

SMOOTH ELECTORAL PROCESS

Preparing for an assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir involves several steps to ensure a smooth and fair electoral process. Ensuring that all eligible voters are registered is paramount. This involves updating the electoral rolls to include new voters and remove ineligible ones. Authorities conduct extensive campaigns to encourage voter registration, particularly in remote and underserved areas. The Jammu and Kashmir Election Commission plays a pivotal role in managing the electoral process. This includes setting election dates, coordinating with security agencies, and overseeing the entire electoral process to ensure compliance with legal standards. Given J&K's unique security challenges, comprehensive arrangements are necessary to safeguard the election process. This includes deploying adequate personnel from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and local security agencies, setting up secure polling stations, and implementing measures to prevent electoral violence. Setting up polling stations in remote areas requires meticulous planning. This includes ensuring the availability of necessary materials such as ballot boxes, voting machines, and stationery. Accessibility and infrastructure improvements are also crucial to facilitate smooth voting. Informing the electorate about the election process, polling dates, and procedures is crucial. This involves running awareness campaigns through various media, including print, electronic, and social media. Special emphasis is placed on educating voters in remote and marginalized communities. Polling staff, including presiding officers and polling agents, undergo training to handle the voting process efficiently. This training covers the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs), the handling of voter queries, and the protocols for addressing any issues that arise at polling stations. To ensure a fair election, monitoring bodies are established to oversee the process and address any complaints or irregularities. This includes setting up control rooms for real-time monitoring and deploying observers to various regions.

World Famed Valley of Flowers

Thou art the lustre in the moon and effulgence in the sun, thou art the taste in water and warmth in the flame; bereft of thou, the world would be devoid of substance (Panchastavi). And the mother earth and all her manifestation of charming natural gifts like lush green forests of higher and lower strata intermingled with blooming flowers and with them the mother earth smiles. This is an unutterable truth and is the greatest strength (Mahabharata). The enchanting and thrilling upper Bhyunder valley was brought into limelight far back in 1931 by Frank Symbthe, member of the successful Kamet expedition who gave the name 'valley of flowers' and made it world famous. Frank Symbthe was so enamored by its charming and enchanting valley that he visited it six years later, explored it extensively with utmost curiosity. As a consequence, therefore, he wrote a fascinating description in his famous travelogue- 'The Valley of flowers'. He also collected more than 250 varieties of seeds and plants for the botanical garden of Edinburgh. The valley of Flowers lies between the main land of Alknanada and Dhuli Ganga, in the Zaskar ranges of Garhwal Himalayas. The river Pushpavati which flows through this valley has its source in the huge Tripta glacier which extends upto the most famous Ghori Parvat peak which is a flattish valley about 5kms long and 2 kms wide stretching East-West. The most convenient entrance to the valley is from South Where Pushavati flows through a very deep gorge. Besides, two more routes preferred by the shepherds and trekkers branch off or offshoot from the valley. The one from the western side leading to Hanuman Chatti via Kant Khal pass and the other from the eastern side leading to Ghamsali village via Lakshman pass and both these places cover three days trekking distance from the valley itself. The river Pushpavati is joined by river Lakshman Ganga which flows down from Hamkund Lokpal Lake at Gangharia where after it takes the name Bhyunder Ganga which joins Alknanada at Govindghat. Govindghat is situated on the main Rishikesh - Badrinath Pilgrims route at the right bank of Alknanada and is at an elevation a rounding 1800- 2000mts from Mean sea level(MSL). Around 278 kms road journey through the river one reaches Govindghat from Rishikesh - The foothill town which is as wall the main rail/motor head to the valley of flowers together with other enchanting and pilgrimage spots for the religious and tourists alike. At Govindghat, the road leads to the Bhyunder valley which further branches off the main road. Gangharia, the last human outpost and the main base camp for the valley of flowers are the Hamkund Shrine. It is around 2-3 kms from Govindghat and can be trekked on foot or by ponies. This track runs along Bhyunder Ganga. One has to cross over through suspension bridge at Alknanada- Govindghat. Ahead, one has to trek through bridle-path which takes a steep and continuous climb which de facto is tiring. The view around the vicinity of this spot has a disappointed introduction to the beauty of nature's bounty ahead. It is after a weary plodding around 3kms or so that the valley widens and one comes across some bewildering and breath-taking landscape. The gradient of river is very steep whereas the flow of water is fast. The fog generated by the churned water beating against perpendicular rocks and massive boulders is wafted far and wide riddling on the breeze produced by the down rushing water of the river. Its cool touch moist the sweet beads and drains away the fatigue caused by the uphill journey. On the right side, a water fall more than 150 meters high descend down the granite rock to meet Bhyunder Ganga. And all the time, one is passing through one of the most beautiful forests full of alpine intermingled with maple, walnut mulberry, elm, oak, bird-cherry, horse-chestnut, honeybea, Alder, rhododendron etc. The foaming river cascades its way till one cross over to the left bank, a little beyond the Bhyunder village. The route to Hathi Parvat and Ghori Parvat emanates from this village. The vegetation changes all of sudden. One is completely surrounded by tall centuries old massive trees of silver fir at Gangharia. Gangharia, a hamlet having a Forest Rest House(FRIH) Tourist Rest House(TRH) a sacred shrine(Gurudwara) and few shops. This spot is located at an elevation arounding 3,200 meters from mean sea level (MSL) and beyond Gangharia exist the unspoiled beauty of nature, the valley of Flowers which is barely 4-5 kms trek on foot or on pony. And from here onwards, Hemkund is hardly 4.5 to 5kms trek. Thence onwards, the valley of Flowers veers sharply to the left from the main trail which climbs steeply to the sacred and famous lake. Hamkund, situated at an altitude arounding 4,200 meters from mean sea level (MSL). The ascent to the valley of Flowers is almost gradual till the valley narrows down into a deep gorge and the forest is compressed between narrow walls of rock. The awesome cliffs guarding this southern entrance of valley are almost rising to more than 1000 meters on either side which block the view of the valley. The valley of Flowers is having a wide space. Beginning at an elevation of 3,500 meters, it gradually slopes down up like a winding corridor; to a little more than 3,700 meters till it meets the snout of the glacier. The valley is snow-bound from mid-November to mid-may during which period this area remains frozen and thereby it is impossible and desolate. But as soon as snow starts melting, the rains commence, and that is the miracle which has made this valley famous world over. (The author is Former Dy. Conservator of Forest, J&K)

