



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on Annihilation of Caste

Prem K. Chumber (Editor-in-Chief)

Ambedkar Times (English) and Desh Doaba (Punjabi)

Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar devoted his entire life for the creation of egalitarian social order in India where there should be no place for social exclusion based on caste. Caste based social hierarchies create and promote discrimination in all walks of life. Babasaheb was of the firm view that without the complete annihilation of caste from the India society, a genuine freedom and transparent set-up of egalitarian administration would not be possible. Corruption free governance and socially responsible commitment towards the nation demand inclusive social order. In fact caste and nation building process are mutually incompatible. Nation building needs fraternity among the communities inhabiting a common territory. Caste stands in opposition to fraternity. Babasaheb termed his struggle against caste spiritual. For him it was not a struggle for economic or political gains. The sole goal his struggle was to restore dignity, confidence and fearlessness among his people. His sole objective was to restore the lost dignity and self-respect to the millions of downtrodden in the society and to prepare them to stand for equal rights on their own strength. He firmly believed that liberty, equality and fraternity should become the real strengths of India, which would lay the true foundations of India democracy. For him political democracy should be based on social democracy. Social democracy in turn is dependent on equal opportunity available to all in the society where there should be no hierarchies and hereditary claims and special rights.

He was a practical visionary who produced voluminous of well-documented literature to put across his viewpoint for the creation of an egalitarian social order. He tirelessly worked day and night throughout his life time for the purpose of establishing social democracy in India. He took more than twenty years to embrace Buddhism from the day he declared that 'I will not die as a Hindu'. His adoption of Buddhism had nothing to do with the Hindu conception of renouncing the world while becoming 'sanyasi'. He remained active in his mission of caste annihilation. In continuation of his earlier political activism during which he founded two political parties (Labor Party of India and Scheduled Castes Federation of India), he prepared a blueprint for the third (Republican Party of India) after embracing Buddhism. To give a practical shape to his social vision, Babasaheb tried all possible ways to bring social reforms within Hinduism in order to make it an all-inclusive religion where the Shudras and Ati-Shudras should not suffer on account of their so-called lower birth. He launched satyagrahas (non-violent struggles) for the entry of lower castes (then known as Depressed Classes) in to public places of utility and religious sites; organized common kitchen eating; and advocated inter-caste marriages. When such measures failed to bring fruit, he put forward the idea of changing religion. After giving it a deep thought (more than twenty years), he embraced Buddhism as a way to egalitarian social order in India.

His people for whom he struggled throughout his life eagerly wait for the true realization of his goal. Their enthusiasm can be seen from the way they celebrate his birth anniversary every year with great enthusiasm and respect. This shows his great legacy that his people carrying forward to make his dream come true.



CASTE ADDED AS A PROTECTED CATEGORY TO ANTI DISCRIMINATION LAWS IN SEATTLE

O. P. Bailey

Founder Member, Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Pittsburg (CA)

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Ambedkar Times (English) and Desh Doaba (Punjabi)

In one of its historic decision the city council of Seattle (Washington) passed an ordinance, adding caste as a protected category to city's Anti-discrimination laws. Seattle, a cosmopolitan city with cultural diversity, has taken a very bold, courageous and an unprecedented step against the practice of caste prejudices. We applaud the boldness, courage and unrelenting efforts of the city of Seattle council member KshamaSawant who espoused this noble cause so seriously with a spirited dedication by proposing this historic ordinance which was passed with an overwhelming majority of 6-1. Since this was a very strenuous and a collective effort, we also admire and congratulate all the organizations for their support which helped to make it happen. It is an historical fact that divisions based on caste system have been inherently built and deeply rooted in the social hierarchy of India for centuries and caste is still treated as a fundamental determinant of social exclusions and development and it is also very unfortunate to observe that this social evil migrates abroad alongwith its migrant and joins the Indian diaspora and gives rise to unfortunate situations seen in Seattle.

