



Aisha Wahab and SB 403

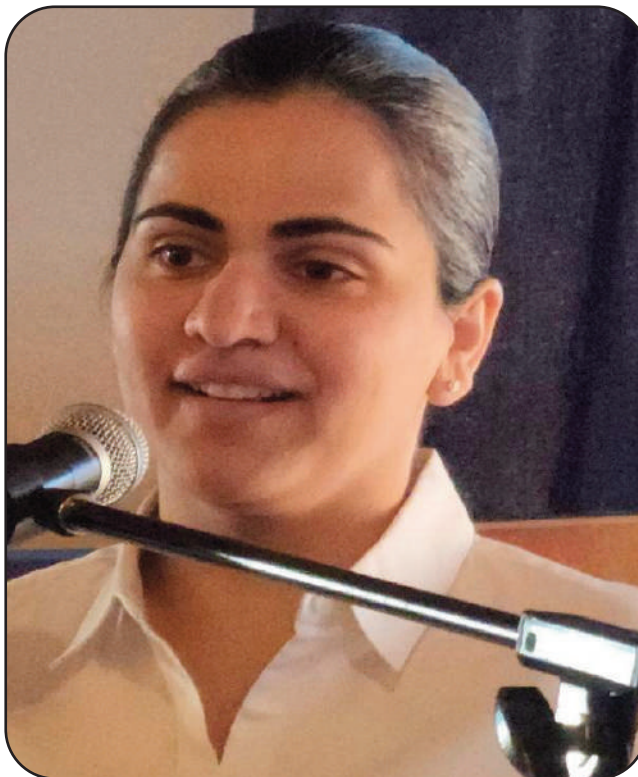
Prem Kumar Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Aisha Wahab created history by introducing SB 403 Bill. The California state Senate has overwhelmingly passed it with a 34-1 vote. This will now go to the Democratic-controlled State Assembly and, if it passes, on to the desk to Gov. If the bill clears both; California would become the first state to protect caste. Aisha Wahab, a graduate in Political Science from San Jose State University and a Master's in Business Administration from Cal State East Bay, is an American politician who has been a member of the California State Senate from the 10th district since 2022. She was born in Queens, New York City, to refugee parents who fled war-torn Afghanistan in the 1980s. Soon after her birth, she lost both her parents and was taken into foster care along with her sister. An Afghan couple from Fremont, California, adopted the sisters. After the 2008 recession, her new family moved to Hayward. It was here in Hayward that she served on the Hayward City Council from 2018 to 2022 and was one of the first Afghan-American elected to public office. She won the large city council seat by defeating two incumbents and was the got highest number of votes in a seven corner contest. Wahad, a Democrat, is the first Muslim elected to the State Senate and either chamber of the California State Legislature. Bill Quirk, California State Assembly member, recognized Wahab as Woman of the Year from District 20 in 2019.

The SB 403 bill would update California's existing civil rights law to include caste among other protected categories like race and sex, and implies that all people in the state of California are free and equal, and are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments.

California could soon become the first US state to protect caste if Senator Aisha Wahab's SB 403 Discrimination on the Basis of Caste Bill, which makes caste discrimination illegal and passed the Senate, sails through the Democratic-controlled State Assembly. The Bill was passed by the Senate by 34-1. The Senate's vote follows legislation to ban caste discrimination passed by the Seattle City Council earlier this year as well as res-



olutions to designate caste as a protected category passed by institutions like the California Democratic Party, the California State University system, the Alphabet Workers Union and corporations like

nationally. "California has seen several high-profile caste discrimination cases in the hiring and promotional practices of Silicon Valley's tech giants and beyond, including at Cisco and within the California State University system," AACD said. "It is very encouraging to see that the lawmakers of the largest US state are marching very fast to enact one of the most important civil rights laws in the 21st century. It gives great hope and encouragement that California lawmakers not only understood the intra-group discrimination based on caste existing among South Asians but also took courageous political positions to outlaw the same."

The SB 403 got tremendous support from various quarters of the diverse and multi-cultural American civil society. America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD), a coalition of Indian-American civil and human rights organizations, congratulated the Senate for "taking this historical step". AACD, which represents the Indian diaspora's true diversity in the US, says will continue mobilizing its constituent communities to ensure the Bill passes both Houses of the California legislature and is signed into law. In a press release, AACD said that thousands of emails and phone calls from community groups or caste-oppressed people supported the Bill, including mass mobilization by California's Ravidassia community, which played a central role in its passage. The Bill was supported by Dalit civil rights organization Equality Labs, a wide variety of interfaith organizations, workers' organizations like Socialist Alternative, California Labor Federation and civil rights groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP. Only senator Brian Jones, who cited groups raising concerns about the Bill, voted against it with five senators absent. "California will start a domino effect to end caste discrimination with an eye vote on SB403. The world is watching."

I trust my colleagues to stand on the right side of history on this matter," cogently said Wahab on the Senate floor. "AACD will continue our mass mobilization for SB 403 through mass education to make it all the way up to the governor's signature to outlaw caste discrimination in California," S Karthikeyan, secretary, Ambedkar King Study Circle, said. Anil Wagde, an activist with Ambedkar International Center, said, "It is great to see the

(Contd.. to next page)



Apple and Cisco. With a 19.25 million workforce and a \$3.6 trillion GDP, such legal protections in California will help all its people let go of the fear of discrimination and allow them to explore their full potential, making California safer, more equitable and more prosperous, AACD said. The Senate's vote on SB 403 shows that California leads the world towards a more equitable society inter-

floor. "AACD will continue our mass mobilization for SB 403 through mass education to make it all the way up to the governor's signature to outlaw caste discrimination in California," S Karthikeyan, secretary, Ambedkar King Study Circle, said. Anil Wagde, an activist with Ambedkar International Center, said, "It is great to see the

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In support of SB 403: Preventing the rooting of Caste in the USA

Aisha Wahab, member of the California Senate, introduced SB 403 bill, which was passed in the Senate with 34 - 1 voting. Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba Weeklies put on record its appreciations for the concerted efforts and support of Aisha Wahab for taking such a bold stand for keeping caste out and also appreciate all who stood in support of the historic bill SB 403 to ban practice of caste in California. It was earlier cleared by the California Judiciary committee and the Appropriation committee. Now, its final approval by the full Senate

with 34-1 votes opens the way for final approval in the assembly and the seal of the Governor. We once again congratulate all for their persistent endeavors in putting their precious time and energies to stop this nefarious social evil from taking roots in the dream land of equal opportunities and social and political democratic set up of the USA

Prem Kumar Chumber
Editor-in-Chief, Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba Weeklies

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(Continue from page 1)

Senate passing the Bill. If the bipartisan support is any indication, it will also pass in the House. "Wagde added that the Bill is "not about who shows up in bigger numbers but about what is the right thing to do. The US should be a discrimination-free country, and as such, America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD) will leave no stone unturned to ensure the passage of this Bill". Vinod of Bhim International Foundation, USA, said, "Thank you to the community which participated in SB403. The Ravidassia community will continue to work tirelessly with other caste-oppressed communities and allies till this Bill becomes a law."

