

# daily Excelsior

Established 1965  
Founder Editor S.D. Rohmetra

## AAY and PHH ration cards under scrutiny

**T**hough India is a developing country, governments of different parties at the centre have always introduced schemes to take care of the poorest among the poor as well as the poor. This includes various benefits, and taking care of their monthly ration is one of them. Right now, three categories of ration cards are prevalent as per Gol orders: AAY (Antyodaya Anna Yojana), PHH (Priority House Holds), and NPHH (Non-Priority House Holds). While AAYs are the poorest among the poor and special subsidised food grains, amounting to 35kg per family, are provided to them, PHHs are provided 5kg per member at a subsidised rate of Rs3 per kg for rice and Rs2 per kg for wheat, while NPHHs are provided rations at Rs15 per kg of rice and Rs12 per kg of wheat. All this is provided under the National Food Security Act, 2013, implemented in J&K in February, 2016. However, as usual, a special provision was made to provide additional food grains to the beneficiaries in Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir Food Entitlement Scheme (JKFES) was introduced, which provides an additional 5 kg of food grains per beneficiary over and above the NFSA scale, as of July 1, 2016. Under JKFES, the food grains are procured from FCI at OMSS rates and then distributed among the beneficiaries at Rs 12 per kg for wheat, Rs 13 per kg for flour, and Rs 15 per kg for rice. This JKFES scheme is right now in abeyance.

Over and above keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic rations for AAY and PHH, are being provided free of charge. Practically, the LG Administration is taking care of every need of the poor in Jammu and Kashmir with full support from the Gol. Despite budget constraints and other factors, the priority is that no one goes without food.

But things are never as smooth as they seem to be in Jammu and Kashmir, and the FCS and CA Department is not an exception. A massive increase of almost twenty lakhs in the AAY and PHH card holders has been noticed post-creation of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, which is beyond comprehension and as such requires proper scrutiny. There are clear-cut guidelines to identify who is to be registered under AAY and PHH with proper documents to support the claim, yet how the public has managed to get themselves fraudulently registered is a matter of serious concern. Ration meant for the needy and poor has been swindled by different means with active inside support. The administration from time to time has plugged various loopholes, like mandatory Aadhaar linkage, and now makes biometric verification mandatory to get ration. Over 30,000 bogus ration cards had been cancelled after this Aadhaar exercise. Earlier, to plug the malpractice of the exchange of good quality wheat at various flour mills, the scheme of providing only wheat was introduced. Separate identification bags are being used with clear-cut markings to identify ration supply material. But connen are always one step ahead of government efforts to plug pilferage. This time it is making fraudulent ration cards under the AAY and PHH categories. The twenty-lakh increase in AAY and PHH ration cards requires proper investigation. The LG administration has rightly pointed out the suspected fraud and asked the FCS and CA Department to conduct proper scrutiny within the set period. Notification is out, and if no documents are produced with the respective TSO within the specified time, then the ration card will be automatically cancelled. In addition to the cancellation, those officials who helped in issuing these fraudulent ration cards must also be booked, and departmental action must be initiated against them, among other things, to recover the loss to UT from their salary or pension. This time, let an example be set: there is no place for corruption and corrupt under the LG administration.

## Three years of Indo-Pak ceasefire

**T**ime is always a big factor, and the once constantly under-fire border residents of Jammu and Kashmir are now enjoying the fruits of peace and development. We cannot choose or change our neighbours, and as such, a troublesome neighbour like Pakistan has always been a nemesis for the residents of border areas in Jammu and Kashmir. Three full-fledged wars and another one in the shape of the Kargil War had been enforced upon us, and the countless firing and shelling episodes had become the routine of the daily lives of the people residing in border villages. They suffered a lot, from not being able to till their fertile land to childrens missing school for months, no development works being undertaken due to firing and shelling, and extensive damages to the households as such. Life in temporary shelters for months, together with limited basic amenities, cannot be described in words here. Only true sufferers can feel the pain and suffering of these people. Despite a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan in 2003, repeated ceasefire violations by Pakistan have been routine, with over five thousand violations in 2020 alone. But the tough stand taken by the Gol since 2014 has changed the scenario. A simple policy of bullet for bullet, not succumbing to these blackmailing tactics, and an eye for an eye policy have produced unprecedented results: a total silence of Pakistani guns and shelling. With the resultant peace, Gol and the LG administration introduced massive border infrastructural projects: upgradation of roads, hospitals, and schools; special schemes for farmers; and loans for youth to enable them to live a normal life now. Special recruitment drives have also been undertaken for the youth of the border. There are still areas that require the administration's immediate attention, as three years of peace are insufficient to fill the development void. But the local administration is well aware of the facts, and efforts are on to bridge the gap at the earliest. Residents are happy to live a normal life now, and one hopes there are no more ceasefire violations in the future.

