner in the progress and development of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir: Our

neighbouring Pakistan which has launched a proxy war in India and lost three wars to us won't like this move but we must have this cultural and social amalgamation in Jammu and Kashmir for our prosperity and ultimate peace.

While we are continuing to do out bit to rehabilitate Kashmiri Pandits in Valley we must also start focussing on developing other colonies and apartments and make them available to the public at reasonable and affordable rates. Once such colonies or high-rise buildings are developed in residential and commercial categories everyone would prefer to buy them in Kashmir and contribute in our UT's economy.

Developing housing colonies in Kashmir is a crucial step towards fostering a unified and composite culture in the region.

By settling people from various parts of India, including the local Dogra community, in Kashmir, we can mirror the cultural diversity seen in other regions like Jammu. This approach ensures that all communities, including those displaced over the years, have an opportunity to reclaim their place in the region.

Learning from the mistakes of the past, such as the failure to protect teachers and other professionals who became targets of militants, it is vital to create a secure and inclusive environment. Large-scale initiatives, akin to the development seen in places like Dubai, can pave the way for sustainable growth and integration in Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring that Pakistan's interference is minimized and the region's rightful heritage is restored.

Additionally, it is essential to recognize and honour the sacrifices made by those who have served

the nation by granting them land in Kashmir: The establishment of colonies, including Sainik colonies and other similar projects, can provide a foundation for a composite culture where all communities coexist harmoniously. The government's commitment to offering plots to the families of fallen soldiers is a step in the right direction, ensuring that the region's land is utilized effectively for the benefit of its people.

Kashmir's history is marked by a rich tapestry of religious and cultural evolution. Initially a significant Centre of Hinduism, and later Buddhism under the Mauryas and Kushanas, the region saw the rise of Shaivism during the Karkota Dynasty in the 9th century. This Hindu rule lasted until the mid-14th century when Islam began to spread, leading to the decline of Kashmir Shaivism and the establishment of Muslim rule, including periods under the Mughal and Afghan empires.

The Sikhs annexed Kashmir in 1819, followed by the Dogra rule after the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. Kashmir's history of diverse dynasties and religious influences culminated in its contested status post-1947, with the region now completely annexed to India.

It is painful to know how a well progressing and prosperous state became a victim of terrorism and ended up being a disturbed area.

Now that situation has returned to normal and people are progressing, I sum this writup with one of my couplets that mentions how we used to live like brothers and sisters in Kashmir....

(Gum Ye Nahi Ki Tume Meri Peeth Pe Khanjar Khopa, Gum Ye Hai Ki Tu Jaanta Nahi Main Tera Kon Hu....)

Reclaim the Night



The question here arises, is there any place in this entire cosmos where our female is safe? She is being molested, raped, and even killed at every juncture of her life. News paper are crammed with incidents like rape of minor girl, sexual assault of a teenager, molestation of an elderly woman and gang rape of an adolescent girl by three or four men. I will not hesitate to call them monsters, who have abridged the whole male community to the least echelon of humanity.

There are lots of other incidents which have made country like India, anxious for women. Not even strangers but neighbors and relatives are also involved in this heinous crime against naive, miserable and feeble girls, especially minors who cannot even resist but pay for being born as a girl child and also pay the price of being born as a girl child. Our country is also turning into, a country,

where sexual assault is rapidly increasing. In addition to kolkata brutal rape and murder case India has also witnessed Nirbhaya gang rape and murder, case, Shakti mills case 2013, Badaun gang rape 2014, Unnao rape case 2017, kathua gang rape and murder case 2018, Priyanka Reddy Hyderabad case 2019.

According to National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), report 2024 india reported 445256 cases of crime against women, these are only those cases which are registered, more than 50% of these cases remain un registered, because people are scared of social stigma, which a girl or the family of girl has to face, after the disclosure.

After going through the case history of innumerable cases of eve teasing, molestation, conjugal harassment, rape and cold blooded murder under lust by 'tarnish men', my heart is howling

with questions and can someone answer me?

