

## STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Daily wagers in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have long been grappling with a host of challenges, from delayed wages to job insecurity. Despite playing a crucial role in maintaining essential services in various government departments, these workers continue to face financial instability and uncertainty regarding their future. Their plight remains one of the most pressing labor issues in the region, demanding immediate attention from the authorities.

One of the primary concerns of daily wagers in J&K is irregular salary payments. Many workers have gone months without receiving their wages, leaving them in severe financial distress. Their earnings are often meager, making it difficult for them to provide for their families. Inflation and rising costs of living further worsen their situation, as they struggle to meet basic needs like food, education, and healthcare.

Most daily wagers in J&K have been working for years—some even decades—without any assurance of permanent employment. Despite repeated appeals and protests, successive governments have failed to regularize their services, leaving them vulnerable to job loss at any time. Many workers live in constant fear that their services could be discontinued without notice.

The demand for regularization has been a long-standing issue, with various worker unions repeatedly urging the government to implement a fair and transparent policy to absorb daily wagers into the permanent workforce. However, bureaucratic hurdles and political indecisiveness have delayed any substantial progress.

Unlike permanent government employees, daily wagers do not receive benefits such as pensions, health insurance, provident funds, or leave entitlements. This lack of security exposes them to severe hardships, especially in cases of illness, injuries, or retirement. The absence of medical support is particularly alarming, as many workers find it impossible to afford treatment in case of accidents or serious health issues. Over the years, daily wagers in J&K have staged multiple protests, strikes, and demonstrations to demand better wages, timely payments, and regularization.

## Ramzan's call for personal and societal change

■ ABDUL QUDDIR KUNDRIA

As the crescent moon signals the beginning of Ramzan, millions of Muslims around the world embark on a journey of self-discipline, reflection, and devotion. This holy month is a time of fasting, prayer, and seeking forgiveness, but it is also an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of unity and work towards eliminating social evils that harm individuals and communities.

Fasting teaches patience, self-control, and empathy for the less fortunate. It is not merely about abstaining from food and drink but also about purifying the heart and mind. This purification should extend beyond individual worship and influence the way people treat one another. The spirit of Ramzan calls for kindness, forgiveness, and a commitment to improving society by addressing issues like drug addiction, crime, domestic violence, and community divisions.

A major challenge faced by many societies today is substance abuse. The growing prevalence of drug addiction, especially among the youth, is a matter of great concern. Drugs destroy lives, break families, and lead to criminal activities. Islam strictly forbids intoxicants, as they impair judgment and lead to destructive behavior. The Quran states: "O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful." (5:90).

Ramzan offers a chance for those struggling with addiction to seek help, break free from destructive habits, and find strength in faith. Families and communities must come together

to support individuals in need, guide them towards rehabilitation, and provide opportunities for a healthier, more fulfilling life. Mosques, community centers, and religious scholars play a crucial role in raising awareness and offering support to those affected by drug abuse.

Another pressing issue is the increasing lack of unity within families and communities. Differences in opinion, social status, or sectarianism often create unnecessary divisions, leading to hatred and animosity. Islam teaches that all believers are part of one brotherhood, and unity is essential for a strong, thriving society. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The believers are like one body; when one part of it suffers, the whole body responds with wakefulness and fever."

This month reminds people to let go of grudges, forgive past wrongs, and work towards peace and harmony. The practice of breaking fast together, offering charity, and praying in congregation fosters a sense of togetherness that should continue throughout the year. Small gestures of kindness, a helping hand to a neighbor, or even a simple smile can strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and friendship.

Domestic violence and the mistreatment of women and children are also issues that need urgent attention. The teachings of Islam emphasize respect, kindness, and justice within the family. The Prophet (PBUH) set the best example in how he treated his family with love and care. He said: "The best among you are those who are best to their wives." Unfortunately, many still experience abuse and oppression within their homes. Ramzan

is a time for introspection—individuals must evaluate their behavior and make efforts to cultivate a home filled with love, respect, and understanding.

Charity is a fundamental aspect of Ramzan, reminding people of their duty towards the less fortunate. Poverty and hunger continue to affect millions, and while giving Zakat (compulsory charity) and Sadaqah (voluntary charity) helps alleviate suffering, long-term solutions such as education, job opportunities, and community development programs must also be encouraged. True generosity is not just about giving material wealth but also about giving time, knowledge, and emotional support to those in need.

