



# Ambedkar Times *Weekly*

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VOL- 12

ISSUE- 22

August 12, 2020

California (USA)

[www.ambedkartimes.com](http://www.ambedkartimes.com)

[www.deshdoaba.com](http://www.deshdoaba.com)

## On India's Independence Day DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Prem K. Chumber**

Editor-in-Chief: [www.ambedkartimes.com](http://www.ambedkartimes.com)

Democracy and social justice are interrelated social processes. The one is incomplete in the absence of the other. Democracy offers freedom space to realize equality and experience fraternity. Equality and fraternity are the two essential ingredients of social justice, which achieves its true form with the addition of liberty. Thus the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity constitutes the essence of social justice and the institution of democracy provides the requisite realm for its realization. Though many scholars' boasts of ancient origins of democracy in India but it would be prudent to argue that democracy achieves its roots in the real sense of the term with the adoption of the constitution in independent India. Bodhisattva Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Chairman of Constitutional Drafting Committee, worked very hard to incorporate various provisions for the realization of social justice in the Indian society. He was of the firm views that if social and economic parity remains an elusive to the multitude of poor and historically socially excluded people in the country, then the very purpose of having parliamentary democracy would not be served efficiently. He reiterated the seminal point during his engaging discussions at various important forums within and outside the Indian parliament that for social justice to prevail in the country, India needs effective participation of the downtrodden in all the different spheres of the society.

The demand for social justice was also raised at various platforms during the freedom struggle movement in colonial India. Ad-Movements in North and South India, Justice Party in South India, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia from Punjab, Swami Achhuta Nand Ji from Uttar Pradesh, Baba Ghasi Das Ji from Madhya Pradesh, Sri Narayana Guru from Kerala raised a consistent campaign for the prevalence of social justice in the Indian society. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia presented a number of resolutions to the British Government for the removal of untouchability and special provisions for the inclusion of socially excluded sections of the society in the public realm of power and social domain.

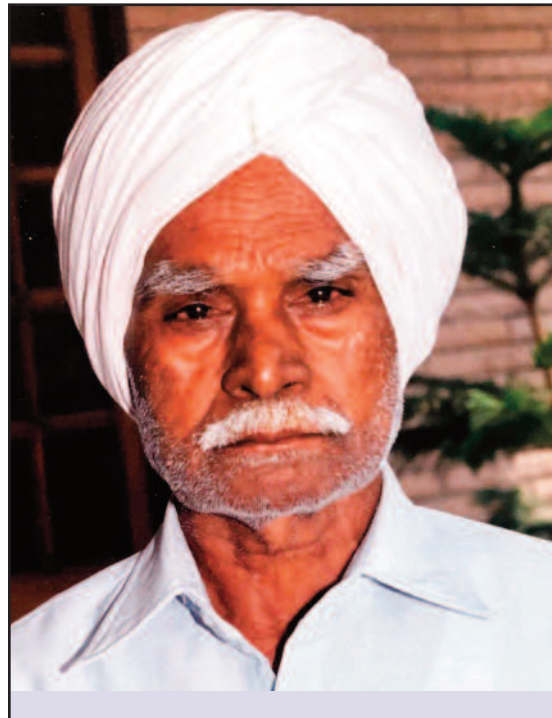
Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia joined hands with Bodhisattva Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar in his struggle for equal rights for the socially excluded people of India. When Dr. Ambedkar spreaded its movement into the political agile lands of Punjab with the formation of Punjab chapter of Scheduled Castes Federation, there was a tremendous response from the grassroots. That was precisely the contributions of Ad Dharm movement which laid the foundation stone of social justice campaign in the Punjab state in the mid-1920s. But the irony of the matter is that even after more than seven decades of India's independence, Dalits in the country are still subjected to various types of atrocities and social discriminations. Though the Indian state, while making the optimum use of various anti untouchability clauses of the constitution, is doing its best to bridle the monster of caste, but still is more needed to be done at the social level where the people should come forward to internalize the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in order to realize the true sense of democracy and social justice.

## Mourning the loss of a noble soul

I had slept the previous night talking to my parents knowing my family back home was healthy and happy. As I was finishing my early morning walk, I got a text saying my eldest uncle had passed away. His name was Sitaram, we used to call him "Sitaram Tayaji". I was baffled and was unable to process the news, after all, I had called them a few hours ago before I went to sleep. My brain and heart were at a war with each other- "how could a healthy person just pass away all of a sudden"? I broke down in the middle of the street sobbing, knowing I had lost someone who was irreplaceable.