- \* Where should we girls go? Is there any place in this world, where we can feel secure?
- \* To be born as a girl child, is this our fault, or is to be born physically weak is our fault?
- \* Why do some 'tarnish men' consider females as their personal property?
- \* Is male ego so supreme, that on being rejected, he should react in the shameful ways of rape and murder?(5) When will this exploitation end? Why male community so revengeful towards females?
- \* Why have females been exploited at every stage of their lives?
- \* Why crimes like female foeticide, dowry deaths, rape of minors are escalating day by day?
- \* Why are girls, who are victims, still awaiting righteousness? Who will provide them justice?
- \* Why male dominating society has been scratching a girl's ego, credit, self respect and liberty from time immemorial?
- \* Why she is devoid of egalitarianism and freedom of choice?(11) Can anybody imagine this world without women, if not, then why brutality against women is raising?
- \* Why blemished men are becoming vampires to women, thirsty for their blood and body?
- \* Why a man always overlooks that, he has taken birth from a female's body?

Our society should need a profound insight of these issues. If the aggression against women keeps on escalating, then our earth would turn into hell.

From self perfection to self realisation: understanding self efforts and fate

PK MAM

The twin purpose of human life is self-perfection and service to humanity, both of which rest on self-effort. Self-effort is the most essential component of human life and is regarded as the first lesson of man's spiritual life. No task we undertake can be completed if we are slack or lack self-effort. If we are unfit to fight the battle of life with full zeal, both outwardly and inwardly against our evil tendencies, we are unfit for God as well.

Self effort is based on the free will that a human being possesses. Man is endowed with free will but must also confront the part played by fate. The interconnectedness between free will and fate is explained by scriptures.

There are five causes for the accomplishment of any work a human being undertakes:

- \*Seat of action-The person who performs the action.
- \*The agent-Instruments used to perform the action, e.g., a knife to cut (both visible and invisible)
- \*Various senses-Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin.
- \*Manifold efforts-The diverse endeavors involved in the task.
- (These four are under human control.)
- \*Unforeseen force of past Karma or fate. This is invisible and beyond human control.

The role of fate or destiny becomes evident when, despite our best efforts, we do not achieve the desired results. In such instances, the cause and effect remain invisible, leading us to believe in

the will of a higher power and accept and surrender to it. This sometimes promotes the idea of blind faith, even though some attribute outcomes to a combination of personal effort, circumstances, and random events.

It is also a fact that man is born with his load of Karmas acquired from past lives, which constitutes his destiny in the present life. Further, what he does in the present life results from past and present Karmas. Free will and fate are like two wheels of a cart, both playing a part in its movement.

Preserving Free Will  
Shree Ramakrishna explains to his disciples who often discuss Free Will vs. Fate: A cow tied to a tether has the choice to stand, move, or sit within the circle formed by the rope. This is called Free Will, but the limitation of its movement, confined to the area of the circle, forms Fate.

Free Will Vs Predestination  
Do we possess free will, or are our actions predestined by a higher power? Are we shaped by our genetics or the environment in which we are nurtured?

Many learned ones believe this debate balances opposing views. In the poem "For the Time Being," a thief claims his nature is God-given and blameless, suggesting predestination. Yet, his preference for thievery implies free will and choice. Both sinner and saint are acting according to their assigned roles. This indicates that while genetics and environment influence us, free will is crucial in distinguishing right from wrong.

Behaviorists argue that individuals unable to discern right from wrong, like serial killers, cannot be held responsible for their actions, similar to how someone born deaf cannot be blamed for their hearing impairment. Without free will, the foundation of morality, law, and societal order would collapse. Blaming fate or divine will for our actions is a Weakness that denies the existence of free will.

Self Effort  
In the epic story of Savitri and Satyavan, Savitri is able to rescue her husband from Yama (the Lord of Death) and bring him back to life after putting in the desired efforts.

In the Mahabharata, Bhishma conveys the same idea, stating that exertion is greater than destiny.

Maharishi Aurobindo explains fate and effort, quoting Napoleon, who, when asked why he believed in fate yet always planned and acted, answered, "Because it is fated that I should work and plan."

The great Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar in his work "Thirukkural" says, "What is stronger than Fate? Even if we think of a way to avert it, it will forestall us." But he also says, "Those who labor untiringly and without fault will overcome even fate."

