



# Ambedkar Times *Weekly*

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## Preserving the Legacy of Ad Dharm Movement

**Prem Kumar Chumber**

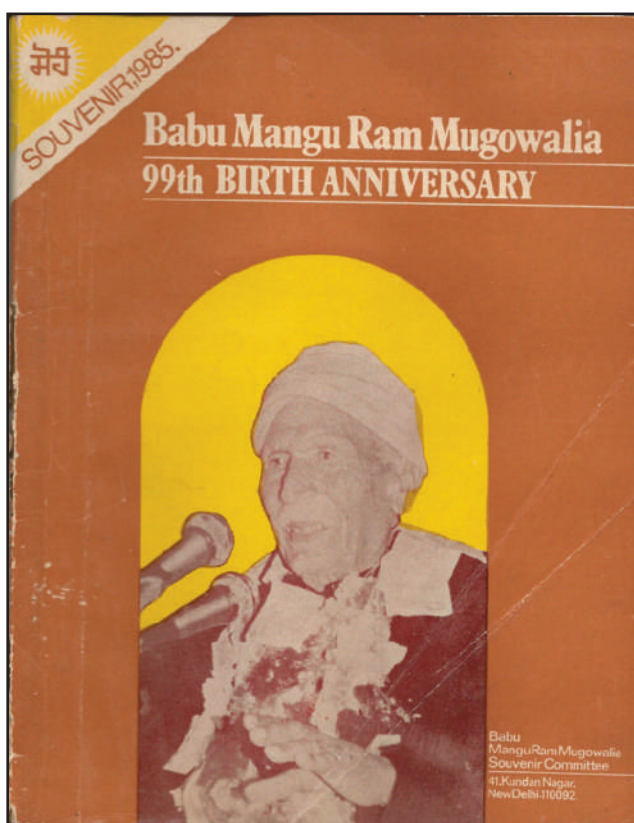
Editor-in-Chief:

Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Ad Dharm movement brought Dalit consciousness in the undivided vast province of Punjab at a time when varied political organisations (Singh Sabhas, Arya Samajis, Muslim League, Ahmadiyya's, Christian missionary societies) representing mainstream communities, in the regions were making concerted efforts to strengthen their numerical strength for gaining some political space in the promised devolution of political power in the form of limited electoral provisions. Though Scheduled Castes, then addressed as Depressed classes, constituted a significant part of the total population of the Punjab province, they did not have their own exclusive political organisation like that of the other mainstream communities in the province. It was for this reason that all other community based organisations were making best of their efforts to win maximum number of Scheduled Castes towards their fold. All of them were asserting their claim on Scheduled Castes to include them in the religions of their respective communities. In fact, it was for the first time in 1920s that the leaders of different communities realised to consolidate the numerical strength of their respective communities as a potent factor for the acquisition of some share in the British system of governance. It was precisely during this very time that the historic Ad Dharm movement took roots in Punjab.

The Ad Dharm movement was founded by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia after his return from abroad in 1925. He along with the efforts of Vasant Rai, Thakur Chand and Swami Shudranand called a mega conference at his native village of

Mugowal and laid the foundation of the Ad Dharm movement amidst various sub-communities of the

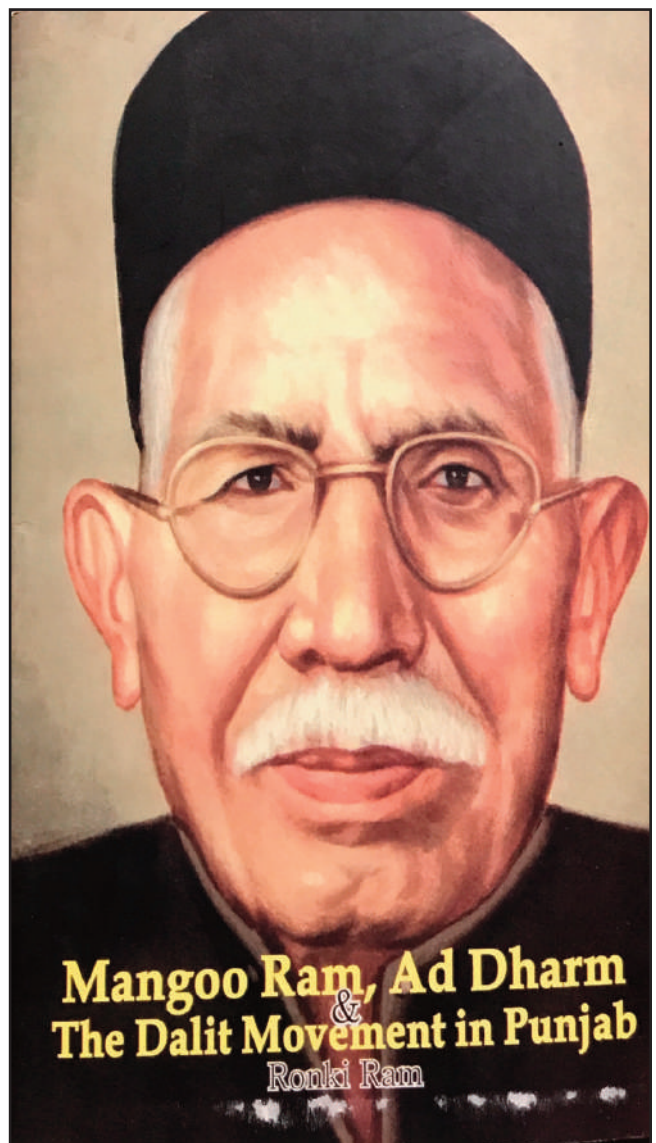
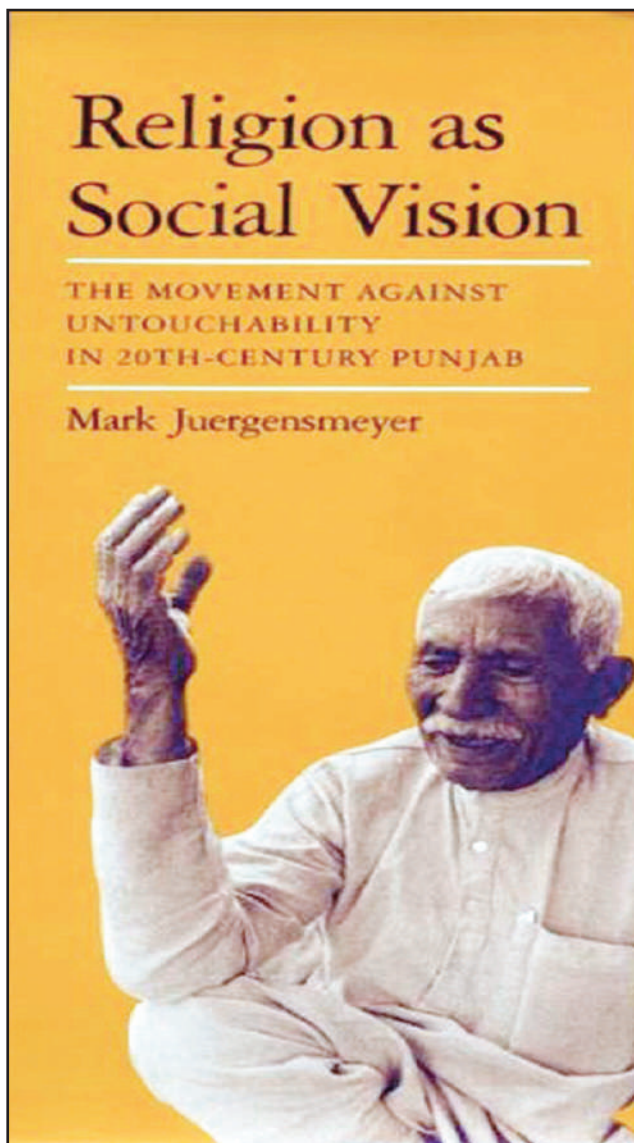
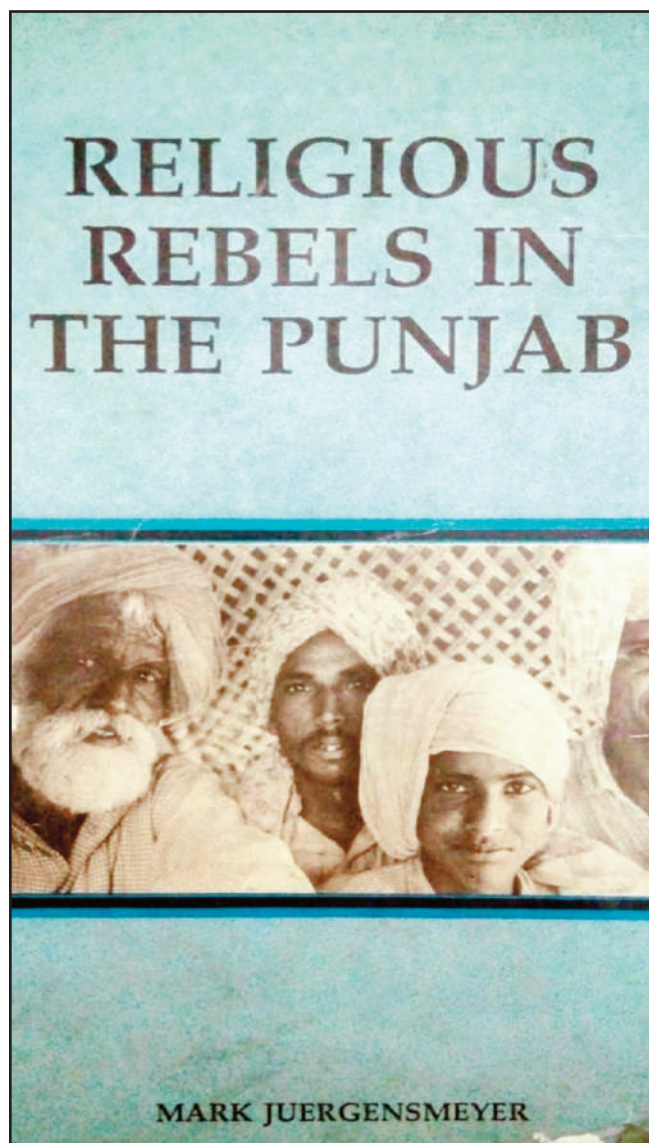


Scheduled Castes. Within a short period of five years, Ad Dharm movement became a household organization of the majority of the lower castes in the province. It had its own Newspaper (Adi Danka), well-organized headquarter (Ad Dharm Mandal) at Jalandhar, separate religion (Ad Dharm) duly recognised by the British government, sup-

ported Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar during his tie with Mr. M.K. Gandhi on the issue of separate electoral communal award at the London Round Table Conferences, won seven out of eight reserved assembly seats in the Punjab Pradesh Provincial Assembly elections in 1937, and all seats in 1946 Punjab Assembly elections. In 1946, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia got elected from the reserved assembly seat of Hoshiarpur. The Ad Dharm movement, under the stewardship of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, made many petitions to the British government from time to time for the upliftment of the lower castes. Despite stiff opposition from the mainstream communities, the Ad Dharm movement was able to carve a niche for itself and acquired a significant political space for the hitherto neglected segment of the lower castes.

Though after India's independence, the Ad Dharm movement got confined to socio-spiritual domain of the lower castes, its legacy became a rich heritage of the Schedules Castes in the state. Mangu Ram Jaspal, namesake of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Mark Juergensmeyer, C.L. Chumber, Ronki Ram, Balbir Madhopuri among others played a significant role in documenting the history of Ad Dharm movement and preserving its legacy. It is matter of great pride for us to put on records that Ambedkar Times (English) and Desh Doaba (Punjabi) Weeklies have been making earnest efforts since their inception in 2006 and 2012 respectively for the wider dissemination of the information about the rich heritage of this historic Scheduled Caste movement across the world.

**Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba forum fondly remember the historic days of June 11-12, 1926 – the foundation day of the Ad Dharm Movement!**



# On the 95th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Ad Dharm Movement (June 11-12)

## Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia: Pioneer of the Ad Dharm Movement

At present Scheduled Castes in East Punjab constitute one-third of the total state population – largest in comparison to their counterparts in all other states and UTs in India. However, their share in the agriculture land in the state is lowest. Less than five percent of them are small time cultivators. Though in terms of administrative set up they are enumerated along with other caste communities in the census records of the villages in East Punjab, actually they live in segregated Dalit settlements situated in the periphery of mainstream villages. The segregated Schedule Castes' peripheries are contemptuously called *Chamarlees* in Doaba, *Thathees* in Malwa, and *Vehras* in Majha: the three distinct spatial-cultural regions of the state. Nevertheless, Scheduled Castes in East Punjab, like all other communities, are Punjabi first and their religion and caste and domiciliary location-scheme later. Like all other integral segments of the syncretic Punjabi qaum, Scheduled Castes are too valourous and well known for their praiseworthy role during the fights of the Khalsa armies of Guru Gobind Singh against the regimes of injustice and social oppression. To live with dignity prompted them in the second half of 1920s, to organise themselves under the Ad Dharm movement (11-12 June, 1926), the maiden Dalit movement of pre-partition Punjab. The Ad Dharm movement was parallel but independent of various other contemporary Adi/Dalit movements (briefly discussed below) emerged almost at the same time in the South India.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia (January 14, 1886 – April 22, 1980) was the precursor of the Ad Dharm movement. He belonged to a Dalit family of leather workers of village Mugowal indistrict Hoshiarpur. His father wanted him to educate so that he could him in his leather business by reading transactions written in English. Despite his relatively well off family background, Mangu Ram faced social exclusion, for his so-called low birth, at the school in a nearby village Bajwara. He was forced to leave the studies abruptly without completing his matriculation. Thereafter, in search of easy life, like the early emigrants from the Doaba, Mangu Ram too landed in America in 1909 and earned his livelihood while working in lumber industry and agriculture farms. That was the time when Punjabi emigrants in North America were planning to form a radical organisation for the liberation of colonial India. Eventually, Mangu Ram became an active member of the Ghadar *Lehar* (movement) founded in 1913. He was one of the five proud members of a Ghadrite group who were assigned

the herculean task of ferrying weapons to India for an armed rebellion against the British rule. But *SS Maverick*, the ship that was bought to transport weapons was caught in route and destiny took Mangu Ram into the Philippines, where he spent the next twelve years of his prime life incognito. Finally, he reached his native village in 1925, to the surprise of all, as everyone already knew the news of his alleged hanging.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia is to the Punjab what Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is to Maharashtra, and just as the Maharashtra Dalit movement owes its origin to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, the Punjab Dalit movement is similarly indebted to Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia. If Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, the famous English-born American political activist, theorist, philosopher and revolutionary of the nineteenth century, Babu

Mangu Ram Mugowalia learnt his lessons of equality and freedom from the proclaimed democratic and liberal values of the United States of America wherein he came into contact, during his sojourn, with the revolutionary freedom fighters popularly known as Ghadar Babas, of the historic Ghadar *Lehar*. This further cemented his resolve to fight for a dignified life for the masses by liberating India from the clutches of the British Empire, and to establish in its place democratic and egalitarian home rule with equality and freedom for all irrespective of caste, class, creed, language, gender and regional differentiations.

