

BUILDING NATION OF CAPABLE HANDS

In a rapidly transforming global economy, where automation, digitalization, and innovation are reshaping industries, the Skill India Mission, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July 2015, stands as a pivotal national initiative aimed at transforming India's demographic potential into a driving force for economic growth. With over 65% of India's population below the age of 35, the mission seeks to equip this vast human resource with market-relevant skills, making India not just the youngest nation, but also the most skilled in the world.

The genesis of Skill India lies in addressing a glaring paradox - while India is rich in human resources, a large segment of its workforce remains unskilled or semi-skilled, often resulting in underemployment or mismatched employment. According to various reports, less than 5% of India's workforce had formal vocational training at the time of the mission's inception. This not only limited productivity but also hindered the employability of India's youth, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

Skill India, through its umbrella initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), and Skill Loan Scheme, aims to bridge this gap by offering industry-aligned training programs, certification, and job linkages. These programs cover diverse sectors - from traditional trades like carpentry and tailoring to modern skills such as artificial intelligence, robotics, coding, digital marketing, and data analytics.

The focus of Skill India is not merely on conventional job creation, but on creating a future-ready workforce that can adapt to new technologies and evolving industry demands. With the rise of the gig economy, startups, and digital platforms, skill sets such as communication, entrepreneurship, customer service, and financial literacy have become essential. Skill India's ecosystem is actively working to integrate these capabilities into its training modules.

Another important component is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which acknowledges the skills acquired through traditional or informal means and provides certification, giving millions of workers formal recognition and improved employment opportunities.

The mission has also brought attention to marginalized groups - including women, persons with disabilities, and economically weaker sections - through targeted skilling programs. Efforts have been made to establish training centers in remote areas and integrate skill development with school curricula, thereby ensuring early exposure and interest in vocational careers.

Despite its commendable objectives and reach, the Skill India initiative faces implementation challenges. These include disparities in training quality, lack of industry participation, inadequate infrastructure, and mismatch between trained skills and local job markets. Often, trained individuals face difficulties in securing employment due to lack of demand or the absence of post-training support.

Moreover, migration trends show that skilled youth often move to urban areas or abroad for better opportunities, leaving rural areas still struggling with unemployment and skill shortages. There's also a need for greater alignment between academia, industry, and training providers, to ensure that skills imparted are truly employable.

To overcome these challenges, a more holistic, integrated, and technology-driven approach is essential. Collaboration with private sector enterprises, international organizations, and global educational institutions can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of skill training. There should also be regular feedback mechanisms, audits, and adaptive curriculum updates based on evolving market needs.

■ G.L. KHAJURIA

How many of us oftenly accept our attachment in real sense of term in so far as love affection and fantasies of our kids and children are concerned. Well, the children mean much more than what we think of them. They are not only our children merely by giving birth to them but in broader spectrum they are the fountain head of the nation.

They are the light and hope of the nation for the future. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Dr. A.P.J Kalam were most affectionate towards children. It has rightly been quoted, child is a father of the nation. Today's children are tomorrow's scientists, Scholars, Educationist and ofcourse plentitude of Doctors, Engineers and bureaucrats apart from distinguished luminaries, cine stars and record breaking sports stalwarts.

They are the best guardian of Borders who play with their lives defending the nation. Children are the future of the nation in more than many ways. They are the blooming flowers of dawn and seedlings of the Nurseries which make the surrounds vibrant and slabrous when nurtured and nourished.

Children are of utmostly warranting care of molding the first step to success in life's run - race. Any right or wrong step can make them heaven or hell apart landing into the Sea of troubles. It, therefore, becomes our bound an duty to boost their upbringings with rightful and dedicated devotional perspectives. If the natural and social cohesiveness between the father and the mother is carefully maintained, the children by all means are sure to succeed but if the same delicate fabric is distorted, there is every apprehension of their being carried away on wrong track.

It is no denying the fact that the parents do

■ ER. PRABHAT KISHORE

World isgoing to celebrate "International Day of Sign Language" on 23rdSeptember for the full realization of the hearing impaired people. Sign language is the means of communication through body movement, specially hand, finger, arm, head and facial expressions besides particular symbols developed. It is the full-fledged natural language with their own grammar and lexicon. This practice is more older than speech.

