

HISTORIC MILESTONE

The arrival of the first freight train in the Kashmir Valley marks a historic leap in connectivity, economy, and integration for the region. This long-anticipated event is not merely a logistical achievement - it symbolizes a new era of economic empowerment, infrastructural progress, and national integration.

The inaugural freight train rolled into the Valley via the newly completed Banihal-Khari-Sangaldan section of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project - one of India's most ambitious railway undertakings. This development is not only technically remarkable, considering the terrain and weather challenges, but also politically and socially significant. It connects the Valley to the national freight corridor, bringing with it the potential to revolutionize trade, transport, and supply chains in Jammu and Kashmir.

Until now, transportation of essential goods to and from the Valley relied heavily on road connectivity, which is often disrupted by landslides, snow, and political instability. With the arrival of freight rail service, businesses and farmers can now move goods more efficiently and cost-effectively, reducing dependency on road transport and decreasing transit time significantly. The freight train service is expected to lower the cost of goods, boost agriculture and horticulture exports, and create new business opportunities across sectors. Apple growers, handicraft traders, and small manufacturers stand to benefit immensely from this connectivity, which can link their products directly to metropolitan markets in Delhi, Mumbai, and beyond.

Moreover, the environmental impact must be acknowledged. Trains are significantly more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly than road transport, aligning with India's larger climate goals and sustainability efforts.

A freight train carrying 21 BCN wagons of cement from Rupnagar, Punjab, successfully reached the newly-commissioned Anantnag goods shed in under 18 hours, covering nearly 600 km. This milestone marks Kashmir's integration into the national freight network.

The Anantnag facility is now equipped to handle both inbound and outbound cargo, opening up efficient transport options for businesses in the Valley.

The launch coincides with the Valley achieving full railway connectivity from Katra to Srinagar, including the completion of the iconic Chenab Bridge. The first freight train to Kashmir is, therefore, more than just a train-it is a symbol of hope, inclusion, and forward movement. It reaffirms the idea that progress, when inclusive and determined, can reach even the most remote corners of the nation.

Historical Introduction of Our Forests

■ GL KHAJURIA

Nature has endowed the Indian sub-continent with luxuriant and plentiful forest wealth. The vast and varied climatic and geological conditions bore forests of different types and intensities ranging from dry thorny forests to wet evergreens. The coniferous forests of hilly region and the deciduous types along foot hills conglomerates many valuable species which serve for the use of construction of houses, bridges and score of other purposes.

The original inhabitants of the country had great reverence for forests and a grove of trees around temples were of ample importance of these trees were considered as sacred as our Gods and Goddesses. And cutting or removal of any of such tree was considered a sin. Under some compelling conditions of a tree was removed, five to ten saplings were planted out to absolve oneself of the sin so committed.

As such, the forests played a prominent part in the cultural and spiritual development of our generations.

The Rishis and the Munis in search of salvation and attainment of wisdom had their Ashrams in the sylvan surroundings of these forests.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata give an attractive description of forests like Dandakaranya and Nandavan. The wildlife consisting of varieties of mammals, birds and reptiles also received due attention for their protection and conservation.

When Lord Rama told Laxman to fetch firewood for cooking by his consort Sitaji, He advised him to remove only dead-dried branches of tree. Even our Gods and Goddess were much conscious of forest whereas we human are always have become lusty and are hell bent to go to any extent to fill our ladder by injury to the vibrant lushgreen trees.

It is dismaying, painful and ironical too. When we chop down those trees more for our

greed than our need. Lord Buddha had messaged us as such; "the forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited and benevolence which sustains us by all means. It offers shade even to the axe man who falls it"

Around 2000 BC, there is evidence of a flourishing Dravidian civilization existing in consonance with the forests that were then in such abundance. The early Aryans were pastoral people interacted in the pursuit of agriculture but they also cleared forests only in the areas where they actually settled down, establishing habitations and institutions in the beautiful surroundings of the forests.