On return to his native village, after spending 16 years abroad, Babu Mangu Ram did not find any change in the predominance of untouchability. In his own words: "While living abroad I had forgotten about the hierarchy of high and low, and untouchability; and under this delusion returned home in December 1925. The same disease from which I had escaped started tormenting me again.

I wrote about all this to my leader Lala Hardyal Ji, saying that until and unless this disease is cured, Hindustan could not be liberated. Hence, in accordance with his orders, a programme was formulated in 1926 for the awakening and upliftment of the Achhut qaum (untouchable community) of India" (*Kaumi Udarian* 1986: 23-24). Consequently, he decided to dedicate rest of his life for the emancipation and empowerment of his fellow so-called low-caste people. He established an elementary school in his native village for the lower caste



Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia

children of those self-same socially excluded sections of the society that later came to be designated Scheduled Castes (SCs) under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) order, 1936, which contained a list (or schedule) of castes throughout the British-administered provinces. Following into the footsteps of his revolutionary Ghadrite leadership in the United States of America, he aspired to both fight against the caste-based social evil of untouchability and to replace it with an all-encompassing social freedom, as well as to join the fight to free the subjugated India and return to it its political freedom. Like his predecessor in Maharashtra, he faced stiff opposition from the so-called upper castes in his fierce struggle against oppressive structures of domination including untouchability – the most egregious one among them.

The Ad Dharm movement, pioneered by Mangu Ram, soon became a household name among the Dalits of the Punjab like the Satyashodak Samaj movement of Phule in Maharashtra. Seth Kishan Das of Bootan Mandi – a well-known local leather merchant – helped build its headquarter named 'Ad Dharm Mandal' in Jalandhar. Mangu Ram with his untiring efforts literally took the movement to the doorsteps of all the untouchables in the region and soon emerged as a cult figure of the Dalits. Under the flag of Ad Dharm movement, he fought for the long denied land rights of the lower castes

who were legally debarred along with other non-agriculture castes from owning agriculture land under the Land Alienation Act of 1900. Moreover, under the local customary law,

popularly known as 'rayit-nammas', the lower castes were also deprived of ownership rights on the residential plot of their houses in the segregated neighbourhoods. They were not allowed to build pucca houses in these separate Dalit localities. They were only permitted to build mud/thatched houses and in return were supposed to perform some *begar* (forced labour without wages) in the agriculture farms of the legal owners of their residential plots.

Another important task towards the material empowerment of the lower castes that was undertaken by the Ad Dharm movement was special legal provision of education and government employment reservation for the lower castes under the state affirmative action. Like the *Satyashodak Samaj* movement in Maharashtra, the Ad Dharm movement soon became a household name among the Dalits of Punjab. It was for the first time in the forgotten history of the lower castes in the state that a golden opportunity knocked at their doors to get them united on a common and distinct platform under the leadership of their fellow-travellers to fight for the most sought after goal of dignified life and to collectively press their long-pending claim for a share in the local structures of power.

In the wake of the limited democratic political process in 1919 prised from the British Government for the institutionalization of the electoral system, every community was busy in organizing its respective members into well-organized socio-political forces (political parties/organizations); and as a young man freshly returned from the US, and meticulously chiselled in the superb companionship of the proud Ghadrite Babas, Babu Mangu Ram able bring together many of his fellow community members to build a separate social and political organization at par with that of the upper

(Contd. on next page)



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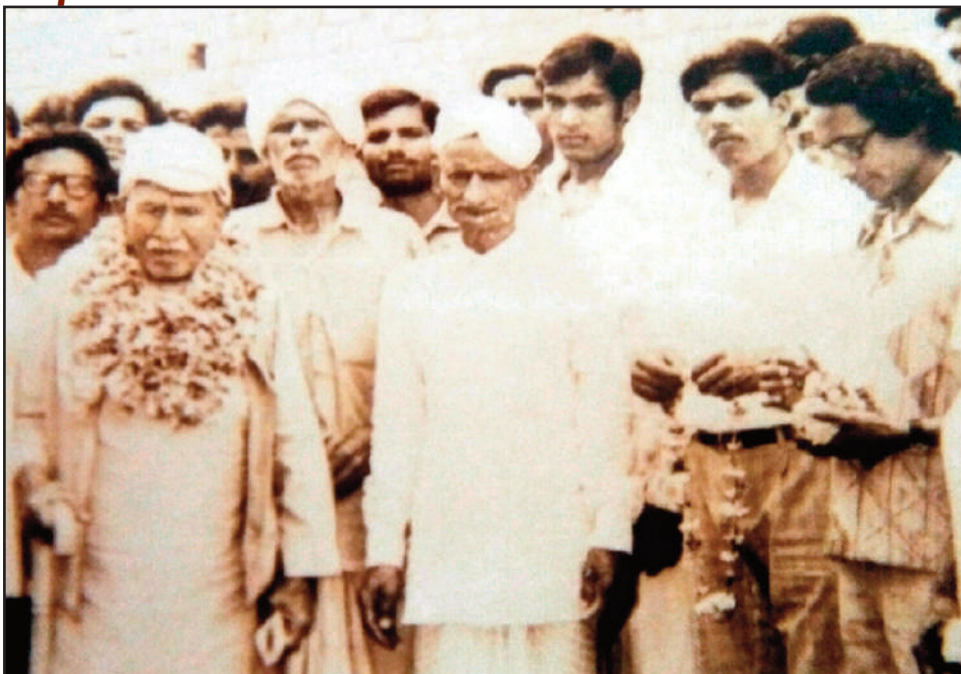
# On the 95th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Ad Dharm Movement (June 11-12)

(Continue from page 2)

caste communities like the Hindu Mahasabha of the Hindus, Muslim League of the Muslims and Singh Sabhas of the Sikhs. This limited election-based legislature-forming-process also led to the formation of similar Adi-movements in other parts of the country like Adi-Andhras, Adi-Dravidas, Adi-Karnataka in the South India, and Adi-Hindus in the Uttar Pradesh province of the North India. Though these different Adi-movements emerged almost at the same time in different regions of the country, there is no evidence to prove that they were instrumental in the rise of one and another. Each Adi-movement was influenced by the then prevailing situations in its own specific context in the given state.

In the posterannouncing the first annual meeting of the Ad Dharm movement, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, along with Swami Shudranand and Babu Thakur Chand, devoted the entire space to the hardships faced by the *Moolnivasis* at the hands of the caste Hindus. He also made an appeal to the *Moolnivasis* to come together to chalk out a programme for their liberation and upliftment. Addressing them as brothers, he said:

*We are the real inhabitants of this country and our religion is Ad Dharm. Hindu Qaum came from outside to deprive us of our country and enslave us. At one time we reigned over 'Hind'. We are the progeny of kings, Hindus came down from Iran to Hind and destroyed our Qaum. They deprived us of our property and rendered us no madic. They razed our forts and houses, and destroyed our history. We are seven crores in numbers and are registered as Hindus in this country. Liberate the Adi race by separating these seven crores. ... Our seven crore number enjoy no share at all. We reposed faith in Hindus and thus suffered a lot. Hindus turned out to be callous. Centuries ago, Hindus suppressed us; sever all ties with them. What justice can we expect from those who are the butchers of the Adi race. The time has come; be cautious, now the Government listens to appeals. With the support of a sympathetic Government, come together to save the race. Send members to the Councils so that our Qaum is strengthened again. British rule should remain forever. Make prayer before God. Except for this Government, no one is sympathetic towards us. Never consider ourselves as Hindus at all; remember that*



**Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and members of Ad Dharm**

*our religion is Ad Dharm (Kaumi Udarian: 1986: 21-22).*

Keen readers of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia have observed that he was conflicted on the issue of the British Raj – on the one hand he feared even greater oppression under Hindu majoritarian rule than under the British – whom he also viewed as possible partners in facilitating a more equal Indian society – but on the other hand he aspired for the dignity of national independence, which necessitated the removal of the British. This remained a recurring paradox in his political approach till the achievement of Indian independence in 1947. In the meantime, he along with other leaders of Ad Dharm movement chose to restore the lost dignity and freedom of the untouchables by detaching them completely from Hinduism and re-consolidating them into their own ancient religion (Ad Dharm). The long domination by the Aryans, they alleged, made them oblivious of their native religion.

Thus, what made the Ad Dharm movement the most politically noticeable and popular of its time was the farsightedness of its visionary leaders in setting the goal of bringing divergent lower caste communities under a single flag and to transform them into a distinct single community at par with other separate communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians etc and to become an appropriate part of the Punjabi qaum. This was the most crucial political move on the part of Babu Mangu Ram, the master strategist, who intervened at a vital moment when limited direct elections were scheduled to be held in the state. He pressed for a separate religion for the lower castes of Punjab to be recorded in the 1931 Census, who in his opinion were neither Hindus, Sikhs, Muhammadans nor Christians. The lower castes, reiterated Babu Mangu Ram, were the original inhabitants – *Moolnivasis* (aboriginal people) of this nation. The alien Aryan invaders, he

continued further, deprived them of their kingdom, looted them, and finally enslaved them. In his brilliant article entitled *Achhut da Swaal* (The Question of Untouchability) published in the *Kirti* monthly of the *Kirti Kisan* party in 1929, penned under the pseudonym of Vidrohi, Shaheed Bhagat Singh supported the Ad Dharm leadership in its tirade against the caste system and for a separate religion, but at the same time also cautioned them to keep their distance from the British.

The Ad Dharm movement, under the leadership of Babu Mangu Ram, aimed at restoring the lost dignity and freedom of the untouchables by detaching them completely from Hinduism and re-consolidating into their own ancient religion (Ad Dharm). However, the task of reviving their ancient religion, in fact, was not an easy one. To revive Ad Dharm was tantamount to developing a new religion for the native people. *Moolnivasis*, the natives of this region, had forgotten their Gurus and other religious symbols during their long period of persecution under the rule of the outsiders. They had been condemned as impure and declared unfit to have their own theology. In order to establish their hegemony and legitimacy over the enslaved *Moolnivasis* of Bharat, the Aryan invaders successfully metamorphosed themselves into upper castes of the first three Varnas (Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) – the fourfold Hindu social order based on *Chatur-Varnavyavastha*. The natives of the conquered land were allegedly pushed into the fourth Varna of Shudras – consisting of artisan castes and still other further reduced into lowest of the low castes, contemptuously dubbed as Untouchable peoples.

The assertion by Babu Mangu Ram that Dalits were the real inhabitants of this land made an enormous psychological impact on them. It provided a theological podium to them to sustain and reinforce the new Dalit identity. The British Government

granted them, as demanded, distinct status of a separate religion – Ad Dharm. The Ad Dharm was based on the teachings and inspiration from the saints of the North India Bhakti movement, particularly Guru Ravidass, Bhagwan Valmik, Sant Kabir and Sant Namdev. In fact, the leaders of the Ad Dharm movement placed the spiritual figure of Guru Ravidass in the centre of their discourse around which the entire socio-political and spiritual paraphernalia of the movement and the separate Dalit religion was woven. In this way, Babu Mangu Ram played a dominant role in chiseling the distinct markers of separate Dalit identity and restoring the natives their lost heroes, Gurus, and rich cultural heritage. He imbued them with the yearning to become rulers themselves.

During the Census of 1931, around half a million Scheduled Castes in Punjab returned themselves as followers of their newly recognized religion – Ad Dharm. Thenceforth, the followers of Ad Dharm took pride in being addressed as Ad Dharmis. Another equally great achievement of the Ad Dharm movement was that it swept the reserved Provincial assembly elections in Punjab in 1937 & 1946, which made it an important stakeholder in the Punjab legislature, perhaps for the first time in the history of the lower castes in the colonial India. Moreover, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and the Ad Dharm movement provided a fertile ground for sowing the seeds of the mission of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar in Punjab. During Dr. Ambedkar's struggle for the separate electoral status for the Depressed Classes at the London Round Table conferences, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia supported him by sending many telegrams in his favour in a tie with Mahatma Gandhi over the question of the leadership of the Depressed Classes in India. An eminent American social scientist, Mark Juergensmeyer, documented in his classic 'Religious Rebels in the Punjab: *The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste*,' the incredible contribution made by Ad Dharm movement in generating social and political consciousness among the lowest of the low to help them rise against the centuries old discriminatory caste system and to establish an egalitarian socio-political order in the image of 'Beghampura' of Guru Ravidass.

**Reference:**

\* Juergensmeyer, Mark, Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste, Delhi: Navayana, 2009.

\*\* Kaumi Udarian (Punjabi), vol. 1, No. 2, January 1986, pp. 21-24 (Jalandhar, C.L. Chumber, ed.).



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 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 tatts 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



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,

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

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



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

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

# In Rememberance of AD-dharam Movement launched by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia on June 11 and 12, 1926

Babu Mangu Ram Muggowalia's crusade for social justice for the exploited and the down trodden sections of Indian Society began on June 11th and June 12th, 1926 after his return from USA. This year marks the 95th Anniversary of this historic movement. Let us have a few glimpses of the trials and tribulations which he had to face to establish a new identity for the voiceless.

**SOCIAL DISABILITIES BUILT IN CASTE SYSTEM:** -The stigma of the caste system in Indian society codified by Manusmriti was the greatest obstacle for untouchables to seek higher education. In spite of all the carping humiliations, Babu Mangu Ram though a good student could hardly complete his high school education at three different schools in Muggowal, Dehradun and Bajwara.

