

## INDIA'S JOURNEY IN HEALTHCARE

India's pursuit of a healthier nation is an ongoing process characterized by substantial improvements in healthcare access, equity, and outcomes. Over the past decade, the country has made remarkable strides towards providing better healthcare for its population. These efforts have been fueled by visionary policies, comprehensive healthcare reforms, and a focus on achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Among the most transformative initiatives in this journey are the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY), Mission Indradhanush, and the development of India's digital health infrastructure.

One of the key milestones in India's healthcare reform journey was the launch of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY). This flagship initiative aims to provide health insurance of up to Rs. 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalizations. Covering 1,961 treatment procedures across 27 specialties, AB PM-JAY targets the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged families, enabling them to access quality healthcare services without financial burden.

Since its inception, the scheme has made significant progress. As of December 17, 2024, over 36.28 crore Ayushman Cards have been issued, offering health coverage to millions of Indian families. A notable feature of the program is its gender equity impact: women account for 49% of the Ayushman cards issued and almost 50% of the total hospital admissions, underlining the scheme's role in empowering women and ensuring they receive the necessary medical attention.

Moreover, AB PM-JAY has successfully empaneled over 30,932 hospitals across the country, ensuring that beneficiaries can avail treatment at a wide range of healthcare facilities. This large-scale enrollment of hospitals has made healthcare more accessible and has helped bridge the gap between underserved areas and quality medical services.

Parallel to AB PM-JAY, India's healthcare system has undergone a digital transformation with the introduction of the Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) initiative. The ABHA number acts as a unique identifier for individuals, allowing them to easily access and share their health records digitally. This initiative aims to streamline the sharing of healthcare data between patients, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders within the ecosystem.

As of December 22, 2024, over 71.81 crore ABHA numbers have been generated, and more than 46.53 crore health records have been linked with ABHA. This digital framework facilitates seamless healthcare delivery, reduces duplication of medical tests, and improves the coordination of care. Additionally, over 3.55 lakh health facilities have been registered on the Health Facility Registry (HFR), and 5.38 lakh healthcare professionals have been registered on the Health Professional Registry (HPR). This vast digital infrastructure is enabling better healthcare management, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the healthcare system.

The journey toward building a healthier nation is far from over, but the foundation laid by these transformative healthcare initiatives is setting India on a path to a brighter and healthier future. With continued focus on equity and digital healthcare solutions, India is poised to lead the way in healthcare innovation and progress.

## Empowering Farmers through Agricultural Innovations

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 23rd of December is observed as the National Farmers Day or Kisan Diwas across India to honour the former Prime Minister of India Choudhary Charan Singh with full enthusiasm and joy. On this day, the awareness among the citizens is created to understand the importance of farmers in the society for the overall social and economic development of the nation. On this day, farmers hardwork is recognised who play a critical role in ensuring food security and sustaining the economy. On this day not only the contributions of farmers are recognised but also the challenges they face are addressed. The history of National Farmers Day dates back to 2001, when the Government of India declared 23rd of December as a special day to honour the farmers. This decision was made in recognition of Chaudhary Charan Singh's efforts in improving the welfare of farmers. 23rd of December is celebrated as the birthday of Choudhary Charan Singh. He was born on 23 December, 1902. Several debates, seminars, webinars, quiz competitions, discussions, workshops, exhibitions, essays, functions etc. are organized by various institutions especially on agriculture across the nation. Choudhary Charan Singh was primarily a peasant and always led an extremely simple life. Choudhary Charan Singh held the office as the fifth Prime Minister of India from 28th July 1979 to 14th January, 1980. He is well known for the budget he represented in 1979. That budget was amal-

gamated to accomplish the needs of the farmers and included everything that a farmer expects. During his tenure as the Prime Minister, he introduced many policies to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. He took initiatives for the welfare of the farmers and united the farmers' community against the landlords and money lenders across the nation. He always followed the famous slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' given by the 2nd Prime Minister of India, Sh. Lal Bahadur Shastri. He was an avid writer and wrote several books depicting his thoughts on the lives of the farmers. He always tried to find out the solutions of various problems of the farming community. Choudhary Charan Singh passed on 29th of May, 1987 but his contributions for the farmers are still known. Sh. Charan Singh's peasantry background helped him to understand the real problems of the farmers and he did his best to solve them. He was a son of soil and he contributed immensely to improve the lives of the farmers. Choudhary Charan Singh is credited to formulate and implement the Zamindari Abolition Act. Farmers Day is celebrated to recognize his valuable services rendered to the farmers of the country. The famous 'Kisan Ghat' in New Delhi is dedicated to Choudhary Charan Singh due to his services for the farmers. Various agricultural institutions and farmers organize agricultural based programmes to pay homage to their beloved leader.