It felt like I woke up on the wrong side of the bed that morning.

He was my oldest uncle, he was a little shy of my grandfather's age but was older than my dad by many years. We weren't related by blood but by destiny. On July 2nd 1963, my dad who was 10 years old, lost his right arm in an accident while working a fodder cutting machine in his village. My grandfather and dad waited by the side of the road, looking for a ride along. In 1963 it was rare for someone to own a car in an Indian village. After a few hours, they were helped by a car which was passing by. My father was brought to CMC Hospital in Ludhiana where he was being treated for his arm amputation. My grandmother used to cook food for those hospital visits, and often the food used to be more than my dad could manage to eat. Grandma used to distribute the excess food to other people who were visiting the hospital. One day she



came across a guy named "Sitaram". She offered him food, but he refused to accept it saying he wasn't comfortable receiving food from people without earning it. My grandparents then asked him if he would take care of my dad who was still healing from his accident and break bread with their family in return.

Over the next few weeks my grandparents got to know more about Sitaram Tayaji's background. His dad was in the Indian Railways. He had lost his parents when he was young. He grew up to work in Indian Railways too, he got married and was blessed with a baby boy. In his adult life he had lost his brothers. Series of unfortunate events unfolded in his married life one after the other- his wife fell down from their house rooftop and lost her life and following her untimely loss, his kid died prematurely in a house fire. He had lost his mental stability having his entire family taken away from him. His memory was foggy on how he travelled from his village in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh to Ludhiana, Punjab where some benevolent guy admitted him to CMC. He recovered in the very same hospital and eventually regained his mental stability. He had lost everything at that point, but he decided to stay back in the hospital and help others who were suffering. In a few weeks my dad was discharged from the hospital. My grandfather was

so moved by Tayaji's circumstances that he asked whether he would come to our village as their adopted son.

On 23rd July 1963, Sitaram Tayaji came to our village. It was serendipity that Sitaram Tayaji became part of my family. He spent 57 years of his life with us and raised two generations of my family. In his early years he looked after my dad and his brothers and after about three decades later he raised me and my cousins. He was loved and respected by everyone in our family.



**Mansimran Kaur Benipal**

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San Jose, CA

My mom has three kids, me being the youngest of a set of twins. Sitaram Tayaji and my aunts took care of me, my siblings and our cousins while my mom went back to work after her maternal leave finished. He learnt how to change baby nappies, he cooked food for us and even lulled us to sleep. He raised me and my siblings and loved us as his own. He was more than a parent, he was our godparent.

When we moved from our village to Patiala, he moved with us. He walked us to and from school. He used to treat us to an ice-cream on a scorching day in the summer heat. He used to make lemonade for us when we came back. We used to eat lunch together. He was very fond of cooking and he was very good at it too. I was his connoisseur, after every meal he used to ask me to taste test the dish. Whenever I com-

plimented his dish, his eyes would sparkle and he would have a bright smile glued to his face. In those formative years, he inculcated in us virtues to live our entire life by. He taught us kindness, hard work and perseverance. He made us the people we are today. He was a gem of a person. A Rare Gem.

I moved far away from home for undergrad and moved out of the country for my grad school.

Even though we were continents apart, I used to call and FaceTime him every week. Towards the latter years he couldn't hear us very well so I used to ask my mom to let him know how much I loved and missed him. When I used to recreate his food, I used to tell him it wasn't as good as his cooking, and it always brought back the same old beautiful smile.

I couldn't wait to go back home and show him the new dishes I had learnt over the years. But kismet had other plans, I woke up to find that he had left for his heavenly abode and a pain seared my heart. He wasn't feeling well that day and as my parents were on their way to take him to the hospital, he took his last breath on my mom's shoulder. In his last minutes, he didn't suffer more than the few minutes of uneasiness. Maybe all the goodwill he earned all his life did surmount to his peaceful last minutes. He was around the people

(Contd. on next page)

# Mourning the loss of a noble soul

(Continue from page 1)

he loved. I would like to think that maybe because he was such a good soul, he passed away in peace. That day, I felt I had lost a crucial part of my childhood along with him.

While growing up I used to wonder the pain he would have felt to live without his kin. I always felt the urge to ask him if he missed them but knew this question would open some old wounds. Now that he has left us and I could feel the similar ache in my heart, I could finally empathize and realize how he would have felt when he lost his own family.