We fervently believe that there has to be a shift in the deeply embedded mental aptitudes of so called upper sections of society towards their traditional beliefs and social practices which can definitely go a long way in filling the gaps of social segregations and building an inclusive social order where everybody can live together in peace, love and mutual harmony.

Without any feelings of repulsiveness against anybody who, unfortunately, is not happy with the passage of this historic ordinance, we do believe that this ordinance sends a strong message of awareness about the futility of caste system and any other kind of social prejudices so rampant in our society which have been eating, from times immemorial, into the very vitals of human civilization.

Role of Education:-

As envisioned by Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, good education is a potent force which appeals to the very conscience of a person lost in delusions and it acts as a window through which you can see the whole world in the right perspective. Incidentally it is relevant to mention here about an article written by late Shri Kuldip Nayar, veteran journalist of international eminence, presented at an international conference held in Durban (South Africa) in the year 2001 on racial segregations, under the

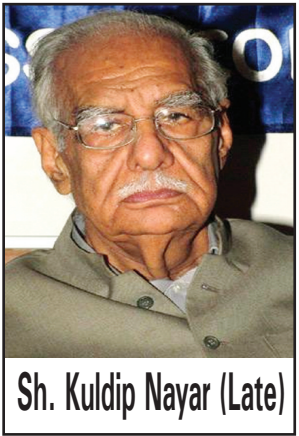
auspices of U.N.O.

As revealed in Mr. Nayar's article India lost a great chance by showing its reluctance to discuss this issue at an international forum. India could have admitted that inspite of constitutional safeguards guaranteed in the constitution authored by Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar; we could not make any substantial progress against the evil of casteism. A copy of the said article of late Mr. Kuldip Nayar will be published with details separately. This historic ordinance has now provided international dimensions to this crucial issue, capturing the imagination of international forums.

Let us all work together and honor the constitutional safeguards for liberation of our society from the social evil of casteism.



Dalits, Durban and a Lost Chance



Sh. Kuldip Nayar (Late)

The news is that New Delhi has been successful in keeping out caste by descent from the final U.N. resolution at Durban on racism. I do not think it is a matter for celebrations, which the unthinking Ministry of External Affairs is doing.

The Government's stand on caste is political. Otherwise, it is not understandable why it should have been a party to block the discussion on Zionism at Durban. People in India support Jews but not the thesis that Israel can go on expanding its frontiers. What has New Delhi proved? Does it mean that India knows of no discrimination by birth, or does it mean that the non-recognition of such ills will make them disappear? True, caste is not racism. But the difference is technical. How does it matter when the end product of caste and racism is the same, dis-

crimination and degradation? Even the National Human Rights Commission, otherwise tilting towards the Government, has said that the nomenclature is of little importance when caste-ism and racism do not treat men and women as human beings.

The series of legislative steps against the Dalits are impressive on paper. But the reality is that they continue to live in separate habitations, draw water from separate wells and get the worst chastisement if they ever dare to raise their head. They are hanged if they marry out of caste. They are murdered if they dare to be equal to the upper caste. Official figures show that one Dalit woman is raped every six hours and one Dalit killed every three days.

Wounded People

No democratic system should be ashamed of discussing at any forum its practices, which disable its own people. A free society owes its existence to the tenets of freedom. The Dalits have never had a breath of freedom in the suffocating Hindu society. They are wounded people, battered and broken. India is strong enough democratically to admit that

it has failed somewhere, despite all the guarantees in the Constitution, to provide the same glow of freedom, which the upper castes enjoy.

In fact, India has lost at Durban yet another opportunity to explain to the international community the country's shame. The Government could have admitted before the world that despite its legal efforts it had failed to remove untouchability and that it wanted the international community to discuss the case and suggest remedies. It would have been New Delhi's moral success.

It was at Durban that Mahatma Gandhi embarked on his agitation against racism and intolerance. It is at Durban that the Government of the country for whose freedom he fought has shut out from discussion caste, which was one of the targets of his agitation. New Delhi, happy over its victory, feels elated that even the U.N. Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, refused to include caste on the agenda when NGOs from India accosted him. But it is Pyrrhic victory. The world expects something better from the land of the Mahatma.

