

FRIDAY SERMONS

Without getting into the exchanges between the J&K Waqf Board leader Darakshan Andrabi and National Conference politicians, one must appreciate the importance of the Friday sermons from hundreds of mosques across the UT. The sermon is a powerful tool of mass communication and is given when the congregation is in full attention and submission. Hence its impact is more powerful. Andrabi has categorically denied having issued any fiat for a uniform sermon to all the Imams. What seem to have happened is the suggestions being made by her and also others that this platform must be used more constructively to address the burning issues of society. The major issue facing people in J&K is the drug abuse and its rising tendencies among the young including girls. In Kashmir, the women not getting married because of the high cost of wedding is a huge problem. The rising cases of domestic violence are issues that is less spoken of but even then well documented. Why the clerics must not speak about these issues in a mosque where hundreds of devotees are gathered once in a week and in total submission to the Almighty? If Darakshan Andrabi or Mirwaiz Moulvi Umer Farooq has suggested this to the clerics there is nothing wrong in it. It's the responsibility of the clerics and imam of the mosques to speak from the pulpit to change society for good. Politicising such a recommendation is petty and not helpful. Politicians can also chip in with speaking on burning issues of society at their public contact programmes. Bringing in societal changes is everyone's responsibility and cannot be left to religious leaders alone, and must never become a political issue. The suggestions of Mirwaiz and Andrabi to use the platform of Friday sermons effectively to spread a message on the burning issues of people should be welcomed and not made into a political slugfest.

Sharadiya Navratri: Awakening women's power through the worship of Maa Durga



--Smt Savitri Thakur

Sharadiya Navratri is a sacred festival in Indian culture that celebrates strength, faith, spiritual practice and self-purification. Worshipping the nine forms of Maa Durga inspires us to embrace courage, restraint, patience, compassion and self-confidence in our lives. These nine days are not merely an occasion for worship and prayer, but also a time to recognise the strength within ourselves and resolve to fulfil our responsibilities towards society.

Each day of Navratri brings a special message. Maa Shailputri inspires firm determination, Maa Brahmacharini represents penance and discipline, Maa Chandraghanta embodies courage, and Maa Kushmanda inspires creativity. Maa Skandamata represents maternal affection, Maa Katyayani the fight against injustice, Maa Kalaratri fearlessness, Maa Mahagauri purity, and Maa Siddhidatri the fulfilment of spiritual practice.

Through fasting, meditation, the chanting of mantras and service, we can focus our minds and bring positivity and discipline into our lives. True spiritual practice is that which purifies our thoughts, brings sensitivity to our behaviour and inspires us to work

for the welfare of others.

Worshipping the Goddess and respecting women's power

In Indian tradition, women are regarded as embodiments of Shakti, or divine feminine power. The form of Maa Durga reminds us that, alongside affection and compassion, women possess remarkable courage, leadership abilities and the capacity to overcome challenges. Today, women are demonstrating their talent and capabilities in every field, including education, science, sports, administration, entrepreneurship, agriculture and politics.

Genuine respect for women must not be limited to the worship of goddesses. It is our responsibility to ensure that every girl has equal opportunities for education, healthcare, safety and advancement. Efforts to make women self-reliant, respect their decisions and provide them with an environment free from discrimination are what give true meaning to the worship of the Goddess.

When a woman becomes educated and self-reliant, her positive influence extends to her entire family and society. Women's empowerment is therefore not merely a matter of women's development; it is a cornerstone of national progress.

From respecting women to nation-building under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi: A new vision for women and child development

The Ministry of Women and Child Development aims to create a safe, healthy environment full of opportunities for women and children. Maternal and child health, nutrition, girls' education, women's safety and economic self-reliance are among the priorities of our collective efforts.

To make women's empowerment an integral part of national development, several important initiatives have been undertaken

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by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. The government's vision extends beyond women's development to enabling them to lead the development process.

In this direction, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, is a historic initiative that provides for the reservation of one-third, or 33 per cent, of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. This is an important step towards increasing women's participation in the country's democratic system and strengthening their role in decision-making.