"Following our historic victory in Seattle in February, the California Senate has voted to ban caste discrimination. The Bill now goes to the Assembly. Anti-caste activists, working people, union members, and my socialist Council office built a fighting movement to win in Seattle, creating national and international momentum. Solidarity to all fighting oppression under capitalism!" said Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Council member of Socialist Alternative. "We are thrilled to see SB 403, the Discrimination on the Basis of Caste Bill, pass through the California Senate. This is a significant step forward in the fight against caste-based discrimination, and we applaud the Senate for taking action to protect the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities. The Bill recognizes the insidious nature of caste discrimination and will help to ensure that it has no place in California," said Syed Ishaq of the Indian American Muslim Council. Raju Rajgopal of Hindus for Human Rights said, "As a Californian and co-founder of Hindus for Human Rights, I am proud that our state is showing the world that there will be no tolerance for caste discrimination in the workplace and educational insti-

tutions. "The Bill's passage is a "victory for all those who have faced caste discrimination in South Asia and are likely face caste discrimination in America, and a defeat for the baseless fears and insecurities of opponents, who have never had to face caste discrimination". He added. Ambedkar International Mission USA congratulated Wahab, the California Senate members, AAC, and all ground activists. "This victory affirms our collective strength as a united group on the AACD platform and strengthens our resolve to continue our struggle to fight social, economic, and gender discrimination and oppression, which will pave the path of equality and justice for our future generations as well as to other parts of the world where caste discrimination needs redressing!" Roja Singh, co-founder of Dalit Solidarity Forum, USA, said, "It is time to root out this transplanted disease of caste hierarchy and practice. It is a shame that we have to wrestle this oppression by its horns here in the USA, founded on liberation principles. We commend the dedication of those who believe in human dignity in California! Thanks, California for leading the way. Jai Bhim. "AACD called on the rest of the US to follow the lead of California and Seattle and pass legislation banning caste discrimination in all forms and settings to create a safer and more equal America for all.

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit activist and the founder of the caste equity organization Equality Labs, told NBC News following the Senate vote that "there are so many people that want to heal from the trauma of caste," "What's been incredible about this moment is to see these really beautiful inter-caste and interfaith alliances, groups that have all said that they've been harmed by caste and want freedom from it." Soundararajan, over the last few years, has been propounding the

cause of marginalized and those who were so-called low birth under the Indian caste set-up. The rigidity of caste-based social stratifications though tamed to a large extent thank to the provision against caste discrimination in the constitution of India and significant social pressure build by various anti-caste organizations, but its traces are yet to be erased from the social domain of Social Asian diasporas. Soundararajan and other Dalit activists say their work in the caste equity space has opened the door for ... physical harassment. "I really, truly hope that our opponents will join us and put down the sword of bigotry," Soundararajan said. "Regardless of their fragility, their discomfort is not the equivalent of the grave discrimination our community is facing. We're just thrilled for what this means for our community to have the opportunity to reconcile and heal from this violence." Many reports obliquely hints at the prevalence of social exclusion, violence and discrimination within the diaspora communities in the U.S.

Referring to the SB 403, Aisha Wahab told NBC News that "the more diverse California becomes and the United States becomes, we need to protect more people in the way the American dream was originally supposed to be. Our laws need to expand and cover more people and go deeper." The bill is designed to protect groups across religions, nationalities and communities. It has the support of the American Civil Liberties Union, Me Too International and the California Labor Federation.

With thanks to inputs from:
<https://www.newsclick.in/california-senate-passes-bill-against-caste-bias-historic-move> And
<https://www.nbcnews.com/>



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Kirya Ceremony of Sh. R. C. Goel (18 May 1933 - 29 April 2023)

Panchkula – (Ambedkar Times Bureau)- Kirya ceremony after the completion of terrestrial life journey of Sh. Ramesh Chand Goel (Retd OSD, VC Office, Panjab University, Chandigarh) on April 29, 2023 was held on May 11, 2023 at Yadav Bhawan, Sector 12, Panchkula. It was attended by his wife and other family members alongwith colleagues and friends of the family. The ceremony started with the completion of GarudPran Path and it's narration, followed by tributes paid by his family. Prof. Preeti Mahajan (his eldest daughter) and his nephew, Prof. Rajiv Goel, paid heart touching tributes to the departed soul. His daughter took everyone present there deep down her nostalgic memory lane reflecting on how she, her younger sister Seema and younger brother Chaturbhuj *Singh Goel* *alongwith* his grandchildren *were* lovingly taken care of by their beloved father who used to bless them by putting his hands on their heads after performing puja every day. She narrated how he used to shower his love in equal propor-



Sh. R C Goel (18 May 1933 - 29 April 2023)

tion on his two daughters and a son and how he deeply loved his two granddaughters, Gauri and Vani *as well*. She also remembered how he cherished a dream to see his children

homemade food specially halva, but never objected to cakes and fast food enjoyed by his kids. Equally touching were the memories shared by Prof Rajeev Goel, his nephew,

study at Oxford and Cambridge and how one could see a spark in his eyes to see his grandson, Akshay Kumar Mahajan (Son of Ajay and Preeti Mahajan) and his wife Sunidhi graduated from Oxford University obtaining degrees in MSc in Law and Finance.

Similarly, he used to feel very delighted to see the awards and achievements of his granddaughters. She also poetically touched upon his simple and high living lifestyle and remembered how he used to love

who also paid rich tribute to his revered Taya Ji. He fondly remembered how his Taya ji supported him in his educational pursuits at Chandigarh. He did not *differentiate* between his children and nephews and loved them equally. After the tributes, RasamPagri was held. The Kirya ceremony was concluded with thanks to everyone present there by Prof. Ronki Ram, son-in-law of Sh. R.C.Goel, who also read the condolence messages sent by Sh. Satya Pal Jain, (Additional Solicitor General of India, Ex Member Law Commission of India and Ex MP) and Sh. Prem Kumar Chumber, Editor-in-Chief, Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba Weeklies (CA, USA).