My parents, siblings, uncles,

aunts and cousins called to exchange our lifelong stories reminiscing him through tears. His memories and tears both come in waves.

Since we are living in a pandemic, I couldn't attend his funeral in person. I hate the fact that I couldn't pay my respect to the person who literally raised me and helped me become the person I am.

I was growing restless at home, hence decided to go for a walk by the beach. It was a gloomy, cloudy day as if God was commemorating his demise. There was a streak of pink hue in the sky where the sun met the ocean.

I would like to believe that his

soul was somewhere out there near the pink glow in the sky. Peaceful. Contented. Free.

He was cremated on 24th July 2020, my family has a week-long "Antim Ardaas" or the last prayer for him which ends on Friday 31st July 2020.

The thoughts that give me solace are if there is an afterlife, he will reunite with his family. The long wait he endured with an ache in his heart will finally come to an end. And if an afterlife doesn't exist, I find some peace in knowing he passed away in the arms of my parents. He loved them as his own kids, and they took care of him until his last breath.



Sita Ram with his nephew Amandeep Singh Benipal-



Sita Ram preparing and cooking vegetables for his nephews and nieces. He was fond of preparing and cooking food for his nephews and nieces. No one in the family could compete with him in preparing delicious dishes. In his last day he also prepared the dishes.



Sita Ram with his nephews Prem Parteek Benipal and Mukhdeep Singh Benipal and niece Mansimran Kaur Benipal

## Loss of Shri Karam Singh Bangar

President Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Fresno CA.

I was shocked and saddened to learn about the death of Shri Karam Singh Bangar President Sri Guru Ravidass Temple, Fresno California.

I know I was close to him and imagine my grief must be overwhelming. Mr. Bangar was thoughtful and generous, and devoted to his family & community. His best qualities were to go out of the way to help others.

I wish you peace, and I'm here to support you during this difficult time to family and friends. God blessed departing soul and give strength to the family to bear this great loss.

My sincere condolences. May you find comfort and the strength to cope.

We are thankful to Prem K. Chumber, Chief Editor "Desh Doaba" for the great help to our community at difficult time. (Coronavirus).

Best source of communication. Thanks.

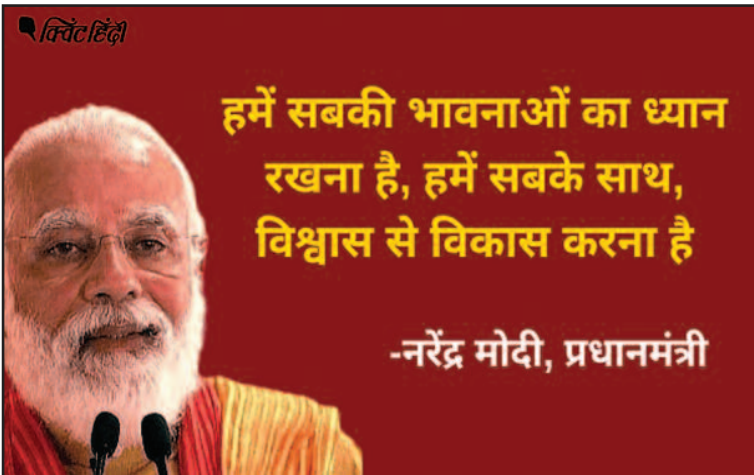
# Kewal Bolina



On behalf of  
American Seniors Citizens Group Sacramento CA  
Entity: IDCorp 4172538, A non-profit organization

# Ram Janambhoomi Mandir at Ayodhya—Let it be an Abode of Peace and Harmony

The time has come full circle on August 5. After a long standoff of five centuries and seven decades of legal battle, Shilanyas (Foundation laying ceremony) and Bhoomi Pujan (Earth breaking ceremony) of Ram Janambhoomi Mandir at Ayodhya was performed by PM Narendra Modi on August 5, 2020 at a carefully crafted solemn ceremony. I have no mind and intension to go to the troubled history of the matter which was settled by the Supreme Court judgment of November 9, 2019 clearing the way for the construction of Ram Janambhoomi Mandir at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid. The fact remains that, one may or may not agree, the dispute between the proponents of Ram Janambhoomi and the stakeholders in the Babri Masjid, generated much to be avoided heat and animosity and soiled the social fabric of the society. The scars of this divide among the Hindu majority and Muslim minority will remain in the years to come, unfortunately. It seems, Muslims might have accepted the fact of Ram Janambhoomi at the site in