The records of Chinese pilgrims (600BC) refer to dense Indian forests even in the North-West regions where much depletion of forests has occurred now. Records relating to Alexander's invasion (327 BC) mention existence of dense forests. Babur, the first Mughal emperor to rule Indian in early sixteenth century is reported to have shot in these forests indicating existence of dense forests and wildlife in that period.

The abundance of forests created an impression that resources were inexhaustible and thus there was no organized effort to conserve and maintain the forests. Casual instructions appear to have been issued by different ruler from time to time to regulate fallings and earn maximum revenue.

During the reign of Chandra Gupta Murya (300 BC), a superintendent of forests was appointed to look after the forests. The protection of wildlife was also a part of his duty. Sometimes specified species of timber value were proclaimed by local rulers as "Royal Trees" felling of which was prohibited without permission otherwise the forests were open to all and the public obtained their requirement without restrictions.

The Muslim rulers did not have much special interest in the conservation and organized management of forests. Their main interest in forests was for hunting. Areas with good

wildlife were declared as "Royal hunting reserves" and thus received some protection. But increase in population and need for extension for agriculture continued to make incursions on forest land and its produce.

The increasing demands of land for expanding agriculture and demand of timber for Navy and other constructional purposes made considerable inroads on forests and forest wealth so much so that it was felt that the forests may not to continue to meet the demands for timber unless some concrete steps were taken for their conservation and maintenance.

In 1855, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor general issued a memorandum to the Government of India outlining policy of conservancy for the whole country. By that time, it was clearly recognized by the administration that if the forest were to be conserved, proper scientific management was necessary.

In 1856, Lord Dalhousie, appointed District Brandis to take charge of the forest and after 22 years in 1878, the Government honoured Brandish with the title of companion Indian empire and he served a knight commandership in 1880 in recognition of the meritorious service he rendered during the period of 19 years.

Brandis was truly the founder of Indian forestry and it was always befitting to commemorate his achievements. As soon as Brandis was appointed as Inspector General of Forests Cleghorn was appointed to assist him. They were responsible for methodical system of Management of forests in all states. A separate forest enactment was introduced that time.

Moreover, with the passage of time, the demand of forest officer increased for the better control and Management of forest.

While Forest Research Institute (FRI) came into existence in 1906, the status of forest school was raised to that of college.

A separate two years course was started in

1912 at Dehra Dun to train science graduates for the provincial forest services of states. The cadre of these officers formed a link between Indian forest services and forest rangers. It was, however stopped in 1928.

The forest research institute is located in a spacious campus called the New Forest. It has fine buildings and vast field research areas. It provides facilities for research in forestry and has received worldwide recognition. The institute is associated with professional training for the forest officers both in the superior as well as the junior levels. The trainings included trainings included within the college as well as outside in the field on forest management and other allied field such as silviculture, survey and engineering, mensuration. The colleges impart training to the forest officers on such pattern which make them physically and mentally fit which makes them adequately stout in the administrative and executive activities.

With the passage of time, the Indian forest college was re-incarnated and named Indira Gandhi Forest College, Dehra Dun. A short administrative course is imparted at Lal Bahadur Shastri College on Public administration at Dalhousie.

The Forest Research institute is overall looked by the Director of F.R.I. and colleges.

The forest colleges are both for Indian Forest Officers and Forest Ranges officers under the overall control of the Principals. The FRI and colleges are of global fame where trainees from all Indian states including foreign countries are imparted trainings.

With the passage of time, the Indian states opened rangers training college in their respective states. After a detailed imparting two years course, the trainees are awarded degrees to serve in their respective states.

(The author is Former Deputy Conservator of Forest, J&K)

Making Accountability mandatory for state functionaries

■ SHIV KUMAR PADHA

Chanakya, also known as Kautilya strongly advocated for accountability as a corner stone of effective leadership and governance. He believed that leaders should be held responsible for their actions and the consequences they produce. Holding individuals accountable for their performance as crucial for motivating high performers and discouraging under performance. According to Chanakya, promoting ethical conduct the state functionaries can create culture of accountability and responsibility, minimizing risks and maximizing long-term success.

