

## NEED URGENT ACTION

The shadow of drug smuggling looms large over India. What was once considered a peripheral issue has now evolved into a full-blown threat, corroding our society from within. No longer restricted to border zones, drug smuggling has spread its tentacles into schools, colleges, and neighbourhoods-devouring youth potential, breaking families, and undermining national security.

This rising trend of narco-terrorism is not just a law-and-order issue; it is a societal and strategic crisis. The flow of drugs across our borders is feeding domestic addiction, funding subversive activities, and destabilizing our communities.

The administration and police forces must be commended for making significant arrests and busting drug modules. Yet, the reality remains that for every consignment intercepted, several may slip through undetected. This calls for multi-agency coordination, technological upgrades such as drone surveillance and AI-based tracking, and stronger international cooperation, especially with neighbouring countries.

Moreover, the fight against drug smuggling cannot rest solely with law enforcement. There is an urgent need for comprehensive demand-side interventions-awareness campaigns, rehabilitation programs, and community policing. Schools and colleges must not just educate students academically, but also about the dangers of substance abuse. Religious leaders, NGOs, civil society, and media must join hands to build a strong social firewall against drugs.

The Union Government's initiatives such as 'Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan' are steps in the right direction, but implementation must be rigorous and localized.

It is also critical to look inward-at the corruption and administrative lapses that sometimes enable this deadly trade. Accountability within the system must be non-negotiable. A single compromised officer at the border, a lenient official at a port, or a turned-blind-eye in the judiciary can cause irreparable damage.

We must remember: every gram of heroin smuggled in is a potential life lost. Every peddler on the street is a threat to someone's son or daughter. The cost of inaction will be paid not in statistics, but in shattered families and ruined futures.

It is time for citizens, law enforcers, educators, and policymakers to unite in a zero-tolerance approach. Let the message be clear and unwavering: India will not be a playground for drug syndicates. The safety, health, and future of our youth depend on our resolve today.

## Navratri is a festival of power and courage

■ RAMESH SARAF, DHAMORA

Navratri is dedicated to the worship and adoration of the nine forms of Goddess Durga, who are considered symbols of power, courage, and women's empowerment. Navratri means "nine nights," and during this time, devotees perform special prayers, fast, and engage in devotional service to Goddess Durga. The Navratri festival is celebrated twice a year during the spring season as Chaitra Navratri and during the autumn season as Sharad Navratri. Sharad Navratri is celebrated during the month of Ashwin, which usually falls in September or October. Chaitra Navratri is celebrated during the month of Chaitra of the Hindu calendar, which is usually celebrated in March or April. Navratri is a Sanskrit word meaning nine nights. During these nine nights and ten days, nine forms of Shakti (Goddess Shakti) are worshipped. The tenth day is known as Dussehra.

The beginning of spring and autumn are considered important confluences of climate and solar influences. These two periods are considered sacred occasions for the worship of Goddess Durga. The festival dates are determined according to the lunar calendar. This worship dates back to prehistoric times, even before the Vedic era. The first three days of Navratri are dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga. This worship is dedicated to her energy and power. Each day is dedicated to a different form of Durga.

Navratri teaches us the victory of righteousness over unrighteousness and good over evil. It teaches us how a person can overcome negativity and realize his or her divine nature through the inherent goodness within him or her. The importance of religion in Indian life is immense. It is a result of India's Ganga-Jamuna culture that people of all religions,

while practicing their own religions, have lived together in this country for centuries with a spirit of brotherhood. This is why India's religion and culture are considered the best throughout the world. There are many festivals associated with different religions that are celebrated with reverence, devotion, and pomp in every corner of India. Navratri is one of them.

During the nine days of Navratri, nine different forms of Adishakti Jagadamba are worshipped. These nine days are considered the most sacred days of the year. These nine days have historical significance in Indian religion and philosophy, and Hindu mythological texts describe many divine events occurring during these days. These nine forms of the Mother Goddess, also known as Navadurga, are: Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skanda Mata, Katyayani, Kalratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidatri.

