

## Shri Amarnathji Shrine – Caring Yatris

**Sh Daya Sagar**

- 1. For about 1000 years the History of Bharat has been written by others or has been written for others. There have been surely some misrepresentation of facts or tailored presentation of the Identity of Bharat and he people . Utmost need has been felt to have a look into the documents and descriptions that that are available to the present day Bharatbasi and the world community.**

**It has to be acknowledged that the History of Bharat , Kashmir and Himalaya kingdoms has to be traced from the times of Samrat Ashok since Kashmir was part of Empire of Ashoka. After the commencement of Chrishtian Era , Valley / its surroundings were invaded by Tartars and so on. Lalitaditay is most famous of known Hindu Kings. Similarly there is need for working on the history of the Shri Amarnathjee Yatra and the Holy Amarnathjee cave. The research has to be carried atleast as back as 1.5 milleniums and hence the project study need be sponsored by some institution, may be Sri Amarnathjee Shrine Board ( Jammu and Kashmir Shri Amarnathji Shrine Act 2000) as well. It said that Kishtwar – Seru Route was another route known to people of Kishtwar J&K and mountainous region. It is also said that Kashmiri Pandits, who doggedly refused conversion to Islam during the days of Sultan Sikander (1387-1407AD) fled to Kishtwar for shelter and safety, trekked the same route to go Shiva Holy Cave.**
- 2. In the recent years ( particularly after establishment of Shri Amarnathjee Shrine Board 2001 ) controversies have erupted over the start of starting and duration of Amarnath yatra. The controversies have to end since some elements have started using the controversies to create differences between the Hindu Muslim.**
- 3. The reasons put forth by administration for putting time restrictions as regards Yatra more lie in the weather. No doubt SASB has also named the reasons for limiting the Yatra Period on (i) demand by some religious groups /saints to limit it to only 30 days (ii) limitations for not carrying the free langars enroute to longer periods (iii) some text of the Nitish Sen Gupta enquiry report that enquired into the conditions as prevailed and the unforeseen climatic catastrophe of 1996 Yatra where in 243 ytries lost their life.**

4. **Shri Amarnath Shrine Board was created in 2001 for (i) management of yatra (ii) upgradation of facilities (iii) ensuring (a) safe (b) secure (c) convenient pilgrimage. There fore since the Yatra is centuries old , the route limitations are not unknown, the Baltal route though difficult can be cleared earlier and the Yatra is of high religious worth for Hindu, the SASB has to attend to the affairs more seriously and work for improving the conditions on priority. In case SASB is not able meet the financial needs for track improvement / relocations and safety from the donations let GOI / State government do the job. Even if there is a need for allocating INR 200 to 300 Cr to the state government for the purpose GOI must do it. Incase GOI / State Government has some political / social problems let it be debited as a long term loan to SASB and it can be cleared by SASB in the coming years out of the expected donations. If still there is difficulty GOI raise loans from ADB / WB for a social welfare project to be excuted on cost benefit basis. Still I do not think Rs.300 Cr is a worrying amount for state Government or GOI.**
5. **The Srinagar Leh route too remain under snow for many months but the road opening has been scheduled for May every year and mostly the road is cleared near to schedule. And in case the weather at any time becomes bad the traffic is stopped. No doubt the route to Amarnathjee cave is more difficult but looking at the importance the route has to be improved and job should have been taken much earlier. The Baltal route is not new but no much attention has been given to it for improvement and increasing the safety of the pilgrims . The Chandanwari route work is given to PDA where as it should have been given on regular basis to organisations like GREF/ JK R&B/ CPWD .**
6. **Why not to allow the Amarnath Yatra on regular basis ( weather permitting ) from May / June every year and continues till the weather permits. The period of 4 weeks from Vyaas Poornima to Raksha Bandan ( Raksha Poornima) can be treated like we treat navratras in case of Mata Vaishano devi jee when some people very particularly prefer to take the pilgrimage **Otherwise the Holy Cave ( 13500 foot above MSL ) is the abode of Bhawan Shiv and those holding Astha could go there any time weather permitting.****
7. **As per SASB figures from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2010 ie. 55 days ( Yatra stopped due to bad weather for 6 days ) 4,51,709 yatris performed the pilgrimage and during 2008 ( 18 June to 16 Aug 60 days ) 5, 33, 368 yatrics performed pilgrimage . In 2009 though the Yatra was scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> June but practically DUE TO BAD WEATHER IT COULD**

START ON 16 June From Baltal side and 27 June from Chandanbadi route, further as overall the weather was not fair only 3,92,653 yatris could perform yatra.