**MIGRATION TO USA:** - Babu Mangu Ram's father who, being financially stable in his business, managed to send his son to USA in 1909 to better his future prospects in life. Babu Mangu Ram who had an impassioned fervour of patriotism in his psyche became an active member of Ghadar Movement in California to fight for freedom from British rule. After a few years of his active participation in the activities of the Ghadar party in USA he was chosen with four other members to smuggle a shipment of weapons to India for use by Ghadarites in India. On being captured by British Agents on his way to India he was lucky and clever to escape from the hands of the British with the help of some German supporters and remained in hiding for many years.

**BACK IN INDIA:** - On his way back to India Babu Mangu Ram had to travel through Madras and many other parts of South India where he was shocked to find the pains of social discrimination worse than slavery which agitated his conscience to start his crusade for social emancipation. In one of the Hindu temples he visited in Madurai in South India he was warned by Pujaris not to get polluted by touching any untouchable in the temple premises. This ignited a new spark in the mind of Mr. Mangu Ram to work against social degeneration of Indian society. He wrote back to Lala Hardial and Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna the pioneers of the Ghadar party in USA and told them that the freedom of his brethren in India from the tyrannical subjugation of the upper castes is more important to him than the freedom of the country.

**AD-DHARM MOVEMENT LAUNCHED:** - On June 11th and 12th, 1926 Babu Mangu Ram convened a large conference of his supporters from every nook and corner of Northern India and announced the foundation of Ad-Dharam Mandal of which he was chosen as President, the title he retained then on during his entire struggle. The conference was held in a primary school in his village where he was a teacher too. This article is specifically dedicated to commemorate the foundation of

Ad-Dharm movement launched on the above mentioned dates.

The following are some of the salient and structural features of his movement which became a legacy for future generations.

1. The most important and significant contribution of his movement is that he was able to establish a distinct identity for Ad-Dharmi community, separate from Hindu hierarchy by claiming to be the original inhabitants of India long before the invasion of Aryans from Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Ad-Dharam Mandal became one of the



most successful movements for Dalit mobilization and Empowerment with completely a separate identity. Greeting salutations of Jai Gurudev and Dhan Gurudev were the products of Babu Mangu Ram's brain. A very authentic book 'India Divided' written by Dr. Rajindera Prasad, First president of Free India, more than seventy years ago (before partition) contains a very vivid description of Ad-Dharm as a separate religion like Jains, Parsees, Jews and Christians based on the reports of census commissioner in 1931 and 1941. This completely negates and invalidates the assertion that untouchables and other lower castes are part of Hinduism. This also reduces their numerical strength which they have always claimed. In 1937 Babu Mangu Ram's party won seven out of eight seats in the provincial legislature.

The element of a separate identity had a deep impact on the thinking of the suppressed section of society which could be deemed as a main factor in the success and the legitimacy of the movement for their liberation from the slavery of the upper classes. Babu Mangu Ram believed that the real method of breaking the caste system was

to destroy the religious notion upon which the system is based and thrives.

## 2. REVELATIONS OF PROFESSOR MARK JUERGENSMEYER:

-Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, a renowned professor and a scholar of international fame and eminence, now accredited with the University of Santa Barbara, met Babu Mangu Ram personally in India more than fifty years ago and made

an extensive research on Babu Mangu Ram's movement as revealed in his Book "RELIGIOUS REBELS IN THE PUNJAB The Ad-Dharm Challenge to Caste".

**STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF BABASAHEB, DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR:** - There were some misapprehensions created by some narrow and divisive attitudes to accomplish their own political motives that Babasaheb and Babu Mangu Ram differed in their approach to handle the problem of caste distinctions. On the contrary Babu Mangu Ram stood shoulder to shoulder with Dr. Ambedkar with his strong support and sent telegrams during his crusade in Round Table conferences, reiterating that Dr. Ambedkar was the national leader of the depressed classes and thus rebuffing the claims of Mr. Gandhi that untouchables were a part of the Hindu community. He even started a counter fast unto death against Mr. Gandhi's ending in the signing of Poona- pact in 1932.

With the spread of education and awakening among the Dalit Samaj the ideology of Babu Mangu Ram Muggowalia is coming back with a new spirit, vigor and enthusiasm to reach the new heights in its journey started almost a century ago.

**DESH DOABA AND AMBEDKAR TIMES,** the two weekly Newspapers owned and edited by Mr. Prem K. Chumber, in circulation among the Indian diaspora in USA and other countries are working ceaselessly to propagate the ideals of Babu Mangu Ram Muggowalia. Mr Prem K. Chumber has been greatly inspired on the life & struggle of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia by his elder brother late Mr. C. L. Chumber and his voluminous writings.

**Congratulations again for celebrating the 95th Anniversary of this great movement launched and pioneered by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia on June 11th and 12th, 1926.**



Humble Sewadar,  
O.P. Balley (General Secretary)  
Supreme Council  
Sri Guru Ravidass Sabhas USA  
1-925-252-6085



## Lest we forget

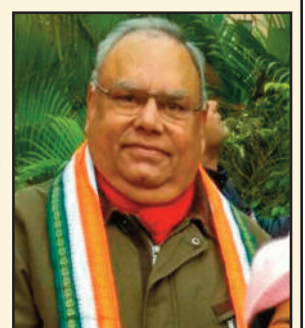
The Ad-Dharam Movement, an important milestone in the journey for the amelioration and emancipation of dalits of India in the contemporary times, were taken on June 11-12, 1926 at a remote village Muggowal in the Mahilpur district of Hoshiarpur in Punjab under the stewardship of Gadri Baba Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia. I thought of taking shelter of the columns of the esteemed Ambedkar Times, which has been the votary and ardent supporter of the Ad-dharam Movement, to remind ourselves of the day of establishment of this unique movement for the social reform of the society and for an equitable socio-economic order for the masses of India. Though much water has flown in the

Ganges and the Constitution of India has embraced the principles of 'Equality, Liberty, Justice and Fraternity' to replace and negate the inherent discriminatory order of the Manuwad yet the relevance of Ad-dharam Movement remains as we are yet to establish, on ground, a casteless society and adopt and embrace the weaker sections of the society as equal partners and stakeholders in the polity, economy and the society. It remains a matter of worry and concern.

The question of dalit identity as the original habitants of India (Ad-dharamis) as separate from other denominations, sharing of political power and getting economic inheritance as equal shareholders remains to be addressed as yet. On

the other hand, we dalits ourselves need to be reminded of much needed unity among the dalits themselves as visualized by the leadership of the Ad-dharam Movement and Babasaheb Ambedkar. The relevance of the Ad-dharam Movement remained as it was before.

I take this opportunity to greet my dalit brethren and the supporters of casteless society on the day of establishment of the Ad-dharam Movement.



Ramesh Chander  
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)  
91-99885-10940

# BABU MANGU RAM MUGOWALIA - A PROFILE

**B**abu Mangu Ram Mugowalia combined in his personage the qualities of a fierce revolutionary, a staunch patriot, a devoted crusader against social evils and above all a true humanitarian through. Born among the lowliest of the low, he crossed all social barriers dauntlessly and suffered all sorts of indignities of life and made his way to reach the pinnacle of greatness.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia represents a rare example among the revolutionaries Ghadarite philosophy. In those dark days, it was rare for an untouchable to understand the essence of revolution against imperialism. But he rose to the occasion and proved his mettle. He joined the Ghadar Party when he went to California (U.S.A.) in 1909 A.D. as its active member. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, it appears desired an establishment of society which must be based on Equality. And he saw one being fought for by the Ghadarites as they had abolished all social distinctions among themselves first which, perhaps, is not the practice with the modern community or who profess change of the sort. As Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia spoke of the Ghadar Party, "It was a new society, we were all treated as equals".

As a Ghadarite, he took part in the organizational activities at first but in 1915 A.D. an occasion came when he volunteered to be one of the five Ghadarites in a dangerous mission involving smuggled weapons shipped from California to the Punjab. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia was chosen by the leader of the Ghadar Party at that time. Mr. Sohan Singh Bhakna, the Secretary of Ghadar Party, whom Babu M.R. Mugowalia remembered as "Godha" sent the five to Los Angeles, where they boarded an intermediary boat, after depositing all of their personal identifications with "Godha", for the rest of the journey's saga. Mangu Ram would be known by a pseudonym, "Nizamuddin".

Putting his life into danger and travelling through Secorro Islands and halting at Mexico, Caladonia Islands, Manila, Singapore and again to Manila where he stayed for sometime and finally to India where he reached in 1925 A.D.

It is after 1925, that his career as a crusader against untouchability and casteism began. As he travelled from Ceylon to Punjab through Madurai, Madras, Bombay, Poona, Sitara, Nagpur and Delhi, he observed the condition of the untouchables on route and was dismayed to see these people being treated so badly. In Madurai, when Babu Mangu Ram visited the Meenakshi Temple, he was told to be careful not to touch Achhut (Untouchables) since they assumed by his dress that he was of a decent caste. By the time Babu M.R. Mugowalia had reached the Punjab, he was convinced that there was need for social change.

Babu M.R. Mugowalia wrote to the Ghadar Party headquarters in

San Francisco about the difficult conditions of the Untouchables in India. He wrote them that their freedom was more important to him than Indian freedom. According to Babu Mugowalia, leaders of the Ghadar Party then disengaged him to work with Scheduled Castes (Untouchables), and wrote him that they would support him in his tasks. Thus, in a new context, the old revolutionary from Fresno continued the Ghadar spirit. This clearly shows that even Ghadarites had realized the need to awaken these slaves of Indian Society - the then Untouchables.

When he started his task of social reform i.e. establishing schools for untouchables poors, he began to look for an alternative

which may provide a lever for the unity of the untouchable poors and then to demonstrate through that alternative the political presence of the untouchables in the politics of Punjab of those days. It must be remembered that Punjab was already witnessing political upheaval and each class was trying to reap at political harvesting. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, along with other conscious men from his class, then founded on June 11-12, 1926 A.D. at his village Mugowal Ad-Dharma as the alternative.

Ad-Dharma's main aim was to create a feeling of identity among the untouchable class which numbered at that time about one fourth of the entire population of India. Babu M.R. Mugowalia and the early leaders of the Ad-Dharma perceived their first task to be the creation of a new religion. In their initial meetings, even before they developed an organisational structure, they labored over a basic ideological theme upon which they could build a system of religious ideas and symbols. Its central motive was novel: the idea that untouchables constitute a quaum, a distinct religious community similar to those of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and that the quaum had existed from time immemorial. It was a myth of power addressed to the people without power. It was intended to communicate the sense of strength that Babu M.R. Mugowalia felt belonged to his caste fellows by right. As he explained, "The untouchables have their powers: communal pride (qaumiat), religion (mazhab), and organisation (mazlis)". The hope was that these powers could be fostered and splintered

through force of ideology.

Ad-Dharma was almost Babu M.R. Mugowalia's show. It inspired the lowliest of the low to fight for equality, economic, social and political in a converted way. The Ad-Dharma, under the dynamic leadership of a true revolutionary like Babu Mugowalia, was an aggressive and autonomous movement or compared to similar movements that took birth in other parts of the country. Within a short span of time, it jolted the 'haves-not' through its rallies, publications, deputations and demonstrations to demand new government policies or to protest upper caste discriminations. The most influential political action of the movement that



can be listed as one of its great achievements, was to get Scheduled Castes registered as a followers of new religion. In 1931 A.D. census, almost half a million of them registered as "Ad-Dharmi" rather than Hindus or Muslim or Sikh. Mr. Mark Juergensmeyer writes as, "Later in the 1930, their political influence turned towards electoral politics, in alliance first with the predominantly Muslim Unionist Party and then with the Congress. It was the logical consequence of the political awakening created among them by Ad-Dharma Movement in Punjab, whose undisputable leader was Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia.

Thus through several means, then, the Ad-Dharmis presented to its followers a vision of a world which both confirmed and transformed the rude experience of untouchables. And in doing so it implied that a different sort of world was coming into being, for the separate identity so defined signaled hope for a society in which social groups carried no inherent mark of judgment and in which the benefits of progress could be shared by all.

Cultural and humanistic aspects of the personality of Babu M.R. Mugowalia were even more glaring. As a humanist his vision of the world was near to rationalist view of the universe (we can even say materialistic as well though in rudimentary form), he believed in the inherent equality of all human-beings; he was against all sorts of exploitations of man against man; and he earnestly devoted his bodily energy and financial resources in founding a new society based upon the gospel of equality. His ideas about the universe and equality of all men are echoed in

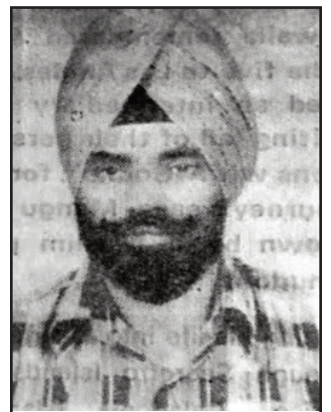
the Ad-Dharma Mandala (1926-1931) report in the preparation of which Babu Mugowalia had played a big role. It reads as follows:

"Nature (Qudrat Ka Mela) created human beings from original source (Adi) at the time that it created all beings in the earth. The knowledge of moral behaviour (karm-dharm) was also given to them at that time by Nature. Nature made humans superior to animals, but among humans all were equal.

In the beginning, when Nature created human beings, there was no discrimination. There were no differences and no quarrels. In particular, there were no such concepts as high or low caste. God (Ishwar) was meditating; all was in harmony. Everyone believed in one dharma which Nature had given then through intellect and knowledge". Babu M.R. Mugowalia did not mean by the word 'God' as something supernatural beings who is said to have created the world and since then regulating it as is believed in theology. Mark Juergensmeyer makes it quite clear in his work, Religion As Social Vision, thus: "Occasionally there is mention of God in a more formal sense". "God (Ishwar) was meditating; all was in harmony". And Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia made a practice of using the name Adi-Purkh for the divine - literally "the originator", or the "Original Being". All these designations, although they are theistic terms, are impersonal in intent.

He, all his life, stood like a rock against social evils such as untouchability, caste-system, women slavery, exploitation etc. His life in cultural side symbolized with the creation of new social virtues such as women's rights, the value of education, abstinence from alcohol and drugs - which were 'nothing less than a new concept of moral order'. Thus Babu M.R. Mugowalia, a Ghadarite revolutionary, social crusader, political activist and strategist and as a humanitarian fought for the establishment of an ideal society till he breathed last. The noble way of commemorating celebrating the 99th Birth Anniversary (for that matter every birth anniversary) of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia - who desired his movement to coincide with Ambedkarite Movement to give the movement of depressed classes a country-wide stature, is to emulate him. Therefore, let us resolve to emulate the great Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia - patriot, social revolutionary, a successful strategist and, above all, a humanist.