Another social ill that must be addressed is dishonesty and corruption. Whether in business, government, or personal dealings, integrity is a cornerstone of Islamic teachings. Lying, cheating, and exploiting others for personal gain are strictly forbidden. The Prophet (PBUH) warned against dishonesty, stating: "The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is entrusted with something, he betrays that trust." Ramzan is a time to reaffirm the commitment to truthfulness, fairness, and ethical behavior in all aspects of life.

The impact of social media and technology on society is another growing concern. While these platforms provide connectivity and information, they are often misused for spreading hatred, falsehoods, and negativity. People must be mindful of how they use their words, both online and offline, as the Quran warns: "And do not pursue that

of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned." (17:36).

Ramzan is a time to reflect on how time is spent and whether it is being used productively. Instead of engaging in gossip, arguments, or unnecessary distractions, this month encourages personal growth, seeking knowledge, and engaging in positive interactions that benefit both individuals and the community.

The spirit of Ramzan is about transformation—not just for a month but for a lifetime. It is about leaving behind harmful habits, embracing goodness, and striving to be a source of benefit to others. While fasting is an individual act of worship, its essence is deeply connected to social responsibility. When people commit to being better individuals, families become stronger, communities grow more united, and society as a whole moves towards peace and prosperity.

As the month progresses, let it serve as a reminder that every action, no matter how small, contributes to the greater good. Whether it is by helping someone in need, breaking an addiction, reconciling with a long-lost friend, or simply being more mindful of one's words and actions, the lessons of Ramzan should continue long after the fasts have ended. Let this be a time of not just spiritual renewal but also social reform, where kindness, honesty, and unity become a way of life.

(The writer is an eminent poet of Urdu/Dogri of Jammu and Kashmir)

## Jammu's Holi: Where Colors Meet Culinary Magic

■ CYRUS SHARMA

As the festival of Holi, one of the most vibrant and festive celebrations, approaches, the people of Jammu get ready for splashes of fun and an exquisite favorite - a banquet of delectables. Holi, the festival of colors, is not merely a splashing of colors; it is also a coming together of families and friends, reveling in the rich gastronomic heritage of the land.

The festivals wake up the appetite for several traditional snacks that are truly local in character and flavor. The celebrations begin with the preparation of special sweets and snacks to be distributed among kin and friends. The most prevalent of the sweets at this time of year is referred to as Kheer, a creamy rice pudding made up of milk and sugar and spiced with some cardamom and saffron. Later, the sweet becomes widespread on Holi, topped with nuts and dried fruits and

making a beautiful start to the celebrations.

Another favorite is Kachalu, deep-fried finger food made of colocasia roots. The crisps are usually served with a tangy chutney dip and loved by children and adults alike. Kachalu-making is one of those family bonding snacks: peeling the roots, slicing, and frying together in a spirit of togetherness.

Rajma-kidney beans is another indispensable Holi table fare in Jammu. Rajma cooked with tomato gravy is of great comfort, served with a portion of steaming rice that warms the tummy and fills the heart. A large pot is made for any neighbor or a friend according to the spirit of sharing and being together that Holi embodies.

By anyone spicy at heart, Aloo Dum can barely be avoided. Dressed to the hilt, baby potatoes in a spicy, aromatic gravy that pairs the best with the sweet-and-salty delights of the Holi spread. Aloo Dum's medley of flavors

gives it that bouncy contrast to Kheer's sweetness and other desserts.

No Holi celebration in Jammu is complete without Gulab Jamun, a classic dessert made from milk solids and steeped in sugar syrup. These soft, syrupy balls are popular with people of all ages and are frequently the centerpiece of a holiday feast. Gulab Jamun cooking is an art form in its own right, with families handing down their secret recipes through generations.

On Holi, the streets of Jammu are alive with laughter, the funny rhythm of dholak and drums, and the wafting aromas of delicious cuisine. Families join together to celebrate, exchanging sweets and snacks and spending the evening laughing and telling stories. The bright delicacies served at the table evoke the vibrant colors of Holi, creating a delicious feast for the eyes and palate.

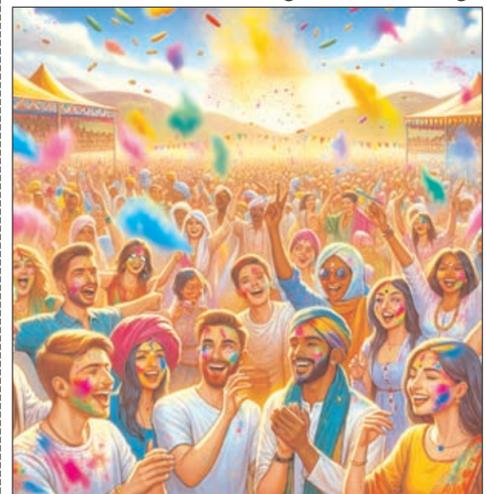
Aside from these classic dishes, many fami-

lies prepare Chole, spicy chickpeas in sauce, with Puri, a fried bread that pairs nicely with practically any thick gravy. These delicacies completely fill one's stomach and embody the spirit of abundance and prosperity that Holi represents.