The Central Government has prioritised women's safety and health alongside their social, economic and political empowerment. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign promotes a positive attitude towards girls and encourages their education. Mission Shakti focuses on women's safety, support and empowerment, while Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 strengthens maternal and child nutrition.

The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana plays an important role in providing financial assistance to eligible pregnant and breastfeeding women in accordance with prescribed provisions.

Resolve to respect and serve women this Navratri

Sharadiya Navratri teaches us that the true meaning of strength lies not merely in possessing power, but in using it for truth, justice and public welfare. On this sacred occasion, let us all resolve to provide girls with opportunities to progress, respect women's contributions, and come forward to help women and children in need.

Let us make the spiritual practice of these nine days a means of bringing positive change into our lives. May our faith become a source of inner strength, our devotion pave the way for service, and our resolve give new direction to women's empowerment and child welfare.

We pray to Maa Durga that, through her grace, every family may be blessed with happiness, peace and prosperity; every woman may gain the strength to live with self-respect and become self-reliant; and every girl may fulfil her dreams. Let us work together to build an India where women are respected, children's futures are secure, and equal opportunities reach every individual.

Heartfelt greetings to everyone on the occasion of Sharadiya Navratri.

Jai Mata Di!

(The author is the Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development.)

REPEATING STORY OF HUMAN BIRTH — UNCONTROLLED

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

Imagine yourself riding in a chariot travelling along a road of peace, bliss and liberation (Kathopanishad 1.3.3-4). You have decided to give the reins (mind) to the chariot driver (intelligence). The mind is uncontrolled; that is, the reins are loose. The chariot driver is foolish and allows this to happen. The horses (senses) go crazy, attracted by the illusions of the material world (The Bhagavad-Gita 7.14). They leave the road and enter a wild forest full of ferocious animals (lust, greed and anger). All are devoured; the soul loses its material body and takes rebirth with the same senses, mind and intelligence (15.8) in a new body (chariot), and another journey begins.

What should have been done? The soul, a part of God (15.7), should have taken shelter in God — the Almighty-while travelling on the road full of dangers (8.15) all around it. God would then have become the chariot driver of life, as Lord Krishna became for Arjuna. The mind would have been controlled with the help of God — the Omniscient. The senses would have been forced to behave and not get distracted by the all-pervading 'Maya' (material attractions).



And the soul would have continued along the road of peace (18.62), bliss (5.21) and liberation (18.62).

For this to happen, one must be very determined. Let us consider the degree of difficulty. What is the mind like? It is a faculty created by God for us souls to think, feel and will freely. The mind is part of our

subtle body (7.4), along with intelligence and 'ahankar' (ego). It is fickle, forceful, strong and obstinate. It is extremely difficult to control (6.34), being subtle and, therefore, very powerful. It must be controlled; otherwise, it can cause a great deal of trouble, and it does.

Why is the mind so difficult to control?

Because it has to be purified through spiritual practices, especially chanting (10.23). Ahankar will not let us take shelter in God, who alone can help us control the mind (7.14). Without God's help, our nature, controlled by the three modes, would not even allow us to want to control the mind.

What happens as a result of an uncontrolled mind? The mind favours the world over God, and thus the soul becomes bound to the world. Lust is already present in the mind, intelligence and body (3.40). One comes under the control of lust, greed and anger (16.21), and one becomes one's own enemy (6.6). Diseases are caused by imbalances in 'kapha' (cough), 'pitta' (acidity) and 'vata' (gas). Greed causes cough, anger causes acidity, and lust causes gas (Shri Ramcharitmanas, Uttar Kand, 120 Kha 15). Mental diseases take charge.

How, then, can the mind be controlled? Lord Krishna has given detailed instructions in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita. Spiritual practices, especially meditation, really help, as does 'pranayam'. God provides spiritual intelligence to help us control the mind. Human life is then well utilised in the present, and one will be on the path to attaining liberation.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a columnist; Views presented are personal.

Building the foundation for a new generation

Aradhita Singh

Not so long ago, news of a terror attack in an Indian city barely surprised anyone, because it had happened before and seemed likely to happen again. One year it was Delhi, the next Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad or Mumbai. Television showed the same images: twisted vehicles, crowded hospitals, relatives searching for the missing. For Indians who came of age in the 2000s, this was the background noise of growing up. Terrorism was not a distant border problem. It had reached the markets, trains and streets of ordinary life.