Does foundation of successful marriage lay on silent sufferings of Women?

AARSHI SHARMA

Marriage is the legal, social and holy union often idealized as haven of mutual love, respect and faith; shared between two individuals with their own unique identities, personalities and cultural backgrounds. It is a complex and multifaceted institution where both the partners must balance each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, the institution of marriage has been a subject of extensive debate and analyses throughout the history.

According to the traditional roles and societal expectations, the idea about the functioning of the marriage institution largely depends on women portrayed as the primary caregivers, playing a much more significant role as compared to men, the more authoritative ones. This perspective is evident in various cultures, including Hindu scriptures, such as Manusmriti and the Ramayana etc. wherein, women were subjugated to some kind of emotional and social burdens.

As noted in Mahabharata (Shanti Parva), "The sufferings of women are profound, their endurance immense. They bear the weight of societal expectations and personal trials with unparalleled strength".

In Ancient texts like, the Manusmriti, the key sources of Hindu laws and ethics, highlights the substantial role of women in maintaining family structures, showcasing their relentless resilience and fortitude. Historically, marriages have been structured around the patriarchal norms, where women are expected to conform to specific behaviours and prioritize their partner's needs over their own, often suppressing their own desires and voices. This notion, still prevails, as it continues to influence the institution of marriage even today.

Thus, women's subjugation within the marriage is a very common phenomenon, and mostly these issues remain buried leading to the cycle of recurrent unheard, unseen sufferings bared by women, bringing attention to the role of women in maintaining marital harmony by choosing to remain indifferent against all prejudices and mistreatment.

Hence, bringing us back to the earlier discussion, 'Does the foundation of a success-

ful marriage lie in the silent sufferings of women?' and if it does, 'Will the marriage be even considered successful in true sense?'

Within the traditional setting, for centuries, women have been relegated to specific domestic roles and abuse, which also resulted in denial of equality in opportunities, autonomy and recognition as an individual identity, leading to feelings of isolation, frustration and despair. These historical perspectives have perpetuated the notion that a successful marriage relies on women's ability to endure and sacrifice. Cultural and societal expectations have long influenced the roles assigned to women within marriage

These silent sufferings can manifest as emotional neglect, being taken for granted hence, undervaluation or not appreciated enough, lack of economic stability or too much financial dependence on the counterpart, creating an imbalance of power, too much dominance over females through physical, emotional or psychological abuse, limited freedom etc.