Amid the fading sun and the lingering festivities, Holi remains in the air as an aura formed by delicious food and emotional togetherness. Thus, traditional Jammu cuisine is important in celebrating this event and reminding people of family, friendship, and community.

To summarize, Holi in Jammu is a festival of color, joy, and, most significantly, food. The traditional delicacies served during this period not only entice the taste buds, but they also bring people together, resulting in lasting memories. As families gather to celebrate, Jammu's rich culinary legacy shows through, making Holi a truly memorable affair.

## Holi: The Festival of Colours, Unity and Joy



■ ARUN KHAJURIA

Holi, the vibrant festival of colours, is one of India's most cherished celebrations, symbolizing joy, unity, and the triumph of good over evil. Observed with immense enthusiasm across the country and even beyond, Holi transcends barriers of caste, creed, and age, bringing people together in a splash of colours and festivity. As we immerse ourselves in the joyous spirit of Holi, it is important to reflect on its cultural significance, the values it upholds, and the responsibilities that come with celebrating it.

The Cultural and Mythological Essence of Holi  
Holi's origins are deeply rooted in Hindu mythology. The most popular legend associated with the festival is that of Prahlad and Holika. Prahlad, a devout follower of Lord Vishnu, was persecuted by his father, the arrogant king Hiranyakashyap. In an attempt to destroy his son's faith, the king's sister, Holika, who was immune to fire, tricked Prahlad into sitting on a pyre with her. However, divine intervention led to Holika perishing in the flames, while Prahlad emerged unharmed. This story signifies the ultimate victory of righteousness over tyranny and is marked by the ritual of Holika Dahan, a bonfire that symbolizes the burning away of evil.

Another legend ties Holi to Lord Krishna, who playfully smeared colours on Radha and the gopis, starting a tradition of joyous colour play. This fun-loving aspect of Holi continues today, as people drench each other in colours, sing, dance, and celebrate the spirit of togetherness.

Holi stands as a festival that dissolves social barriers. On this day, distinctions of class, status, and religion fade away as people come together, greeting each other with "Bura na mano, Holi hai!" (Don't mind, it's Holi!). It is a festival that promotes harmony, renews relationships, and fosters a sense of belonging. In a world often divided by differences, Holi reminds us that unity and joy can thrive when we embrace each other with love and acceptance.

The Need for a Responsible Celebration  
While Holi is a time of great excitement, it is essential to celebrate it responsibly. The excessive use of synthetic colours, water wastage, and reckless behaviour can take away from the festival's true spirit. Many artificial colours contain harmful chemicals that can damage the skin and the environment. Opting for organic, eco-friendly colours ensures a safe celebration. Additionally, in a time when water conservation is crucial, dry Holi or playing with minimal water can be a meaningful step toward sustainability.

Respecting personal boundaries is equally important. Holi should be a celebration of happiness, not an excuse for misbehaviour. Consent and dignity must be upheld in all interactions, ensuring that everyone, especially women and children, feels safe and included in the festivities.

Conclusion  
Holi is more than just a festival of colours; it is a celebration of life, love, and the triumph of good over evil. As we come together to revel in its joyous spirit, let us do so with mindfulness respecting traditions, protecting the environment, and ensuring a safe and inclusive celebration for all. This Holi, let's spread not just colours but also kindness, harmony, and happiness.

(The writer is from Patel Nagar Kathua)

## Modi puts life into Wildlife: A new era of conservation in India

■ MANMOHAN DHAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has once again demonstrated his commitment to environmental conservation by spearheading initiatives aimed at revitalizing India's rich but threatened wildlife. Under his leadership, India has launched groundbreaking programs to protect endangered species, expand forest cover, and promote sustainable coexistence between humans and nature.

Since taking office, Modi has championed numerous wildlife preservation efforts, emphasizing that economic growth and environmental protection must go hand in hand. His government has prioritized increasing the population of endangered species like tigers, Asiatic lions, and elephants, while also taking decisive action against deforestation

and poaching.

One of the biggest achievements under his leadership has been the success of Project Tiger, which saw India's tiger population rise from 2,226 in 2014 to over 3,000 by 2023. This success has solidified India's position as home to more than 75% of the world's wild tigers. Similarly, the Project Lion initiative has focused on increasing the population of the endangered Asiatic lions in Gujarat's Gir Forest, ensuring their long-term survival.