For millennials, those years are lived memory. For much of Gen Z, they are a documentary or a story told by parents. That gap matters, because every generation judges its country by what it has experienced. What feels routine to one may be the hard-won result of sacrifice and difficult choices for another.

The early 2000s were hopeful and fragile at once. The economy was opening up and the middle class was dreaming bigger. Yet the 2001 attack on Parliament, the 2006 Mumbai train blasts and the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, which claimed 166

lives, exposed deep gaps in the country's security architecture. The 2008 assault put cross-border terrorism on the global radar and raised hard questions about intelligence coordination and coastal defence.

Reform followed. The National Investigation Agency was set up in 2008, and intelligence sharing and coastal security were strengthened. These steps did not end the danger. The Pune German Bakery blast in 2010, the Mumbai serial explosions of 2011 and the twin blasts in Hyderabad in 2013 showed that terror networks could still strike.

The lesson was plain: reacting well after an attack was not enough. India needed to detect plots early, dismantle the networks behind them and treat terrorism as an ecosystem of people, money and infrastructure rather than a string of isolated incidents.

After 2014, the Modi government built its security policy around zero tolerance for terror, with closer intelligence coordination, pre-emptive action, tighter investigations and a crackdown on terror financing. The aim was to neutralise threats before they turned into bloodshed.

Its stance on cross-border terrorism also hardened. The 2016 surgical



strikes and the 2019 Balakot air strike showed a readiness to respond militarily to major attacks. Counterterrorism became tied more openly to deterrence, and the message was that terror would now carry costs well beyond diplomatic protest.

Set against the 2000s, the change is visible. The serial bombings that repeatedly rocked India's big cities have become far rarer. Terrorism has not vanished, and threats in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere demand constant alertness. Still, the distance from that earlier decade is significant.

Gen Z feels this in everyday life. Commuting to college, riding the metro, strolling through a mall, at-

tending a concert or booking a holiday all rest, in part, on a sense that public places are safe. Few people think about the institutions that make this possible. For a generation raised amid widening opportunity, planning a future without bracing for the next big attack can feel normal. But that confidence is neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Security and development are also bound together. Factories need secure supply chains, tourism needs public trust, and digital payments need defences against cyber threats. National security is not separate from development; it is one of the conditions that allows development to continue.

The past decade has brought a major expansion of highways, airports, railways and digital public infrastructure. UPI has transformed everyday payments. Their durability depends on the state's ability to protect critical infrastructure and respond to new threats.

That link grows stronger as India aims to become a developed nation by 2047. Building creates opportunity; protecting what has been built allows it to last. India's success will be judged not only by how much it builds, but by how well it safeguards it.

India's standing in the world tells a similar story. In the 2000s, major attacks repeatedly put its security weaknesses under the global spotlight. Today its international role spans economic partnerships, technology cooperation and diplomacy, and its 2023 G20 presidency offered a prominent stage for that growing role. Influence abroad draws on economic and technological strength, but credibility rests on a country's ability to protect its people and interests.

For young people raised on digital payments, new infrastructure and widening horizons, all of this can look like progress taking its natural course.

It is not. The security environment in which a country grows is neither automatic nor permanent. It depends on policy choices, institutional strength and the unrelenting work of those entrusted with protecting the nation. India's counterterrorism journey has been shaped by reforms and security institutions across successive governments. Since 2014, the Modi government's focus on stronger capabilities, preventive action and a more assertive strategic posture has become a defining feature of it. Holding on to these gains demands sustained vigilance, because terrorist networks keep adapting.

As India heads towards 2047, today's young will inherit both the opportunities development has created and the duty to preserve the conditions behind them.

For millennials, the fears of the 2000s are lived experience. For many in Gen Z, they are fast becoming history.

Real progress is not a generation that has forgotten fear, but one with the confidence to dream beyond it. For those spared the anxieties of their elders, understanding the journey from vulnerability to resilience is the surest way to value the peace they have inherited.