The blame is not that of the upper caste alone. The politics of

votes has become ingrained in the Dalits. Their leaders, belonging mostly to the creamy layer, have come to enjoy the spoils of office, without articulating the cause of the lowest in real terms.

While piloting the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the tallest among the Dalits, was able to incorporate in it the numerous safeguards for the untouchables. Untouchability is also banned. But this has made Hindu society no better in its treatment towards untouchable. The upper caste has not changed, neither in its attitude of hide-bound superiority, nor in its refusal to admit the Dalits in the social structure. Caste is denounced but not the cast system.

But what annoys me is the patience and stamina of the Dalits who have stayed part of the Hindu society in spite of the cruelties they have undergone for untold years. Dr. Ambedkar aptly described the situation by borrowing a phrase from Shakespeare: "It may be your interest to be our masters but how can it be ours, to be your slaves?"

Courtesy: Durban 2001

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Congratulations to the City of Seattle for banning caste-based discrimination

Chetna Association of Canada congratulates the City of Seattle for passing a law on February 21st and banning caste-based discrimination in businesses and other public settings. Initiative led by Seattle City Councilor, Kshama Sawant, saw a support of 6 out of 7 councilors, signaling an overwhelming support by city's elected officials. In addition the ordinance received support and endorsement of local, national, and International Organisations representing multi-faith and social sectors from across the world, including, Chetna Association of Canada.

There are many similarities between Seattle and the lower mainland of BC. Therefore, there are opportunities to exchange and leverage learning from each other.

Just as Bellevue Tech Hub has gained prominence recently, similarly, Vancouver is expected to be-

come the "next tech hub of North America". There are many other similarities between Seattle and the lower mainland, including migration patterns.

Burnaby, Surrey, and the Province of BC have supported awareness campaigns by proclaiming April 14 - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality since 2020.

Incidents of casteist slurs continue to be received and reported by the local media in Canada.

Awareness campaigns alone are not sufficient. Legislations such as the one passed by Seattle are also needed in Canada. One of the reasons India made strong advancements towards equality is its legal framework provided by the Constitution. In absence of the legal framework, social reforms would have been less effective and certainly not sustained for over 70 years.

Two years ago, Chetna Asso-

ciation of Canada made a presentation to Surrey Council and requested that the City of Surrey consider making it a "caste free zone". It is time that the City of Surrey revisits the request and considers passing a similar law. Other cities of the lower mainland should also consider doing the same.

The upcoming Dr. Ambedkar International Symposium on Emancipation from April 21 to 24, 2023, will have one session on Caste in academic settings in Canada and other jurisdictions. This will provide highlights of how caste based discrimination in universities are being proactively addressed and identify actions and strategies that need to take.

The Seattle Ordinance (I call it the "Sawant Ordinance") was successful because it received support from a broad range of social and multi-faith groups. Such support from diverse groups also decimated

criticism of some organisation-who saw no justification for the 'Sawant Ordinance'.

By working together in addressing Caste for over forty years in the Vancouver area, a broad-based support against casteism and in favour of "Sarbat Da Bhala" already exists. Let us leverage this to take the movement to the next level of strengthening equality.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "No one is free until everyone is free". Similarly, "no one is equal until everyone is equal".

By addressing one inequality at a time, equality for all will be generated.



Jai Birdi
General Secretary
Chetna Association of Canada

Assembly Public Safety Committee Rejects Common Sense Legislation to Reduce Retail Theft

SACRAMENTO - (February 28, 2023) Assemblyman Josh Hoover (R-Folsom) announced that the Assembly Committee on Public Safety rejected his bill, AB 75, to restore pre-Proposition 47 penalties for serial theft offenders with multiple prior convictions. The bill was killed on a 2-6 party line vote.