Prof. Preeti Mahajan (D/o Sh. R C Goel)

Chetna Association of Canada Supports SB 403

Chetna Association of Canada joins anti-caste activists and supporters in congratulating State of California for introducing and passing SB403, a legislation that now adds caste as a protected category and enhances processes of inclusion in all public areas.

The legislation was first introduced on February 9, 2023. After going through the due processes, it passed at the third reading with an overwhelming support of 34 versus 1 on May 11, 2023.

Other jurisdictions such as City of Seattle have passed a similar ordinance while City of Burnaby recently passed a motion to include caste as protected category in its policy framework.

Anti-caste activists and supporters are pleased with this decision and acknowledge support of many diverse groups and organiza-

tions regardless of cultural or faith backgrounds.

ator Aisha Wahab and co-authored by California State Assembly Member,

state are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind whatsoever."

The amended act will now "provide that all persons within the jurisdiction of the state are so entitled regardless of their caste".

Legislation related to employment housing, California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) will also now be amended to include caste as a protected category.

Jai Birdi

General Secretary
Chetna Association of Canada

Regular Session: Thursday, May 11, 2023

Y Allen	Dahle	Y Limón	Y Roth
Y Alvarado-Gil	Y Dodd	Y McGuire	Y Rubio
Y Archuleta	Y Durazo	Y Menjivar	Seyarto
Y Ashby	Y Eggman	Y Min	Y Skinner
Y Atkins	Y Glazer	Y Newman	Y Smallwood-Cuevas
Becker	Y Gonzalez	Nguyen	Y Stern
Y Blakespear	Grove	Y Niello	Y Umberg
Y Bradford	Y Hurtado	Y Ochoa Bogh	Y Wahab
Y Caballero	N Jones	Y Padilla	Y Wiener
Y Cortese	Y Laird	Y Portantino	Y Wilk

YES: 34 NO: 1

SB 403

Wahab et al. Item #: 86
Vote Required - 21

SB 403, to amend the existing law, the Unruh Civil Rights Act, was sponsored and authored by Sen-

Jasmeet Bains. The law provides "... that all persons within the jurisdiction of this

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D. C. Ahir

The Ad Dharm Movement and Dr. Ambedkar

When in 1915 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was giving final touches to his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University in New York, a Punjabi

nationalists led by Lala Hardayal. By his sheer devotion and sincerity to the cause of India's freedom, he came to be regarded as the most dependable and reliable member of the organization. In 1915, Mangu Ram volunteered to be one of the five Ghadarites accompanying a shipload of guns and propaganda material headed for India. This ship was unfortunately intercepted by the British as Batavia, and was sealed. It remained sealed for nearly a year, with the five Ghadarites as prisoners inside. In the meanwhile, they were prosecuted in absentia, and sentenced to death for taking out the weapons illegally on the ship. On hearing the capital punishment, some patriot Indians in Germany decided to help the imprisoned Ghadarites. Somehow, they managed to smuggle the prisoners out from the sealed ship, and sent them in different directions. Mangu Ram was put in a ship going to Manila. By mistake,

for fear of being intercepted. Taking him, therefore, as dead, his wife married Mangu Ram's elder brother, who was a widower. The validity of the death warrant issued by the British Government lapsed in 1924. Then Mangu Ram thought of returning to India. Accordingly, he came back to Punjab in 1925. Soon thereafter, Mangoo Ram became involved in another kind of freedom struggle, the liberation of the untouchables, the people among whom he was born, and the people who were meekly suffering the atrocities of the Hindus. Babu Mangu Ram's association with the Ghadar Party had broadened his outlook, and sharpened his skills as an organizer. Soon he found a band of like-minded young men involved in the social work, and began organizing them in order to liberate the downtrodden from the clutches of the Hindu social slavery.

Encouraged by the response to his

Dharm Mandal were established in Jalandhar city from where the movement was organized in a systematic manner, and the devoted missionaries spread the message far and wide in the Punjab, and even beyond. Since the Mandal had accepted Sahib Shri Guru Ravidass Ji as its spiritual leader, the movement became primarily popular amongst the Chamars, and they readily adopted the nomenclature of Ad Dharmi.

At the time, Babu Mangu Ram was organizing the untouchables of the Punjab under the banner of Ad Dharm; Dr. Ambedkar was fighting a similar battle in another part of the country. Though they were thousands of miles apart, yet their ideas and methods of struggle were almost identical. Both believed that the present day Scheduled Castes are not Hindus, and that their salvation lies only in being independent of the Hindu religion. Both believed in self-help and advocated peaceful means to achieve their goal. Both laid the greatest emphasis on 'education'. Babasaheb considered "education" the key to all progress, and Mangu Ram says that only "education can lead us to Sachkhand (the realm of truth)." Again, Babasaheb exhorted the people to follow the Three Commandments of 'Education, Agitation and Organization' to gain power. According to Mangu Ram, the poor have three kinds of power: "Qaumiat (collective solidarity), Mazhab (spirituality) and Majlis (organization)".

Within a year of its founding, the Ad Dharm movement created quite a stir in the Punjab by constant rallies and conferences, if forced the Government of the day to take notice of the problems of the untouchables. One of the reasons of the poverty and exploitation of the untouchables was the pernicious system of beggar, the system under which they were forced to live at the beck and call of others and were obliged to do a great deal of work without any remuneration whatsoever. The Ad Dharm Mandal agitated against the system of beggar, and demanded its abolition. The Mandal also agitated for repealing the Punjab Land Alienation Act which prohibited the untouchables from buying even a small piece of land. The Ad Dharm movement reached its peak at the time of 1931 Census. As a result of their sustained propaganda, more than half a million untouchables declared themselves as Ad Dharmis. This showed the organizational skill of its leaders. "The massive support", as says Mark Jueregensmeyer, "created political capital, and Mangu Ram used that capital in political ways. Ad Dharmi candidates stood for public offices and an alliance was created with the Unionist Party. In both instances, scheduled caste leaders supported by the Ad Dharm organization achieved public positions".