Ayodhya but may not forget the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. Turning the wheel of history and disregarding the secular edifice of the country, the matter has been settled, to my mind, succumbing to the dictates of 'majoritarian' approach represented by the demographically majority Hindus and politically thumping majority of the current BJP government of PM Narendra Modi. It will remain a matter of regret that both the parties i.e. the Hindus and the Muslims could not resolve the matter with understanding and accommodation. It would take time to heal the wounded psyche of the Muslim minority in the years to come. Obviously, BJP has registered this as a great success in fulfilling its promises made in their electoral manifesto. But much remains to be done in the larger interests of the composite culture of India. Hopefully, the issue should be out of the way of harmony and brotherhood in our multicultural and multiethnic society as PM Narendra Modi asserted in his speech at Ayodhya, "We have to join stones for construction of the Ram temple with mutual love, brotherhood," he said, asserting that everyone's sentiments have to be taken care of. "Social harmony was the core principle of Lord Ram's governance," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said while referring to Ram Rajya, a perceived welfare state.

I ventured to write on this sensitive subject not as an expert analyst or an historian but as a layman and a humble citizen of India. The issue has been debated and analyzed

thoroughly in depth by the stakeholders, religious Gurus, civic society, political parties and above all the judiciary of the country. Forgetting all differences, in the larger interests of the country, we all should accept the ground reality. It will be much appreciated if the Hindu majority shows magnanimity and try its very best to heal the hurt feelings of the Muslim minority in accordance with the cultural ethos of the often proclaimed Ram Raj, constitutional and legal stipulations, secular values and multiethnic edifice of the country. The majority Hindus must reconcile with the history that Babar came, conquered, ruled and assimilated in the main stream of the society. Neither Hindus nor Muslims are to be blamed for what happened. We should cherish the fact that India remained and it shall remain. I am sorry to add that I

don't agree with the former part of PM Narendra Modi's assertion in his speech at Ayodhya on August 5 when he said, "Despite efforts to eradicate Lord Ram's existence, he lives in our hearts and is the basis of our culture." Who can erase Bhagwan Ram's existence? I don't understand. Is there any confidence deficit in this regard? I believe in the poetic assertion:

Yūnān o-Miṣr o-Rūma, sab miṭ ga'e jahān se  
Ab tak magar hai baqī, nām o-nishan hamārā  
Kuch bat hai kih hastī, miṭī nahīn hamārī  
ṣadiyon rahā hai dushman daur-i zamañ hamārā

In a world in which ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome have all vanished Our own attributes (name and sign) live on today.

There is something about our existence for it doesn't get wiped Even though, for centuries, the time-cycle of the world has been our enemy.

On the other hand, it is an undeniable fact that history cannot be erased. It is history that Aryans (Hindus) came from Eurasia and made India as their home by step-siding of Dravids and Nagas said to be the Moolniwasis of India. Hinduism superseded Buddhism. Some sites like temples, Budh Viharas and other important remnants of the Moolniwasis and Buddhists must have been looted, demolished, occupied and converted into the sites of the occupying forces. There is no dearth of such examples in the history of

mankind. Retaining the civilizational values, we must take these aspects in our stride and learn to live in harmony and peace. If this harmony and peace is achieved in our society and polity, one can tend to say that "Ram Rajya" has been established. The message of the Ram Janambhoomi Mandir - let us say Ramalaya should be the meaningful poetic expression of Allama Iqbal:

AA GHAI RIYAT KE PARDEY IK BAAR PHIR UTHAA DEIN  
BICH DON KO PHIR MILAA DEIN,  
NAQSH-E-DUI MITAA DEIN  
Come, let's, once again, remove the curtains of unacquaintedness; let's help the separated beings meet again [and] remove the motif of duality.  
SOONI PADI HUI HAI MUDDAT SE DIL KI BASTI  
AA, IK NAYAA SHIWAALAA IS DES

vide a sense of security and belonging to the minorities. The minorities should desist from expecting endless magnanimity from the majority. PM Narendra Modi said that the construction of the Ram temple was an instrument to unite the country. It is a welcome statement. All of us should take it at its face value. There is no other way, if we really want that India shall remain India.