*Courtesy: Souvenir Babu Mangu Ram Muggowalia 99th Birth Anniversary published by MR. C. L. Chumber*



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# MAKING SENSE OF DALIT IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

## REVIEW ARTICLE OF A RECENT STUDY IN PUNJABI

Punjab has the highest proportion of Dalits (29 percent, Census of India 2001) in India and this whopping numerical presence has further increased with the inclusion of Mochi and Rai Sikh/Mahatam castes into Scheduled Castes category in the state. Despite having the highest proportion of Dalit percentage in the country, Dalits in Punjab, however, are extensively deprived of agricultural land. Among them less than 5 percent (Census of India) are cultivators. They shared only 4.82 percent of the number of operational holdings and 2.34 percent of the total area under cultivation (1991 Census). Consequently, their landlessness rendered a large number of them into agricultural labourers and made them subservient to the landowners. However, a significant change has taken place over the last few decades. Dalits in Punjab have improved their economic position through hard work, job diversification and emigration abroad. They have entered into a number of professions, which were traditionally considered to be the mainstay of the business and artisan castes. This has led to a sharp decline in the number of Dalit landless agricultural workers in Punjab whose strength has come down from 24 percent in 1991 to 16 percent in 2001.

However, the dissociation of Dalits from the menial and agricultural work in Punjab and their relatively better economic conditions have probably failed to get them entry into the local structure of power, almost totally monopolized by the so-called dominant/upper castes. This is what forced them to look for alternative ways of social mobility and empowerment.

The story of Dalit identity, emancipation, empowerment and mobility is quite different in Punjab from that of the rest of India. There happened to be two main models of social mobility available to the socially excluded sections of the Indian society. These two models are: Conversion and Sanskritisation. Conversion and Sanskritisation aim at seeking Dalit emancipation by crossing over to something new/external that would facilitate them to quit their centuries-old entrenched subordination [Ram 2012: 639].

But as far as Punjab is concerned, Dalits seem to have avoided this two fold way of social mobility for the reasons best known to them. They prefer to improve their social status through highlighting their caste identity.

What distinguished caste in Punjab from the rest of the country is the primacy of the material (land) and political factors over the principle of purity and pollution dichotomy. Punjab is primarily an agrarian state. Social status in Punjab is basically measured in terms of possession of land. In Punjab, land is basically under the absolute control of the dominant caste

i.e. Jat Sikh [ibid: 656].

Therefore, Jat Sikh considered themselves at the top of caste hierarchy in Punjab, particularly in Sikhism. Since Purity/Pollution is not the criterion of social exclusion in Punjab, it does not make much difference whether you follow the cultural norms of priestly class or not. Even if someone embraces some other religion in Punjab to get rid of caste-based discrimination rampant in Hinduism, it still does not make much difference so far, as long as he fails to acquire some land in agriculture-dominated state of Punjab. So Dalits conversion into another religion becomes meaningless and they prefer to improve their social position through reconstructing their identity on the basis of caste and reinventing their cultural heritage.

Dalit Pachhan Mukti Ate Shaktikarn (Dalit Identity, Emancipation and Empowerment) is the second book written by the author in the Punjabi language. This ethnographic work, under review, is based on historical and analytical methods. The main argument of the book is that Dalits in Punjab are consciously and systematically constructing their caste/religion based identity. Caste based identity helps them in emancipation from the inferiority complex and gaining empowerment in the otherwise oppressive mainstream Punjabi society. It also discusses the sources and stages of Dalit identity formation in Punjab by focusing on various Dalit movements like Ad Dharm, Ambedkarite, Bahujan Samaj and the mushrooming growth of Ravidass Deras. Relying on archival and ethnographic sources, the study meticulously explores the causes behind the rise of Dalit identity in Punjab and the ways it exhibits the same. Before exploring the various themes which the book analytically discusses, there is a need to highlight the prologue of the book.

In the prologue, the author has described the importance of vernacular/mother language. In the views of the author mother tongue is not only used as a tool of conversation but in reality it also helps in understanding the complexities of social existence, culture, identity, nationality, economy and psychology. Language and culture are the two intricate determinant factors of the existence and development of a community.

There is a common impression that one can write about the complex aspects of life and society rather more comfortably in ones mother tongue. Till date, the most

renowned literary works, opinioned the author, were written by authors in local languages. The writers who achieved this reputation through mother/local language are: Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Derrida among many others. Similarly, Punjabi i.e. the local language of Punjab, was popularized by Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith, in gurmukhi script. Punjabi language, culture and literature eventually developed through the gurmukhi script. Today, the domain of Punjabi language is shrinking while relying more on ditto vocabulary of other languages than making use of original Punjabi vocabulary. The author alarms that by doing

so we would not only weaken our mother tongue vocabulary but also dwarf our culture. The book is arranged into eight chapters in addition to a detailed prologue, foreword, introduction, epilogue (Dalit suppression and emancipation: synthesis and reaction) and a detailed bibliography based on scattered but rich Punjabi sources. The first

chapter explores the long journey of Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment in Punjab. The chapter opens with the ubiquity of Dalit question in Indian society which remained inflamed during the period of Buddhism, Bhakti movement, the mission of social equality and justice run by Sikh Gurus, Adi movements and also during the movements run by Phule-Periyar/Ambedkar- Kanshi Ram. The protest against the silence of upper castes on Dalit question is raised from time to time.

However, the big silence on Dalit question at the time of Indian national movement has not only revealed its narrow canvas but also separated it sharply from its wider social domain deeply drowned in social inequalities and social evils. Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment are discussed in two perspectives: first, Marxist/Leftist and second, caste prestige. Marxists/Leftists study Dalit question from economic/class perspective. They observe Dalit identity in terms of class. They argue that the Dalit oppression is based on their economic subjugation. They consider caste to be the superstructure on class. They criticize the newly emerged middle class among Dalits who follow the bourgeoisie and casteist parties. Particularly, they criticize the Bahujan Samaj Party leaders who limit themselves to 'caste politics'. They argued that bourgeoisie Dalit class wants to maintain its position in present politi-



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cal system. They never participate in Marxist struggle and always oppose it.

Therefore, Marxists adopt similar planning for bourgeoisie, religious and Dalit political parties. They also argue that Dalit consciousness is a hurdle in revolutionary thinking. Although, Dalit consciousness recognises the revolutionary spirit but in the end it goes in favor of capitalism and makes it strong. Second, the author argues that in Punjab, Dalit identity is emerging on the basis of caste. The caste inferiority is challenged through the proverb of caste prestige. The caste based Dalit identity is giving birth to Dalitism. And Dalitism has become victim of one-sidedness which looks at the Dalit emancipation only through the prestige of caste. The author questioned caste based Dalit emancipation while asking a pertinent question that is it a positive way of Dalit emancipation? He described that Dalit question is not a question of Dalits only. This question, in his views, is related to the change of social, economic and political structure of the entire Indian society. Quoting Dr. Ambedkar, the author says that Dalit question is facing two main rivals: Brahmanism and Capitalism. If Dalit movement failed to abolish Brahmanism and in the presence of capitalism somehow able to gain slightly through reservation, then this type of change will be far away from Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment as defined by the author. Dalit emancipation, emphasized the author, is related with the freedom of individuals from individuals who are encircled within oppressive structures of social dominations based of hoary caste system. The struggle for Dalit emancipation is waged by Dalit middle class.

The Dalit middle class is the product of constitutional affirmative actions and the teachings of Ambedkarite ideology. This Dalit middle class firmly observes that Marxist parties are their opponent. The basic reason of their opposition to the Communist parties is that such left parties are themselves votary of capitalism and therefore are unable to understand the everlasting caste based division of Indian society.

The instances of caste based Dalit identity are normally observed in Doaba region of Punjab. Couplets of caste prestige such as "putt Chamaran de" (the babes of Chamars), Guru Ravidass di foj kardi a mojj" (the children of Guru Ravidass are relishing) etc. are often found written on cars,

(Contd. on next page)

# MAKING SENSE OF DALIT IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

(Continue from page 7)

jeeps and bikes in the Doaba region of Punjab. The religious places popularly known as Deras/Ravidass Deras are mushrooming on caste line. Such caste based religious places are providing most sought after socio-religious space to Dalits which differentiates them from other communities. Ravidass Deras, as argued by the author, are providing a new and different identity to Dalits by combining spirituality with politics. Dr. Ambedkar and Guru Ravidass have become the center of Dalit identity. It was first highlighted by Ad Dharm movement. The question of Dalit emancipation and empowerment has been continuously raised by different persons through different ways for instance Buddha, Sants of Bhakti movement, Sikh Gurus, Jotirao Phule, Adi/Ad Dharm movements, Ambedkarite movement, and Kanshi Ram. Dalit empowerment critically analysed through different ideologies.

Gandhian philosophy emphasises on Dalit emancipation and empowerment within Varna Vyastha through eliminating the caste hierarchy from the minds of people. It represents Varna Vyastha with moral principles. In other words, it emphasises on Dalit emancipation without elimination of the caste system. Ambedkar-Gandhi Poona Pact is the outcome of such philosophy. Efforts of British government (divide and rule policy) had also empowered the Dalits in a limited way. On one hand, Britishers empowered Dalits through communal award and, on the other hand, they kept away Dalits from land ownership. The reservation provided by the Colonial government in electoral system, recognition of Ad Dharm as a new religion of Dalits, victory of Dalits on the reserved seats of Punjab provincial Assembly election in 1937 and 1946 etc are known as examples of Dalit empowerment. In the views of the author, it shows that such a process of Dalit empowerment is ultimately went in favour of further strengthening the already entrenched institution of caste system. The educated and middle generation Dalits have been trying to seek emancipation and empowerment through constructing separate religious/caste identities. The educated class has legitimised their act by using the idea of caste based identity as popularized by Kanshi Ram. From the last few decades, religion/caste based Dalit identities have emerged as hub of Dalit emancipation and empowerment.

However, the emergence of caste based Dalit identities are fast becoming the cause of routine caste conflicts in Punjab. Second chapter is a detailed account of the changing basis of Punjabi Dalit identity. Dalit identity is related to resourceful, prosperous and respectable life.

It is a demonstration of positive efforts of Dalits who consciously put emphasis on projecting themselves as an altogether a separate different social group/community. It also helps them in flouting their distinct

political value in the arithmetic of electoral politics. Earning respectable space in society through political power, seems to be the sole purpose of emerging Dalit identity. It also looked at as if providing freedom from Brahminical structures.

Historically, the idea of distinct Dalit identity started from the Buddhism. Buddha was the first to raise voice against the symbols and behaviors of Upper Castes which were responsible for oppression of Dalits. Due to the efforts of Buddhist prophets Dalits attained opportunities to capture the political power. After a long period, in medieval time, in north India Sants of Bhakti movement and Sikh Gurus' mission of social equality provided a new meaning to Dalit identity. However, during Ad Dharm movement, Dalits for the first time took initiative to construct their identity on their own. The leaders of Adi Dharm movement created religion based Dalit identity i.e. Ad Dharmi. The religious paradigm of Dalit identity was a process of regenerating the hitherto eclipsed Dalit history, culture and heritage. 'Ad Dharmi' as a religious identity separates Dalits from the mainstream religions such as Hindu, Sikh and Muslims. In edition of religion, the leaders of the movement also constructed the different Dalit identity through religious texts, Gurus (Guru Ravidass, Bhagat Kabir, Balmik, Namdev), shrines, slogans (Jo Bole So Nirbhye – Sri Guru Ravidass Maharaj Ki Jai" and Jo Bole So Nirbhye – Ad Dharm Ki Jai"), symbols (So-hung), prayers, dress codes, construction of religious places, and salutations. Ad Dharm movement also encouraged the Dalits to attain political power and to become resourceful to further strengthen Dalit identity. Subsequently to the Ad Dharm, Ambedkarite movement played a significant role in construction of Dalit identity. It is notable that Ad Dharm movement constructed Dalit identity on religion. However, Ambedkarite movement focused on the rational Buddhist identity. Dr. Ambedkar argued if Dalits want to live like human beings than they should construct their distinct political identity.

Dr. Ambedkar was highly respected among the Dalits in Punjab. Dalits of Punjab not only respect Guru Ravidass but also adhere to neo-Buddhism that concentrated on rational thinking in respect of devotion. Dr. Ambedkar's understanding toward caste and its solution through democratic way presents him as the most effective leader of downtrodden. After the Ambedkarite movement, Bahujan Samaj movement played a vital role in formation of Dalit identity.

Babu Kanshi Ram emphasized on caste based Dalit identity and its importance for gaining political power. He organized middle class of Dalits Bahujan Samaj at a platform i.e. Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF). Systematic organizational structure of BAMCEF provides a new Dalit identity that organised Dalits around political programmes. The sole

purpose of this identity is to make Dalits as the holders of political power. The next two stages of Bahujan Samaj's political programmes which play a vital role in construction of Dalit identity are: Dalit Soshit Sangarsh Samiti (DS4) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). This was for the first time when Dalits realized to capture political power through caste line. BSP through its caste card is providing different meaning to Dalit identity. It is also providing a new alternative to young Dalits of rural and urban Punjab. The roots of Dalit identity are based on political alternative or capture of political power. In Punjab, the distinction of Dalit identity did not gain appreciation in political field but it has become fashionable in cultural field. In the earlier stage of BAMCEF, caste symbols were used in derogatory sense but now they are deployed to gain recognition as Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment.

Ravidass Deras are the major socio-religious institutions that hold the command of the Dalit identity in the state. Ravidass Deras are dedicated to the Guru Ravidass mission. The Deras demonstrate distinct Dalit identity through different religious traditions, customs, slogans, prayer, festivals, hymns, dress etc. It revolved around the Bani and teachings of Guru Ravidass. In the rural Punjab, particularly among Chamar community, new socio-cultural movements are silently growing its influence. The numbers of Dera followers are increasing day by day due to their adoption of the blended philosophy of Guru Ravidass and that of Dr. Ambedkar. The credit of blending the philosophies of Dr. Ambedkar and Guru Ravidass goes to Dera Sachkhand Ballan.