Since conventional speaking requires sense of hearing for people to speak, Sign Language helps hearing impaired people to communicate with others as well as among themselves. This helps in social inclusion of HI people and leads to a path of their all-round development with dignity.

The history of Signs is as old as civilization itself. When there was no formal language, signs were used for communication. Initially the baby and his/her family make connect

their utmost and sacrifice their everything for their children. Right from the time a child is born, the conscientious young parents see to it that their child has everything as for example Education, Clothings, Toys and whatever is available within their best possible reach. They leave no stone unturned for their child's upbringing and fulfilling his every demand and desire.

However, many strings are attached to their children by the over ambitious parents who expect the child as miniature adult, a master of all trades they also expect them to excel in every field whether in studies or sports, reading, writing, oratory so to say on all aspects of life and aspire them second to none. And there lies their happiness and all hope.

In such pursuits, the children are deprived of their fundamental rights of being child. The kaleidoscopic magic of childhood, the charms of wandering through delightful avenues are get lost. Apart from all these, the rainbow- coloured fantasies vanish like a silver lining in dark clouds. Do we as wise parents are doing justice by depriving them of charming dream from which they don't want to part with.

Now, let us have a glimpse of surrounding scenario currently looming large amongst little kids and up springing children. The early morning picture is too amusing to have appreciations for all the wise parents in that their little kids are pushed into the labyrinth of learning with heavy load of books and note books beyond their caring capacity on piggy-backs. This way they are confronted with triple-load - Physical, mental and Psychological.

Are we meting out justice to our budding kids and children is a very pertinent point to

ponder upon. The higher authorities at the helm should come to the forefront in framing policies and promulgating parameters in association with the conscientious parents.

How is the life of children of today? They are weaned straight from milk bottle to the nursery school! The more the homework he or she carries, the better school is considered to be. Not to be left behind in race for excellence, the child is sent for tuition and the teacher imparting tuition to more than 30-40 children at a time. Things are no better at home too. In many rich homes where parents are over-obsessed with their pursuits, the children are oftenly diverted to video games, expensive toys, computers to the extent of internet and social medias apart from mobile of all hues in a way that the very spirit and sanctity becomes somehow obliterated by overuse , misuse or to say abuse.

The enigmatic scenario doesn't stop over here. The generous amount of pocket money even in mediocre families, whether the mother is employed or otherwise routinely a housewife, there is hardly any time for the family members who can share their feelings to foster their togetherness. Whatever little leisure is there it is squeezed out of the marathon of life and is swallowed by the TV serials which instead of creating congenial environment add fuel to fire in hassle-packed progression which way in becomes like a quick-fix in family trifling over frivolous issues thereby hooking the altitudinal inertia of our kids, children and their associates.

Surveys show, the more children watch the less they observe. Their thinking and responses become adult like in other words around the minds of the children find shortcuts into adulthood without having the know-how of

natural process of growing. And all these factors in togetherness are sure to create a generation of mini adults lacking imitative, motivation and enterprise. There is a tendency to put the whole blame at the door of school and the education system. It is an admitted fact that schools complicate the matters but at the same time, solution lies at home. It is, in fact, the home that moulds the character of the child.

The kids and the small children are extremely sensitive and receptive as they are growing all the time and in the process they are accepting or rejecting the goods and bads as they are physically fragile and mentally fertile. So, in all manifestations, parent's guidance play a pivotal role in moulding the life of the children.

The educationist opined that a child is influenced by three prominent factors- the school where he studies, the friends and his associates with whom he plays and shares his feelings and finally home where he spends maximum time with parents and other kids/ children of his relation. So, home is predominant ly the best school for the kids and young children.

Considering today's lifestyle, in almost all families dinner time is an ideal time. It is worthwhile to say that after the dinner is over, there is a cool and congenial environment when the children can conveniently be convinced to share their feelings and aspirations with their parents and the relatives and their kids and children on all matters and so such this can play a prominent part in moulding and shaping the future of both the kids and the children.

(The author is former Dy. Conservator of Forest J&K)

Sign Language: A Fundamental right of the HI people

with each other through signs. Over period of time Standard Sign languages such as American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), Indian Sign Language (ISL)etc. have been developed, which are playing an effective communication tool by HI personnel to survive in the world.