In addition to protecting individual species, Modi's administration has actively promoted habitat restoration. The Green India Mission has led to large-scale afforestation projects, creating new green corridors that support biodiversity. India has also expanded its network of protected areas, including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, giving ani-

mals more space to thrive.

The reintroduction of the Cheetah in India after 70 years, through a project that brought African cheetahs to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, has been another landmark achievement. This ambitious effort aims to restore ecological balance and revive the country's historic biodiversity.

Under Modi's leadership, India has gained international praise and recognition for its proactive approach to conservation. The government's efforts align with global environmental goals, including commitments made at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP) and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Looking ahead, India aims to further expand protected areas, combat climate change, and strengthen laws against wildlife

crimes. Modi's vision is clear: economic progress should not come at the cost of nature. His administration's policies reflect a balance between development and sustainability, ensuring that future generations inherit a thriving, biodiverse India.

By putting life back into wildlife, Narendra Modi has set India on a path of environmental revival. Through strong policies, conservation programs, and global cooperation, he has reaffirmed India's role as a leader in wildlife protection. As these efforts continue, India's forests, rivers, and national parks will remain a haven for the country's majestic wildlife, securing their place in the natural world for years to come.

It is hoped that Modi's recent safari outing in Gir will take India to new heights in wildlife conservation worldwide.

## People Participation in Rural Upliftment

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

In present era, the concepts of public participation and rural development are frequently mentioned in developed and developing nations across the globe. The rural areas are different in many ways from the urban areas. About 70% of India's population is still living in rural areas. Over the years it has been observed that poverty ratio has declined. The poverty eradication which is the main thrust of the government cannot be achieved all in a sudden but it needs sustained efforts through various programmes framed according to the need of the hour with the concurrent role to be played by the government and the rural society through active people participation in these programmes. The concept of people's participation is an integral part of the Democratic Welfare State contained in the Indian constitution. The community development programmes laid emphasis on people's participation right from very beginning. In order to start any programme people participation in actual practice is more important than getting contribution from them in labour, cash, land and other materials for the programmes activities such as irrigation, roads, wells, schools etc. The people should be involved in planning the programmes and their opinion should also be considered in formulating their needs.

In fact, the subject of rural development is an old one but it is constantly coming up with new dimensions due to the inclusion of new issues and ideas. It is said that after Independence India has become an industrial power with space and nuclear capabilities. Self-sufficiency in food grains production with better infrastructural facilities, India is now set on a higher trajectory of economic growth. Presently India is



having surplus food. Achievements of planning should be guided not only by the overall growth rate but also by the pattern of distribution of the benefits to all the sections of society. It is essential that a rural development programme should not only get the sanction but also should be supported by the participation of millions of people in the country. It is the people of the country who have to accept and execute the programmes for their own improvement. It is important that the people should regard all aspects of community development as their concern and develop their capacity and faith in themselves and in the efficacy of their own co-operative action to solve their problems. Through such programmes

the local communities can make far greater contribution than action by any other organised level of society to raise the level of living of all the people in terms of their basic needs and desires, i.e. needs and desires for food, clothing, shelter, education, health, recreation and community life. It is not necessary that participatory approach can solve all the problems faced by the people. It is only a method by which Government's assistance can be easily and more effectively channelled to the rural people by involving them in different programmes for their improvement. Presently both the Central and State governments are giving great importance to participatory approach in implementing rural devel-

opment programmes. The concept of community participation dates back to 1950 but it has not been properly followed. Although at present much importance is given to the participatory approach, there is need for people participation in implementation of developmental programmes.

Success of any programme depends upon the people participation. It has been observed that many development programmes are started with great interest but they are not sustainable. The sustainability of a poverty alleviation programme largely depends upon the effective linkage between government, non-government organisation and people. It is irony that though much thrust is given to participatory approach in rural development, the schemes/programmes actually do not provide much scope for such participation. Participation can be considered as the mass movement incorporating the active, voluntary participation of our rural people. All the Central and State Government schemes having the objective of rural, urban poverty alleviation, aiming at employment generation, providing subsidised commodity, service, should have mandatory component for participatory approach. Suitable amendments need to be incorporated in Central and State Government acts, rules, manuals and schemes/programmes guidelines to make local bodies self-governing. Participatory approach can be made through Government orders in all spheres of District and local administration. Overdependence of Government machinery upon departmental infrastructure in the area of planning and estimating of tax revenues and collecting them can be reduced by using the local body institutions.

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