8. **In addition to the pilgrimage value , the yatris have another attraction for visiting the beauties and soothing weather of Kashmir valley during summers. The Yatra has swollen to Nearly 6.35 Lakh in 2011. Looking at the Religious fervor and the tourist attraction in Kashmir Valley , the numbers can easily touch 10 Lakh next year unless the communication , shelter and social / physical security hazards discourage the yatris from visiting the Holy Cave of Shiva.**
9. **So for just 10 lakh yatris the average load on the routes shall be 17000 yatris one way for 60 clear yatra days.** But the average can not be distributed so uniformly. Let us assume that in view of short duration yatra the peak would be around 35000 yatris visiting per day and number **could be as low as 1000 a day also. Imagine in case 35000 yatris have darshan in a day then people on the TRACKS to and from cave would be upto 70000 in a single day from Pajtarni onwards.** Even if we assume that the yatris would be equally distributed on Chandanwari and Baltal routes , present status of the two tracks are not at all capable of handling such yatri load. The studies got conducted so far by the government recommend allowing not even one third of the expected load.
10. Looking at the present programmes and plans of SASB & government more need be done as regards:
  - (i) **The number of Yatris : As per disclosures made by SASB the maximum possible yatra days could be not more than net 60 days unless very very extraordinary projects as regards the communication infrastructure are taken up by the SASB or the State / center government. Route : The condition of both the Routes (i) Pahalgam Chandanwari Sheshnag Mahaguna Top Pantarni route (ii) Baltal Sangam (Panjtarni) route is not good. In spite of the calamities and disasters faced during the last 15 years no much attention has been paid so far. Both the routes meet after Panjtarni and after that the whole load has to be taken by the route from Panjtarni / Sangam ( Amravati and Panjtarni ) to Holy Cave Shrine .**  
**Imagine how can such a load be safely handled .**
  - (ii) **Track width and safety :** The position of Baltal route is still bad. In spite of so many yatris preferring this route , SASB / Government have not taken any major project worth improving the route. So, in case SASB can not afford to bear the cost of the track improvement , government of India must fund the route improvement / modification project. **A comprehensive project should be got drawn out on war footing basis involving experts / consultants from national / international level with the terms of reference like (i) bearing a maximum load upto 70000 to 80000 yatris on the**

tracks on a particular day and accommodating them in a manageable manner (ii) ensuring enroute protection to yatris against bad weather (iii) making available regular shelters enroute (iv) creating provisions for the Langars / social / volunteer groups (v) health / social security needs (vi) disaster management (vii) available time and weather limitations for doing infrastructural improvements. (viii) Utilities / food arrangements enroute incase free langars are not able to handle longer durations .

**It has to be kept in mind that Government of India will have to spend a few hundred crores for this purpose and that too in next two to three years maximum . No doubt highly professional and technically / infrastructurally equipped agencies will have to be associated / assigned the work in view of special / difficult working conditions.**

NO DOUBT ADDITIONAL ROUTES TOO NEED BE Looked into Like :

**Kishtwar – Seru Route** ::Kishtwar -Seru route is said to be another route known to people of Kishtwar J&K and mountainous region. It is also said that Kashmiri Pandits, who doggedly refused conversion to Islam during the days of Sultan Sikander (1387-1407AD) fled to Kishtwar for shelter and safety, trekked the same route to go Shiva Holy Cave.

**Via Zojilla Pass::** The Zojilla route to the Holy Cave of Amarnath has also been a known shorter route . It could be trekked on foot and lands down near cave from the Amarnath peak. :

**Sacki- Pansal route** : Some geographical studies of the region have also revealed that Sacki-Pansal route could also be the possible route leading to the Holy Shiva Shrine Cave. Though on the face of it terrain could be very difficult and weather hazards could cause disasters .

**Possibilities for modern disaster management techniques and methods could be looked** into in the process of finding ways and means to reduce peak loads on the conventional tracks. It has to be kept in mind that the a few decades **earlier Baltal was also not that regular route ..**

- (iii) Stay : The present status of the available boarding facilities enroute is very inadequate.
- (iv) Health : **The infrastructure would need a very very special attention. During 2011 yatra nearly 100 ( subject to correction ) people have died enroute. All those who died were not old people. Although SASB / Government had made arrangements but still some thing more need be done. Looking at the importance of the YATRA in addition to main stations enroute, as far as possible qualified doctors & lifesaving emergency medicines / back ups should be made available every 500 meter interval at SASB / Government cost to yatris.**
- (v) Rescue : There is utmost need for looking at the support system available during yatra for rescuing the yatris in case of any disturbance due to rush / weather / .disturbances. Much needs be done.

- (vi) Weather : No doubt man has no control over the Nature but man could take preventive measures. So a very adequate and effective weather information / warning system has to be installed. **As far as possible the teams deputed for the purpose during yatra must have 50% of the team members who were also part of the team year before**

**11. Socio- economic support to the people / yatries around :**

- (vii) Pithoo / palki : The route is long , difficult and high altitude. So the yatries may need to acquire the services of pitthoo / pony / palki. **This has not to be commercialized and taxed as has been done by SMVDSB. No tax should be taken from the pithoo / ponywala/ palki. If possible to ensure that the pithoo/ ponywala/palki to need to survive let the government / SASB subsidise the charges of pithoo/ ponywala/ palki so that the poor / handicapped / old yatries can honorably perform yatra.**
- (viii) Helicopter Service fare should be subsidized by SASB / Government ( surely for the infirm / handicapped / ) in view of the importance of Yatra to Hindu.
- (ix) **First preference the SASB should lay on spending the donation from yatries on the welfare of the local village population around Pahalgam and Baltal areas.**
- (x) **The SASB should lay first stress on the school education of the children belonging to villages around the Holy Cave route.** They should be supported for taking up the professional education as first preference.
- (xi) **Any school / college / university SASB takes up should extend free education to atleast the local people / people around if not to all .** This aspect has been ignored by SMVDSB and the SMVDS University is no good to the poor and people around the shrine / needy Hindu. Government colleges give free education but Shri Mata Vaishano Devi University charges heavy fee from the college students.
- (xii) health care of the local population has to be the prime objective if not for all. **The donations received by SASB should be used for such purposes in the first instance.**
- .....September  
2011.....