Courtesy: Dr. Ambedkar and Punjab by D. C. Ahir

youth, who had gone to America a few years earlier, was involved in a dangerous mission of smuggling guns from California to the Punjab for inciting mutiny in India. This Punjabi youth later became famous as Babu Mangu Ram, the founder of the Ad Dharm Movement. Mangu Ram was born in a small village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur, Punjab on 14 January, 1886 in an untouchable family; his father was a leather merchant. As by then the doors of education had been opened to all by the British rulers, Mangu Ram was sent to the school in the nearby village, Mahilpur, but the treatment meted out to him by the Hindu teacher was far from human. Like Bhim Rao in Satara, Mangu Ram too was made to sit outside the classroom. Not only that, even the teacher would not teach him directly; he was invariably given lesson through a Muslim student. Somehow, Mangu Ram passed his middle examination and joined high school at Bajwara, a nearby town. Here too. He was subjected to the same humiliation, and was made to sit outside the classroom. One day, it rained so heavily that in spite of taking shelter under a tree, Mangu Ram was completely drenched. And when the snow-balls, accompanied by high velocity winds, fell like missiles on him, he was unable to bear it any longer. So, he ran to take shelter inside the classroom. As soon as he had entered the room, the teacher saw him, and instead of showing any sympathy, he started beating him with a stick for having come inside. Weeping and crying, Mangoo Ram went out, and somehow reached his home.

Unmindful of the insult and beating, Mangu Ram again went to the school next day. As soon as he reached there, he was surprised to see the teacher in the process of purifying the classroom by sprinkling water on the wooden table, chair and the tats on which the students used to sit. On seeing him, Brahmin teacher cried out, "Oh Chandal, you have come again". Fearing another beating, Mangoo Ram hastened back, never to go again to the school. And that was the end of his education.

With his education coming to an abrupt end, Mangu Ram became unemployed, and bit frustrated too. In 1909, he, along with some other young men from the village, went to California, U.S.A. in order to earn some money by working in the Peach Orchards of Fresno and elsewhere in the San Joaquin valley of central California. Instead of earning money, he, however, became involved in the activities of the Ghadar Party, an international network of militant Punjabi



however, the ship reached Singapore. Unfortunately for Mangu Ram, here he was recognized by some traitor Indians who had earlier worked for the Ghadar Party. They informed the Police. By now, for running away from Batavia, death warrants had been issued by the British Government to be executed wherever any one of them was found. Accordingly, the Singapore Police began preparing for his execution. Then a miracle happened. Just half an hour before his execution, a gentleman named Barde, whom Mangu Ram had never seen or met, came, caught him by the arm, took him out of the Thana, and putting him on the same ship in which Mangu Ram had come, he asked the Captain of the ship to sail for Manila. By the time the Police swung into action, the ship had crossed the Singapore Port Limits. Having failed to intercept the ship, the police caught hold of some drunkard; executed him to cover up their lapse, and announced that Mangu Ram had been executed. This news was later published in the Indian Newspapers.

For the next 7-8 years, Mangu Ram hid in the Philippines, and during this period he had no contact with his family as no letters could be written



ideas, Babu Mangu Ram convened a Conference at his village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur on 11-12 June, 1926. Addressing the largely attended Conference, Babu Mangu Ram proclaimed that the Untouchables constituted a separate Qaum, a religious community like the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and those they were the original inhabitants of this country. Hence, the movement was named as Ad Dharm; and its leaders devised distinctive costume, bright red turbans and shashes; coined a new sacred mantra or symbol, "So-hang" and exhorted the people to call themselves as Ad Dharmis.

The primary object of the Ad Dharm was to give the untouchables an alternative religion. Its another object was to reform the society from within. As social movement, the Ad Dharm exhorted the people to abstain from immoral practices; to lead a life of purity and piety; to discard the use of alcohol, drugs, give education to boys and girls, and to treat all men and women equal in the society. On the whole, the movement was aimed at giving the untouchables a sense of pride and dignity as members of the Ad Dharm.

The headquarters of Ad

Remembering Surinder Mahey - My fellow Bootan Mandian

Surinder Mahey (1957-2023), a fellow Bootan Mandian, a known and prominent face of the Mahey clan of Bootan Mandi, Former Mayor of Jalandhar and currently a dalit face of BJP in Punjab is no more. He passed away today, May 15, after a prolonged hospitalization and fight against deadly cancer and other health problems. His untimely death has closed an important chapter of the day to day socio-political hustle and bustle in and around Bootan Mandi. Surinder was the worthy son of the soil who made his mark in socio-political and business circles of the region. Though I had written about Surinder Mahey in my blogs several times with one reference or the other yet I thought of writing again today to remember him as one of my extended Mahey family and join the bereaved family in their hour of grief. I recall my blog of September 4, 2010 – Some of my fellow Bootan-Mandians - 2 when I was still in service. I give an extract of that write up for perusal:

Quote

The time does not stop. Seths of Bootan Mandi continued to do well in the traditional leather business. They made their off spring to join them but without educating them to take over with a modern outlook. Some of them survived and some, who could not sustain, vanished or changed track. One family requires special mention, the family of Shri Surinder Mahey who rose to the coveted position of the Lord Mayor of Jalandhar. He belongs to an ordinary and poor background with little education. His uncle Shri Ram Lal, who came back from the UK after many years, provided financial back-up and support to the family. It was a wise move and appreciable action. But the young boys Hussan and Surinder, sons of Shri Rup Lal, availed off the god sent opportunity and proved their worth in establishing themselves in the leather business. I was not aware of Surinder's political inclinations. He

got himself elected as a member of The Jalandhar Municipal Council sometime in 1985. He made good contacts in political set-up. I remember meeting the then Union Minister Yogender Makwana, Chaudhary Jagjit Singh, Chaudhary Darshan Singh Kaypee and some Congress leaders at the residence of Surinder in early 1986,

the occasion was the marriage of Surinder, if my memory is correct. He gained further strength and could succeed in occupying the prestigious position of the Mayor of Jalandhar. It is not a mean achievement. Bootan Mandi shall be proud of him. I understand that Surinder still enjoys a good standing in political circles. Apart from his good work as the Mayor, he also contributed considerably to the betterment of the community. I am told that he is the main force behind the project of the magnificent Guru Ravidass Dham at Bootan Mandi. The project is not yet complete and would require further efforts to bring it to completion. Surinder also did a good job in constructing a new building for the school in Bootan Mandi and handed over the Government to run the school, as usual. It would, to my mind, have been better if the school is run directly by the Guru Ravidass Education and Welfare Trust, with a view to provide quality education to



the children of the area. It was feasible but the Trust itself, to my knowledge, unfortunately is not fully functional because of internal problems and personal ego of the Seths. I pray that some better sense prevails and Bootan Mandi retains the lead in the affairs of the community.