Navratri occurs four times a year. It is celebrated from Chaitra, Ashadha, Ashwin, and Paush Pratipada to Navami. During the nine nights of Navratri, nine forms of the three goddesses, Mahalakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga, are worshipped, known as Navadurga. Durga means the remover of sorrows from life. Navratri is an important festival celebrated with great enthusiasm throughout India. The festival signifies the victory of truth over falsehood. According to Hindu beliefs, Navratri is celebrated twice a year. According to the Hindu calendar, the first Navratri is celebrated in the month of Chaitra and the second in the month of Ashwin. Navratri continues for nine days, during which people worship different forms of the Mother Goddess with devotion and faith. In India, Navratri is celebrated with different methods and rituals in different states.

According to religious beliefs, Goddess Durga descends to earth during these nine days. To celebrate her arrival, these days are celebrated with great pomp and show across the country as Durga Utsav.

On the first day of Navratri, girls are worshipped. On the second day, young women are worshipped. On the third day, women who have reached maturity are worshipped. The fourth, fifth, and sixth days of Navratri are dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and peace. A yajna is performed on the eighth day. The ninth day is the final day of the Navratri celebrations. It is also known as Mahanavami. On this day, nine young girls who have not yet reached puberty are worshipped. These nine girls are considered symbols of the nine forms of Goddess Durga. Their feet are washed to honor and welcome the girls. At the end of the puja, the girls are presented with new clothes, items, and fruits as gifts.

Sharadiya Navratri, the festival of worship of Shakti, has been celebrated since ancient times, from Pratipada to Navami, with nine fixed dates, nine constellations, and nine powers, with ninefold devotion. Each form of Adishakti is worshipped separately during the nine days of Navratri. The ninth power of Goddess Durga is named Siddhidatri. She bestows all kinds of siddhis. Her vehicle is a lion and she sits on a lotus flower. She is worshipped on the ninth day of Navratri.

According to a legend associated with this festival, Goddess Durga slew Mahishasura, a buffalo-like demon. According to mythology, impressed by Mahishasura's intense meditation, the gods granted him the boon of invincibility. After granting him the boon, the gods worried that he would misuse his power. Mahishasura expanded his empire to the gates of heaven, leaving the gods astonished.

He usurped all the powers of the Sun, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Chandrama, Yama, Varuna, and other gods and became the master of heaven itself. The gods were forced to wander the earth due to Mahishasura's wrath. Enraged by Mahishasura's audacity, the gods created Goddess Durga.

It is believed that the equal power of all the gods was exerted in the creation of Goddess Durga. To destroy Mahishasura, all the gods gave their weapons to Goddess Durga, and it is said that the combined efforts of these gods made Goddess Durga even more powerful. During these nine days, the battle between the Goddess and Mahishasura took place, and ultimately, after slaying Mahishasura, she became known as Mahishasura Mardini. Kali is the first and foremost of the Navadurga and the ten Mahavidyas. Among Lord Shiva's powers, the Dashamahavidyas, which take on multiple forms, both fierce and gentle, are capable of bestowing infinite siddhis. In the tenth place is Kamala Vaishnavi Shakti, who is also Goddess Lakshmi, the presiding deity of natural wealth. Gods, humans, and demons are all crippled without her grace, and therefore, her worship is equally described in both the Agama and Nigama scriptures. All gods, demons, humans, and Gandharvas yearn for her grace and blessings.

Fasting during Navratri eliminates toxins from the body, keeping it healthy and disease-free. Meditation, yoga, and devotional practices during Navratri bring peace to the mind, reducing stress and anxiety. The primary purpose of the Navratri fast is to control the senses and accumulate spiritual power. In fact, Navratri is a grand festival of inner purification. Thought pollution pervades the environment today. In such a situation, the importance of Navratri increases even more.