Sign language is used where speaking is not possible or difficult. It can be frustrating for HI people if they are not able to communicate properly with the people around them. Sign language bridges the language barriers between the Hearing Impaired and the speaking people.

Sign language is a naturally evolved language like other oral languages and is considered to be the mother-tounge of the HI people. Like other spoken languages, sign language is also used to convey feelings, thoughts and other information to the recipients. Sign language interprets to translate the oral language into visual-manual language to make HI people to understand the information.

According to Census 2011, there are more than 13 Lakh HI people and more than OneCrore people having hard of hearing in Bharat. As per the WHO report, by 2050 nearly 250Crore persons will have some degree of hearing loss and at least 70 Crore will have to be hearing rehabilitated. Worldwide. Hence, there is need to promote Sign language in various areas for the betterment and upliftment of the HI persons. Once the hearing-able children learn the Sign language, it will make them to intermingle with their HI counterparts which will be useful in the mainstreaming and inclusive education of such students.

Access to information through sign language is a fundamental right of the HI people. It is also essential to provide educational, vocational, social and personal guidance in sign language to HI people. Such people have to face a lot in the form of social stigma and discrimination. The lack of facilities such as unavailability of signage at public places

to challenge in schools and workplaces, makes their day-to-day life diffiult.

The absence of sign language interpreters in schools is an important barrier in the schooling of HI persons, which ultimately results in either such people remain uneducated or they are forced to drop out. Under Samagra Shiksha, efforts have been made to provide proper hearing equipment to the III children, so that they could cope up with the lessons taught and remain in the mainstream. It is the need of the hour that Sign language be promoted effectively in every walk of life not only for HI people and persons working for them, but all those members of the society and family, where such persons are living. The awareness and sensitization activities will pave the way to change the mindset of the society as well as families, which will prove to a milestone in the long run for mainstreaming the HI people and welfare of the country.

(The author is a technocrat & academician)

The Silent Epidemic: Is Your Smartphone a Tool or a Trap?

■ MOHAMMAD AYAZ RAINA

Smartphones and social media have become the heartbeat of modern life. They wake us up, keep us entertained, connect us to friends, and even guide us through emergencies. Social media, too, has turned into a virtual home where people spend hours every day. But behind the shiny screens lies another reality - one of sleepless nights, anxiety, poor focus, and broken human connections. What began as a tool of empowerment is now quietly shaping into a new epidemic: digital addiction.

Doctors, educators and psychologists warn that excessive mobile use shows symptoms similar to gambling or substance addiction - craving, withdrawal, and loss of control. The signs are everywhere: people checking their phones every few minutes, children refusing to sleep without a gadget nearby, families sitting together but talking less.

In Jammu & Kashmir, studies already show a worrying pattern among students and young professionals. Many feel restless when away from their phones, and a large number admit to spending

more time online than on studies or outdoor activities.

Globally, more than 5.4 billion people - two out of every three humans, use social media. Each spends more than two hours daily scrolling through feeds. In India, the scale is even greater: Over 491 million Indians are active social media users, and the number is expected to touch 900 million by the end of 2025. Research shows that Indians spend 7.3 hours every day on their phones - more than both Americans and Chinese. Among children aged 10 - 14, smartphone use has already reached 83%, much higher than the global average. A study in Jammu revealed that nearly 79% of college students show signs of internet addiction. Across the country, one-third of teenagers are hooked on their phones, with visible impacts on health, studies, and relationships. Addiction does not spare even the global icons. Bollywood actor Aamir Khan admitted in 2021 that he was addicted to his phone, checking it every 15 minutes. The habit disturbed his peace of mind so much that he quit using a smartphone and deleted his social media accounts. His choice,

once surprising, now seems like a wise step many others wish they could take. One of the most disturbing effects of digital addiction is the shrinking human attention span. Once, people could focus through long movie scenes of 45 minutes. Television reduced it to 26 minutes. YouTube brought it down to 5 minutes. Today, Instagram Reels and TikTok keep attention for less than a minute. Experts warn it may soon fall to just 10 seconds. This is reflected in daily life - students unable to focus on studies, families distracted during meals, and drivers glued to screens even on the road. In Kashmir, the challenge is even more severe. Surveys show that over 60% of children aged 5 - 16 are digitally dependent. Many panic when their phone battery drops. Online games like Clash of Clans, Free Fire, PUBG and Call of Duty are household names even among primary school kids, fuelling aggression and detachment from real life. Homes glow with the blue light of screens, while parks & playgrounds lie empty. Parents, themselves busy scrolling, often hand gadgets to toddlers to make them eat or sleep. This goes against the World Health Organization's