Thus, beginning the never-ending cycle of suppression, sufferings, deprivation and relentless struggle, passed on like generational wealth of trauma. Different generations, different eras but the pain remains similar.

Studies have shown that women often shoulder a greater emotional and domestic labour than men, even when both partners are employed full-time. These struggles unfortunately, frequently go unnoticed adding to their silent sufferings, and reinforcing the idea that marital success is measured by how well women adhere to these roles.

In recent decades, divorce rates have been rising both globally and domestically, reflecting shifts in societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and individual expectations about marriage and relationships.

India is considered to have the lowest divorce rates globally, estimated to be around 1.1%, but in the past few years, it has witnessed a huge surge of 50% to 60% and interestingly, it is one of the few countries where most divorces are initiated by men.

Many tend to believe that the major reason for this spike could be related to the

growing independence of women, which is challenging and re-defining the traditional gender roles. While other factors also contribute to a divorce, women often face more public scrutiny than the men if they attempt to end an unsatisfactory relationship.

Since a very long time, women especially in the Indian context have been subjugated on the basis of gender. The brutality over women have been such a common sight that we are now desensitized to even consider it as an abuse.

Abuse in the term we all understand is quite superficial, the word has a more nuanced meaning to it. For instance, we have all heard at some point in our life that the food at home is better and cheap than the restaurant one, but we often forget to count in the human labor put in by our mothers and wives. The home-made food is cheap because we sit back and watch 8 pm debates while the females of the house work putting in the time and efforts.

It might be very interesting to note that the rice eating states in India have better women literacy rates than the wheat eating states. The reason is quite simple, rice takes lesser time to get cooked hence lesser time in the kitchen and an avenue to do something apart from the labor in kitchen. This is that very silent suffering which we have been talking about here.

These are the small aspects of day-to-day life which have remained untouched for years and the reason we probably think or talk about them today is because these women have now gotten the traction they needed. This reality is easily reflected even in the smallest of incidents that occur on a daily basis that we don't even consider them worth remembering, for example- in most cases, a child doesn't shy or fear raising voice at his/her mother but fears and respects his father more.

This is what a traditional patriarchal mindset has led us to.

Much like Mother Earth, expected to provide mankind with countless and continuous supply of resources without asking for anything in return and is exploited selfishly and recklessly, women can be linked to our planet. They give out so selflessly and endure silently, despite the lack of consider-

ation and gratitude from their own people. This is the essence of womanhood.

Sadly, we are still part of a society that fears empowerment, a society that considers women to be less than men, a society that expects women to endure everything with a smile on their face. Therefore, being part of a society like this wherein people have been conditioned to treat women as inferior gender and a modern, independent woman who's aware of her rights and knows how to raise her voice as a threat to the society, household and marriage.

Although society may view a marriage as successful simply due to the number of years a couple has stayed together without divorcing, it doesn't mean the relationship is healthy if mutual support and respect are lacking.

A strong and successful marriage is truly achieved when both partners are equally dedicated to tackling challenges and are willing to work together to build a fulfilling relationship and a promising present and past together.

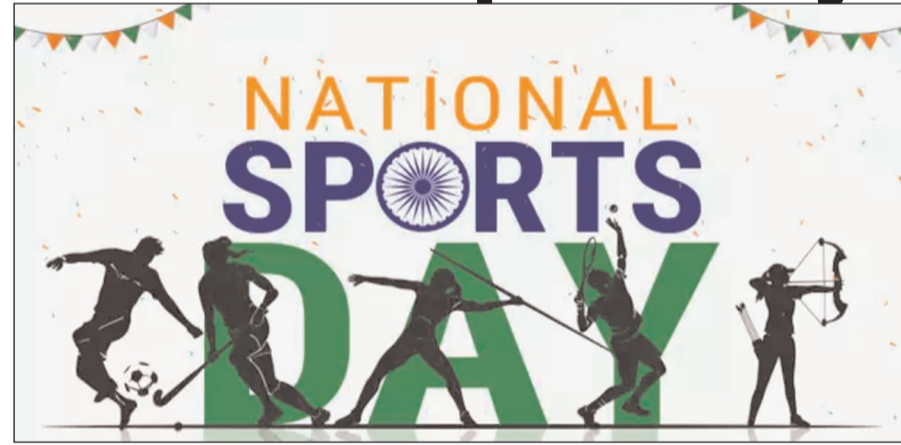
But still majority of the people hold on to the traditional thinking of blaming failed marriages on the independency of women mostly due to their unease with their idea of women in power. It's quite a paradox, in a country where we revere female deities for their unparalleled strength and valor, it's ironic that many women are still treated as mere doormats and punching bags within their own homes. Strong women frequently encounter double standards. For example, assertiveness and leadership are often praised in men but criticized in women.