Unquote

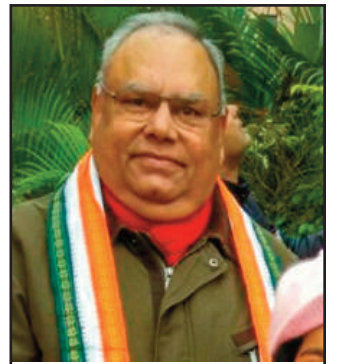
On my return to my roots in Bootan Mandi on retirement from a long diplomatic career in 2011, my interaction with Surinder Mahey increased particularly with regard to the community issues and matters of interest and concern. I found him an enthusiastic social activist and fully involved in community activities. He was always reverential to me, I must register it here. But to my personal assessment, I must be truthful to say, he was somewhat over-obsessed with a bit of excessive personal ego but at the same time fully amenable and accommodative. I personally recall that in 2011-12 during Guru Ravidass Jyanti celebrations in Bootan Mandi, he parted company with the main stream managing committee of Guru Ravidass Educational and Charitable Trust and Guru Ravidass Dham owing to some differences which were mostly personal and arranged parallel functions. I tried to argue and advised him and the other group to shun this divisive approach with a po-

etic assertion - हम ही हम है तो क्या हम है, तुम ही तुम हो तो क्या तुम हो! - They got united in the successive years; it was a matter of satisfaction.

Surinder Mahey, as a politician, learned the tricks of the trade from the political big-wigs like Chaudhary Jagjit Singh, Darshan Singh Kaypee, Mohinder Singh Kaypee among others. I was told that he had enjoyed good rapport with Captain Amrinder Singh while he was in the Congress Party. He remained a successful and active Mayor of Jalandhar from 2002-2007. People still remember his tenure as the Mayor with appreciation. Later he lost track and left the Congress Party for political convenience which did not go well for his political career.

In 2019, he joined BJP and contested elections from the Kartarpur constituency in 2021 and lost. Surinder Mahey tried his best to catch-up with the BJP bandwagon but the fate intervened to upset his plans. He fell seriously sick and succumbed to the deadly cancer after a brave fight. The last time he spoke in Bootan Mandi and paid tributes to Babasaheb Ambedkar on April 14 at Guru Ravi Dass Dham, exactly a month before his Good-bye – Alvida on May 15. With the sad demise of Surinder Mahey, a promising career has been cut short. I close this personal tribute with the prayer to the Almighty to grant peace to the departed soul. We have lost a worthy BootanMandian.

जो बादकश थे पुराने; उठते जाते हैं, सुबह करीब है अल्ला का नाम ले सकी



Ramesh Chander
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)
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ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL (SB 403)

SUPPORTED BY CALIFORNIA JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

California Judiciary Committee, in its meeting held in the Building 1021, O Street, Sacramento (CA) on April 25, 2023, favored the above mentioned bill, proposed by Aisha Wahab, State senator from Hayward, Fremont Area of California. This definitely clears a big hurdle in the way of passing this Bill. This bill will now go the Senate Appropriation Committee before it is submitted to the Senate for approval and signatures of the Governor.

This historic bill, if passed by the Senate, will be a landmark decision and will explicitly add caste to the list of protected categories already on record in the state statutes and those who are discriminated on the basis of caste will be able to seek legal remedy for violation of their rights. Hundreds of supporters

and opponents of the proposed bill gathered outside the Capitol Building



in Sacramento on April 25, 2023, displaying their signs and raising slogans in favor and opposition of the bill.

The demonstrations went through very peacefully and successfully without any un-toward incident under the strict supervision, control and guidance of the Capitol police.

This historic gathering in-

cluded community members from all parts of California including the Bay

Area, Bakersfield, Sacramento and Yuba City.

Two Busloads of supporters (Numbering about 50) came from Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Pittsburg, California including some prominent community members named Mr. Shashi Paul, Ramesh Suman, Kulwant Kaur Banga, O.P. Balley Dharam-

pal Chonkria, Vinod Jakhu, Niranjan Singh, Dashvinder Paul, Jagtar Bhatia and Salinder Bhatia.

Dr. Nir-mal Singh from Bakersfield played a vital role in co-ordinating this momentous get-together.

Mr. Prem Chumber, Editor in Chief, "Ambedkar Times" and "Desh Doaba" Weeklies provided a very vital role in professional and video coverage of the entire event.

More detailed information about this historic bill will be shared with all as it moves further in the senate proceedings. Thanking you all.



O.P. Balley
(Founder member)
Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha
Pittsburg, CA



V.B. Soni

Ambassador (Retd.)

Gentleman Bureaucrat: Vimal Chandra

Some great personalities, out of modesty, shun limelight while doing their bit to help humanity. Their contribution accordingly goes unnoticed and unacknowledged. Vimal Chandra was one such person, belonging to that rare breed. He gave wise counsel, guidance, help and support to countless people, from modest background and victims of high caste prejudices. He understood their predicament well, as he himself came from such a milieu and identified and empathized with them. He authored a publication entitled: "Handbook on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe" (S.C. & S.T) in 1968 based on lifetime work in the office of Commissioner, S.C. & S.T. It became a useful reference material for researchers and scholars.

There is scanty material in public domain about Vimal Chandra's background, family history, official positions held and contributions made. To collect the material, there was no better source than the man himself. Accordingly, with questions and note book in hand, I picked his brain at length, in half a dozen sessions with him.

I found him gracious, patient and generous with his time to have granted those marathon sessions in January/February 1996, when I visited Delhi on midterm home leave, from my posting in Jamaica. With his photographic memory, he recounted events dating back to more than 60 years back, not leaving even minor detail. What follows was a fascinating account of what came out from him.

Vimal Chandra's family hailed from Village TANDA, UNA District, Hoshiarpur in Punjab. The only son of Labbu Ram and Nandi Devi, he had three sisters Malawi, Ram Pyari and Vidya. The family surname Bhatia transformed to Bhatia in due course of time. Born on 6th November 1915 he was a bright student from the beginning. He graduated from D.A.V. College, Lahore, Punjab University with Honours in Philosophy in 1936. One of his lifetime close associates, Ishwar Das Pawar, was pursuing LLB course, while being employed as Clerk/translator at Lahore High Court. From then on they forged a lifelong close family bonding.