advice: zero screen time for children under two, and just one hour daily for those aged two to five. Famous J&K Doctors like Dr. Sushil Razdan and Dr. Kaiser warn that early screen dependency is damaging brain development, creativity, and emotional strength. Headaches, poor posture, and eye strain are now common among schoolchildren. The biggest damage is to relationships. Real friendships are being replaced by "followers" and "likes." Family conversations are giving way to endless scrolling. Children are increasingly exposed to violent games, fake online identities, and harmful content. Mental health experts now speak of a new condition called "Screen Dependency Disorder." The answer is not to reject technology, but to use it with balance. Families can create small rules: no phones during meals, no devices at bedtime, and limited screen time during family gatherings. Parents must set the example. Teachers can promote phone-free classrooms, encourage outdoor activities, and guide students on safe internet use. Young people can set app timers, switch off unnecessary notifications, and spend more time on hobbies like reading, music,

or sports. Policymakers can enforce child-safe platforms, introduce age checks for apps, and develop more parks, libraries, and community clubs. Schools, especially in Jammu & Kashmir, can include screen-time checks in health programs and encourage device-free study hours during exams. Smartphones and social media are not going away - and nor should they. They are powerful tools for learning, creativity, and connection. But if we don't act wisely, they may control us instead of empowering us. If India hopes to become a developed nation by 2047, it needs a generation that is strong, focused, and socially connected. The challenge before us is clear: reclaim balance, protect childhood, and rebuild human connection. If ignored, this silent epidemic could reshape not just individual lives but the social fabric itself. But if addressed wisely through awareness, discipline and healthier habits - technology can remain a tool, not a trap. The choice, ultimately, is ours.

(The writer is Lecturer, National IOT Awardee & JK UT Best Teacher Awardee)

Insurance of Fruit Crops in Jammu Region: Securing Future of Horticulture

■ PROF. (DR.) PARSHANT BAKSHI

The Jammu region of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is a prominent fruit-growing area, renowned for its diverse fruit crops such as mango, litchi, guava, citrus and papaya. Fruit production plays a vital role in the livelihoods of thousands of farming families and contributes significantly to the region's economy. However, this sector faces high levels of uncertainty due to natural calamities such as hailstorms, floods, untimely rains, drought, frost, strong winds, and pest/disease outbreaks. To safeguard orchardists against these risks, crop insurance for fruit crops has emerged as a critical tool for promoting climate-resilient and sustainable horticulture.

Importance of Insurance for Fruit Crops

Fruit crops are perennial and require long-term investment in terms of planting material, orchard establishment, irrigation systems, and maintenance. Unlike annual crops, the damage to fruit orchards due to natural disasters has a long-lasting economic impact, as trees take years to reach full production.

The importance of fruit crop insurance in the Jammu region includes:

a) Risk Management

It protects fruit growers against losses caused by natural calamities such as flash floods, heavy rains, drought, frost, and hailstorms. It also reduces financial vulnerability of small and marginal farmers.

b) Income Stabilization

It ensures continuity of income even during bad crop years and provides compensation for loss of yield or total orchard damage, supporting farmers' families.

c) Encourages Investment

It motivates farmers to adopt modern technologies like high-density planting, protected cultivation, and drip irrigation by reducing risk.

d) Facilitates Institutional Credit

It helps farmers access loans from banks, as insured orchards are considered safer by financial institutions.

e) Promotes Climate-Resilient Horticulture

It encourages adoption of climate-smart practices, knowing that insurance acts as a safety net during extreme weather events.

Stages of Insurance Coverage for Fruit Crops

Fruit crops, being perennial, require stage-wise insurance coverage to ensure complete protection. The following stages are crucial for mango, litchi, citrus, guava, and other fruit crops grown in the Jammu region:

a) Establishment Stage (Year 1-3)

Coverage: The losses due to mortality of young plants caused by floods, drought, frost, or pests.