Droupadi Murmu

**O**n Constitution Day last year, I was delivering the valedictory address at the celebrations organised by the Supreme Court of India. Talking of justice, I thought of the under-trial prisoners and then could not resist speaking at length about their plight. I spoke from the heart, and it made an impact. On International Women's Day, I want to share some thoughts with you in the same spirit - straight from the heart.

Right from my childhood days I have remained perplexed about the status of women in society. On one hand, a girl child receives so much love from all around her and is even worshipped on auspicious days. On the other hand, she learns very soon that the possibilities open before her in life are fewer than those available to boys of her age. On one hand, a woman is respected for her innate wisdom, even appreciated as the central figure of the family who takes care of everybody. On the other hand, she has a limited role, if at all, in nearly all significant decisions about the family or even herself.

Over the years, as I stepped out of home, first as a student, then as a teacher and later in social service, I could not help but wonder about such paradoxical attitudes. Sometimes I felt that as individuals, a majority of us recognise men and women as equal. However, at a collective level, the same people impose limits on a half of us. During my lifetime itself, I have seen most individuals progressing towards the notion of equality. At the social level, however, old customs and traditions, like old habits, linger on.

This is the story of all women around

the world. Every other human being on earth begins life with a kind of hindrance. In the twenty-first century, when we have achieved unimaginable all-round progress, many nations are yet to have a woman as the head of the state or head of the government. At the other end of the spectrum, unfortunately, there are places in the world where even today women are considered lesser human beings; where even going to school can be a question of life and death for a girl!

This was not always so. In India, there were times when women were decision-makers. Our scriptures and our history talk of women known for their valour, scholarship or administrative skills. Today, again, countless women are of course contributing to the nation-building in their chosen fields. They are heading corporate firms and even serving in the armed forces. The only difference is that they have to prove their worth in two domains - they have to excel in their career and also in their homes. They do not complain but all they expect from society is that it respects their autonomy for women.

This leads to a curious situation. We do have a healthy representation of women at the grassroots level in various decision-making structures. But as we

## Her Story, My Story

# Why I am hopeful about gender justice



President of India, Droupadi Murmu

Therefore, I firmly believe that the social mindset needs to be changed. The deeply ingrained gender prejudices must be identified and purged to create a peaceful and prosperous society. Conscious efforts have been made to promote social justice and equality. But these steps have not proved adequate to ensure gender representation. In educa-

tion and jobs, for example, women lag far behind men more because of social conditioning than any design.

In a number of convocations I have attended in different parts of the country, I have noticed that women, if given a chance, often outperform men in academia. It is this indomitable spirit of Indian women and our society that gives me confidence about India emerging as the torchbearer of gender justice in the world.

It is certainly not the case that one half of humanity has had any head-start by keeping the other half behind. The fact is that this mismatch is hurting the whole of humanity, because the two wheels of its cart are unequal. Not only economic progress, but climate action too would speed up if women are included in decision-making. I am sure that the world will be a lot better place if women are made equal stakeholders in the progress of humanity.

I am, indeed, hopeful that the future is bright. I have seen in my life that people change, attitudes change. That is indeed the story of our race; otherwise we would still be living in caves. The story of women's emancipation has proceeded slowly, often painfully slowly, but it has proceeded only in one direc-

tion and has never made a U-turn. That is what gives me confidence to believe, as I have often stated, that the coming Amrit Kaal up to the centenary of India's independence belongs to young women.