Around that time a well-established builder Nanig Ram's family was on the lookout for a suitable match for the daughter Shanti, (born 10th September 1923). The eldest son Mohan Lal, who had taken charge of the family affairs, after his father's death, visited Lahore in 1935 to check out on Ishwar Das. His name had been recommended, by an associate. The latter's response to the proposal was that his priority was to complete his LLB degree first. So

the matter was not pursued.

After graduation in 1936, Chandra qualified as Lower Division Clerk (LDC) but could not join, on account of lack of proficiency in typing. That proved to be a blessing in disguise, giving him an opportunity and time to prepare for a higher post. Sure enough he qualified for Assistant level position advertised by the Public Service Commission. In 1938 Vimal Chandra joined Government service in the office of Accountant General in Shimla. From there he was asked to proceed to Delhi. As he did not know anybody in the city, he sought the help of Mohan Lal in finding residential accommodation. (He had met him during the latter's Lahore visit.) A modest flat from amongst the family property in Paharganj, not far from Imperial Talkies was offered, which is where he initially started life in Delhi.

In the meanwhile, search for a match for Shanti was still on. In response to a matrimonial ad in a local newspaper, somebody claiming to be close to a Royal family in Jammu region, offered to be the facilitator for the match. Through correspondence, family details and photos were exchanged, resulting in quick engagement. The date of the proposed marriage was fixed in November 1937 and invitation cards distributed.

When a family friend received the wedding card he enquired if a background check had been done on the prospective bridegroom. He alerted that the groom may be suffering from some serious disease. Shocked by this disclosure, its veracity was checked out. Sure enough, the rumours turned out to be true! The proposal was immediately withdrawn. The groom's side refused to accept it and threatened to bring the

baraat on the fixed day anyway, leading to much tension. Mercifully that did not happen and a disaster was averted.

Fortuitous circumstances put Vimal Chandra in a position to be the right choice at the right time for Shanti. A suitable approach was made and the marriage proposal was accepted by both sides. The wedding date was fixed for January 26, 1939. Preparations got under way in the right earnest. Just a day before the date, unexpected complications developed. Without the knowledge and approval of Vimal Chandra, a close relative of his, approached the bride's

side exploring possibility of some 'consideration'. This was turned down with the response that the girl would be given gifts and presents out of love and affection, which could not be the matter of discussion/negotiation.

This unforeseen development

made Shanti's brothers nervous. They were unsure if the baraat would actually turn up at the appointed hour for the ceremony! Youngest brother Bankey Lal was sent to discreetly check out, if preparatory activity at the place, where bridegroom's party was lodged, were going on as per schedule. Much to everyone's relief, no let-up in the proceedings was reported there. In the event the bridegroom's party did arrive at the fixed time. The marriage was solemnized normally, as per Vedic rites, much to everybody's relief. That's how the couple's life's inseparable life journey started.

Shanti proved to be a perfect life partner, as proudly commented by Vimal Chandra himself. She blended well within the family. Facing a challenging domestic situation, she proved more than a match because of her affable personality, warm and af-

fectionate nature. She was a perfect hostess and entertained constant stream of official and family guests' graciously. She had a good knowledge of religious and social customs and rituals. Her attribute as a match maker was impeccable, advising people on a whole range of issues. A very popular person and a favourite of relatives and friends, she was a noble soul.

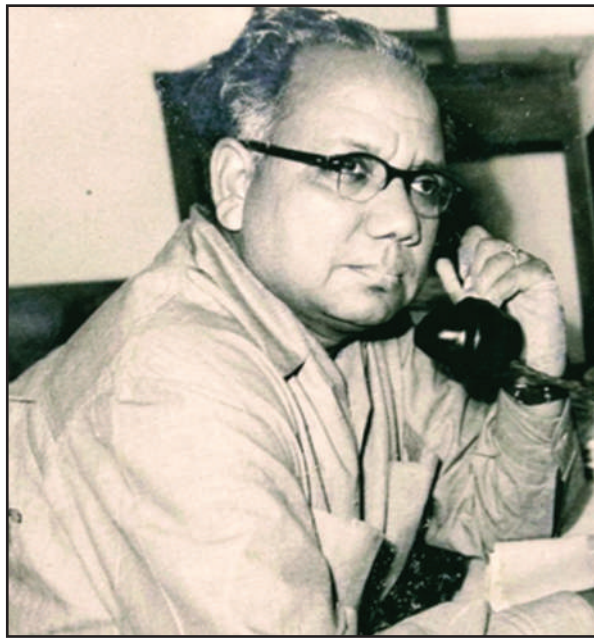
One of the earliest influences in Vimal Chandra's life was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In 1936 Baba Sahib had visited Punjab for a discussion with Sikh leaders, to examine the option Scheduled Caste community could consider to escape from the clutches of deep rooted caste prejudices, rampant in the Hindu society. Could conversion to Sikhism be the answer? He started with a visit to Lahore, during which the student in Chandra got drawn to his magnetic personality, becoming his early follower.

Vimal Chandra's official career got off to a grand start with posting to Ministry of External Affairs, South Block in 1938. He worked for varying periods of time in the Northern and Eastern Division, followed by General Section. He rose to be Resident Clerk in Central Registry in South Block, which meant he was on duty from the close of office at 4.30 p.m. till the following morning at 10 a.m. The important job involved sorting out incoming important Dak, dispatch of classified telegrams to higher ups, overlooking smooth and efficient movement of communications to various Government departments. His stint in that Ministry lasted till 1946.

All India Scheduled Caste Welfare Association (SCWA) was formed at Dr. Ambedkar's initiative in 1942. Up and coming earliest graduates from Punjab, Vimal Chandra and Kartar Singh, who had taken up Government jobs, became two of its office bearers. At the height of the World War II in July 1942, Ambedkar was appointed to the prestigious Executive Council of Governor General, as its Labour Member. His priority was to fight for a fair deal for his people. Even before the demand for reservation, his unrelenting fight was for adequate representation for the downtrodden in various official positions. He was aware of the standard excuse that there were no qualified people among the community, to be considered for the purpose. He immediately swung in to action to address the issue.

Baba Sahib got together a group of promising young members from the community, to personally mentor and guide for the leadership role. Vimal Chandra was in regular touch with him, in connection with the activities of SCWA. He became a trusted confidant of Ambedkar and helped him putting together an informal study group, taking responsibility for logistical arrangements for their meetings. The tea and snacks on the occasions used to be brought by the

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Gentleman Bureaucrat: Vimal Chandra

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individuals voluntarily. Baba Sahib used to give important lessons on various aspects of life. His main emphasis was on importance of education and books, as tools to uplift his people. He was at pains to underline the importance of the world of knowledge and the study of relevant academic material.