So, 'does a woman's decision to speak out in a society that usually expects her to endure silently create problems in the marriage?' The answer is simple, look around and find out, reflect on the past and hear the silences between sentences that you might have left out, talk to her as she might speak up about the bare scars she might be hiding while enduring it all.

After all, 'Women- nurturer, creator, fighter, dreamer, brave, resilient, vulnerable, fierce and everything subsuming; the kind of flower that shouldn't be plucked but deserves to keep on blooming.'

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National Sports Day



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National Sports Day is annually celebrated in India on 29th of August and on this occasion legendary hockey player and Capitan Major Dhyan Chand who had revolutionized hockey playing and made game of hockey popular among the people of India is commemorated and remembered. 29 August is the birth anniversary of Major Dhyan Chand and this day is celebrated in his honor and tributes are paid to the Hockey legend. He has to his credit gold medals which he won in Olympics for India in the years 1928, 1932, and 1936. He scored 400 goals in his illustrious hockey career, from 1926-1949. National sports celebrations are organized on this occasion to mark this day. The most noted memorials for him were the Major Dhyan Chand Award, the highest award for life time achievement in sports and games in India. There is no one who has reached his level in hockey. The birth anniversary of hockey legend is on 29th August 1905. The national sports day was yesterday celebrated across the country and in Jammu and Kashmir UT, the day was celebrated in schools, colleges, universities and sports department celebrated this day with great enthusiasm and fervor by organizations various sports events and activities. National Sports Day is a public holiday in various countries to honor the national sports teams and sports traditions of those countries. On this day, people from different age groups take part in sports like Kabaddi, marathon, basketball, hockey, cricket etc. Every year on 29th August, India comes together to celebrate National Sports Day. National Sports Day not only celebrates his birth anniversary but also emphasizes the importance of sports, games and other physical activities in our daily life. Thus importance of games and sports is highlighted and brought home to the people especially to students and young generation because after all the contribution and value of playing games and sports and other physical activities is very great in the full development of the human personality and on this occasion, people and students are made aware of the value of games and sports so that they will think it their priority to participate in games, sports and physical activities for the development of their personality. As we

observed National Sports Day 2024, it is an opportune time rather moment to reflect on the significance of sports in fostering national unity, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and inspiring the younger generation to engage in physical activities. As we honor the legacy of Major Dhyan Chand Ji on his birth anniversary, let us commit ourselves to making India a powerhouse on the global sporting stage. On the National Sports Day, we should commend our athletes, coaches, and everyone who has devoted their life to development of sports. The man known as "The Wizard of Hockey" Major Dhyan Chand was born on August 29, 1905. He became one of the best-known Indian players in the world for his outstanding hockey skills. He became a legend in sports world because of his unmatched accuracy in scoring goals and ball control. Major Dhyan Chand started playing in 1926, and his career spanned till 1948. He represented India in 185 games and scored a whopping 400 goals during his career. It was in 2012, the Indian government declared his birthday as National Sports Day in recognition of his contributions to Indian sports.

His commitment, self control, discipline and passion for the game are celebrated on this day, motivating athletes throughout the nation. Star of the Indian hockey team that dominated the sport in the years before world war 2nd, Dhyan Chand played an important and enviable role in helping India compete their first hat-trick of Olympic gold medals with wins at 1928, 1932 and 1936 Summer Olympics. National Sports Day is