What makes me hopeful is the fact that we as a nation began with a sound foundation of gender justice. About a century ago Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns during the freedom struggle encouraged women to cross the threshold and step out into the world. From those days, our society as a whole and women in particular have aspired to build a better future. Prejudices and customs not favourable to women are being done away with either through legislation or through awareness. This seemed to have positive impact as Parliament today has the highest number of women representation. Needless to say, my election as the President of the world's largest democracy is a part of the saga of women's empowerment. I believe the spirit of "innate leadership in motherhood" needs to be invoked to promote gender justice. A slew of government programmes to directly empower women, such as 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao', are steps in the right direction.

We should also appreciate the fact that societies take time to match step with the best of progressive ideas. But societies are composed of human beings - half of them women - and it is up to us, each of us, to hasten the progress. Thus, I wish to urge each of you to commit yourself to one change, in your family, neighbourhood or workplace - any change that would bring a smile on a girl's face, any change that would improve her chances of moving ahead in life. That is one request, as I said before, straight from the heart.

(The author is President of India)

# G20: Driving Women-Led Development

Amitabh Kant

**I**ndia's G20 Presidency comes at a critical juncture and an opportune time. Countries across the world are looking to build back better from the host of crises experienced over the past three years. From the COVID-19 pandemic to the ongoing climate crisis, it is now well-acknowledged that the impacts of a crisis are very often gendered, exacting their highest price on women and girls, impacting their safety, livelihoods and health.

India's Presidency of G20 brings an enormous focus on the role of women and gender equality. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has highlighted the imperative need for tackling critical issues of women's access to finance, entrepreneurship, and labor force participation.

On the domestic front, the Government of India has taken a conscious decision to place women's empowerment at the heart of its 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' development agenda, with a commitment to supporting their holistic development at all stages of life. The 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme has led to a 16-point improvement in the sex ratio at birth since 2014. The MUDRA Scheme that provides microfinance has over 70% women beneficiaries. Mission Poshan 2.0, an integrated nutrition support programme has served over 1.2 crore pregnant and lactating mothers. Several other steps, from the establishment of working

women's hostels, to the launch of various skills-development programmes, and initiatives to secure their safety and freedom from violence - all testify to India's concerted focus on securing the Suraksha (Safety), Suvridha (Convenience) and Swabhiman (Independence) of our women.

Increasingly and in line with our society's civilisational ethos - the Government is also recognising the centrality of 'Nari Shakti' to affect meaningful society-wide transformation. Simply put, there is a greater focus on the role of women as drivers of growth and agents of changes, and not simply as beneficiaries of development.

With India steering the efforts of the G20 in 2023 - the time has come for us to build on the momentum generated so far, and further this agenda of women-led development. Given that gender is a cross-cutting theme - affecting almost all the other development prospects we hope to see a renewed emphasis on gender equality across the entirety of the G20 Agenda, and its engagement groups.

In particular, we look forward to advancing concrete actions on the following themes:

First, supporting women's digital and financial inclusion. Globally, almost half (42%) of women and girls remain outside the formal financial system. Despite progress in financial inclusion rates, the gender gap has not narrowed and a 7% gap persists. Digital technology innovations, particularly

for information & communication, have the potential to accelerate women's economic empowerment. Yet, there remains a Digital Gender Gap, both in access to digital technology and to digital education. India has prioritised women's digital financial inclusion through the JAM or Jan Dhan-Aadhar-Mobile platform and this has allowed significant social protection programs to reach women directly as well as strengthened and women's economic empowerment. Through the G20, we must look at similar concrete ways to strengthen women's digital and financial inclusion.

Second, strengthening women's capacities to make them equal stakeholders in development. This is important both to facilitate the entry of, and to ensure continuity in women's participation in the economy and in society. For instance, despite education being wholly acknowledged as the cornerstone of empowerment - globally only 49% have achieved gender parity in primary education, 42% in lower secondary education, and 24% in upper secondary education. Globally, around 1.1 billion women and girls remain outside the formal financial system, many of whom also have limited access to digital technologies. Similarly, in countries across the world women perform significantly higher unpaid care work. Therefore, it is crucial that the G20 works together and drives consensus and actions around dismantling these long-

term structural barriers that women face and their lives and at work.