At the very outset of proceeding further in my writing I feel it worthwhile to interpret as to who are the state functionaries and the subjects of a state. In common and simple language "the state functionaries are individuals who hold positions of authority and perform administrative duties within a government or a political party. They are essentially public servants who carry out the functions and responsibilities of the state". They are involved in public service, working in various capacities within government offices and state owned enterprises. their responsibility is to implement policies, managing

resources and ensuring the smooth functioning of the state apparatus. Whereas the subjects of a state are the individuals who are under the jurisdiction and authority of that state. This refers to anyone living within the geographical boundaries of a state's territory. The term implies a relationship of obedience and allegiance to the state's laws and government.

But the term accountability is interpreted by every state and its functionaries what suits to their comfort and ease and which help them shifting the responsibility and saving their skins. In reality accountability refers to the acceptance of responsibility for honest and ethical conduct towards others. It also implies a willingness to be judged on performance and not on mere pretence. In Hinduism accountability is understood through the lens of Karma, emphasizing that individuals are responsible for their actions and their consequences. This includes both intentional and unintentional deeds, and the concept extends to the impact on others and the universe. Accountability in Hinduism takes in its ambit one's Karma and rebirth, Dharma and duty for righteous path, ethical decision making.

India has emerged as a fast develop-

ing country and is galloping towards achieving its ultimate objective of leading the international community on diplomatic, economical, defense, science and technology fronts, making India self reliant and self dependent. India has conquered land sea and the sky. But one thing which irks every nationalist and honest and dutiful citizen is the inactiveness, dereliction of duties corruption, highhandedness, adamancy, insensitiveness and sense of impunity on the part of the state functionaries, which implies a disregard for the potential repercussions of one's actions often because the individual believes they are immune to accountability. This can be due to the social status, power, or lack of effective law enforcement.

In India the innocent citizens are considered accountable for the lapses which they have no control over, but on the contrary the state functionaries disassociate themselves and try to escape scot free from the responsibility and lapses demonstrated by them in their respective domains. There are ample examples/ incidents where the state functionaries keep their eyes shut and the ear closed over the national losses of both property and precious lives due to their non performance and non compliance of the duties assigned to them.

Under such state of affairs where the subjects are made to suffer for the mistakes and negligence of concerned agencies, The law abiding citizens have got the legitimate right to seek the answers for the Yaksh Prashan (questions) from the state functionaries regarding the term accountability which it seems totally missing in the case of the state. Who is accountable;

For the red tape ism and pendency in the offices as a result of which the citizens suffer for the non issuance of the important documents/ certificates like cast, income, birth, death certificates, EWS, domicile/state subject, renewal of the licenses, character certificates, mutation and land survey documents, issuance of ration cards and allied problems.

Refusal of treatment when one fails to deposit the huge medical charges, when the patient dies in the emergency ward queues waiting for the treatment, or one dies without the blood transfusion in the event of excessive bleeding. Or due to the wrong treatment in the hospitals.

When the patient dies of negligence of the doctors and is kept on the ventilator in order to mint money to fish the troubled waters.

When one dies in the accidents due to the dilapidated condition of the roads and bridges.

When the citizens are refused the amenities of life failing to produce the documents, not issued to them even after pretty long time.

When the citizens are panelized for not submitting the ITRs in time. When the detained criminals languish in the jails in the absence of any charges even after decades of imprisonment. Late depositing of GST, violating signal. Carrying plastic bags. late depositing of TDS and the forms all resulting into the fines.

When the youth is denied admissions for want of the documents not issued by the concerned department.

Non renewal of the legal gun licenses for the last ten years. Non providing the basic necessities of life like health facilities, water and connectivity.

When the photographs of bank defaulters for few thousands of rupees are displayed on the bus stands railway stations and humiliated by the beating drums on their doorsteps where many have committed suicide of being ashamed of.

When the newly or under construction roads and buildings collapse before in angulations resulting in heavy toll of human lives and loss to the national exchequer.

When hundreds of patients including

children are burnt alive in the hospitals and the cinema halls.

Where the cheaters of the nation abscond and lead a prosperous and happy life in other countries and the properties of the small loaners are confiscated by the government.