"Residents and small business owners across our state are calling for common sense changes to Proposition 47 to restore accountability and provide relief from rising retail

theft," Assemblyman Hoover said. "A crime without consequences is no longer a crime.

That is where we stand under the status quo. My bill sought to fix this by implementing reasonable penalties for repeat offenders, but unfortunately too many of my colleagues do not believe consequences are an effective means of deterring criminal activity."

AB 75 would have given voters the opportunity to reform Proposition 47 in a meaningful way. A

recent UC Berkeley/LA Times poll found that 78% of voters believe crime has risen over the past year and 59% would support increasing penalties on property crimes.

"Folsom businesses experienced \$1.4 million in losses in 2021, including \$353,000 in shoplifting alone," testified Folsom Mayor and local small business owner Rosario Rodriguez. "It's laws like Proposition 47 that make it very tough to do business in California because of a lack of accountability."

Former Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness also joined the hearing to testify in support of the bill, stating:

"While this bill will help small businesses and the community at large, we also have an obligation to the offenders themselves to ensure to the greatest extent possible that they do not reoffend and that they get on the path to a better life. [AB 75] offers that, Proposition 47 does not."

"Ambedkar Times" & "Desh Doaba" fondly remember Mr C. L. Chumber on his 66th Birthday

Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba weekly newspapers fondly remember Mr C. L. Chumber on his 66th Birthday. His contribution towards the legacy of the Ad Dharm movement in the form of his well-documented writings is praise worthy. He published a souvenir on the Ad Dharm and the role of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia Ji in the awakening of Dalit consciousness in pre-

partition Punjab. The right tribute to Mr C. L. Chumber Sahib will be to reproduce his writings in a series of columns in Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba weekly newspapers. So on his 66rd Birthday, we are going to reproduce from this week in "Desh Doaba" weekly newspaper. -

Prem K. Chumber



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Guru Ravidass Gurupurab celebrated in Times Square, New York

Among the dazzling lights of Times Square, New York city, on February 4th evening, history was created when for the first time ever, the global Guru Ravidass followers congratulated the entire world on Guru Ravidass Jayanti with a full billboard ad display. A dedicated team of Guru Ravidass followers in USA, the committee of Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, New York and Begumpura Cultural Society worked to place a billboard ad in one of the biggest screens of Times Square, the heart of the largest city in the world, New York. The billboard ad displayed for a duration of 15 seconds every 4 minutes ran for 24 hours. Satguru Ravidass Maharaj



ji's famous composition, "Aisa Chahu Raj Mein" displayed on the big screen with its English translation for the global audience to see and learn. I

Sabha New York and Begumpura Cultural Society went as a group to Times Square around 5 PM on February 4th to witness the billboard ad

What was the purpose of this billboard ad you might ask? This was not only a celebration by the Ravidassia community, a testament to Satguru Ravidass

Maharaj ji's timeless words of "Neechoochkaremeragobind" but an expression of joy on joining the Gurupurab celebrations with rest of the community which is back home in India and in other

countries around the world. As the photos and videos of the billboard ad were shared on social media within minutes, the reverberations were felt globally on the symbolism behind the celebrations in Times Square.

Members of Shri Guru Ravidass



being displayed. The community brought a cake and posters to commemorate this historic event. As the sangat took pictures and videos of the event and posted them online, they started trending on social media within minutes.

Jai Gurdev!

Seattle City Bans Caste Discrimination in a historic first

There comes a time in every society where it must reckon with inequality and oppression of a section of its members. The question then becomes whether that society will ignore the oppression of its minority members because acknowledging and fixing it is difficult or will it have the courage to take it head on and address it? Seattle City decided to take it head on by having an uncomfortable but necessary dialogue on the evil of caste discrimination and while doing so, it made history. History because it is the first governmental body outside of South Asia to ever do so.

On Tuesday, February 21, 2023, history was made in Seattle City when the Seattle City Council voted 6-1 to pass the legislation brought forth by Councilmember Kshama Sawant to ban caste discrimination in the city. This landmark legislation amends Seattle City's municipal code to include caste as protected category alongside race, gender, religion and more. This legislation is religion independent and does not target any particular religion but rather the discriminatory mindset that is pervasive in ALL religions of the South Asian community in Seattle.