Ravidass Deras do not only exist in Punjab but also in abroad. The growing numbers of Ravidass Deras are taking the shape of new socio-cultural Dalit movement. The Sants of Deras Sachkhand Ballan are leading the movement of Ravidass Deras. Dera Ballan, also known as Dera Sant Sarwan Dass, is playing a vital role in construction of Dalit identity. Since, Sant Sarwan Dass Dera is providing multifarious facilities (schools, hospitals etc.), religious places, symbols, salute, slogans, and respectable social space to Dalits for led a descent life. Recently, Dera was in news to provide new religious identity to Dalits i.e. Ravidassia and holy book "Amrit Bani of Guru Ravidass".

In the third chapter, author describes the role of Punjabi qaum in Dalit emancipation and empowerment. He has criticized those people who defined Punjabi qaum narrowly. He defines Punjabi qaum in broader and positive sense that includes common language, area, economy and mind-set. In other words Punjabi qaum constituted all the people who reside in and outside of Punjab and have common language, culture and worldview. Due to influence of different religions, the Punjabi qaum is believed to become synonymous with

the welfare of all, brotherhood and commonhood, serve freely, and secure the interest of poor and humble. It demonstrates that Punjabi qaum represents devotion of love, equality, sharing-ness and democratic values. It neither opposed anyone nor oppressed anyone. Because of these characteristic of Punjabi qaum castism never become much rigid as in the other parts of India. In Punjab castism has been based on materialistic things i.e. land. Therefore, Dalits are free from the notion of Purity and Pollution. It becomes the major cause of their emancipation from Brahminical ideology and elastic attitude toward castism that can help for their empowerment. Author argued that not only the question of Dalit emancipation and empowerment but the problem like communalism also can be solved through the philosophy of Punjabi qaum.

The lager qaumi identity (Punjabi) will liberate Punjabis from all other small identities. It will teach the lesson of love and social equality not only to Punjabis but to the whole world. The fourth chapter describes the issues related to caste and class and Dalit emancipation in Indian Punjab. It is generally perceived that Punjabi society is free from Brahminical Varna system. However, the criticism of caste system by Sants of Bhakti movement, Sufis and Gurus, argued the author, highlights the fact of caste system in Punjabi society. According to the author the existence of caste system in Sikh panth can be judged from two questions: first why Dr. Ambedkar, who once wanted, changed his decision to convert into Sikhism? Second, what was the reason that Sikh leadership started a campaign to seek the constitutional provisions of affirmative action for Scheduled Castes for the lower castes among Sikhs? Sikh Gurus vehemently criticized the evil of caste system both theoretically and practically. The author further discussed that the period from Sikh Gurus to the missals was known as 'golden period of Sikhism'. During this period Sikh panth was free from caste system at all. This was the period when Shudras joined the Sikhism and played an important role in the emerging egalitarian Sikh identity. Not even a single example of caste based discrimination can be found during that period.

Subsequently, caste system emerged into Sikh panth: first, due to its close relationship with Hinduism. Second, it entered into Sikh panth with the adoption of the cultural patron of Jat community. During the second half of 19th century Singh Sabha movement was launched to reform the Sikh panth. Though the movement offered some relief from castism but it failed to eliminate caste system from Sikh panth. Caste hierarchy in Sikh panth, however, is different from that of Hindu religion. Among the Sikh, Jat Sikhs are recognized as superior. The lower castes in Sikh panth are largely categorized

(Contd. on next page)



# MAKING SENSE OF DALIT IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

(Continue from page 8)

into two groups; Chamars and Chhuras. The Chamar Sikhs also known as Ramdassia Sikh and Khalsa Brader. The Chhuras Sikhs are known as Mazhabis and Rangretta Sikhs. They are kept in the lowest rung of caste hierarchy in Sikh panth as well as in Hinduism.

Caste hierarchy in Sikh panth is based on materialistic things not on purity and pollution. Priestly activities in Sikh shrines are not only limited to upper/dominant castes in Sikh panth. The fifth chapter deals with Guru Ravidass, Ad Dharm and Dalit emancipation. According to the author, Bani (spiritual poetry) of Guru Ravidass is a major source of Dalit consciousness in Punjab. Guru Ravidass did not only write in spiritualistic sense. In fact, his poetry also challenged insidious caste system and oppression of the lower castes. In his Bani Guru Ravidass also talked at length about Beghampura (an ideal state) where no one would be found sad and each one would live a happy life. The author wrote in detail about how the leaders of Ad Dharm movement highlighted Guru Ravidass and his bani which was already a great source of Dalit consciousness. Ad Dharm leaders meticulously spreaded this consciousness among Dalits. The movement made every attempt which ideologically and philosophically was necessary for the establishment of a new religion including religious book, symbol, prayer, salute, slogans, etc. But in the post independent period, the movement did not sustain.

However, the seed of Dalit consciousness that were sown by Ad Dharm movement are now nurtured by Ravidass Deras. Recently, the Ravidass Dera of Sachkhand Ballan announced a new religion i.e. Ravidassia. And Dera also appealed to Dalit communities to register their religion 'Ravidassia'. The author ends this chapter with a critical note that time will tell whether Dalit will accept Ravidassia as their religion or it will end up like Ad Dharmi as a new caste category among Dalits.

The sixth chapter is a detailed description of the ideas and efforts made by Dr. Ambedkar for Dalit emancipation. Dr. Ambedkar's vision about Dalit emancipation and empowerment are discussed by the author broadly in the following three aspects: first, the problem of Untouchability should be resolved through reforms in Hindu religion and society.

Secondly, by constitutional provisions of reservation and social inequality should be reduced and anti-Dalit elements should be dealt strictly by law.

Thirdly, emancipate the Dalits from caste system by converting into Buddhism. For Dr. Ambedkar issues like social equality, self-esteem and respectable life are more significant than poverty and resource-less for Dalits. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar suggested the necessity of social democracy for Dalits' emancipation. Social democracy, for him, is based on the

three principles; freedom, equality and fraternity. These three principles are necessary to live a dignified life and establish political democracy. That's why he set up three political parties (Independent Labour Party, Scheduled Caste Federation and Republican Party of India) for Dalits' emancipation. However, he failed to organise Dalits to attain political power. Beside the political and legal methods to resolved the problems of Dalits. He also emphasised the peacefully social protest against the discrimination. He lunched many movements for emancipation of Dalits for instance temple entry movements and to get water from restricted pounds.

In the seventh chapter the author discussed in details the views of Shaheed Bhagat Singh towards the

salvation.

Therefore, he called himself atheist. As contrary to Congress, he did not prefer only political independence but also wanted to resolve the social and economic problems of Dalits, labourers, artisans and farmers. He criticized the disgust of Upper Castes towards Dalits. He argued that Dalits are hatred because of their bad economic condition.

Therefore, we should remove their poverty rather than hate them. He asked Dalits to organised and struggle for their emancipation. He argued "you are real labourers, labourers be organised. You will not lose except the chains of your slavery. Awake and revolt against the ruler.

Nothing will happen with these slow reforms." He also warned Dalits about bureaucrats and feudals

Gurdass Ram Alam, Charn Dass Nidhark and Chanan Lal Manak clearly draw the pictures of Dalit life, oppression and empowerment. This chapter also talked in detail about the Dalit poetry that was written during the Ambedkarite movement in Punjab. In the opinion of the author, Dalit thinkers observe the Dalit identity and emancipation in Dalit poetry from two perspectives: small stories and social criticism. Dalit poetry criticizes all types of socio-cultural, religious and political conditions which preserve the social hierarchy based on oppressive four-fold Varna categories. Dalit poetry, said the author, represents the labourers, farmers, poorer, untouchables, cobblers, wavers as its hero who were earlier ignored.

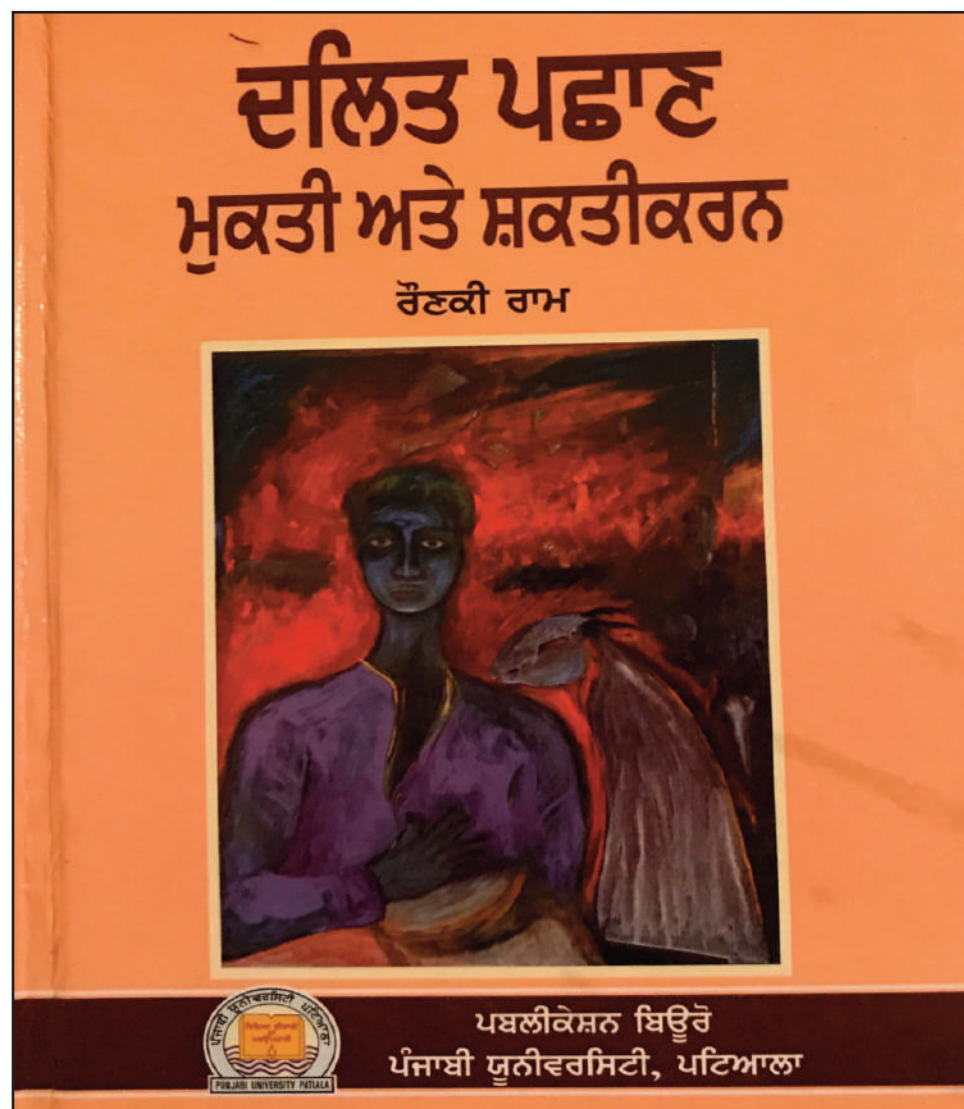
The author further states that at present, Dalit poetry addresses the Dalit struggle from both caste and class perspectives. But to receive relief from caste system it lays stress on Ambedkarite and medieval Sants' philosophy than Marxist. Dalit poetry, writes the author, has been in the process of inventing counter culture as against the mainstream culture of social domination and all pervasive hegemony.

The epilogue includes various interviews of the author which were published at different intervals in various local/vernacular newspapers and magazines. These interviews help in understanding the complex issues of Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment. It provides us deep understanding of the author on the issues like Dalit identity, education, literature, their social, economic and political position in the pre and post liberalization, privatization and globalization period.

On the whole, this book is another good attempt by the author to analytically explore in Punjabi language the complex theme of Dalit identity, emancipation and empowerment. The book provides a compact and rich account of the rise of Dalit consciousness, identity and assertion in Punjab. Based on ethnographic and archival methods, this analytical volume in Punjabi is a welcome addition to the growing critical Dalit literature on Punjab in vernacular.

The publisher too deserves commendation for bringing out the book in an impressive form and wrapped up in an artistic cover with a reasonable price tag. It is a must read for lay, academic, political and media persons.

**Ref.** Mochi and Rai Sikh/Mahatam were added in the list of Scheduled Castes by the Constitution Scheduled Castes Amendment Act 2002 (Act No. 25) and 2007 (Act No. 31 of 2007) respectively. With the inclusion of these two castes the numbers of SCs have reached up to 39 castes For more detail see Ronki Ram (2012), Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation: Articulating an Alternative Dalit Agenda in East Punjab, Modern Asian Studies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 639-702.



question of Untouchability. The two waves of non-Dalit movement that raised voice for Dalits' emancipation along the national independence were Gadhar movement and Hindustan Socialist Republic Party (an organisation established by Bhagat Singh).