Third, enabling women's leadership at all levels of decision making. Today, India is being served by over 1.90 crore women in administrative offices, over 17,000 women elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions, and over 10,000 women in the defense forces. Such an approach to women-led development will be critical for ensuring that their unique perspectives, experiences and leadership styles are brought to the table, which in turn can lead to more inclusive and effective decision-making.

Finally, it is important to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes realised across various initiatives. For this, prioritizing gender-disaggregated data systems will be critical, as investing in the collection and sharing of gender-disaggregated data will be important for developing targeted interventions, and monitoring progress towards gender equality.

Although the interlinked crises the world has faced has set us back from achieving our common development goals - India's G20 presidency offers the opportunity for us to set the agenda for next phase development. In this window of opportunity, it is critical that we place women at the heart of our efforts so as to achieve a better tomorrow.

(The author is G20 Sherpa & former CEO, NITI Aayog, Govt of India.)

# Mahasamadhi Anniversaries of two Great Saints

Vivek Atray

**T**here is hardly any parallel in the whole universe to the guru-disciple relationship, which abides and flourishes in India even today. All other forms of human bonding and love are perhaps linked to ties of blood, romance or friendship, but the guru-disciple relationship is uniquely distinct in nature, being based on the selfless yearning of a guru for the spiritual progress of his disciple, and by the unconditional, all surrendering love of his protégé.

A glorious example of the exemplary relationship between a saint and his foremost disciple was provided by Swami Sri Yuktswar Giri and his peerless protégé, Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, author of "Autobiography of a Yogi", one of the most renowned spiritual classics of all time. This magnificent book outlines for us with disarming and inspiring insights, the years of grooming under the loving but unsparing eye of Sri Yuktswarji which led to the blossoming of Mukunda, the devotee, into the jagat-guru, or global guru, that Yoganandaji came to be.

A significant chapter from this great book titled, "Years in my Master's Hermitage" highlights the sheer quality of Sri Yuktswarji's train-

ing and the unstinting, unwavering receptivity, despite initial human trepidations, of Yoganandaji, who ultimately emerged as the father of yoga in the western world after having migrated to the

Satsanga Society of India (YSS) and later, in the US, its counterpart, Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) the global level sister-organisation of YSS.

These two bodies continue to disseminate the yoga-meditation teachings of Yoganandaji and emphasise the need for direct contact with God, along with the oneness of all true spiritual teachings of the world. Hundreds of thousands of devotees of these teachings vouch for the fact that their lives have undergone a tangible turn for the better, once they began the walk on this spiritual path in right earnestness.

Several incidents from those formative years of Yogananda's life under the watchful eye and strict but innately loving tutelage of Sri Yuktswarji, as described in "Autobiography of a Yogi,"

bring forth to the discerning reader the sheer hunger of the young Yoganandaji for contact with

the Divine, and the even greater determination of his guru to chisel his disciple's life in accordance with the finest spiritual laws.

The delicate, sensitive, love-permeated bond of the chela and his guru, along with the necessary concomitants of wisdom, forgiveness and heavenly love, constitute the real legacy of these two towering lives which were dedicated to the cause of upliftment of mankind from the threefold types of suffering - physical, mental and spiritual, that the destructive force of maya-delusion impels all men to go through.

The highest scientific meditation technique, Kriya Yoga, is the timeless and universal gift that Sri Yuktswarji and Yoganandaji, (guided by the divine param-gurus, Lahiri Mahasaya and Mahavatar Babaji), bequeathed to this world, which has been battered and bruised by inexorable karmic forces over several millennia.

The mahasamadhi divas of Sri Yoganandaji was on March 7 and of Sri Yuktswar on March 9. Even these neighbouring dates are perhaps indicative of the eternal bond between them. And the most priceless quality that enveloped their lives is love for God, a love that each one of us must seek to cultivate.



Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda Sri Sri Swami Sri Yuktswar Giri

United States at his guru's bidding. Yoganandaji established, in 1917, the Yogoda

bring forth to the discerning reader the sheer hunger of the young Yoganandaji for contact with

Anil Anand

**A**s much the political system of India talks against the dynastic politics - mostly from the electoral perspective to score brownie points - the more it is witnessing this trend-traveling from generation to generation and form one political leader to the other. There is no harm and there is nothing unconstitutional about the wards of political leaders have a right to pursue a political career, provided they are not foisted from the top.