India is predominantly an agricultural country and agriculture is the backbone

Remain calm, serene, always in command of yourself.  
You will then find out how easy it is to get along.  
-Paramahansa Yogananda

## Remembering Choudhary Charan Singh

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Today is the birthday of fifth Prime minister of the country, late Choudhary Charan Singh. Born in 1902 in a middle class peasant family in Noorpur of district Meerut in Uttar Pradesh he left this world on May 29, 1987. He was a great farmer's leader who remained Prime minister of the country from July 28, 1979 to January 14, 1980. During his tenure as Prime minister of the country, he introduced many farmer friendly policies and enacted much legislation to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. He was first elected to U.P Legislative Assembly in 1937 from Chhaprauli constituency and continued to represent it many times. Choudhary sahib held several ministerial positions in Uttar Pradesh cabinet including Revenue, Agriculture, Home and Transport. Known for his simplicity and understanding of rural India's challenges, Singh introduced several policies to improve the lives of farmers and ensure sustainable agricultural development. He believed in empowering rural communities and fostering a self-reliant agrarian economy.

When he became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, he introduced the Land Holding Act of 1960, aiming to lower and standardize land ceiling limits ensuring fair distribution of agricultural land. He also played a leading role in drafting the Debt Redemption Bill of 1939, which alleviated the financial burden on rural farmers giving a relief to farmers from moneylenders and a key role in the enactment of the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1950. His dedication to farmers' welfare earned him the title of 'Kisan Leader', and his birth anniversary is celebrated as 'Kisan Divas' to honor his contribution to Indian agriculture and rural development. The Kisan Divas has been celebrated since 2001 in the country. Due to his contribution towards addressing the welfare and rights of Indian farmers and significantly impacting the nation's agricultural policies, he is also acknowledged as 'champion of farmers'. Commemorating with the birthday of a great visionary who devoted his whole life for welfare of farming community, National Farmers' Day also known as 'Rashtriya Kisan Divas' is celebrated every year on 23rd December.

Farming constitutes one of the oldest practices that mankind knows about and which is still in practice today. It dates back to over 10,000 years. One simply cannot undermine the role of farmer's in our life and economy at large. To ensure that they get due credit and

attention that they deserve, countries across the globe observe their 'National Farmers' Day' every year. The event is also popularly called as 'Old Farmers' Day' in the United States (US). There isn't an exact date when celebrating Farmers' Day became a trend, but the tradition is being followed since the early 1800s. In different parts of the globe, the National Farmer's Day is celebrated on different dates by different countries.

In India, agriculture sector is a vital contributor to our economy; creating and providing livelihood opportunities to about 50% of the population directly or indirectly. Majority of the rural population including the women folk are engaged in this sector. Since independence, country has achieved many milestones in agricultural production. From a production of 50 million tonnes in the post independence years, the food grains production reached a record 332.22 million tonne in the 2023-24 crop year (ended June), driven by bumper wheat and rice output. The technological interventions along with an enabling environment has led the country to increase the production of food grains by 5.6 times, horticultural crops by 10.5 times, fish by 16.8 times, milk by 10.4 times and eggs by 52.9 times since 1950-51 thus making a visible impact on the national food and nutritional security. Country ranks first in the production of number of crops like Banana, Lime and Lemon, Papaya and Okra.

The horticulture production in the country has exceeded food grains production in the country. The country has the largest area under cultivation. It is the largest producer of pulses, spices, milk, tea, cashew, jute, banana, jackfruit and many other commodities (FAO). It stands second in production of fruits and vegetables, wheat, rice, cotton and oilseeds. India has the largest cotton cultivation area all over the world after China and the USA. India is the third highest potato producing country. India is also the second largest producer of Pulses in the world. The country also has the largest livestock population.