The RSS, BJP and their field organizations like Bajrang Dal, VHP among others must understand that their dreams and aspirations have been fulfilled. They should desist from giving undue importance to their 'creed' over and above that of the nation. The same is also true of the Muslims and others who sometimes tend to 'have the cake and eat it too' to carry forward their agenda by playing a 'victim card', against the mainstream of the society. I am reminded of a warning of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, father of the Indian constitution, which he gave in a speech in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949. He, referring to the fact as to how India lost its independence in the past, 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 Indian 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 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."

The Ram Janambhoomi Mandir will be completed in a couple years. It will usher us into "New India: as proclaimed by RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat in his speech at Ayodhya. We should be back to business as usual to make India ready for the challenges of the 21st century with the slogan – Sab Ka Saath – Sab Ka Vikas and Sab Ka Vishwas. I conclude with a Shabad (Hymn) of Guru Ravidassji which is as relevant today as it was yesterday:

Keh Ravidass Khalas Chamara;  
Jo Hum Sehri So Meet Hamara



**Ramesh Chander**  
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)  
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MEIN BANAA DEIN

The territory of heart is vacuous for a long time.

Come, let's make a new shrine in this land.

DUNYAA KE TEERATHON SE OON-CHAA HO APNAA TEERATH  
DAAMAAN-E-AASMAAN SE US KA KALAS MILAA DEIN

Our shrine should be taller than all the shrines of the world!

We should make its spire touch the edge of the sky.

HAR SUBH UTHH KE GAAYEIN MANTAR WO MEETHEY MEETHEY  
SAAREY PUJAARIYON KO MAI PEET KI PILAA DEIN

We should sing, each morning, the amiable hymns

[and] make all the worshippers drink the wine of love!

SHAKTI BHI SHAANTI BHI BHAKTON KE GEET MEIN HAI

DHARTI KE WAASIYON KI MUKTI PREET MEIN HAI

[Both] power and peace are implied in the songs of the disciples.

The salvation of the people of the world lies in love!

The Hindu majority must pro-

# Babu Jagjivan Ram as Railways Minister

Babu Jagjivan Ram was Railways Minister from 1956 to 1962 and in his tenure he modernized the Indian Railways and his efforts paved way for accelerated growth making the Indian Railways the fourth largest in the world and the largest in Asia. Major steps were taken towards the goal of self-sufficiency. Modernization, better management practices, self-sufficiency in indigenous production of railway requirements etc. received special attention. New lines were laid, single lines were doubled and electric traction took place. Action was initiated for electrification of Railway on a big scale during his tenure. He set a record by not allowing any increase in passenger fares for five years. He introduced a number of amenities for all classes of passengers.

He also took innumerable



welfare measures for Railway employees. The most noteworthy step was the introduction of a Pension Scheme in 1957, similar to one applicable to the Central Government employees. Staff training schools were opened and the existing ones were expanded. This facilitated the Railway staff to equip themselves with necessary skills for more responsible work, thereby improving their career prospects.

He examined ways and means by which promotions could be faster. Measures were taken which led to the building of new quarters for rail staff across the country. New railway hospitals and dispensaries were also opened. Primary schools were opened for the children of rail workers.

It was during Babu Jagjivan Ram's stint at the Railways that

reservations were made for departmental promotions of employees from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and these were strictly imple-

mented. Attention of the recruiting authorities was constantly drawn to the necessity of filling all vacancies for the candidates belonging to the reserved category.

The Railways were the key to India's economic development. The shifting of Babu Jagjivan Ram to Railways in 1956 was a tribute to his effective handling of his earlier responsibilities with brilliant results.



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## Railway For Little Ones

# Prime Minister Nehru's Birthday Celebrated As 'Children's Day'

Prime Minister Nehru's sixty-ninth birthday on November 14, 1958, was celebrated throughout India as Children's Day. One of Mr. Nehru's engagements on that day was the opening of the Children's Railway. He also laid the foundation stone of the permanent building of Bal Bhavan, a Government-sponsored institution for children. The institution organizes recreation and constructive leisure time activities for children of the age groups five to ten and ten to fourteen. Its permanent building will be ready in a year's time. It will house a children's museum, open air and covered theatre, reading-room, arts and crafts rooms, workshops, clinic, creche, gymnasium and swimming



Children's Railway: A miniature railway which extends over a distance of half a mile in the Bal Bhavan grounds was presented to Prime Minister Nehru by Union Railway Minister Jagjivan Ram. Photo shows the Prime Minister enjoying a joy-ride with the children.

pool. The total cost of the project is estimated at Rupees 1,700,000 (\$357,000).