(The author is a freelance journalist)

## Maharaja Hari Singh: Democrat and Patriot in the Context of Nehru's Valley-Centric Politics

■ SUNIL SHARMA

The historical narrative of Jammu and Kashmir is frequently centered on Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah. Maharaja Hari Singh, the final Dogra ruler, is often depicted as a reluctant monarch resistant to democratic change. However, this perspective, as seen in works of many renowned scholars overlooks evidence of Hari Singh's patriotism and progressive outlook. Prior to independence, he advocated for Indian unity, implemented democratic institutions, and introduced reforms uncommon among princely states. His vision encompassed all regions of Jammu and Kashmir, including Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, and Gilgit-Baltistan. The primary obstacle to this vision was Nehru's mistrust, influenced by personal animosity and a focus on the Kashmir Valley.

At the First Round Table Conference in London in 1930, when many princes tried to isolate themselves from the Indian national movement, Hari Singh made a clear stand. "I have never disguised from my friends my warm support of the idea of an All-India Federation," he declared. He also acknowledged that while the princes owed loyalty to the British Crown, they also had "full sympathy for the aspirations of their motherland for an equal and honourable place in the comity of nations." In contrast to it, many other princely leaders focused on maintaining their ties to the British and protecting their autonomy, expressing concerns over losing power in a unified India. For example, a representative from Hyderabad remarked, "Our first duty is to protect the rights and privileges enjoyed by our state under British rule." These were not the words of separatists, but of a monarch who saw his future tied to India's destiny.

While Hari Singh was a monarch but his policies were no less democratic. In 1934, he established the Praja Sabha, an elected legislative assembly that provided political parties and citizens with a platform for participation in governance. Although its powers were limited, this institution represented a significant move toward participatory politics. Also, Maharaja Hari Singh enacted legislation against child marriage, promoted compulsory primary education, and introduced peasant welfare reforms.



While many princely rulers were against such changes, he promoted freedom of expression by modifying the press rules and stood at the forefront for modernization of his people. These reforms indicate an effort to transition Jammu and Kashmir toward responsible governance while maintaining stability in a complex and diverse

region.

Yet, despite these clear signals of patriotism and reformist nature Jawaharlal Nehru never trusted him. The distrust was rooted more in personal biases rather than in policies. In 1946, during the Quit Kashmir agitation led by Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference, Nehru entered the state against the Maharaja's orders. Treating him as an ordinary lawbreaker, Hari Singh's government had him arrested. For Nehru, this was an unpardonable slight. He never forgave the Maharaja for denying him the special status he accorded himself as India's national leader. From that moment, Nehru's politics in Jammu and Kashmir were colored by this bitterness. However, it is important to consider Nehru's stated constitutional concerns, which were centered around ensuring a secular and democratic framework within a newly independent India. He painted the Maharaja's rule as a potential barrier to such principles in a historically diverse and culturally rich region like Jammu and Kashmir.

Instead of acknowledging Maharaja Hari Singh as a rightful custodian of Jammu & Kashmir, Jawaharlal Nehru entrusted Sheikh Abdullah as the "voice of Kashmir". Nehru's loyalty to Abdullah not only undermined Maharaja's rightful authority, but subverted the security concerns at large. In 1947, Nehru put conditions when Hari Singh already showed his interest to join India. The conditions were that Sheikh Abdullah to be released from prison and given power. Practically, India's national interests were overshadowed by Nehru's personal friendship with Abdullah and his grudge for Maharaja.

In other princely states like Junagadh and Hyderabad, the decision regarding joining India was resolved quickly. But Jammu and Kashmir issue was left unsettled, until Pakistan's tribal invasion in 1947 led to a hurried decision of joining India officially. But Maharaja always wanted to join India. In his letter to Lord Mountbatten, Maharaja Hari Singh's intent is clear: "I have no option but to ask for help from the Indian Dominion. I have accordingly decided to accede to the Dominion of India."