Two individuals in the same impoverished conditions might receive the same opportunity for education. One embraces it with dedication and hard work, while the other ignores it. The success of the first person illustrates how sustained effort

can transform potential opportunities into real achievements, highlighting the role of personal effort in shaping outcomes. Winning or losing is not important; what is important is that our self-effort is 100% dedicated to the task we undertake, without diverting our attention to the results.

To sum up  
FATE and Free WILL are both karma or action, with the difference being in time.

FATE: The result of past karma. We do not know our fate created by our earlier Karmas. It is hidden.

FREE WILL. Present karma. But fate can be neutralized by exercising Free Will. With sufficient efforts, we can take the nail out of the wood. So, increase the intensity of present karma, and we can override the intensity of past karma.

Here, Divine grace plays a crucial role in overcoming past sanskaras by providing guidance and opportunities for transformation.

However, it requires sincere self-effort and surrender to God. Just as external help is needed to untie someone bound by ropes, divine grace aids in our spiritual growth when we combine earnest personal effort with surrender.

We must put in genuine effort with sincerity and intelligence, avoiding self-sabotage, to make ourselves eligible for divine grace.

Ultimately, self-efforts and divine grace work together as complementary forces in our journey toward spiritual advancement.

Rakhi-a symbol of love and protection-has gone digital

SURJIT FLORA

August 19, marks a significant annual religious celebration that brings together diverse communities and highlights the special bond of love, protection, and care between siblings. This festivity holds immense importance for the Hindu faithful. Raksha Bandhan signifies the special connection between brothers and sisters, fostering a sense of closeness and protection.

Two Sanskrit words signify the concept of protection and bond, from which the term Raksha Bandhan originated. The festival symbolizes the strong bond between a brother and sister; with the brother pledging to always be there for his sister and the sister offering prayers for his happiness, prosperity, and achievements. On this special day, sisters engage in morning prayers and then proceed to tie the Rakhi threads on their brothers' wrists, expressing their heartfelt wishes for a life filled with excellent health and prosperity. The brothers, in return, offer gifts and promise to protect them no matter what.

The celebration is a joyous occasion that unites families and embodies a desire for happiness, love, peace, and prosperity to prevail in our lives.

Today, a wide range of individuals in India, not just able-bodied brothers and sisters, celebrate Raksha Bandhan or Rakhi. The festival has expanded to encompass the commemoration of connections between cousins, distant relatives, and even close friends. In some instances, it has even crossed gender lines, with women tying Rakhi to other women they consider sisters.

Preparations for Rakhi have already begun. The markets are filled with a wide variety of Rakhis, ranging from simple threads to intricate designs adorned with beads, stones, and even precious metals like gold and silver. Households meticulously craft elaborate dishes and purchase sweets, a common feature of Indian festivals, in significant quantities. The day itself is characterized by a sense of happiness, mirth, and the gathering of loved ones.

Over the past few years, Rakhi has embraced

the digital era, thanks to the growing influence of social media and online shopping. Many individuals, particularly those residing in foreign countries or far from their loved ones, choose to utilize online platforms to send Rakhis and gifts, upholding the cherished tradition despite geographical separation.

Extensive cultural impact  
Rakhi holds great significance as it symbolizes the deep-rooted values of Indian culture, highlighting the importance of family, honor, and duty. The festival serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of family values, fostering a deep sense of unity and compassion among its participants. From a broader perspective, Rakhi also fosters a spirit of unity and mutual admiration among individuals from diverse communities and cultures.

Ultimately, we can conclude that Rakhi is a significant celebration of the unique bond between siblings, a bond that surpasses the mere act of tying a thread around the wrist. This festival cel-

brates the values of love, care, and lifelong commitment to protect and cherish one another. In a fast-paced world, Rakhi serves as a gentle reminder to take a moment and appreciate the meaningful relationships in our lives. This festival holds a special place in the hearts of people from all backgrounds.

Every year, people celebrate Rakhi to deepen the bond between brothers and sisters and to foster love and harmony.

This beautiful connection is gradually fading amidst the increasing demands and rapid pace of modern life. This partnership aims to thrive as it moves forward through the various stages of relationship development. This Rakhi celebration emphasizes the importance of everlasting love and commitment between brothers and sisters, regardless of any challenges they may face. It highlights the significance of mutual understanding and consideration for one another.

(The writer is a veteran journalist and freelance writer based in Brampton)