

Fate of languishing projects

We hardly need to recall the efforts of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir in respect of ensuring the pending, unfunded or to be precise - languishing projects of development were completed and all difficulties, mainly with regard to their funding, even meeting their escalated costs of reconstruction, were met. These projects were more than 600 in number and it is to be believed that there were many such projects virtually "rotting" for past many years and it was, perhaps, nobody's concern all those years to do something about them, at least, to the extent of protecting that huge amount which was already spent on them till those projects were virtually abandoned. To retrieve the precarious position about both the status of the projects and the utility of the money spent on those projects, Jammu and Kashmir Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation Ltd (JKIDFC) was created in the year 2018 with a mandate to raise funds up to Rs.8000 crore. Since lot of clamouring was witnessed about the causes of the concerned projects plunging into uncertainties as attributed to funds crunch and now, when that main problem rather the hitch was adequately taken care of, why should there be still problems which could absolutely have been avoided?

It is really in bad taste to find glaring instances revolving around sheer incompetence, recklessness, under performance and resorting to irregular practices in respect of most of the projects revived under the "Languishing Projects" scheme which reflects very poorly about those authorities of different departments who were to run, supervise and monitor these projects? These Heads of Departments and other concerned authorities, otherwise should have shown exemplary interest in ensuring these projects maintained all parameters of timeline and quality standards. Official paraphernalia and other requirements like tendering processes, physical verifications, stage-wise monitoring, clearing bills and payments of contractors in time to restore confidence in the system and the like, hardly needed any special emphasis but still, many a time there were guidelines and reminders issued by the Finance Department as also by General Administration Department about adopting a pointed and serious approach towards the completion of these projects.

It is, however, unfortunate that there should be very poor manner of conducting of the execution of many projects coming under the category of languishing ones hence undermining the process of the fruition thereof. Not only have instances been noticed about splitting of tenders but drawing funds from two sources or resorting to duality of funding too have been observed. While efforts have been made by the Government to cut on delays and red-tape-ism, instances are there when considerable delay has been caused in releasing funds to the contractors. The list is unending depicting incompetence or simply following and strengthening the "Chalta Hai" syndrome which these projects, in each and every stage, must have faced leading to their becoming a liability and retrieving them now under languishing projects. Many projects have not been taken at all for reconstruction, while in most of the others, their fate hangs in the balance due to non-tendering of works. JKIDFC has stakes involved as it is providing funds, it has naturally to see, find and detect shortcomings of different hues including irregularities regarding the issue of finances and suggest remedial measures too. It has, therefore, come out with finding cogently a host of shortcomings and in certain cases, clearly declared performance as "unsatisfactory". It is a commendable decision to ask the concerned officers to clarify their position and forward the same to the Corporation.

We would like to add that had there been a strict monitoring process in place in respect of each and every project and timely action taken, perhaps the position would have been better and not as much dismal. It is only the extent of realisation of one's duty and obligation as responsible officers and authorities in the Government to walk an extra mile and work sincerely and had such feelings been there, though we cannot generalise, the fate of most of the projects even after arranging funding for them would have been comparatively better. It would be quite proper, therefore, to invoke accountability and responsibility.

Best House Construction awardees

Jammu province has registered its three residents as awardees under "Best House Construction" under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna. They are one from Samba, one from Ramgarhand one from Bhandarwah. To incentivise and encourage best performing states and UTs under the PMAY(U), for implementation and innovation, Government of India had decided in early 2019 to confer such awards. It is primarily with a view to make the dream of millions of the countrymen true to own a house and since a target of constructing one crore houses under the scheme by the end of 2022 is envisaged, better performance and speed were aimed at, hence the award of "Best House Construction". It may be noted that monthly incremental progress on vital parameters is judged for deciding about such awards. Not only are, therefore, performers awarded but an opportunity is given to slow performers too to improve upon their working.

However, it is a matter of joy that three of the residents of Jammu Province got these awards through video conference by the Prime Minister. It must provide an opportunity to the concerned Municipal Councils and other agencies engaged in implementation of the flagship scheme of providing housing to all, to gear up their efforts in the noble direction and treat such awards as only the first ones and to strive to get more in future.

Yoga- The scientific approach to religion

Brij Mohan Sharma

Nowhere in the world, except in India, has there been a real and sincere research to discover a pragmatic, life-moulding and universally applicable scientific method of reaching Infinity by awakening the consciousness in man of his inherent divinity. The scientific method, so discovered, has been named Yoga by our ancient rishis and accomplished spiritual personages. This is the science which all lovers of God irrespective of their caste, creed or religion may apply to attain the Divine Bliss which is the common goal of all religions.