Risk Factors: Poor establishment, improper planting, or damage due to heavy rainfall.

Remedy: Compensation for replanting cost, including planting material and initial maintenance.

b) Vegetative Stage (Year 3-5)

Coverage: The damages to growing trees before they start fruiting, especially from strong winds, hailstorms, or pest/disease outbreaks.

Trigger Event: A decline in healthy plant population below the insured threshold.

Remedy: Financial assistance for corrective orchard management, training, pruning, and integrated pest management (IPM).

c) Flowering and Fruiting Stage (Year 5 onwards)

Coverage: It provides protection against flower

drop, fruit drop, or total crop loss due to untimely rain, high temperature, hailstorms, or insect attacks.

Trigger: The percentage drop in fruit yield beyond the agreed threshold (e.g., 25-30%).

Remedy: The payout based on yield gap calculated from historical yield data and crop cutting experiments.

d) Post-Harvest Stage

Coverage: Losses during storage and transport caused by unseasonal rains, fire, or accidents.

Remedy: Compensation for damaged produce to prevent market-linked financial losses.

Remedies and Preventive Measures

While insurance provides financial compensation, preventive steps are equally important to minimize risks. Fruit growers in the Jammu region should adopt the following remedies:

a) Orchard Management Practices

► Plant high-density orchards with disease-resistant and high-yielding varieties.

► Follow proper pruning and training to reduce storm damage.

► Use windbreaks to protect orchards from high-velocity winds.

b) Water and Soil Management

► Construct raised beds or drainage channels in flood-prone areas.

► Adopt drip irrigation with mulching to conserve soil moisture during drought.

c) Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM)

► Regular monitoring for fruit flies, mealybugs, and fungal diseases.

► Timely application of biological and chemical controls to prevent severe infestations.

d) Climate-Resilient Practices

► Use protective netting for hailstorm-prone orchards.

► Adopt organic and natural farming methods to improve soil health and plant resilience.

e) Farmer Awareness and Record-Keeping

► Maintain accurate records of orchard area, yield, and inputs used for insurance claims.

► Participate in training programs organized by SKUAST-Jammu, Horticulture Department, and insurance companies.

Schemes Available for Jammu Region Farmers

The Government of India and the Union Territory of J&K have introduced several insurance schemes for fruit growers:

a) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Purpose: Provides comprehensive insurance for notified fruit crops like mango, litchi, citrus, guava, and pomegranate.

Coverage: Losses due to natural calamities, pests, and diseases during all stages - from planting to post-harvest.

Premium: Farmers pay 5% of the sum insured, and the rest is subsidized by the Central and UT Governments.

Benefit: Financial support for orchard restoration and income stabilization after crop damage.

Claim Settlement: Based on crop cutting experiments (CCEs) to assess actual yield loss.

b) Restructured Weather-Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS)

Purpose: Protects fruit crops from adverse weather events such as excess rainfall, frost, drought, heatwaves, or hailstorms.

Coverage Basis: Weather-index based, using data from automated weather stations (AWS) for quick payouts.

Premium: Farmers pay 2-5% of the sum insured, with the remaining cost shared by the government.

Benefit: Provides timely compensation, especially for weather-sensitive crops like mango, litchi, and citrus.

c) State Horticulture Development Schemes

Purpose: Supports rehabilitation and replanting of orchards damaged by floods, storms, or drought.

Coverage: Compensation for damaged orchards and structures like polyhouses or drip systems. There is provision of subsidies for disease-free, high-yielding varieties and hail/frost protection systems.

Benefit: Quick restoration of fruit orchards and promotion of climate-resilient technologies.

The recent flash floods in Jammu region pose huge losses to fruit grower. In such circumstances, fruit crop insurance is not merely a financial tool, but a lifeline for sustainable horticulture in the Jammu region. By covering risks at every stage from planting to post-harvest insurance encourages farmers to adopt modern practices, ensures income stability, and strengthens the region's horticulture sector against the uncertainties of climate change. The coordinated efforts of fruit growers, research institutions like SKUAST-Jammu, the Horticulture Department, Government of J&K and insurance agencies can build a robust system that empowers fruit growers and secures the future of Jammu's horticulture.

(The writer is Head of Division of Fruit Science, SKUAST-Jammu)