The agriculture sector despite a vital contributor to the country's economy still suffers from some inherent loopholes and challenges like sustainability, climate change and its non remunerativeness. Indian agriculture is predominated by the presence of small and marginal farmers. This vital segment of Indian agriculture is often the neglected one; still outside the reach of developmental policies and programmes. They are still outside the formal framework of technological interven-

tions, have no or little access to credit facilities and are not in a position to avail crop and livestock insurance. Although government has started many programmes for their empowerment, these are yet to show the results on grounds.

Agriculture has become a non remunerative sector. More and more farmers are leaving this sector and the youths are not interested in this. The benefits of the different farmer welfare schemes do not reach all. Only a representative group of farmers avail the benefits. Indian agriculture is characterized by the predominance of small and marginal holdings. About 86% of the farmers are marginal and small. They needed to be included in the farmer welfare programmes and it must be ensured that the benefits of different agricultural schemes percolate down to them. The farm women are also an important part of the agricultural sector in the country. This is also a day to highlight various issues confronting the farm sector and the farming community. Farmers are not satisfied with the Minimum Support Price announced by the government every year. Although the Minimum Support Prices are announced by the government every year for 22 crops, yet the farmers are not satisfied with the MSP announced by the government and are demanding a legal provision on MSP.

The government has also been proactively supporting the farming community by starting many programmes for their welfare and rejuvenation of farm sector. PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKISAN) provides financial support to the farming community. PM Kisan Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) aims at improving the irrigation potential and efficiency of the irrigation network in the country. Soil Health Cards are being provided to the farmers which contain detailed description of the fertility status of their soils and the recommendation thereof. The marketing structure in the country is also being improved with many marketing reforms. e-NAM is being strengthened to connect all the mandi across the country. Organic and Natural farming is being promoted in the country to reverse the negative effects of chemical led intensive cultivation. Credit and insurance facilities are also being provided and their coverage is also being extended to include all the farmers. Special focus is being laid on the farm women and the youths. Many youths have now turned entrepreneurs and are providing job to many others instead of seeking job from others. Besides these, we also need to adopt and

promote different practices for sustainable agriculture that result in food security and resilience. Practices like Zero/No tillage ensure that the soil is not ploughed but disturbed to the least possible extent. It helps to minimize mechanical soil disturbance which is essential to maintaining minerals within the soil, preventing erosion, and preventing water loss from occurring within the soil. Growing the same crops year after year of the practice of monocropping depletes the soil of different nutrients. Therefore crop rotation that involves growing different crops doesn't rob the soil of its nutrients; instead add to the nutrient composition of the soil. Practicing crop rotation with more than two species does not allow insect/pests and weeds to be set into a rotation with specific crops. When crops are rotated, these act as a natural insecticide and herbicide against specific organisms. Growing of certain crops in the fields and then ploughing them back in the soil to enrich the soil with various nutrients. Green manuring helps increase biomass production in the fields, increase organic matter content, micro-organisms activity and also increase availability of both macro as well as micro-organisms to the crops. Organic and Natural Farming techniques which are based on use of local resources improve the soil health and also do not produce pollution of any kind. The adoption of an integrated farming system approach that involves different components also ensure that the local resources and family labour is used effectively and farmers get compensated from another enterprise in case of failure of one enterprise.

Today agriculture is witnessing what is called 'digitalisation'. Just as our smart phones have become necessary for us, in the future the farming community is all likely to see through digital glasses and at the same time young farmers are likely to don the digital glasses or consult devices that will help them to analyze their work and accordingly take decisions for their betterment. For farmers, it has come as a fascinating experience. Digitalisation of agriculture has also emerged as another revolution, more so for the large numbers of the world's smallholder farmers. Various digital farming technologies include Internet of Things (IoT), Precision Farming, Agricultural Drones and Robots and smart greenhouses have proved to be a boon for farming community.