By this, however, it should never be construed that the various religions we practise are, in any way, diffident or lack the requisite ethos to attain the desired objective. In fact all the great religions of the world preach the necessity of finding God and promoting brotherhood among men. What, then, creates the difference among them? It is the bigotry in men's minds.

As the things stand, it seems religion has been hijacked by vested interests whose main mission in life is to keep the pot of bigotry and religious intolerance boiling so as to keep mankind divided. "Mine is the only one the best one" is the declaration of most of the denominations and cults. The evil spirit of hate and fanaticism has so powerfully influenced the minds of men that they have lost their moral sense of reason and discrimination. Fundamentalists and fanatics have no ears to lend to the sane voice of humanistic groups who advocate and stress for more and more universal approach to religion. They have installed their henchmen in the places of worship who dance to their tune and parrot their voices.

In such a deplorable state of affairs, the practice of a science of religion has become imperative, and Yoga is that science. This is the only time-tested scientific approach to religion which can regain the rejuvenate the lost and much wanted cohesion and harmony among various religions of the world.

Yoga teaches us how to rise above the delusion of separation and realize our oneness with God. It enables man to perceive the universal basic truths underlying various religions and defeat the divisive and fundamentalistic tendencies. Once human beings realize that they are all children of the one Father, and that there is no difference in the basic truths of all religions, there will be no more difficulties or dogma.

To teach this science of Yoga to the world, India has produced a number of yogis and Self-realized masters. It is due to their unceasing efforts that Yoga has received world-wide recognition and is being practised almost all over the globe.

Paramahansa Yoganandaji was one of such great Yogis and the first great master of India who lived in the West for over thirty years to teach yoga and its universal scientific and spiritual truths. He entered this world in India on January 5, 1893, and left it in America on March 7, 1952. He personally initiated numberless students in yoga and other scientific techniques of meditation for awakening divine consciousness in human beings.

Today, more than ever, he is recognised as a world teacher, an enlightened exponent of universal science of yoga, a great son and spiritual ambassador of India, a benefactor of mankind. His nature was universal, his life a blend of spiritual wisdom and practical efficiency.

Whatever man's own affiliations, he will definitely benefit from Yoganandaji's non-sectarian and scientific instructions. The great master explains the laws of life each of us needs to know. They are valuable for our daily physical, mental

and spiritual welfare. By steady and patient practice of Kriya Yoga and other scientific techniques taught by him, man becomes capable of removing the delusive covering of human forgetfulness and the divine love of the heart bursts forth in a joyous flow to meet God's love.

In India, religion has always been understood to be a matter of seeking, finding and verifications as any of the branches of science. The Indian thinkers discovered by their investigation that there are two fields in which man functions. One, the external field, the other, the internal. They studied both in a scientific spirit.

And, it was by this investigation that the science of Yoga, which pertains to the inner field, i.e. the subtler laws that rule the hidden spiritual planes and inner realms of consciousness, came into being. For this, the ancient rishis of India adopted the same methods of investigation as are largely applied in the discovery of positive sciences: collection of facts, their classification, dispassionate study of these so as to reveal the law or laws underlying them and finally the application of such knowledge for alleviation of human suffering and enrichment of human life. The insights thus gained were retested and amplified by a galaxy of subsequent thinkers leaving to posterity the invaluable legacy and dynamic scientific tradition known as Yoga.

So, Yoga is not a sect but a universally applicable science which enables man to realize his self. Yoga is for everybody, for the people of the East as well as for those of West. It is not meant for any particular religion. All men, irrespective of their

caste, creed and religion, have the right to practice yoga to know their immortal divine nature. In brief, realization of the oneness of man and his Creator is the whole essence of Yoga. An understanding of man's inescapable need for God, in every aspect of living, removes the otherworldliness from the religion, and makes knowing God the basis of a scientific and practiced approach to life.

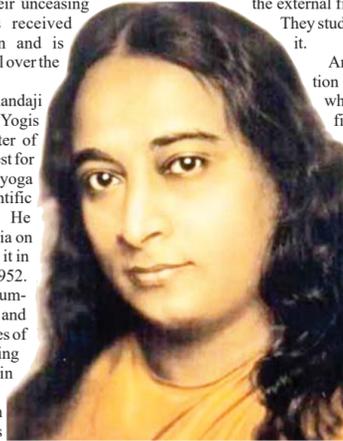
"God is approachable. Talking of Him and listening to His words in the scriptures, thinking of Him, feeling His presence in meditation, you will see that gradually the Unreal becomes real, and this world which you think is real will be seen as unreal. There is no joy like that realization", says Paramahansa Yogananda.