Other achievers among Dr. Ambedkar's protégés included Munshi Ram Bhardwaj, Prakash Chander, Nanak Chand Rattu, Bhonsle, DG Jadhav, Meshram, Devi Dayal, Bankey Lal, Dr. K.L. Muir and Rai Sahib Puran Chand. Later Sohan Lal Shastri, joined as an important collaborator. Baba Saheb brought him as a senior draftsman, helping in the Hindi translation of important legal documents. As the Law Minister Dr. Ambedkar was busy drafting the Constitution of the new Republic of India, and later the Hindu Code Bill. S.L. Shastri, provided a helping hand, in many ways.

It was common knowledge that Vimal Chandra had gained confidence of Baba Sahib and his family. The latter's only son, Yashwant Rao disappointed the father no end, showing no inclination for academic pursuits. Even at the age of 31 years, he had not settled in life. At that stage he fell in love with a girl but did not dare approach his father for permission for marriage. Using Vimal Chandra's proximity, he tried seeking the father's permission through him. With great trepidation when the subject was broached, Baba Sahib flared up, dismissing in a brusque manner the proposition aside by a remark: "I am against marriage just for the heck of it. People should become useful to the society before considering marriage. The purpose in life should be to acquire knowledge by reading books. Anybody who does not read at least a book per week has no right to exist."

In 1946 in Labour Ministry, which was under the charge of Dr. Ambedkar, as Member in Viceroy's Executive Council, a vacancy at the level of Superintendent became available. With his recommendation Vimal Chandra was appointed on that post on transfer from External Affairs Ministry. He worked there for some years before he found his rightful place in the newly created Office of Commissioner for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (S.C. & S.T.), building its architecture virtually from inception. Having carved a niche for himself on the subject, he rose from positions of Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner going on to the rank of Director. Even after attaining the age of superannuation, which then was 55 years, he was given extension for three years, keeping in view his competence and thorough knowledge of the subject. From a modest dwelling at 54 Foch Square, Gole Market, he moved in March 1956 to the sprawling green Lutyen's Zone Bungalow at 56, Ashoka Road near Bangla Sahib, where he stayed

on till his retirement from Government service on November 5, 1973. The Independence of India was accompanied by a traumatic partition of the country on August 15, 1947. One of the biggest mass migrations in human history, uprooting millions of people on either side of the newly created border, resulted in millions from West Punjab on the Pakistan side of the border descending on Delhi. Majority of people were given temporary shelters in camp conditions. Vimal Chandra's sisters, along with their families were accommodated in the cramped condition at his Government accommodation at Foch Square. For months the residence was teeming with scores of occupants. There was uninterrupted 'lan-



Daughter Shashi and Darshan Nafri Reception. 6.2.1966. From left Khub Singh, Nafri, Renu, Santsoh, Bishan Lala

gar' in operation at all hours of the day. Food used to be cooked not just for the newly arrived guests but also for refugee camps, especially for the orphan girls traumatised as rape victims, while fleeing Pakistan. Not for a moment did the hospitable couple show any exasperation, while voluntarily undertaking this humanitarian gesture, in spite of the great personal discomfort: ample proof of their large heartedness and generosity.

Wife Shanti proved to be an anchor and a rock-solid support system, Vimal Chandra was fully devoted and dependent on her. He never tried to hide their special bonding in public. While going out together, he would often lovingly hold her hand swinging it gently, as they walked along in the manner of young lovers! Shanti was an accomplished singer. The song everyone wanted to hear her sing at private family gathering was "Yehzinda giusiki haijokisi kahogaya" from the blockbuster film 'Anarkali'

Eldest son Vinod joined Government service and Ashok migrated to Canada after finishing his College. Deepak got his engineering degree and after working for a public sector undertaking, he too shifted to Canada. Chandra's eldest daughter Shashi married Darshan Ram Nafri, who retired as an I.A.S. officer, while the younger one Manjula married a banker Surinder, who rose to a high position in the Reserve Bank of India. An incident worth mentioning about the motherly instinct of Shanti that

came to the fore pertains to her nephew. In 1954 his youngest bhabhi Kishan Devi, after delivery of the youngest son Bharat, underwent a medical emergency. In her stomach a ball like foreign element developed, growing in size, causing anxiety. She had to be operated immediately, before it became cancerous. During the period Shanti came forward to take care of the baby voluntarily. She nursed Bharat like her own offspring, till the mother got out of the hospital. Such was the care, maternal affection and dedication she showered on him. November 1984 would be the saddest month in Vimal Chandra's life. The country was reeling after the tragic assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31 1984

ent could not hide the smirk on their faces. The candidate, who was unprepared for such a question, recovered quickly enough to give the right reply!

Vimal Chandra enjoyed the reputation of being a balanced and a fair person. He never showed undue favour to anyone. It was for this reason that the families of his wife's three brothers approached him for help in deciding on contentious issue of property division. It was a complex matter but he took it on as a challenge. He listened to the claims and counter claims, examined the intricate issues involved carefully and came up with fair division formula, acceptable to the three parties. If such a matter had been brought before a court law for arbitration, it would have dragged on for a prolonged period of time, entailing a huge cost, creating bitterness among the contending parties. His constructive approach and deft handling saved the family honour.

I was privileged to have been mentored by him, when I was preparing for All India Civil Services Examination. Result of that was to be announced in May 1967, through a press release by Press Information Bureau's (PIB) office, then located in the Annex to All India Radio building on Parliament Street. A day before its formal announcement I went to that office to check and could not believe that I had made it to the IAS/IFS. Before rushing home, I decided to take a detour through 56, Ashoka Road residence of Vimal Chandra and broke the good news first to him. And from there, on reaching home at 53, Hanuman Road, I learnt that he had already informed my father about it on phone, depriving the surprise element. He just could not contain his happiness at my achievement and became the harbinger of good news to my father.

Vimal Chandra and Shanti proved to be the perfect match makers for our family. Three of my sisters got married to the bridegrooms, selected by them. In my own case also, they came up with proposal for the daughter of his old friend Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar settled in Chandigarh, Kamlesh. That's how the two of us got married on May 13, 1968.