The common narrative that show Maharaja Hari Singh as a reluctant and confused ruler is misleading. There

are ample evidences which prove that he supported India early. His stance on accession is not merely a survival strategy, but encapsulates the vision of Jammu and Kashmir to grow as a part of India. This uncomplicated accession is transformed into a complex political problem because of Nehru's mistrust and Abdullah's ambitions which delayed this process. Hari Singh's vision for Jammu and Kashmir was larger than Kashmir valley. It was plural and multiregional. His political ambitions embraced Jammu's Dogra, Ladakh's Buddhists, and people of Gilgit-Baltistan, along with Kashmir valley. One resident of Ladakh said in a local meeting, "The Maharaja's initiatives have always considered our cultural heritage alongside the political necessities." In the same way, a community leader from Gilgit-Baltistan remarked, 'Hari Singh's reforms paved the way for our voice to be heard in the political discourse.' But for Nehru, idea of Jammu and Kashmir was narrowed to Kashmir valley and Sheikh Abdullah. By reducing a complicated and diverse region to a single person and single region, Nehru weakened India's long term position and created divisions that still trouble us today.

It is time that history should correct itself and rewrite the narrative which give Maharaja Hari Singh the respect he deserves. Maharaja Hari Singh deserved to be remembered as a patriot and democrat who clearly wants to join India, not as an obstacle. His legacy lies in what he truly cherish, Indian unity and a more democratic governance within his state. On the other hand, Nehru's personal hostility and valley centric approach turned a uncomplicated accession into a political crisis.

When ongoing discussions regarding Jammu and Kashmir's history and future is underway, it should include recognition of Hari Singh's contribution. India's strength has historically being reinforced when it respects all regions and all communities equally. Maharaja Hari Singh exemplified this approach and we should acknowledge him for his unwavering intent in India's nation building.

(The author is the Leader of the Opposition and a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Jammu and Kashmir)

## Higher Education in Horticulture: A Gateway to Global

■ PROF. (DR.) PARSHANT BAKSHI

Horticulture, a vital branch of agriculture, plays a significant role in ensuring food and nutritional security, enhancing farmer's income, and driving sustainable development. With the increasing focus on climate-resilient agriculture, organic farming, and technology-driven production systems, higher studies in horticulture have gained immense relevance. Students aspiring to advance their education in this field can unlock diverse opportunities, both in India and abroad, while contributing to the nation's vision for sustainable and innovative agricultural practices as envisioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

**Why to choose Horticulture for Higher Studies?**

Horticulture encompasses fruit science, vegetable science, floriculture, landscape gardening, plantation crops, spices and postharvest management. It bridges traditional knowledge with modern technologies such as precision farming, protected cultivation, smart irrigation, climate-smart systems, and biotechnology. The students pursuing M.Sc. and Ph.D. programs in horticulture can have following opportunities:

- To gain specialized expertise in fruit crop production, breeding, and processing.
- To conduct research in areas such as climate resilience, natural resource management, and organic farming.
- To collaborate with global research institutions to develop innovative solutions for emerging challenges.
- To build leadership skills to work as scientists, entrepreneurs, policymakers, or educators.

**Career Opportunities in Horticulture**

The demand for skilled horticulture professionals is expanding due to government initiatives like Doubling Farmers' Income, PM-FME (Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises), and the National Horticulture Mission. The graduates and postgraduates of Horticulture can explore careers in the following areas:

**Research and Development**

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes and

State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) offer roles as junior research fellows, research fellows, scientists and subject matter specialists. The specializations in plant breeding, biotechnology, postharvest technology, and protected cultivation are in high demand.

**Government Jobs**

Horticulture Development Officers, Agriculture Extension Officers, Banking officers, Lecturers in higher education, KAS, IAS, and Bloek Technology Managers in state departments of horticulture/agriculture. There are positions in National Horticulture Board (NHB), Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Spices Board of India.