The Children's Railway has been built around the twelve-acre site of Bal Bhavan, and is complete in every respect. The circular track is half a mile long, and there is a railway station named Khelgaon (Play Village). The train consists of a small engine and two open bogies, and can carry fifty children. It passes over a bridge and through a tunnel; there is also an overbridge and level crossing and complete signals. The children pay fifteen naye paise (about 3c) for a joy ride.

Source Courtesy: India News, Vol.3 No.22, 1958

# RESURGENCE OF AD-DHARM IN DOABA VILLAGES

Source Courtesy: The Times of India, February 8, 2004

The Guru Ravi Das birth anniversary celebrations this week reflected a revival of the Ad-Dharm movement of the mid-1920s as youth took over the reins from the

elders. They said the celebrations had been reduced to ritualism, prabhhat pheris, bhog ceremonies and hymn singing to pay tributes to Guru Ravi Das, Guru Kabir and Guru Valmiki. Instead, the youth organised seminars and lectures by social ac-

tivists, writers and journalists who urged the youth to bring about a change and spread social awareness. Speaking at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Lok Chetna Library at Kaddiana village Paramjit Singh, social activist, elaborated on the concept of Be-

gumpura which was the basis of the Dalit movement. The dream was that of a casteless society, which was a marked change from the class conflict theory which had not generated much momentum in this country, he said.

**MIKEY**  
**HOTHY**  
for **LODI CITY COUNCIL**

## Lodi City Council District 5 Campaign Updates

Hi folks,

I wanted to give a quick update on the state of my Lodi City Council District 5 campaign.

The deadline to file paperwork to be a candidate was on Friday and I was the first candidate to meet the qualification threshold. I'll be competing against two others for this seat in November.

The first fundraising numbers of this election cycle have been reported and I managed to raise more than both of my opponents combined. I reported slightly less than

\$14k for the June 30th report and have raised approx. \$16k in the month of July. With almost \$30,000 raised, my campaign is in the strongest position to get the message out to voters this November.

Lastly, the first campaign volunteer activity is coming up tomorrow- Tuesday, August 11th at 5:30pm. We'll be texting registered in the voters and talking about issues that are important to them. If you'd like to volunteer please sign up here.

**Best,**  
**Mikey Hothy**

# Dr. Ambedkar's entry into the Constituent Assembly

Source Courtesy: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume 13

PART I: From Dr. Ambedkar's entry into the Constituent Assembly to the presentation of the Draft of the Indian Constitution to the Constituent Assembly

Following paras from Page No.24-26:

The Cabinet Mission had recommended the setting up of an advisory committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities etc. Accordingly, the assembly constituted the Advisory Committee under the Chairmanship of Sardar Patel by a resolution on 24th January 1947. The Committee consisted of 50 members in which Dr. Ambedkar was one. To facilitate its work, the Advisory Committee appointed the following four sub-committees.

1. Fundamental Rights sub-committee.
2. Minorities sub-committee.
3. North-East Frontier Tribal Areas sub-committee.
4. Excluded and partially excluded areas (other than those in Assam) sub-committee.

Dr. Ambedkar was a member of the first two sub-committees and took keen interest in their deliberations. He also submitted a memorandum to the Fundamental Rights sub-committee in which he gave concrete shape to his ideas. This memorandum was later published for wider

circulation under the title 'States and Minorities, what are their rights and how to secure them in the Constitution of free India'.

The Constituent Assembly



also appointed three other committees, namely (1) the Union Power Committee, (2) the Union Constitution Committee and (3) the provisional Constitution Committee. Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the Chairman of the first two committees while the third one was under the Chairmanship of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. These Committees were

set up by a resolution on 30th April 1947.

Dr. Ambedkar was member of the Union Constitution Committee. The report of the Committee was submitted to the President of the Assembly by its Chairman Pandit Nehru on 4th July 1947. The work done by Dr. Ambedkar in various sub-committees of the Assembly was considered very useful and convinced the Congress bosses beyond doubt that the legislation and solidification of freedom would not be easy without the services of Dr. Ambedkar. Consequently upon the partition of Bengal, Dr. Ambedkar ceased to be a member of the Constituent Assembly. The Congress Party which had earlier opposed tooth and nail his entry into the Constituent Assembly came forward and sponsored his candidature.