A different kind of sonrise has taken place in the political horizon of the country which has almost gone unnoticed. More so in the cool environs of politically controversial and hot Kashmir Valley. A low-profile launch without trappings of a VIP son entering politics with fanfare. Not only that the new entrant to the terrain-tried and tested with success by his father - surprisingly chose to silently witness the proceedings of a youth rally held in the heart of Srinagar city.

Launching his son into politics by former Congressman and an old warhorse, Ghulam Nabi Azad, was as surprising as his severing ties with the Congress where he cut his political teeth. He did make an event, and rightly too, of his quitting Congress to form Democratic Azad Party since changed to Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) to meet requirements of the Election Commission of India. But not the launching of his son. Saddam Nabi Azad, 41, a businessman though a trifle late in following his father's foot-steps made his first public appearance at a DPAP youth rally held at once Kashmir's prestigious Nagin Club lawns. His plunge into politics was without any splash and did not make big headlines.

Nevertheless, this is an interesting development when Azad senior is making every effort to ensure that his new party establishes a connect with the people particularly after highly successful Jammu and Kashmir-leg of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat

Jodo Yatra (BJY) which attracted large section of the youth in the Valley. Is the young, dashing and handsome Saddam a counter-move to rally the youth behind DPAP?

It was not by chance that he was present at the youth rally which had been carefully planned to have a packed house of enthusiastic youth. DPAP chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad's son Saddam Nabi Azad has joined active politics, a party spokesperson confirmed after the rally. The clarification came though there was no formal ceremony to launch him into politics and induct in the party.

Purely from Jammu and Kashmir perspective dynastic politics has been an accepted norm now. And there is nothing new in yet another dynast entering politics. What makes it interesting is that Mr Azad had till date kept his wards out of political glare and unlike his many peers in politics both at the national and J&K levels never shown inclination to launch either his son or daughter into politics at least till the time he was ruling the roost in Congress.

Why now? This is an interesting and curious question.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's two generations - Dr Farooq Abdullah, his brother Dr Mustafa Kamal, sister Mrs Khalida Shah, and his (Farooq's) son Omar Abdullah, both former chief ministers, are already in politics. So are the daughter and son-Mehbooba Mufti and Tassduq Hussain Mufti, of another former chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed. The daughter became chief minister and son joined politics after the Mufti's demise.

There are others of the ilk of Bilal Lone and Sajjad Lone, sons of former minister and legislator who later turned separatist, Abdul Ghani Lone, who are running their father's party People's Con-

or mentioning his father's name," the DPAP sources said.

What role will he play in the DPAP or Jammu and Kashmir politics, is still not clear. Has he been drafted by Mr Azad to counter the younger set of leaders in rival National Conference, Peoples Democratic Party and Congress (in the aftermath of Mr Gandhi's BYJ in J&K)?

Saddam Azad, married to Delhi based fashion designer Gauri Karan, daughter of a former bureaucrat couple, has at least one task cut out for him before he gets going with his own agenda. Ostensibly, he has entered politics to help his father steer the fledgling DPAP to stability and create a niche for itself in the turbulent politics of J&K which is different from Omar Abdullah's and Mehbooba Mufti's cases.

They had entered politics in a comfort zone to carry forward their family legacy and became chief ministers whereas Mr Saddam Azad, though is attached to a political legacy, has forayed into politics under difficult circumstances, with a new political party and facing the onslaught in the Muslim majority Union Territory on his father's purported cosy relations with the Narendra Modi government.

What makes it interesting is that despite Ghulam Nabi Azad being the first chief minister from Jammu region, though his ancestors hailed from Kashmir Valley, chose to launch his son not from Jammu but the land of his ancestors. It is another matter that his mother Shamima Azad is a famed Kashmiri-folk singer.

Why Srinagar's Nagin Club and not his own native Chenab Valley in Jammu region or per se Jammu if not Delhi since he is heading a state-level party?

It seems that Azad senior has set his eyes on Kashmir-centric politics rather than Jammu which is considered a BJP-stronghold. And to compete with gen-next of Abdullahs, Muftis, Lones and Sozs.

(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

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