

Remembering Padmashri Jagan Nath Kaul

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How swiftly the time flies. Padmashri Pt. Jagan Nath Kaul, affectionately addressed as Papa Ji by all, has faded away from the world's stage after a long and successful innings on 16-12-2008 at Faridabad. My thoughts go out to this towering personality of our time to recapture his aura. I had the opportunity to meet him thrice. First, when he presided over a meeting of Kashmiri Samaj in Faridabad. Next, when he visited SOS Varanasi in about 2003 and I met him at the residence of my sister's husband Pt. Shashinandan Lal Dar and lastly, at the seminar on Kashmir Culture and Heritage for Global Harmony organised by the Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society, Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi on 04-04-2006 where my paper *Banaras Hindu University And Kashmiri Pandits* was also read. Our interaction was short but it made on me a deep and lasting impression.

Since Varanasi has been introduced above it may be mentioned here in passing that SOS Balgram, Kheer Bhawani (Danialpur), P.O. Chaubepur, Varanasi which is about 16 km. from the city on Gazipur and is spread over thirty acres of land, was inaugurated by Dr. Harmann Gmeiner and Kashi Naresh His Excellency Maharaja Dr. Vibhuti Narain Singh Ji on 23-02-1985 and started functioning with about 120 children and about 18 residential quarters. Now there are about 270 children in the SOS Balgram. Besides this, quite a large number of children from the neighbouring villages also avail of the various benefits provided by the institution and receive education up to 10+2 level under CBSE Board. The association of major Prof. Shivnandan Lal Dar (1907-1992), son of Rai Saheb Pt. Raghunandan Lal dar (1880-1959), OBE Dy. Collector, began in 1984 and he was made Member, Board of Directors, SOS India (National Collaborating Office, New Delhi) in 1985 and remained till his end in 1992. His son, Pt. Shashinandan Lal Dar, joined as a Manager, SOS Balgram School in 1994 and is continuing.

Papa Ji last visited Varanasi in about 2007. A lesser known but an interesting fact about the land on which SOS Balgram, Varanasi is constructed is that the land, which had an old *Devi Mandir* and a large *Taalaab* on it, originally belonged to the king of Nepal who gifted it to one of his trusted person who, in turn, sold it to the

present owners in about 1984. Papa Ji was so much enchanted by the temple and its surroundings that he desired that the name of the place Danialpur be changed to Kheer Bhawani. Now the place is known in the Revenue records as Kheer Bhawani.

Papa Ji was born in Rang Teng, Srinager on 13-10-1924 to Pt. Neelkanth Razdan and Smt. Vishmali Razdan but was given in adoption to his maternal uncle Pt. Shankar Kaul and his wife Smt. Rukhmal Kaul. He had his early education in Srinagar but graduated from Punjab University. He did his MA (Economics) from Rajasthen University and had a PG Diploma in Management. He worked for some time as an Assistant Director in Social Welfare Department. Then he proceeded overseas for higher studies in social welfare and childcare. Papa Ji married Indira Kaul, respectfully addressed as Mimi Ji, and sired three daughters, namely, Girija Kaul who is married to Prof. Dr. M. K. Bhan ; Sadhana Kaul who is married to Pt. Shiv Khazanachi ;and Kalpana Kaul who is married to Prof. Dr. Omesh Kini and one son, Pt. Siddharth Kaul, who married Ramma Kaul.

Papa Ji had an Impressive personality. He was tall, slim and fair-complexioned. He was handsome and looked elegant spotless white *Churidars* and *Kurta* with a matching *Wasket* and a shawl thrown over his shoulders. He was soft spoken, a patient listener and had a welcome smile for everyone. He expressed great concern for the suffering mankind and spoused the cause of the underprivileged children and the orphans. He was deeply religious and had a broad and liberal outlook. He extended a helping hand towards the needy and the neglected irrespective of their caste, creed or sex. He was an unparallel leader.

Papa Ji embarked upon a lifelong career in social service and upliftment of the unprivileged with full dedication and total commitment when he associated himself with Dr. Harmann Gmeiner and established first SOS Children's Village, with about two hundred children on roll, at Green Fields, Faridabad in 1964 and became its Director. Today, there are about forty SOS Children's Villages all over India with about 15,000 children under its wings. He was Secretary-General when Mrs. Tara Ali Beg was the President of SOS, India. Later on, he became Chief of SOS Children's Villages Organisation of India. Besides this, he was deeply concerned with and agitated about the plight of his own community members who were displaced in their

own country during 1989-1990 as both the State as well as the Central Government failed to protect them. He was keen to ameliorate their conditions and to provide succour to them by setting his heart on attending to their problems and solving them. Many a displaced persons remember him with gratitude for his well-needed and timely assistance.

Papa Ji, in order to serve his community well, took up the reins of All India Kashmiri Samaj as its President and remained at the helm of affairs from 1994 to 2003. He was President, Kashmiri Sewak Samaj, Faridabad also for about ten years. He was instrumental in and played a pivotal role, during this period, in the construction of Sharika Bhawan Complex, Sector 17, Faridabad ; a replica of Hari Parbat temple of Chakhreshwar in village Anangpur, Faridabad ; three co-operative Group-Housing societies, namely, Lalleshwari Vatika, Sabzar and Gayatri, also in Faridabad, besides Kashmir Education, Culture And Science Society and Lal Ded Cultural Centre at B-36, Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi. Presently, he was Chief Patron of Kashmir Sewak Samaj, Sharika Bhawan, Sector 17, Faridabad.

Papa Ji was a recipient of a number of awards in recognition of his dedicated and selfless service to mankind like Raja Ram Mohan Roy Teacher's Award (1984), SOS ring and medal, Austria (1984), Appreciation Award, Mexico (1995), Rajiv Gandhi Manav Sewa Award (1995), G.D.Birla Award (1996), Twentieth Century Achievement Award, USA (1998) by the American Biographical Institute, USA, Dadabhai Naoroji New Millennium Award (1999), Satpal Mittal National Award, Vayoshrashtha Award (Ministry of Social Justice), Annual Award for Excellence in community Service by Kashmir Overseas Association, Georgia (2006) and the prestigious Padmashri in 2000.

Papa Ji was a social activist, a philanthropist and a great visionary. He worked tirelessly for the welfare and progress of the community. His greatest contribution to the contemporary Indian society was that, despite being a member of the displaced and rootless community fighting a lone battle of existence he could single-handedly provide security of home, warmth of love, an opportunity to lead a decent and respectful life and above all bring an endearing smile on the innocent faces of thousands of the orphans and the unprivileged. He was a true Karmyogi and a

saintly soul. In his passing both the SOS movement and the struggling Kashmiri Pandit community suffered a setback and an irreparable loss. We miss his physical presence but he lives in our hearts forever. People like him never die. They go away only to return to serve the humanity better. His noble soul, like a bright star, blesses and guides us.

About the author :- Shri G.K.Gurtu, whose ancestors were the resident of Tankyapora (Amiya Kadal), Srinagar, belongs to that group of migrants which settled in Kashmiri Mohalla, Lucknow. He was Secretary, Kashmiri Samaj, Agra between 1988-1990. He retired as Superintendent, National Sample Survey Organisation (Govt. of India) new Delhi in 1995. He lives in Sector-8, Faridabad and pursues creative writing and helps the needy.

Published in February 2010, Kashmir Sentinal.

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