Councilmember Sawant led the charge on recognizing the existence of caste discrimination in Seattle and then working to outlaw it. This legislation was demanded by a strong coalition of Ambedkarite, Civil Rights and inter faith religious organization like Ambedkar International Center, Ambedkar Association of North America, Equality Labs, Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans, Ambedkar King Study Circle, Periyar International, Boston Study Group, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of New York, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Fresno, Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,

Pittsburg, DFW Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Dallas, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Union City, Ambedkar Times, Desh Doaba, AISRO Canada, Chetna Association, Canada, Indian American Muslim Council, local Sikh temple organizations of Washington and more. This broad coalition worked tirelessly to

Sandeep Loi

garner support by creating an intense media and community outreach campaign which resulted in the community sending thousands of emails, letters of endorsements to the Seattle City Council to pass the legislation. This was further backed by courageous caste oppressed South Asians who came forward to give in-person and remote testimonies to the Seattle City Council at great personal and professional risk. These testimonies described in detail the caste oppression faced by the caste oppressed while living and working in America. They described how their caste identity caused them to face discrimination in employment, getting lower wages than their peers, discrimination in housing, discrimination while seeking marriage alliances and more. They described how they routinely heard casteist slurs like "Chamar", "Bhangi" in South Asian social gatherings,



places of worship and how they would be excluded by oppressor castes once their caste identity was revealed. The Ravidassia community made the Seattle City Council understand as to why there are separate Shri Guru Ravidass Gurudwaras in America as part of its testimony. Providing more context to the Seattle City Council where brave members of Canadian organizations AISRO and Chetna Association who drove from Vancouver, Canada to Seattle and many Ambedkarites who drove from Bay Area, California to be present for the in-person testimony. This was reminiscent of the Freedom Riders Movement of the Civil Rights era. They provided further context to the city that caste discrimination exists amongst South Asians, up north in Canada as well.

This was a historical moment of reckoning for the American civil society, and not just Seattle to the issue of caste and caste discrimination. Up until now, the civil discourse was dominated by dominant oppressor castes who brushed aside the mention of caste and caste discrimination in America as nonexistent or hearsay. Thousands of testimonies given by caste oppressed people from ALL religions made it impossible for the Seattle City Council to ignore it further.

This was backed by endorsements and letters of support from plethora of activists, experts and em-

inent personalities like K.P Ashwini - Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at United Nations, Dr. Cornel West - eminent activist, scholar, Alphabet Workers Union, Representative Pramila Jaypal of Washington's 7th Congressional District and more.

To ensure that they get heard by the city, Ambedkarites lined up outside the City Hall as early as 2 AM braving intense cold and sleeplessness. They did this to ensure they would be heard as the opposition has been notorious for silencing and denying the voice of the oppressed in the past. As the final proceedings of the vote started at 2 PM local time, the City Hall was packed with Ambedkarites who were carrying posters and flyers as they prepared to give their in-person testimonies. They were supported by hundreds of Ambedkarites on the phone who had dialed in to give remote testimony as well. The Council heard close to a hundred emotional and intense testimonies and then decided to proceed for the final vote. As the clerk called the roll and Councilmembers started voting YES, the hall erupted in chants of Jai Bhim, the moment the 4th vote was called and it became clear that out of 7 present Councilmembers, 4 were in favor of the bill. As the final tally came to 6-1 (out of the 9 Councilmembers, 7 voted and 2 abstained), many Ambedkarites broke down in tears of joy and relief. The video of that moment is now viral on social media and has been viewed millions of times globally.

As I looked at the final vote tally, I couldn't help but remember Babasaheb Dr. B.R Ambedkar's clarion call to "Educate, Agitate and Organize" and how this coalition made history. I knew that Babasaheb was watching and smiling. **Jai Bhim.**