To be honest, it is difficult to describe in words the glory of the science of Yoga. As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in its eating. So, why not start practising yoga meditation from today. (Yes, I mean from today!) Let me give you some hints from Chapter VI of holy Gita: Sit in a quiet place on a soft cushion with your spine erect and straight. Close your eyes, and focus their gaze on the space between the eyebrows- the centre of concentration and the seat of intuition. Meditate as deeply as you can without winking your eyes. Those who go deep enough in their concentration and meditate regularly are sure to penetrate the 'third eye' and feel God's presence.

However, for actual training and practice, you shall have to seek guidance of a 'true Guru'. I use the word 'true Guru' because "in this age.....it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning", as correctly observed by Mahatma Gandhi once.

Without realization through meditation, religion is the most mysterious book of all. You will never be able to understand it. So, make religion real by scientific methods of yoga. Science gives you definiteness and certainty. "If I have not spent hours seeking God in meditation, I would not have known that religion is a science", said Paramahansa Yogananda.

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Dr. Pradeep Kumar Singh

The infectious corona pandemic has affected entire humanity. This disease appeared about 1-year ago and covered the entire world within 3-months. Different countries have been struggling with the disease in their own way. In India too, a 40-day lockdown was imposed from 25-March. But, as the disease is not expected to leave quickly, the conditions are being gradually relaxed, to let the system run.

The pandemic has affected almost every aspect of human life. It is said that, "the first happiness is to have a healthy body, and second happiness is to have sufficient money". That is, both physical health and financial condition should be good for a happy life. But even with the continuous efforts of the government and administration in the pandemic period, both have got badly affected. In fact, the nature is almighty, and the human efforts have limitations. In this disaster, both physical health and economic condition had a very close relationship, if the effort is made to save one, the chances of getting the other affected increase. It is said, "if there is life, there is the world". Also, "if wealth is lost, nothing is lost, but if health is lost, something is lost". That is, the

Corona continues to wreak havoc

health should be given priority over money. Thus, most of the countries including India imposed lockdown to save physical health, which is showing a huge impact on the economy. But theories also have practical limits. Other activities of life cannot be suspended for a long time. Therefore, according to the Prime Minister's time-tested principle "Jaan bhi, Jahan bhi", the activities are being taken forward in a phased manner. Still, it will take time to restore normalcy in every sphere of life.

So far, more than 8-crore people have got infected with corona, of which about 18-lakh have died, and more than 5.7-crore have recovered. The average mortality in the world is about 3%. Death rate was more than 20% in the month of April, which is gradually decreasing. The death rate in this pandemic may have been low, but the situation remains appalling due to high infection rate and lack of treatment for the disease. The maximum number of daily cases of infection 7,36,117 was detected on 17-December, while the maximum number of deaths 13,783 occurred on 16-December. Global data suggest that the three

months October-November-December indicate the third wave of the corona pandemic. This wave appears to be more contagious and deadly, and is still continuing. The United States ranks first in total infected cases (about 1.98 crore), and India in second place (1.02-crore). The US ranks first in pandemic deaths (around 3.43 lakh), and India in third place (about 1.48 lakh). Brazil faced more deaths than India (about 1.91 lakh). Brazil, Russia and France rank third, fourth and fifth respectively in total infected cases. While Brazil, Mexico and Italy are in the second, fourth and fifth position in terms of total deaths.

Among other affected countries, Andorra ranks first with 101,842 infected cases per million population, while Montenegro and Luxembourg are second and third, respectively. Similarly, San Marino ranks first with 1678 pandemic deaths per million population. The situation is similar for the Belgium. Slovenia, Bosnia and Italy rank third, fourth and fifth respectively. There have been approximately 1200 or more deaths per million in these three countries. The data is constantly changing. It is very

interesting to see here that although all these countries have been badly affected by the pandemic, yet only a few of these could attract focus of media coverage. Probably because the total number of infected people and the deaths in these countries has been much less than that in the countries which have been in media focus, due to very small population of most of them. The highest population among these countries is in Italy, 6.04 crore. The population in other countries is very small, even the population of San Marino is just 34-thousand. Perhaps that's why Italy remained in focus of media. Anyway, there is more focus on developed, rich and powerful countries, because they are more relevant in the world order.