**Private Sector**

**Agribusiness firms, food processing industries, and seed companies offer roles in:**

- Product development and marketing.
- Quality assurance.
- Export and supply chain management.

**Entrepreneurship**

- Establishing nurseries, tissue culture labs, organic farming units, or value-addition enterprises.
- Leveraging government schemes like PM-FME, Startup India, and RKVY-RAFTAAR for funding support.

**International Opportunities**

- Demand for horticulture experts is growing globally, especially in floriculture, protected cultivation, and fruit production.
- Roles in agribusiness consulting firms, research organizations, and global food companies.
- Foreign Education Opportunities and Scholarships

- For students aspiring to pursue M.Sc., Ph.D., or Postdoctoral programs abroad, numerous scholarships and exchange programs are available which includes:

**1. Indian Government and Bilateral Scholarships**

- ICAR International Fellowships for Ph.D. studies in recognized foreign universities.

- Ministry of Education Scholarships under international agreements with countries like the USA, UK, and Japan.

**2. Prestigious International Scholarships**

- Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship (USA): For Master's and Ph.D. programs in agricultural sciences.

- Commonwealth Scholarship (UK): For Master's and Doctoral studies in sustainable agriculture and horticulture.

- DAAD (Germany): For higher education and research in horticulture and plant sciences.

- Erasmus Mundus (EU): Offers integrated Master's and research opportunities in agricultural sciences.

- Australia Awards Scholarship: For specialized research in horticulture and allied fields.

**3. Research Assistantships and University Grants**

- Many universities in Canada, USA, Australia, and Europe offer fully-funded assistantships for research projects related to horticulture and sustainable agriculture.

**Tip for Students:**

**To qualify for these scholarships, focus on:**

- A strong academic record.
- A Letter of Recommendation from Mentor
- Research experience (publications, project reports).
- Language proficiency tests like IELTS, TOEFL, or GRE.
- Letter of Invitation from Mentor of Inviting Institute
- A clear Statement of Purpose (SOP) highlighting your vision and contribution to global horticultural development.

**Alignment with NEP 2020**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes skill development, research, innovation, and global collaboration in higher education. Thus, pursuing higher studies in horticulture perfectly aligns with these goals:

**NEP 2020 Vision Horticulture Alignment**

Multidisciplinary education Integration of horticulture with biotechnology, AI, IoT, and business studies.

Global collaboration Exchange programs and international research partnerships.

Research-driven learning Hands-on training in climate-smart

practices, postharvest management, and value addition.

Skill development and entrepreneurship Promotion of startups in organic farming, agri-tech, and food processing.

Digital learning Use of e-learning platforms, virtual labs, and precision agriculture tools.

The NEP encourages flexible curriculum structures, allowing students to combine horticulture with management, data analytics, or environmental science, thus broadening career prospects.

**How to Plan Your Higher Studies Pathway**

- Undergraduate Stage (B.Sc. Horticulture/Agriculture):
- Build a strong foundation in plant sciences and technology.
- Participate in internships, rural awareness programs, and fieldwork.

**Postgraduate Stage (M.Sc. Horticulture):**

- Choose a specialization like Fruit Science, Floriculture, Vegetable Science, or Postharvest Technology.
- Work on a research project and publish findings in journals.

**Doctoral Studies (Ph.D.):**

- Focus on advanced research areas such as genomics, climate resilience, or protected cultivation.
- Collaborate with international research institutions.

**Skill Development:**

Take short courses on Geographic Information System (GIS), hydroponics, Internet of Things (IoT) in agriculture, and agribusiness management.

Pursuing higher studies in horticulture offers students a gateway to impactful careers, both in India and globally. With government initiatives, global scholarships, and the vision of NEP 2020, students can equip themselves with advanced knowledge and skills to address critical challenges like climate change, food security, and sustainable farming. By aligning education with innovation and entrepreneurship, the next generation of horticulturists can lead the transformation of India's agricultural landscape while gaining international recognition.

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