Due to the influence of Arya Samaj, Bhagat Singh and his family were against the caste and Untouchability. Bhagat Singh discussed deeply the problem of religious fundamentalism and Untouchability in his three writings; Firkhu fasadh ate uhana da ellaaj (communal violence and their solutions), Dharm ate sadhi azadi di jang (religion and war of our independence), and Achhut da swal (question of Untouchable). In his essay Achhut da swal, he argued that religion is the foundation of Untouchability and caste system in India. Religion morally confesses the lower castes to serve the upper castes for

which he said were also responsible of their slavery. He argued that it is through awareness that Dalits could achieve their emancipation from caste. The eighth chapter deals with the question of Dalit emancipation in Punjabi Dalit poetry. Dalit poetry, as pointed by the author is not only related to life of Dalits but also criticized the perpetrators of Dalit atrocities. It challenges, writes the author, the political and religious authority which supports Dalit oppression. The oppression of Dalits was first time challenged in the radical poetry of the Bhakti movement of medieval period. Subsequently, the leaders of Adi movements of 1920s also used poetry as a medium to criticize Dalit subjugation, documents the author with a number of examples. It is an excellent achievement of the book that it elaborates minutely how the poetry of Babu Mangu Ram,

# Shaky Edifice of Indian Democratic Federalism

In the 72nd year of India becoming a Republic in January 1950 after the promulgation of its constitution which declares India as 'India that is Bharat shall be a Union of States', it seems that the vision of our forefathers to make India a democratic polity is increasingly coming under stress. Of late, PM Narendra Modi's government in its 8th year of governance with absolute majority in the Lok Sabha appears to be facing challenges which are bound to adversely affect the very edifice of Indian democratic federalism which might result in definite danger to India's existence as an independent, sovereign and dignified member of the comity of nations. Without going into the details and blame game, it is time to sit and think to save India from ushering her into "Grammar of Anarchy" as feared by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the constitution. The political analysts both in India and abroad have already started terming our polity as 'flawed democracy' and 'electoral autocracy'. It is a matter of concern and worry. India needs "Gyansheel" leadership, as advised by Babasaheb Ambedkar, with a sense of statesmanship to steer clear the mess which we have created for ourselves by placing our vested interests above that of the country. I have no hesitation in quoting Dr. Ambedkar again when he warned us in his speech in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949 in which after explaining the history of how India lost her independence in the past and how it might be lost again. The visionary leader said, "Will history repeat itself? It is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and will probably be lost forever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood." It is time to wake up before it is too late. I am reminded of an Urdu couplet of Allama Iqbal:

Chhupa Kar Ashtin Mein Bijlian Rakh

Li Hain Gardu Ne;  
Anadil Bagh Ke Gafil Na Baithen Ashi-  
anao Mein

I am not an expert political analyst and write this as a layman but somewhat concerned and worried citizen about the on-goings in the administration and conduct of our senior functionaries. The immediate provocation in this regard came from some recent happenings of which all enlightened fellow citizens must be aware. Let me elaborate a bit:

i) Handling of the Covid situation: - It is presumed that Modi Government is strong and decisive with a thumping majority in the parliament. Unfortunately, the Government could not register its hold on the situation. It could not take along the opposition in dealing with the challenge. Rather than generating a sense of confidence among the masses with regard to labour migration, providing beds, oxygen and other medical facilities,

vaccination, the Government remained bogged down in a blame game and finding excuses. Even if there were some inadvertent slackness in the conduct of the situation, there was no harm in admitting it and trying to rectify the situation. The leadership could not show 'statesmanship' and succumbed to scoring brownie points which went against the tenets of good governance. The resultant slugfest and bickering undermined the basic principles of 'co-operative federalism' as stipulated in our constitution in its letter and spirit. The opposition also failed to show their involvement and sincerity in working with the Government in dealing with the situation. It did not go well with our democratic credentials.

ii) Political expediency prevailed: - It has been observed that, of late, the tendency to grab power at any cost has taken the driving seat. Both the governing class and the opposition remained busy in gaining political power by hook or crook without showing any scruples and adherence to the constitution, morality and propriety. Amidst the corona crisis, state elections were held without thinking of its repercussions. Unfortunately,

the constitutional authorities like the Election Commission and so called free and fair media seemed to be towing the government dictates. Election Commission could have curtailed and streamlined the mindless election campaigns. The apex government agencies like the CBI, ED and others are used to settle political dissent. It is yet another area where we have miserably failed and the "Laxman Rekhas" crossed for political expediency. The constitutional coveted positions like Governors are unashamedly jumping in the arena to please their masters in Delhi. These are some of the disturbing trends for the democratic and federal polity which should be arrested, sooner than later.

iii) The 'Steelframe' under threat: - The Civil Services, the so called 'Steelframe' and the permanent government of the country have increasingly come under stress and

threat. It is not a good omen. The recent happenings in Maharashtra and Punjab involving senior police functionaries involved in slanging matches with their political bosses, the recent happen-

ings in West Bengal involving extension, transfer to the Centre, and his appointment as an adviser to the CM stinks of rot which has set in the polity. Yet another example of insensitive conduct of the government has just come in Jalandhar itself - a senior functionary of the Enforcement Directorate, said to be an honest and straight officer, was handed over a charge sheet on the day of his retirement instead of a bouquet of flowers. Were the concerned authorities sleeping before, if there were serious charges against the officer? Can it happen without the nod of the Minister of Finance under whom the Directorate of ED functions? It is a disturbing trend which needs to be addressed immediately. Former Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran has written, "There is a growing perception that the role and status of civil servants has diminished under the Modi government" in an article in the Tribune of June 2.

iv) Judicial Overreach:- Of late, it

has also been observed that the three principal organs of the state, as stipulated in the constitution, that is Executive, Legislature and Judiciary are log-gerheads with each other; particularly the judiciary is trying to encroach upon the spheres of legislation and execution as the 'High priest' of the state. The case in point, to my mind, is the recent pronouncements and directions given by the courts in the matters pertaining to decisions and policies of the elected government with regard to dealing with Corona pandemic. It will be advisable to rectify the situation, before it gets too late. The system of 'Checks and Balances' in this regard is required to be adhered to scrupulously.

I have simply tried, as a novice, to underline and highlight some of the recent happenings which have undermined the principles and edifice of democratic federalism of our country. It was but obvious and natural that the tussle among the states vis-a-vis the Centre has generated avoidable heat and controversies detrimental to the smooth functioning in terms of the letter and spirit of the constitution.

The political leadership ought to be 'Viveksheel' and Gyansheel' under the dictums of 'morality and propriety'. Both the government and the opposition, political outfits, civil services, civil society at large need to look into this and have introspection to set the situation right before further damage is done. Let us once again visit Babasaheb Ambedkar and listen to what he said while cautioning the nation about the challenges ahead, in the Constituent Assembly, "I do not wish to weary the House any further. Independence is no doubt a matter of joy. But let us not forget that this independence has thrown on us great responsibilities. By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame except ourselves. There is great danger of things going wrong. Times are fast changing."



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# My Struggle in Life

## Unfortunate Incidents

Of the hundreds of students on the rolls of our school, three were Muslims—Nurdin; Jan Mohd, nicknamed Jani; and Nawab Khan. Nurdin was tall, of average description, and looked smart and shrewd. His father, Fazla, was a well-known thief. An equally well-known thief was Mangu. They belonged to the neighboring villages, Basdehra and Jakhera, respectively. People had spun legends about them. It was said that they, and in particular Mangu, could enter a house and escape from there after accomplishing their job even if it were through an incredibly narrow hole. They were also regarded as past masters in the art of dodging and duping the police. People in general made appreciative references to them as they posed no danger to the common man; they selected the houses of rich persons. There were only moderately rich persons in our ilaqa (area). The main booty they had in view were money and ornaments of gold and silver.

Nurdin's father did not like that his son should enter the same trade as he himself was carrying on. Therefore, in order to wean him away from the environments, which were of his own creation, he sent him to school. After the completion of the village school education, Nurdin was admitted in our school. But his mind was not in his studies. It wandered about, and his thoughts were fixed on the occupation of thieving, of which he also had some experience. Even in the school, he would do small exploits of the trade. Fazla got scent of the aberrations in his son, and one day he came to the school with a long, threatening lathi (big stick). Sensing danger from his father, Nurdin took to his heels, but the father was too much for him. He chased and overtook him in the very premises of the school. He gave the boy so severe a beating with the lathi that Nurdin alone could bear.

Probably he took that very harsh incident in his stride, considering it a rehearsal for the coming episodes, for such incidents were inherent in the profession he intended to adopt. He was likely to meet with a much harsher treatment at the hands of the police. This incident did not deter him from cherishing the thoughts that were gripping his mind. Finally, he quit the school.

Jan Mohd was a tall, slim, and charming boy. He belonged to a poor family and was my close neighbor in the village. His father Idu was known for his gentlemanliness. Jani was candid in his likeable behavior and boisterous in his laughter. On the various functions of the school, he used to sing Arya Samaji (person belonging to Arya Samaj "noble society," a Hindu reform movement founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875) songs and would take part even in religious matters like

sandhya (prayer). He matriculated from the school and then got into service at the Ripon Hospital at Simla. The communal disturbances of 1947, however, took him to Pakistan. Since then we have lost track of him.

Here we are particularly concerned with Nawab Khan. A stocky and handsome young man. He was a little older in age than an average student of the school. He was soft spoken and had mild manners. His uncle Mian Dalipu was a hakim (physician) of repute and was a good friend of my father. He served as our family physician, and we had great faith in him. It must be observed here that there was no distinction between the Muslim students and others. In those days, the monster of communalism had not yet raised its ugly head. There was complete harmony and amity between different communities, and people regarded each other with respect and brotherly feelings. Nawab Khan came from quite a well-to-do family which had branched off sometime back from the original Hindu Rajput princely family of the small hilly state of Bangarh, situated in the neighborhood of our village Dehlan. An ancestor of the Nawab Khan family had married a Muslim woman, and as a result, so the story goes, the family was excommunicated from the brotherhood; and under compelling situations, the members of the family embraced Islam. Nawab Khan had been cherishing a desire to go back to the Hindu fold, and while in the school, he opened his mind to the headmaster who was a devoted and true Arya Samaji. He felt happy at the idea of his pupil. Without entering into the details of what transpired among the concerned Arya Samajis, it will suffice to say that the stage was set for the next step—shuddhi (meaning purification, but in this case, it meant conversion). The ceremony was held on the school premises, and after the investiture of Yagyo-Pavit (a sacred thread worn by a Brahman), Nawab Khan was given the new name Ranbir Singh. Even before his conversion, Ranbir Singh used to perform all the

Arya Samaji rituals including sandhya—prayers in Sanskrit—twice a day. Now he became formally a full-fledged Hindu. There was, however, a small group of students who had some personal grudge against him and were in search of an opportunity to wreak vengeance on him. The above event gave them the needed opportunity.

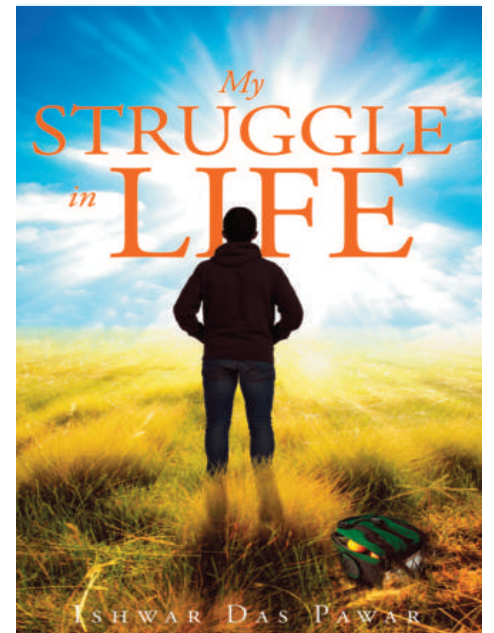
Due to shortage of accommodation in the boarding house some of the boarders including myself and Ranbir Singh were accommodated in the classrooms of the school. The group opposed to Ranbir Singh hit upon a plan. At about midnight one day, they came with a hurricane lamp and woke me up. On seeing them at such an odd hour, my heart throbbed. "Something serious was in the offing," I thought. They told me that they wanted to have a talk with Ranbir Singh and asked me to accompany them to his room, which was two rooms away from

mine. I had no idea as to what all this was about, and they would not tell anything in advance. I agreed to go with them as my going with them would do no harm, and if anything, it might help avert anything untoward happening. I had nothing but love and affection for Ranbir Singh.

The door of the room where Ranbir Singh was sleeping was bolted from inside. He was woken up and made to unbolt the door. Though a young man of courage, he looked terror-stricken. Then the warning group started unfolding their plan. They called upon him to say, "I am not Ranbir Singh. I am Nawab Khan." Prudently enough, Ranbir Singh, a new convert to Hinduism, faithfully repeated these not only once, "I am not Ranbir Singh. I am Nawab Khan". Prudence at the time was the better part of valor. Then the group showered a volley of mostly filthy abuses on their target and asked him sternly to repeat the abuses upon himself. It was a very bitter pill indeed to swallow. But again, he yielded to expediency and repeated verbatim what he was required to say. Ranbir Singh's attitude, though not of defeat but of rare prudence, proved disarming. All through this dirty drama, I stood there amazed, apprehending physical harm to Ranbir Singh. But the group retreated, uttering more abuses.

It was a great relief. The situation had been saved from worsening; anything could have happened. The headmaster was informed early next morning of what had happened in the night. He came to the school earlier than usual, grim and with all signs of anxiety writ large on his face. Except the erring group, the sympathies of all were with Ranbir Singh. But the mischief and the harm had been done. The headmaster handled the situation with tact but with firmness as well. The recalcitrant group, however, started a small scale demonstrations after school hours. The name of Tek Chand Syal, a classmate of mine, needs special mention in this context. A young man of liberal views and brilliant understanding, he openly sided with Ranbir Singh. The demonstrators made him also a target of their vilification.

But Tek Chand remained undaunted and weathered the storm bravely. This incident created a stir in the school as well as among the local Arya Samajis for several days. Gradually the agitation subsided, leaving behind a trail of bitterness and rancor. The wounds inflicted were never to heal. The final tenth class students on preparatory holidays were busy with their studies. University examination was nearing fast. As customary, the outgoing students were to be given a farewell party. I was also to appear in the final examination and Ranbir Singh too. Contributions were collected for the function. The mischief mongers were again on their job. We knew about their plans to spoil the solemnity of the function. My brother and myself decided to stay away from the func-



tion, and if I recall correctly, Jan Mohd also joined us. We left for Rakkar in the morning as usual for studies and decided to come back only after the function was over.

The function started with a sad background. There was a large quantity of sweets to be distributed among the students and the staff. The dissident group had made a settlement with the sweeper of the school. The students belonging to the Arya Samaj families took their share of the sweets and ate their fill. And so did the staff. But the said group had their own way of dealing with the sweets.

They accepted their share at the spot but gave it to the sweeper who was, according to the understanding, a little distant, possibly out of sight, from others with a spacious cloth spread on the earth. Other wavering students and also many others sided with the dissident group and dropped their share of the sweets on the chaddar (bed sheet) of the sweeper. The function had lost its charm and meaning. Everybody felt humiliated and downcast. But it could not be helped.

We learnt about all this on coming back in the evening. We felt satisfied with our decision to evade the function. Ranbir Singh again became Nawab Khan. We even, thereafter, addressed him as Ranbir Singh, but nobody could change the hard fact that he had been relegated to the Muslim fold. He carried with him both names: Ranbir Singh and Nawab Khan. His children had been married into Muslim families. But all honor to him, he, along with his family, continues here in our country in spite of what happened in the communal disturbances of 1947.

This incident is still fresh in my mind, and at times, it evokes feelings of disappointment, disgust and abhorrence. It reminds me of the ass-and-cow story about Akbar the Great, whether true or merely a cock-and-bull story, it is full of significance.

Akbar wanted to be converted to Hinduism. Consequently, he expressed his desire in this regard to the Hindus. The votaries of casteism, however, planned differently to meet the king's wish. The story goes that the Hindus brought an ass to the darbar (royal court) and, in full view of Akbar, started washing the animal. When the king enquired what all that was about, they replied, to his great astonishment, that they were going to convert the ass into a cow.