Given the global scenario, the corona pandemic situation in India, with a population of about 138-crore, can be considered more or less controlled. The total number of infected people has reached about 1.02 crore so far, and about 1.48 lakh deaths have also been reported. It is a matter of satisfaction that about 98.07 lakh people have got recovered and the average death rate is less than 1.5%, which is half of the

global death rate. The average death rate in April was more than 28%. In the last 8-9 months, various aspects of the corona pandemic have been discussed in the media. Also, there has been significant development in healthcare facilities in the country in this duration. Society has undoubtedly benefited from the advisories on pandemic prevention and health care. In the early stages pandemic, lack of specific knowledge about the symptoms and prevention of the disease, or lack of facilities in the healthcare system, could have also been the cause of high mortality.

Currently, the US is passing through the third wave of the Corona pandemic, while Brazil, Russia and France all suffer from the second wave. Although a second wave of the pandemic was observed in some parts of India also, the overall rate of spread is decreasing in the country. The peak of the pandemic wave has passed in September. The maximum daily number of infected people 97,859 was observed on 16-September, and the maximum daily deaths 1,283 was reported on 15-September during the peak days. However, the

maximum daily deaths in the country 2,006 was reported on 16-June, when spread of the pandemic was on the rise.

The pandemic continues to wreak havoc. The country is still facing 20-25 thousand new infected cases and 200-400 deaths daily. Despite precautions, there are reports of infection among people working in different areas. The recent news of a relatively more infectious new strain B.1.1.7 of the corona virus in Britain is frightening. It takes time to understand the impact of new strains, and by then the infection spreads in society. Vaccination has begun in a few countries. Some side effects of the vaccination have also come to light. Usefulness of the vaccine on the new strain of corona is yet to be explored. The vaccination of 138-crore population with very limited trained manpower (in proportion to population) in the country is extremely challenging, and cannot be possible without public support. Overall uncertainty continues. Precaution is the only protection, that is, maintaining and enhancing the body's immunity along with "2-yard distance and mask" is very important.

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Globalization and Protectionism

Bharat Jhunjunwala

Global consultancy firm Price Waterhouse Coopers has said that India has the potential to become world's No 2 economy in 2050 after China if it adopts the required structural reforms. The question is which structural reforms? The "structural" reforms of demonetization and GST, though touted as path-breaking etcetera have led to a secular decline in our GDP growth rates. Remember that international agencies like these had supported these steps of the Government. So, let us think through the challenges lest we lose the No 2 slot.

The challenge of the decade is how to manage the new technologies. A driverless Metro Train was inaugurated in the country recently. Good. But Matthew D Johnson, Professor at St. Stephen's University, Canada has forecast that robots will displace 50% of jobs by 2035. The situation will be much worse by 2050 when India has the potential to become No 2 in the world. The total employment in the organized sector has been declining in the country in the last many years while large numbers of youth are entering the labour market. Let also provide jobs to the backlog of unemployed; we are adding to the unemployed by killing the existing jobs, in part, by adopting new technologies. Robots are making pizzas and serving to the customers in human-less shops in the United States today. Wherefrom will the crores of our small shop owners and youth make a living then? A restaurant in Kerala recently introduced robotic waiters. So, jobs are vanishing. On the other hand, the small industries that are in the forefront of job creation are under pres-

sure from big companies that manufacture through global value chains. A large pharmaceutical manufacturer in India may be importing raw materials from China, containers from Brazil, electronic equipment from Germany and logistics software from India. They roam the world looking for the lowest prices for raw materials and highest prices for their finished goods. They also get "economies of scale." The cost of production is less when undertaken on a large scale. A small pharmaceutical company cannot possibly compete with these large companies because it has to buy raw materials locally even if they are expensive; and sell the finished goods locally even if the price is less. The small entrepreneur may be a graduate who is the purchase manager, production manager, human resource manager, accountant, finance manager and marketing manager of his small unit. How can she possibly compete with the numbers of Engineers and PhDs employed by big companies for each of these functions?

If our small industries come under pressure, if the job-creation suffers then the youth entering into the job market will engage in counter-productive criminal activities instead of productive activities. This is the logical result of adopting efficient production by hi-tech global value chain driven big companies. Thus, global consultancy firm Arthur D Little and Bank of America have said that local production should be encouraged and small industries should be provided assistance. I do not think the "encouragement" and "assistance" will be effective given the huge and ever-increasing gap in the technologies and global value chains developing between small- and

large companies. "Encouragement" and "assistance" means that the big- and small will continue to compete in the market. This will not work in the coming decade just as it has not worked in the last three decades of liberalization. I recall a report commissioned by the Manmohan Singh Government that suggested that clusters of small industries must be established to enable them reduce their cost of production by making community water pollution treatment plants, for example. That did not work. We will necessarily have to provide "protection" rather than "encouragement" and "assistance" to our small businesses to enable them to stand competition from large companies in order to provide jobs to our youth.