celebrated to promote the significance of sports and physical activity in the country. The day serves several important purposes such as follows--- 1-Honoring Major Dhyan Chand Legacy. He played a crucial role in India's dominance in hockey during the early 20th century, leading the Indian team to win three Olympic gold medals. It was believed that once the ball hit his stick, it only resulted in a goal. His achievements brought international recognition to Indian hockey, and his name became synonymous with excellence in the sport. National Sports Day was established to commemorate his contributions and to inspire future generations to excel in sports. 2-Promoting the importance of Sports... The annual celebration of National Sports Day serves as a reminder of the value of sports in promoting overall well-being, mental health, and physical fitness. It stresses how important athletes are for developing self-control, self-discipline, leadership qualities and teamwork. The day is an opportunity to promote physical activity and sports participation, which are essential components of a healthy lifestyle, particularly among young people. 3-Raising Awareness about significance of sports. The National Sports Day is an occasion to highlight the value and importance of sports and games in the development of the human personality and the younger generation is made aware about the value and significance of games and sport. 4-Raising Awareness and Encouraging participation. It aims to increase the participation of youth

in games and sports for a balanced and fit life. As reported by Business Standard, the theme for National Sports Day 2024 has not been yet announced. Last year, the theme focused on "Sports as an enabler to an inclusive and fit society". The National Sports Day aims to increase public awareness of health and sports. Numerous initiatives and events are organized to highlight the importance of games and sports in human life. As we observed National Sports Day 2024, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the significance of sports in fostering national unity, promoting a healthy lifestyle and inspiring the younger generation to engage in physical activities. National Sports Day 2024 celebrated the unbeatable spirit of sportsmanship and the enduring legacy of Major Dhyan Chand. It is the day to reflect on the importance of sports in our lives, promote physical fitness and inspire the next generation of athletes. National Sports Day also aims to increase public awareness about health and sports. Various initiatives and events were organized to showcase the benefits of regular physical exercise and inspire more people to partake in sports. Schools, colleges, and sports organizations nationwide arranged sports activities, workshops, and fitness programs and engaged the community and stressed the importance of an active lifestyle. Government initiatives often coincide with National Sports Day to promote sports and fitness.

For instance, Prime Minister Modi launched the "Fit India Movement" on National Sports Day in 2019. This movement encourages Indian's to prioritize fitness and integrate it into their daily lives. Building a sports culture is another significant goal of National Sports Day.

The day serves as a reminder of sports potential to unite people, foster national pride, and enhance the country's global standing in various sports disciplines. It emphasizes the need for better sports infrastructure, support for athletes, and the development of sports at grassroots level. At the end we can say that we should continue to celebrate the National Sports Day in future as well with redoubled enthusiasm.

(The author is retired education officer and columnist)

The Future of Artificial Intelligence

ASHOK KUMAR

In the rapidly evolving landscape of technology, artificial intelligence (AI) stands out as a transformative force reshaping industries, societies, and everyday life. As we look towards the future, the trajectory of AI development promises to bring both remarkable advancements and profound challenges.

Innovations on the Horizon AI's potential to revolutionize various sectors is becoming increasingly evident. In healthcare, AI-driven diagnostics and personalized medicine are expected to significantly improve patient outcomes. Machine learning algorithms are already aiding in early detection of diseases and crafting individualized treatment plans.

In the realm of transportation, autonomous vehicles are moving closer to mainstream adoption, promising safer roads and reduced traffic congestion.

Furthermore, AI's role in environmental sustainability is gaining momentum. Advanced models are being used to predict climate patterns, optimize energy usage, and develop innovative solutions for waste management. These technologies are crucial as the world grapples with the pressing issues of climate change and resource depletion.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations Despite the promise, the rise of AI brings a host of ethical and practical challenges. The potential for job displacement due to automation remains a significant

concern.

While AI has the capacity to create new job opportunities, the transition period may be difficult for many workers. Policymakers and industry leaders are working to address these issues through retraining programs and discussions on universal basic income.

Privacy and security are also critical issues. As AI systems become more sophisticated, the risk of misuse and the need for robust data protection mechanisms grow. Ensuring that AI operates transparently and ethically is paramount to maintaining public trust.

The Road Ahead Looking forward, the path of AI development will likely be shaped by ongoing

research, regulatory frameworks, and societal acceptance. Collaboration between governments, tech companies, and academic institutions will be essential in steering AI advancements in a direction that benefits humanity as a whole.

As we stand on the cusp of this new era, the future of AI holds the promise of significant advancements alongside the need for careful consideration of its implications.

Balancing innovation with ethical responsibility will be key to harnessing AI's full potential while mitigating its risks. The coming years will undoubtedly be pivotal in defining the role of artificial intelligence in shaping a better world.

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