Where the political leaders and the elements involved in the antinational activities are provided with Z and Y type security and the law abiding peaceful citizen is left at the mercy of god.

Where thousands of structures collapse due to the use of junk and spurious materials in the construction. Where thousands of the poor die due to the consumption of the illicit liquor every year. Where the throats of those having faith in their religion are slit and the criminal escape free from the site un harmed an un interrupted.

Where the administration never gives any weightage the public grievances resulting into the non redressal of the public issues.

The answer to all these Yaksh Prashans is obviously the state and its functionaries who are accountable and not the common man who always falls prey to the blunders, carelessness and non performing attitudes of the state.

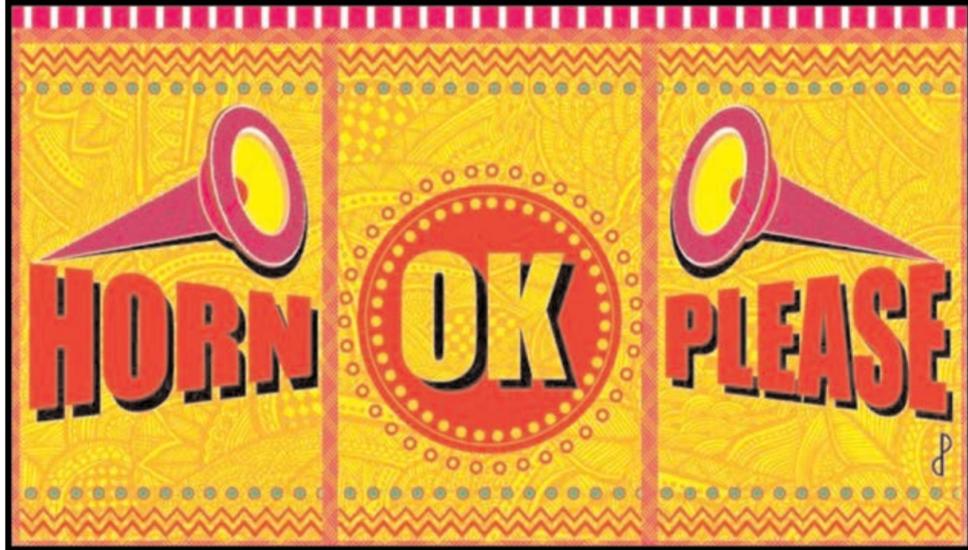
(The writer is a social activist from Basohli)

From Alert to Annoyance: The Honking Culture in India

■ BAIRAJ CHAWALGAMI

In the modern Indian urban landscape, the sound of incessant honking has become an inescapable part of daily life. Whether one is walking on the street, driving a vehicle, waiting at a red light, or even sitting in the supposed quiet of a hospital or school zone, the shrill, repetitive blasts of vehicle horns fill the air with an ever-present cacophony. Honking, originally designed as a warning tool to enhance safety on the roads, has been misused to the point of becoming a nuisance. It has evolved into a form of expression of frustration, entitlement, impatience, and even aggression. While it might appear to be a minor issue compared to more visible challenges like traffic congestion, air pollution, or road safety, rampant honking has emerged as a serious problem in India, deserving urgent attention from both authorities and citizens. India ranks among the noisiest countries in the world, and a large contributor to this auditory pollution is the misuse of vehicle horns. From two-wheelers and auto-rickshaws to buses and trucks, the culture of honking is deeply ingrained in the driving behaviour of most road users. One often finds drivers honking in stationary traffic, at red lights, on narrow residential roads, in silence zones, and even during late-night hours, when traffic is sparse and the roads are relatively clear. This over-use is not just unnecessary but often irrational, reflecting a lack of driving discipline and awareness of the impact of such behaviour.