(The writer writes on agriculture and social issues)

## Problems of an ageing population in India

■ DR. SATYAWAN SAURABH

India is at a unique stage in its demographic transition. India is characterized by a rise in its young population, which could be an opportunity to accelerate growth. However, a parallel phenomenon that needs equal attention in the context of India's economic development is the rapidly aging population. Aging is a continuous, irreversible, universal process that lasts from conception to the death of an individual. However, the age at which a person's productive contribution reduces and he or she becomes economically dependent can possibly be considered as the beginning of the elderly phase of life. According to the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, a senior citizen means any person being a citizen of India who has attained the age of sixty years or more. A demographically young country like India is aging slowly. By 2050, 1 in every 5 persons in India will be above 60 years of age. 1/8th of the world's elderly population lives in India. The percentage of senior citizens in

India's population has been increasing rapidly in recent years, and this trend is likely to continue, according to the First Secretary of India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. Low income or poverty has been found to be associated with elder abuse. Fewer economic resources are considered a contextual or situational stressor contributing to elder abuse. Due to the ever-falling interest rates on bank deposits, most middle-class elders actually depend on elder pensions to sustain themselves.

In India, 74% of elderly men and 41% of elderly women receive some personal income, while 43% of the elderly population earns nothing. 22% of elderly Indians who receive personal income receive less than Rs 12,000 per year. As elderly people stop working and their health care needs increase, governments may be overwhelmed by unprecedented costs. While some countries may have reason to be optimistic about population aging, the Pew survey shows that residents of countries such as Japan, Italy, and Russia are the least confident about

achieving an adequate standard of living in old age. A national survey conducted by the NGO HelpAge India showed that 47% of elderly people are financially dependent on their families for income and 34% are dependent on pensions and cash transfers, while 40% of those surveyed expressed a desire to work "as much as possible." One in five older people in India suffers from mental health problems. About 75 percent of them suffer from some chronic disease, and 40 percent have some other disability. These are the findings of the Longitudinal Aging Study of India in 2021.

Older people suffer from both degenerative and communicable diseases due to the aging of the body's immune system. Infections are the leading causes of morbidity, while vision impairment, difficulty in walking, chewing, hearing, osteoporosis, arthritis, and incontinence are other common health problems.

The number of sick and frail elderly people in need of affordable nursing homes or assisted living centers is likely to increase. Lack of geriatric care facili-

ties in hospitals in rural areas. According to a recent survey, 30% to 50% of elderly people had symptoms that made them depressed. Most of the elderly living alone are women, especially widows. Depression is closely linked to poverty, poor health, and loneliness. With adults being busy in formal jobs and children being busy in school activities, no one stays at home to take care of the elderly. The relationships among neighbors are not as strong as in rural areas. Economic constraints do not allow them to pursue creativity. Due to neglect from family members, many people prefer day care centers and old age homes instead of living with children.

Elder abuse is a growing international problem that has many manifestations in different countries and cultures. It is a fundamental violation of human rights and causes a number of health and emotional problems. Abuse can be classified as physical, sexual, psychological, or financial. According to the report, abuse is relatively more prevalent among older women and those living in rural areas.

Nearly half of the elderly feel unhappy and neglected; 36 percent feel they are a burden to the family. Emotional damage caused by verbal or emotional abuse includes torture, suffering, fear, pervasive emotional discomfort, and loss of personal pride or sovereignty.

At the socio-cultural level, the presentation of the elderly as weak and dependent, lack of funds for care, elderly people in need of assistance who live alone, and the breakdown of relationships between generations of the family are potential factors for elder abuse. Due to economic problems, the elderly from lower castes have to work for a living even in old age. Though this is difficult, it keeps them active and maintains a sense of self-esteem and respect from the family. While for the elderly from higher castes, good jobs are less available, and they hesitate to take up menial jobs. This makes them unemployed, hence creating a sense of being 'useless' and frustration. Living with multiple household members other than the spouse is associated with an

increased risk of abuse, especially financial abuse. Most senior citizens may find the available accommodation unsuitable and unsuitable for their needs.

They face gender-based discrimination throughout their lives. The gender-based nature of aging is such that universally, women live longer than men. At the age of 80 years or more, widowhood dominates the status of women, with 71 percent of women and only 29 percent of men having lost their spouse. Social customs prevent women from remarrying, resulting in an increased likelihood of women living alone. The life of a widow is filled with rigid moral codes, with integral rights being sacrificed and freedoms being circumvented. Social prejudice often results in improper allocation of resources, neglect, abuse, exploitation, gender-based violence, lack of access to basic services, and withholding ownership of assets. Older women are more likely to be excluded from social security schemes due to low literacy and awareness levels.