Vimal Chandra continued to serve the society, even after retirement, in various capacities. He was Adviser to several Government departments and a consultant in the selection board of Public Sector Undertakings like NTPC, PNB, LIC, EPI, Indian Airlines, EIL. He had a tremendous sense of humour. An incident recalled by his son Deepak's friend, interviewed for the post of Junior Project Engineer in Engineering Projects India Ltd. (EPI) would bear that out. At the interview he was answering competently the questions put to him by Board members, which included Vimal Chandra. To put him at ease, to check his reflex, Chandra out of the blue asked him: "How many buttons are there in the shirt you are wearing?" The atmosphere in the cabin lightened up, as those pres-

Vimal Chandra was a great family man. After the passing away of his wife he took over the responsibility to bind the family together. He was a doting and caring grandfather. On a visit to his home one would find his grandchildren rallying around him to listen to his stories and fascinating anecdotes. He had the interest, patience and time for them. In fact he could sit in a group of any generation or age group and be connected with them all, as if he was one of them. He used to derive immense pleasure by asking out of context questions to test their knowledge. A grandchild of his fondly recalls, that at times sitting beside him, a subject was given to him to compose a poem. He would

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Buddhism: A far Greater Revolution than the French Revolution

Dr. Ambedkar in his book "Philosophy of Hinduism" writes that Buddhism was first a religious revolution which eventually turned into a Socio-Political revolution. He considered Buddhism as a far greater revolution than the French Revolution. It becomes natural to ask how was Buddhism a religious revolution and why the need to revive our society on Buddhist principles is even greater today.

According to Dr Ambedkar, Religion is not a fixed phenomenon and its meaning has varied from time to time in accordance with the development of human thinking in relation to his societal surroundings. During its evolutionary history, two drastic changes have occurred in the meaning of religion - the integration of concepts of God and Morality into the scheme of religion. These changes have resulted in fanaticism which manifests itself as sentimental nonsense both in personal as well as social relations.

I would name this incorporation of God and Morality into the



scheme of religion as COSMO-MORAL CORRUPTION. Tathagat Bud-

dha was the first religious teacher who, through an ideological revolution corrected this corruption by freeing the meaning of religion from the concepts of God and Morality and made human mind the epicentre of his teachings.

Dr Ambedkar in "Buddha and His Dhamma " questions what can a man who has no internal purity in him give to the society..? Buddha said that the presence of Dukkha in the world has its origin in the human mind which eventually manifests as wrong social ideologies creating class conflicts. A man suffers from Dukkha because of his wrong thoughts and actions towards himself and others in the society which leads to wrong inter personal as well as inter social relations.

Tathagata Buddha, by taking away the power from an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God as the deciding factor of all

human thoughts and actions, universalized and equalized all moral values of life in order to reduce moral conflicts arising out of division of morality based on class, caste and gender. He made the re-orientation of human mind the source of social reformation.

Dr Ambedkar by reviving and reinterpreting Buddhism in the form of Neo-Buddhism, freed theology from COSMO-MORAL corruption, the biggest corruption ever done to enslave human mind and society.



Dr Amritpal Kaur
(Dental Surgeon)
Writer on Ambedkarism, Buddhism and Feminism
Founding Member National Council of Women Leaders

California Senate passes Bill seeking ban on caste-based discrimination

The California Senate has overwhelmingly passed a legislation seeking to explicitly ban caste discrimination in a historic move that

first US State to add caste as a protected category in its anti-discrimination laws.

Promoters

which provides that all people in California are entitled to the full and

firm legal consequences for those seeking to avoid responsibility or

'Legislation to put caste in protected category'

If signed into law, it would make California country's first state to outlaw caste-based discrimination Passed by 34-1 vote, the Bill would add caste as a protected category in anti-discrimination laws The Bill adds caste as a protected category to an existing law, the Unruh Civil Rights Act in the US Promoters of the Bill said a similar bill is being tabled in the State House of Representatives.



would make America's most populous state, also the country's first, to outlaw caste-based bias.

State Senator Aisha Wahab, the first Muslim and Afghan American elected to the state legislature, introduced the Bill last month.

Passed by 34-1 vote, the bill - SB403, would make California the

of the bill, being led by non-profit Equality Lab, said that a similar bill is being introduced in the State House of Representatives, before it can be sent to the Governor to be signed into a law. The bill adds caste as a protected category to an existing law, the Unruh Civil Rights Act,

equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments.

The bill provides explicit protections to those who have been systemically harmed due to caste bias and prejudice. It also provides

ramifications for permitting or participating in caste discrimination and caste-based violence. This landmark bill comes just weeks after the California Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously passed SB403 in April.

(With thanks- The Tribune)

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close his eyes and, on the spot, come up with a verse that rhymed perfectly.

To ward off the scorching sun, overhead sola hat which was an Indian sun helmeted cap, made from pith material, was popular during the colonial period. Vimal Chandra used to wear it. To amuse the children, he devised a 'magic' trick by standing with his back against the wall with the hat touching it. While whistling and letting off air from his inflated mouth, he would simultaneously press the hat against the wall lifting it from the front and gradually bring

his heel down making it look like a magic. Then again he used to make mouse origami with his white handkerchief, putting it in his palm and making it jump off by suddenly closing his fist, to the excitement of the children. The game was for the kids to catch the mouse.

And then after almost 20 years following his wife's departure, Vimal Chandra decided to join her in heaven on February 21, 2004. He left a void in the lives of his family, friends, former colleagues and admirers.

Vimal Chandra was a cultured man with a fine taste. He was a

straight forward person with simple habits. He dressed elegantly, a trait he no doubt learnt from Dr. Ambedkar. His use of Brylcreem gel to keep his hair in place was his trademark style! His hobbies included solving cross word puzzles. He enjoyed watching movies and saw 'Anarkali' about 20 times. He attended International Film Festivals regularly. His favourite TV show was "The Bold and The Beautiful". No one could disturb him during the programme.

Chandra's family says that he was a discerning foodie and enjoyed exotic dishes, particularly non-vegetarian. He consumed raw bulbs of

garlic daily with relish, stating that it was the best medicine for heart. He had fondness for namkeen Bhajia mixture and would sneak into the kitchen and locate the carefully hidden jar containing his favoured item. He was often troubled by a blocked nose. His constant companion to counter that problem used to be Vicks nasal inhaler.

Vimal Chandra was a gentleman bureaucrat. He was never arrogant nor haughty. Nobody ever saw him losing his temper. He never drank nor smoked. He had no extravagant habits. In short, an exemplary personality, a role model.