The psychological roots of excessive honking lie in a broader culture of impatience and lack of civic responsibility. The horn, instead of being used as a safety measure, is wielded like a



weapon to intimidate or clear the way. In many cases, honking is a substitute for proper road etiquette: instead of waiting for a vehicle to move, a pedestrian to cross, or a signal to turn green, the driver resorts to honking as a demand for instant compliance. The very idea of a shared road space, where all users have equal rights, is undermined by this aggressive behaviour. What makes the situation worse is that this pattern of honking is often rewarded-in that people do respond by yielding or moving aside-reinforcing the behaviour further. Beyond being an irritant, constant honking has severe consequences for public health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has established that prolonged exposure to noise lev-

els above 55 decibels can lead to hearing impairment, cardiovascular issues, sleep disorders, and elevated stress levels. In Indian cities, it is not uncommon for noise levels during peak traffic hours to exceed 85 to 90 decibels. Children, the elderly, and hospital patients are the worst affected. There is also growing evidence that noise pollution contributes to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, particularly among urban populations constantly exposed to this auditory assault.

Hospitals, educational institutions, and residential areas are particularly vulnerable, despite being marked as silence zones under Indian law. The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, clearly prohibit

the use of horns in these zones and restrict honking between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Yet, the enforcement of these rules is lax. Even in metropolitan cities with comparatively better traffic management systems, violations are common and penalties are rare. In most parts of the country, traffic police are either unequipped or unwilling to penalize offenders, and there is a general apathy towards noise violations. Without strict enforcement, the laws remain merely advisory in nature. Some Indian cities have made attempts to address this problem. Mumbai's police department, for instance, launched the innovative "Punishing Signal" campaign, wherein the red traffic signal timer would reset every time the decibel level of honking

surpassed a certain threshold. The campaign was aimed at shaming drivers into reducing honking and garnered significant public attention. While creative, such efforts remain isolated and short-term. A systemic approach, supported by both policy and public participation, is essential if any meaningful change is to be achieved.

Education is another crucial pillar in combating this menace. Most Indian drivers are not taught proper horn usage during their learning period. Driving schools often focus on maneuvering skills and basic traffic rules, but neglect to instill a sense of civic responsibility and road-sharing etiquette. Introducing modules on noise pollution and the health impacts of honking into driver training programs could help foster more responsible behaviour. Likewise, incorporating such topics into school curricula could help shape future generations of more considerate citizens. Technology can also play a role in limiting honking. Car manufacturers can be encouraged to install softer horns or to develop horn systems that limit prolonged use. Horns with built-in timers or decibel limits could reduce misuse. GPS navigation apps can include reminders or tips to avoid unnecessary honking, particularly in sensitive zones. However, any technological solution must be accompanied by behavioural change to be truly effective. Urban planning too must respond to this challenge. The very design of many Indian roads-narrow lanes, poorly timed signals, inadequate signage, and lack of pedestrian crossings-contributes to traffic chaos and, by extension, honking. Better infrastructure can ease driver frustration and reduce the perceived need to honk. Clear road

markings, digital traffic lights, dedicated lanes for different types of vehicles, and pedestrian zones are all proven methods to bring order to chaotic traffic and reduce auditory aggression.

Equally important is the role of public campaigns and citizen awareness. Mass media-print, radio, television, and social media-can be powerful tools for change. Campaigns that portray excessive honking as a sign of poor manners and civic irresponsibility can influence public perception over time. Just as littering has gradually become socially unacceptable in many circles due to years of sustained campaigning, so too can honking be reframed as undesirable and uncivil. Community-led initiatives, such as local awareness drives and school competitions on noise reduction, can further reinforce the message. At its core, the issue of excessive honking reflects a larger crisis of empathy and shared responsibility in public spaces. The roads, like any other public domain, require cooperation, patience, and mutual respect. Honking might seem like a fleeting action, but its impact is far-reaching - on health, on peace of mind, and on the very quality of life in our cities. The right to a quieter, calmer, and healthier urban environment must be asserted by citizens, enforced by authorities, and respected by all. India's progress cannot only be measured in terms of GDP, infrastructure, or digital connectivity. It must also be seen in how we treat one another in shared spaces. A simple act like refraining from honking can become a powerful symbol of civic maturity and social awareness. If we wish to build cities that are not just modern but humane, the time to stop the honking is now.