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# BABA SAHIB DR. AMBEDKAR (A Revolutionary)

**W**"e will have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction or else those who suffer inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so laboriously built." These are the words which Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar spoke on 25th November 1949 while addressing the Constituent Assembly after completing the Indian Constitution piloted by him which he presented to the President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad on 26th January 1950 in the presence of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and other prominent leaders.

In my view, these words were more directed towards the sufferers of inequality i.e. downtrodden and unprivileged of India rather than administrators of it. Baba Sahib extremely worked hard to frame the constitution and get it passed with its preamble:-

**JUSTICE** Social, economic, and political;

**LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, and worship;

**EQUALITY** of status and opportunity and to promote among them all;

**FRATERNITY** assuming the dignity of the individual; Inter alia he included the Fundamental Rights, such as Equality before law (ART 14); Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or the place of birth (ART 14); Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment (ART 16); Abolition of untouchability (ART 17); Protection of traffic in human beings and forced labor (BEGAR) (ART 23); Remedies for enforcement of fundamental rights (ART 32, 226); by the judiciary i.e. the Supreme Court of India and the High Courts of States. Besides this, the directive principles of state policy under which states shall endeavor to secure social order for promotion of welfare of the people were also provided.

These principles specially include an adequate means of livelihood to all citizens, men or women, equally (ART 39); Rights to work, to education, and public assistance in certain cases (ART 41). Living wage etc. for workers (ART 43); and promotion of educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward sections (ART 46).

This all would show that all these provisions have been made especially to confer, to protect, and safeguard the basic rights upon and for the S.Cs. and S.Ts. who had been hitherto deprived of them for centuries under the Manu's Laws contained in the Manu Smiriti due to which these communities became downtrodden, unprivileged and untouchable. So that such castes, tribes may not be ignored, their list was drawn out later on by the President of India in consultation with Governors of the States and made a part of the Constitution as directed by it under articles 341 and 342. To further insure the amelioration of these classes, a particular section has been added as part XVI to the constitution

under the caption, special provisions relating to certain classes under which seats shall be reserved in the house of people and legislative assemblies of the states in proportion of their population in the states, for S.Cs\* and S.Ts, (ART 330).

Reservation of S.Cs, and S.Ts in the services and posts has been provided under article 335 in connection with the affairs of the Union and the States. To watchdog and safeguard the interests of the S.Cs. and S.Ts., a National Commission (ART 338) consisting Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and three other members has been provided.

Considering the concerted effort accompanied by versatile genius put in by Baba Sahib in framing the constitution and unique leadership of the downtrodden, Mr. Sharad Pawar the former chief minister of Maharashtra, paid his heartiest tribute to Baba Sahib in his Foreward of "Ambedkar's Writings". In the following words;

In Baba Sahib Ambedkar, we have not only a crusader against the caste system, a valiant fighter for the cause of the downtrodden in India but also an elder statesman and national leader whose contribution in the form of Constitution of India will be cherished forever by posterity. In fact, his fight for human rights and as an emancipator of all those enslaved in the world gave him international recognition of a liberator of humanity from injustice, social and economic. Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then prime minister of India paid a

glowing tribute to Dr. Ambedkar while moving a condolence resolution in the parliament as follows, "Dr. Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive feelings of the Hindu society," (Foreward to Dr. Ambedkar's writings and speeches) Pt. Nehru once said that he was accidentally born in a Hindu family to indicate that he did not believe in casteism and its edicts.

But during his lifetime he did not shed off Hinduism. As against this Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar, after thoroughly studying the Hindu religion and its social and cultural tenets took the vow that though he was born a Hindu because it was not in his power but he would not die as a Hindu. To keep his solemn vow, Baba Sahib embraced Buddhism and took, "Diksha on Dusehra Day in 1956. Before his death on 6th December 1956. Baba Sahib adopted Buddhism because it is the most secular and scientific religion in which there is no caste and class prejudice but equality, fraternity, love, and affection." The former prime minister Indira Gandhi also said, "The life of Dr. Ambedkar gives a lesson to us



**R. C. Paul (Late)  
(Retired Judge)**

that most of evils in our society can be eliminated by domestic reforms as introduced by this great leader." In framing new constitution, Baba Sahib was undoubtedly a larger than life persona. This is established from further words of Sharad Pawar," Dr. Ambedkar incorporated the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity in the Constitution of free India, it is a living tribute to his juristic genius and social conscience that over the years, the high courts and supreme court have shaped the law to serve the social ends of governmental efforts to improve the lot of the poor."

In pursuance of edicts, of the constitution, certain laws have been enacted and certain ordinances/directions have been promulgated for the upliftment and welfare of the S.Cs. and S.Ts but little has been achieved so far. Protection of Civil Rights Act

1955 and S.Cs and S.Ts. (Protection of Atrocities) 1989 have been passed but despite this the offences

to attract these provisions are still being permitted in Indian societies. Very few cases are registered, tried, or result into conviction due to general prejudice.

Reservations in central or state appointments proportionate to the population of these caste or classes have been notified but their quotas have not been fully filled up. There is a great backlog, though there is no dearth of qualified candidates among the SCs and STs for appointment on such posts. There is no reservation in private sector. Now the state trading is also being squeezed to be picked up by private firms and agencies. This will further limit the appointment scope of the SCs. and S.Ts. candidates on key posts.

The reservation in legislation of course is fully implemented but the MLAs and MPs belonging to the SCs and S.Ts are doing nothing tangible to better the fate of the castes or tribes whom they are supposed to represent, because they occupy the reserved seats for and on their behalf on reserved quotas. They are elected on the tickets of national or regional parties of non- S.Ss, and non S.Ts, financially supported by the millionaires and as such they never raise any point in the parliament or the state assemblies for the welfare of the S.Ts. and S.Cs. to whom they are expected to represent. They are after filling their own coffers with money by indulging in corruption. They are in a way running with the hares and hunting with the hounds.

Ours to be elected members do not form a strong independent party to press for the fulfilment of the demands of our people on account of whom they contest the reserved

seats in the elections. They do not gain the political power which is most needed in the words of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar as expressed by him in the following lines/Political power is the most precious thing in the life of the community especially if its position is constantly being challenged and the community is required to maintain it by meeting the challenge. Political power is the only means by which it can sustain its position" (in Pakistan or Partition of India) According to Baba Saheb, "lost rights are never regained by begging and by appeals to conscience of usurpers. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition." He has asked us, "write down on the walls of your houses that you were Dasses (slaves) of yesterday but want to be Rulers of tomorrow." During more than 6 decades from the adoption of Indian constitution there has not been caused an appreciable dent in the abysmal plight of S.Cs. and S.Ts. Also untouchability has been abolished by the constitution it still exists in some parts of India. Yet it exists in the mind of caste Hindus and non SCs. who feel ill at ease in the matters of reservation in the appointments and the posts. There is lack of education among the S.Cs. and S.Ts. due to poverty and unemployment. The schemes of their welfare are not fully implemented. The funds earmarked and given the disposal of the states by the central govt. for the purpose are either misappropriated or mis-utilised. Most of the S.Cs, and S.Ts. constitute labor class but suffer from unemployment.

The higher education and medical facilities have become out of their reach being most expensive. Still these people have not blown up the structure of political democracy as prophesied by Baba Saheb. This is because they have not united under one banner. Their population in all the states is not less than 25% of the total population. In Punjab it has risen up to 32%. In case they all get together and form a compact unit like Sikhs in Punjab and BSJ? in U.P and make alliance with some national or regional parties, they can have balance of power in their hands to form the govt, of their choice and rule as contemplated by Baba Saheb. Let a better sense prevail upon the S.Cs. S.Ts. and their leaders to recollect Baba Saheb's philosophy and attain political power. Let them shed off fatalist notion that they are born to suffer the atrocities at the hands of Hindus due to their mythological previous deeds. They should learn the universal truth, "The fault does not lie with our stars but with us that we are underlings" in the words of Shakespeare.

According to Baba Saheb, "The political power is the most precious thing in the life of a community, especially if its position is constantly being challenged and the community is required to maintain it by meeting the challenge. Political power is the only means by which it can sustain its power".

# UNPUBLISHED PREFACE THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA

Source Courtesy: Columbia University  
www.columbia.edu

April 6, 1956

[Text provided by Eleanor Zelliot,  
as prepared by Vasant Moon]

A question is always asked to me: how I happen[ed] to take such [a] high degree of education. Another question is being asked: why I am inclined towards Buddhism. These questions are asked because I was born in a community known in India as the "Untouchables." This preface is not the place for answering the first question. But this preface may be the place for answering the second question.

The direct answer to this question is that I regard the Buddha's Dhamma to be the best. No religion can be compared to it. If a modern man who knows science must have a religion, the only religion he can have is the Religion of the Buddha. This conviction has grown in me after thirty-five years of close study of all religions.

How I was led to study Buddhism is another story. It may be interesting for the reader to know. This is how it happened.

My father was a military officer, but at the same time a very religious person. He brought me up under a strict discipline. From my early age I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a Kabirpanthi, though his father was Ramanandi. As such, he did not believe in Murti Puja (Idol Worship), and yet he performed Ganapati Puja--of course for our sake, but I did not like it. He read the books of his Panth. At the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read every day before going to bed a portion of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house to hear the Katha. This went on for a long number of years.

The year I passed the English Fourth Standard Examination, my community people wanted to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to congratulate me. Compared to the state of education in other communities, this was hardly an occasion for celebration. But it was felt by the organisers that I was the first boy in my community to reach this stage; they thought that I had reached a great height. They went to my father to ask for his permission. My father flatly refused, saying that such a thing would inflate the boy's head; after all, he has only passed an examination and done nothing more. Those who wanted to celebrate the event were greatly disappointed. They, however, did not give way. They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father, and asked him to intervene. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded, and the meeting was held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a copy of his book on the life of the Buddha, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it.

I began to ask why my father did not introduce us to the Buddhist lit-

erature. After this, I was determined to ask my father this question. One day I did. I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeated the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables. My father did not like the question. He merely said, "You must not ask such silly questions. You are only boys; you must do as you are told." My father was a Roman Patri-



arch, and exercised most extensive Patria Pretestas over his children. I alone could take a little liberty with him, and that was because my mother had died in my childhood, leaving me to the care of my auntie.

So after some time, I asked again the same question. This time my father had evidently prepared himself for a reply. He said, "The reason why I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana is this: we belong to the Untouchables, and you are likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is natural. The value of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana lies in removing this inferiority complex. See Drona and Karna--they were small men, but to what heights they rose! Look at Valmiki--he was a Koli, but he became the author of [the] Ramayana. It is for removing this inferiority complex that I

ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana."

I could see that there was some force in my father's argument. But I was not satisfied. I told my father that I did not like any of the figures in [the] Mahabharata. I said, "I do not like Bhishma and Drona, nor Krishna. Bhishma and Drona were hypocrites. They said one thing and did quite the opposite. Krishna believed in fraud. His life is nothing but a series of frauds. Equal dislike I have for Rama. Examine

was the only religion which a society awakened by science could accept, and without which it would perish. I also pointed out that for the modern world Buddhism was the only religion which it must have to save itself. That Buddhism makes [a] slow advance is due to the fact that its literature is so vast that no one can read the whole of it. That it has no such thing as a bible, as the Christians have, is its greatest handicap. On the publication of this article, I received many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls that I have undertaken the task.

To disarm all criticism I would like to make it clear that I claim no originality for the book. It is a compilation and assembly plant. The material has been gathered from various books. I would particularly like to mention Ashvaghosha's Buddhavita [=Buddhacharita], whose poetry no one can excel. In the narrative of certain events I have even borrowed his language.

The only originality that I can claim in [=is] the order of presentation of the topics, in which I have tried to introduce simplicity and clarity. There are certain matters which give headache[s] to the student of Buddhism. I have dealt with them in the Introduction.

It remains for me to express my gratitude to those who have been helpful to me. I am very grateful to Mr. Nanak Chand Rattua of Village Sakrulli and Mr. Parkash Chand of Village Nangal Khurd in the district of Hoshiarpur (Punjab) for the burden they have taken upon themselves to type out the manuscript. They have done it several times. Shri Nanak Chand Rattu took special pains and put in very hard labour in accomplishing this great task. He did the whole work of typing etc. very willingly and without caring for his health and [=or] any sort of remuneration. Both Mr. Nanak Chand Rattu and Mr. Parkash Chand did their job as a token of their greatest love and affection towards me. Their labours can hardly be repaid. I am very much grateful to them.

When I took up the task of composing the book I was ill, and [I] am still ill. During these five years there were many ups and downs in my health. At some stages my condition had become so critical that doctors talked of me as a dying flame. The successful rekindling of this dying flame is due to the medical skill of my wife and Dr. Malvankar.

They alone have helped me to complete the work. I am also thankful to Mr. M. B. Chitnis, who took [a] special interest in correcting [the] proof and to go [=in going] through the whole book.

I may mention that this is one of the three books which will form a set for the proper understanding of Buddhism. The other books are: (i) Buddha and Karl Marx; and (ii) Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India. They are written out in parts. I hope to publish them soon.

**B. R. Ambedkar**  
26 Alipur Road, Delhi  
6-4-56

his conduct in the Sarupnakha [=Shurpanakha] episode [and] in the Vali Sugriva episode, and his beastly behaviour towards Sita." My father was silent, and made no reply. He knew that there was a revolt.

This is how I turned to the Buddha, with the help of the book given to me by Dada Keluskar. It was not with an empty mind that I went to the Buddha at that early age.

I had a background, and in reading the Buddhist Lore I could always compare and contrast. This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and His Dhamma.