The protection provided to domestic- and small industries may lead to them making sub-standard or expensive products. They will be able sell their shoddy products in the domestic markets because good quality products made by large- and foreign companies would be subject to high taxes and get priced out of the market. An example of this was the production of the shoddy Ambassador cars in India for three decades till Sanjay Gandhi entered in collaboration with Maruti the eighties.

One possible way out is to limited robotic and large-scale production for exports. That will enable our industrialists to adopt frontline technologies and also obtain the benefits of cheap labour available in our country—but only for the exports. The country will get advanced technologies and jobs will be created in the export sector; while the domestic market will provide space to the small companies and they will create jobs. But

let us not fool ourselves. The "inefficient" production undertaken by the small manufacturers in India will lead to high cost of production. The garment that could be produced by a large company at Rs 200 will be produced by the small manufacturer at Rs 250. This will impose an "unnecessary" cost on the Indian consumer. This cost should be seen as a "employment tax." When the consumer pays Rs 50 more for the garment she will pay Rs 100 less for the loss due to increased crime. The choice before the Finance Minister is this: Will we ask Indian consumers to buy expensive domestic goods with jobs; or cheap foreign goods without jobs?

The demographic divide being touted as India's strength is slowly but inexorably moving towards becoming a demographic disaster. Demonetization, GST and Covid Pandemic have dealt three heavy blows to our people. Those who have lost their jobs are eking out a living by selling vegetables. According to one district-level official of the BJP from UP, the daily earning of vegetable sellers has declined from Rs 2,000-a-day to Rs 500 today. Today there are 20 vegetable vendors where there were only two previously. This decline in people's income will certainly explode—even if it takes a few years for that to happen.

The challenge for the next decade is to find a pathway between the efficiency of the job-eating large businesses; and the inefficiency of the job-creating small businesses.

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(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

Apprehension on farm bills

Sir,

This refers to the farmers agitation underway in the country. There is no mention of Minimum Support Price (MSP) to the farmers in the bills as is claimed by the Government that it shall be given to the farmers. How can anybody claim that MSP shall remain the same whereas there is no mention of continuation of the MSP in the bills and there are ample chances that the MSP shall be discontinued and the farmer shall suffer for inadequate knowledge about the open market.

Second is about mandi laws. The farmer is not so educated about laws. When the farmer will go to sell his produce to the market he will be exploited in the name of new farm bills by the officials of the Mandis.

Further, as mentioned by Rekha Mahajan in her article that not a single APMC (Agricultural Produce Market committee) is going to be closed but the farmer wants their assurance in the farmer bills in this country.

As per new bills, it is a choice to the farmers to sell their produce to the market or outside the market. It is already available to the farmers and the farmers of Jammu and Kashmir are sell-

ing their Apple crop throughout the country without any barrier.

Third is contract farming. In this regard it may be mentioned that if there is less price in the market than the price agreed to in the contract, then the company will purchase the produce from the open market and the poor farmer will not be in position to get his contract completed without intervention of the judicial system.

The Farmer knows that his land can not be taken by the company but he will suffer in the hands of the company if the price at the time of sale is adverse due to any reason.

The farmer of Punjab Haryana and Uttar Pradesh is not so simple that anybody or political party can misguide him.

We the people of whole country appreciate the good steps taken by the Government to improve the financial condition of the farmers and also request to the present Government to accede to the genuine concerns of the farmers in the larger interest of the country as the farmer is the Anndata and contributor to the GDP growth

Hem Dogra
Jammu

Ladies everywhere

Sir,

This has reference to the news item, "J&K gets first woman bus driver", DE Dec 29,2020. I too appreciate the lady bus driver of our J&K UT, but we must not overlook many of our local and particularly nomadic females commercially driving horse carts on roads to sell milk, vegetables and transporting fodder etc. Besides, girls and ladies are driving daily scooters, bikes and cars carrying families and parents etc.

Ladies, nowadays, also are on borders guarding the country, helping in interior security, piloting

Rafale fighter aircraft etc. Rather it is insult to lady folk to say that lady is doing this or that. Both males and females are doing interchangeable daily chores. We see males preparing foods in all banquets, restaurants, hotels. Males are washing in laundries. So preparing food or washing clothes or driving vehicles or piloting aircrafts, or guarding borders is now unisex and not a thing for a particular gender. Anyway our lady bus driver Pooja Devi deserves all moral support but must not be out of proportion.

Rami Pandotra
Jammu

Readers Write