The urge to write this book has a different origin. In 1951 the Editor of the Mahabodhi Society's Journal of Calcutta asked me to write an article for the Vaishak Number. In that article I argued that the Buddha's Religion

# Future of Parliamentary Democracy

This speech was delivered by Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar at D.A.V. College, Jalandhar on October 28th, 1951

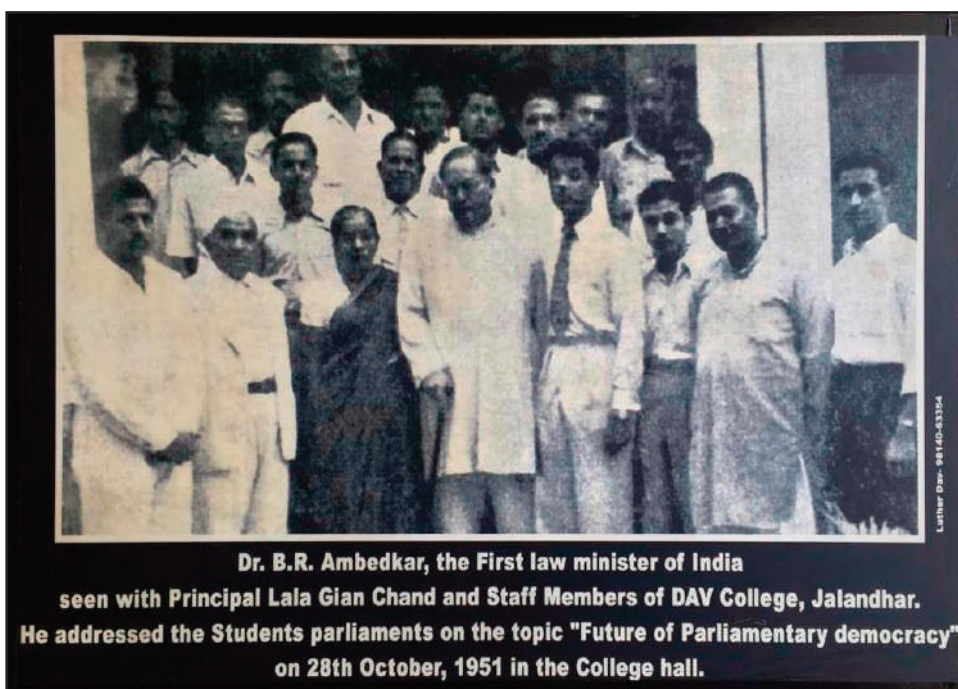
I am indeed thankful to you for the great honour done to me of asking me to address the special session of your parliament. During my whole life I have been, so to say, a wanderer from subject to subject, from profession to profession. I began my career as a Professor of Political Economics in the Government Commerce College, Bombay after my return from England. But I soon felt that the Government Service was no good for a man who was bound by rules of discipline. He is hampered at every stage in his work of public service. I then went back to England and qualified for the Bar. After my return I rested for a short period and then accepted the post of the Principal of the Law College at Bombay. I came back to the profession of teaching. I worked as the Principal of the Law College for five years. Then the 1935 Government of India Act came into being which brought the popular legislatures into being for the first time. I then thought of taking a jump into politics and I left the service and took to politics. Since then I have alternatively been doing legal practice and serving the public. Legal practice and public service are thus the alternating currents in my life, and I do not know on which current my life will end, whether A.C. or D.C.

I am very fond of the teaching profession. I am also very fond of students. I have dealt with them. I have lectured them in my life. This is the first opportunity I have got to address students since my resignation from the Cabinet. I am very glad to talk to students. A great deal of the future of this country must necessarily depend on the students of this country. Students are an intelligent part of the community and they can shape public opinion. I, therefore, take special pleasure in addressing you the members of the Parliament and I am really thankful for the opportunity given me.

When your principal wrote to me requesting me to address you, he did not indicate any particular topic on which I shall speak to you this morning. But suddenly, as usually happens in my case, in the flash of a moment the subject became clear to me and I have decided to speak a few words to you on the subject of parliamentary government. The time at my disposal is very short and I will therefore be able to give only a brief analysis of the subject.

During the discussion in the Constituent Assembly there was a variety of opinion as regards the nature of the Constitution that we should have. Some preferred the British system; some the American system. There were others who did not want either of these two types of government. But after a long discussion, a large majority of members came to a conclusion that the system of the Parliamentary Government as it is in Britain is best suited to our country.

There are some sections of people who do not like Parliamentary Government. Communists want the Russian type of government. The socialists are also against the present Constitution of India. They are agitating against it. They have declared that if they come to power, they will modify it. Personally speaking, I am very attached to the Parliamentary system of Government. We must understand what it means and we must preserve it in constitution. What is meant by Parliamentary Government? There is a book on the English Constitution written by Walter Baggot; it



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the First law minister of India  
seen with Principal Lala Gian Chand and Staff Members of DAV College, Jalandhar.  
He addressed the Students parliaments on the topic "Future of Parliamentary democracy"  
on 28th October, 1951 in the College hall.

is indeed a classic treatise. It was later expanded by other authorities on constitutional government like Laski and others. He has put the conception of the Parliamentary Government in one sentence. He says Parliamentary Government means government by discussion and not by fisticuffs. You will always find in the British system of Government that they hardly ever resort to fisticuffs when taking any decision. The decision is always taken after discussion. Nobody introduces the element of disturbance in the British parliament. Look at French Politics. Decisions are arrived at more than often by knocking knockout blows. You will find that this system is hardly adequate to those not born in that system. It is an alien institution to them. We must learn, understand and make it a success.

Parliamentary democracy is unknown to us are present. But India, at one time, had Parliamentary institutions. India was far more advanced in ancient times. If you go throughout the Suktas of Mahaparinirvan, you will find ample evidence in support of my point. In these Suktas it is stated that while Bhagwan Buddha was dying at Kusinara (Kusinagara) a message to the effect was sent to the Mallas who were sitting in session at that time. They were decided that they should not close the session but would carry on with their work and would go to Kusinara after finishing the business of the Parliament. There

are innumerable references in our literature to prove that the Parliamentary system of Government was not unknown to us. There are many rules about Parliamentary procedure. May's parliamentary practice is generally followed. One rule that is invariably followed everywhere is that there can be no discussion without a motion. That is why there is no discussion on a question. The rule was also practiced in our land in ancient times. The system of secret ballot now in vogue is also not new to us; it was followed in Buddhist Sanghas. They had the ballot papers which they called Sala-

rule must be elected by the people from time to time. He must obtain the approval of the people. Hereditary rule has no sanction in the Parliamentary system of government.

Secondly, any law, any measure applicable to the public life of the people must be based on the advice of the people chosen by the people. No single individual can presume the authority that he knows everything, that he can make the laws and carry the government. The laws are to be made by representatives of the people in the Parliament. They are the people who can advise the men in whose name the law can be proclaimed. That is the difference between the monarchical system Government and the democratic system Government. In monarchy, the affairs of the people are carried on in the name of the monarch and under the authority of the monarch. In democracy the affairs of the public are carried on in the name of the head of state but the laws and the executive measures are the authority on which the government is carried on. The head of state is the titular head; he is merely a symbol. He is consecrated 'Murti'. He can be worshipped but he is not allowed to carry out the government of the country. The government of the country is carried out, though in his name, by the elected representatives of the people.

Thirdly and lastly, the Parliamentary system of government means that at a stated period those who want to advise the head of state must have the confidence of the people in them renewed. In Britain, formerly, the Parliament were carried out every seven years. The Chartists agitated against this; they wanted annual elections. The motive behind this agitation was very praiseworthy indeed. It would have been best in the interests of the people if annual elections were held, had it been possible, of course. But Parliamentary elections are very costly affairs. So some sort of compromise was arrived at and a five year period was supposed to be the responsible period at which the legislators and the ministers were to go back to the people and obtain the fresh renewal of their confidence.

This is also not enough. The Parliamentary system of Government is much more than government by discussion. There are two pillars on which the Parliamentary system of Government rests. These are the fulcrums on which the mechanism works. Those two pillars are an opposition and free and fair elections. For the last 20 or 30 years we acclimated to one single political party. We have nearly forgotten the necessity and importance of opposition for the fair working of Parliamentary Democracy. We are continuously told that opposition is an evil. Here again we are forgetting what the past history has to tell us. You know that there

(Contd. on next page)

# Future of Parliamentary Democracy

(Continue from page 14)

were Nibandhnars to interpret the Vedas and Smritis. They used to begin their comments on Slokas and Sutras by stating firstly the ParvaPakshs, the one side of the question. They used to follow up by given the Uttar Paksha, the other side. By this they wanted to show us that the question raised was not an easy question, it is a question where there is dispute, discussion and doubt. Then they used to give what they termed as Adhikaran where they used to criticize both the Pakshas. Finally, they gave the Siddhant, their own decisions. From here we can find that all our ancient teachers believed in the two party system of Government.

One important thing in the Parliamentary Democracy is that people should know the other side, if there are two sides to a question. Hence a functional opposition is required. Opposition is the key to a free political life. No democracy can do without it. Britain and Canada, the two exponents of the Parliamentary system of Government, recognize this important fact and in both countries the Leader of the Opposition is paid a salary by the Government. They regard the opposition as an essential thing. People of these countries believe that the opposition should be as much alive as the Government. The Government may suppress the facts; the government may have only one-sided propaganda. The people have made provision against these event-

alities in both these countries.

A free and fair election is the other pillar on which Parliamentary Democracy rests. Free and fair elections are necessary for the transfer of power from one section for the community to the other in a peaceful manner and without any bloodshed. In older times, if a king died, there was at least one murder in the palace. Revolution used to take place in the palace resulting in murders before the new king used to take the reign of his country into his authority. This has been the history of India. Elections must be completely free and fair. People must be left to themselves to choose those whom they want to send to the Legislatures.

Now the question arises as to whether there is any desire on the part of the party in power to permit any opposition to be created. Congress does not want any opposition. Congress is attempting to gather people of sundry views under one canopy. I ask you whether this is a desirable trend in the Political life of this country. What about free and fair elections? We must not lose sight of the fact that Big Business is trying to play a great part in the political life of this country.

The amount that is being contributed to Congress on behalf of Big Business is a very dangerous thing. If moneyed people try to influence the elections by contributing to the election fund of any political party, what will be the result? If the party which

they have supported financially comes into power, they will try to extract concessions for themselves either by modifying the present legislation or by influencing the party in power to legislate in such a manner as would be beneficial to their interests. I ask you, gentlemen, whether under these circumstances there is any hope left for the Parliamentary system of Government to do any good to the country. I would like to refer to the Mahabharat. During the battle between the Pandvas and the Kaurvas, Bhishma and Drona were on the side of the Kaurvas. The Pandvas were in the right and the Kaurvas were in the wrong. Bhishma admitted this. Whensomebody asked Bhishma as to why he was supporting the Kaurvas if he found the Pandvas to be in the right. Bhishma replied in the memorable sentence. I must be loyal to the salt if I eat the food of the Kaurvas. I must take their side even if they might be in the wrong.

Today the same thing is happening. Congress is accepting the financial help of the Banias, Marwaris and other multimillionaires. Congress is eating their food and it follows therefore naturally that Congress will have to take the side of these Big Businesses at all crucial times. We also find that the government servants are influencing the elections in favour of the party which is feeding them and their dependents. No less a personality than Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, at the inaugural session

for the Bhartiya Jan Sangh at Delhi recently, openly charged government servants of helping the Congress and thereby nullifying the elections from being free and fair.

Under these circumstances, do you, gentlemen, think that there is any hope for Parliamentary Democracy to succeed?

If Parliamentary Democracy fails in this country, and is bound to fail for the reasons mentioned by me, the only result will be rebellion, anarchy and Communism. If the people in power do not realize that people will not tolerate hereditary authority, then this country is doomed. Either Communism will come, Russia having sovereignty over our country, destroying individual liberty and our independence, or the section of the people who are disgruntled at the failure of the party in power will start a rebellion and anarchy will prevail.

Gentlemen, I want you to take note of these eventual certainties and if you wish that the Parliamentary system of Government and Parliamentary Democracy prevail in this country If you are satisfied that we cherish the inherent right of individual liberty, then it is your duty as students, as the intelligent community of our country, to strive your utmost to cherish this Parliamentary system of Government in its true spirit and work for it. Gentlemen, I have done. I thank you for having given me this opportunity to address this august gathering.



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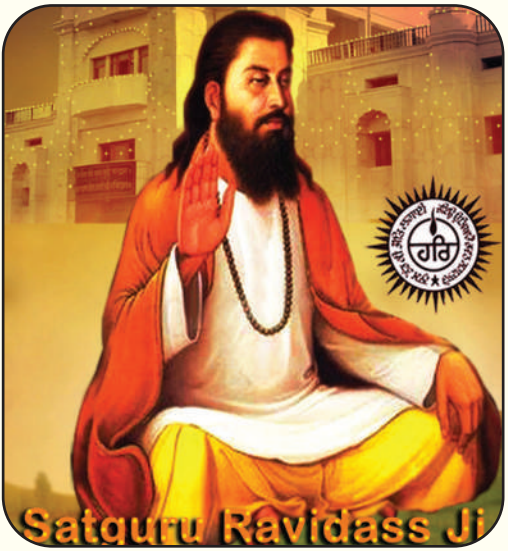
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## Pittsburg Gurughar's 36th Anniversary



Satguru Ravidass Ji



**Begampura sahar ko naao!! Dukh andohu nahi tih thaaoo!!**

Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg's 36th anniversary will be celebrated on June 27, 2021. Akhand Path will start on Friday 6/25/2021 at 10:00 AM and conclude with Bhog ceremony on Sunday 6/27/2021. Path and langar sewa will be hosted by and Sangat and Sewadars. We are very fortunate to have **Sant Anoop Singh ji "Una Wale"** perform Gurbani Shabad Kirtan on this occasion. Gurugarh Ragi Jatha of Giani Ompal Singh ji & Giani Gurnam Singh ji will also do the Shabad Kirtan. Bhai Dhanwant Singh Malhi and family will be doing the **Nishaan Sahib Sewa on June 26, 2021, Saturday, at 11:00 AM.**

Gurughar activities were limited for over a year because of COVID-19. This will be the first celebration after the restrictions are lifted. We will be following Contra Costa County's COVID-19 health guidelines. Entire Sangat is requested to attend the function and get Guru Sahib's blessings.



Jagtar Bhatia (Chairman)



Shinderpal Narabut (President)



Dharampal Chonkaria (Gen. Secretary)



Vinod Kumar Jakhu (Treasurer)

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Balvir Chand Mal



Jagdev Ram



O.P. Balley



Dr. Harmesh Kumar,



Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Committee Members & more

### LEGAL COMMITTEE



Jaiia Jaggi



Salinder Bhatia



Ajai Paul Ram



Shashi Paul

The New Committee appreciates the services of the previous committee and the selection panel and is looking forward to continued support. Guidance and cooperation of the entire Sangat who is the backbone of our Gurughar. Thank you.

### Sangat De Sewadar

**Chairman**  
Jagtar Bhatia

**President**  
Shinder Paul Narabut

**General Secretary**  
Dharam Pal Chonkria

**Treasurer**  
Vinod Kumar Jakhu