In his letter dated 30th June 1947, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly requested Mr. B. G. Kher, the then Prime Minister of Bombay to elect Dr. Ambedkar immediately. He wrote, "Apart from any other consideration we have found Dr. Ambedkar's work both in the Constituent Assembly and the various committees to which he was appointed to be of such an order as to require that we should not be

deprived of his services. As you know, he was elected from Bengal and after the division of the Province he has ceased to be a member of the Constituent Assembly. I am anxious that he should attend the next session of the Constituent Assembly commencing from the 14th July and it is therefore necessary that he should be elected immediately".

Accordingly, Dr. Ambedkar was re-elected in July 1947 from Bombay as a member of the Constituent Assembly. Soon after, Prime Minister Nehru invited him to join the Cabinet he formed on 15th August 1947 on the eve of independence. Dr. Ambedkar accepted the invitation and became India's first Law Minister. On 29th August the Assembly unanimously elected him as Chairman of the Drafting Committee which was assigned the task of framing the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar, who was a strong opponent of Congress had now become their friend, philosopher and guide in the Constitutional matters. - Ed



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## Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia And Ad-Dharma Movement

Ishwar Das Pawar,

District & Sessions Judge (Retd.)

While recalling the significance of the role of the Ad-Dharma movement launched by Babu Mangu Ram of Mugowal in the year 1926, for espousing the cause of the Untouchables of the pre-partition Punjab, we must remind ourselves of the circumstances prevailing in those times. For, since then tremendous changes have taken place in the social, political and administrative fields, and not many of the present times may have a precise idea of the harrowing conditions and environments in which our people found themselves.

Till about the mid-twenties there was no social and political awakening among the untouchables. People had been fed on the deceptive and demoralising Brahmanical philosophy that the Untouchables were born as such not by any coincidence but because of their accumulated bad deeds committed in the past lives. As a consequence, they were disintitiled to get education, to own and possess property, to take to professions and avocations of their own liking and choice, and to a place of equality, honour and dignity in society. This was the divine dispensation. It was dinned into their ears day in and day out that this was not due either to their own fault in this life or to the fault of society that they were born in the lowest and wretched castes, and, therefore, they were made to suffer untold hard-

ships and punishments under the edict of the Almighty for their past sins. Out of sheer ignorance these misguided and gullible people tacitly accepted their cursed fate foisted on them by the clever sort. For their woeful sufferings they would beat their foreheads in utter helplessness and say pathetically that it was due to their inevitable fate and destiny. It never occurred to them, and there was none to tell them, that they were being duped and cheated by the uppermost strata of society who were interested in keeping them under their feet. They could not understand why others who were leading most sinful lives before their very eyes were enjoying all comforts of life both good and bad. The good deeds of the ignorant and unsophisticated people of this life were of no consequence for them in this life; they were being stored and preserved for consideration in the life to come. It was a very cunning ruse played on the ignorant and deprived people.

There was none among the Untouchables to raise the banner of revolt against this aggression, oppression, tyranny, deception and exploitation of the poor and the ignorant committed behind the facade of religious philosophy. There, however, appeared on the scene an inspired soul in the person of Babu Mangu Ram of Mugowal, who came back from America after a decade's sojourn there. There he was a member of the Ghadar Party formed by the Indians

living there to supplement the struggle of freedom launched by the nationalists here.

On reaching home Babu Mangu Ram founded an organisation under the name Ad-Dharma Mandal. Soon a band of enthusiastic and devoted workers gathered around him. The message brought by Babu Mangu Ram was new inspiring. It was aimed at awakening the Untouchable. The message called upon them to know and realise themselves as they had forgotten their true selves due to the hostile influences in which they had been living for thousands of years. It caught the imagination and hearts of the oppressed and down-trodden people and soon Babu Mangu Ram's name became a household word. He succeeded remarkably well in creating awareness and awakening the people. His path was beset with difficulties and he had to work against odds and trying circumstances. Financial difficulties apart, he and his co-workers were chased everywhere and hounded out of bound out of bounds of towns and villages by the Hindus, and quite often they had to hold their meeting and conferences in open fields. One such incident also took place at Una. A weekly "Adi-Danka" in Punjabi was also started to carry the message to every nook and corner of the province. This was the beginning of the struggle for getting back the human rights of which they had been deprived of for centuries. Wherever Babu Mangu Ram went,

the people were eager to have a glimpse of their beloved leader and benefactor. He did the pioneering work to awaken the people. My own relations with him had been very close and cordial. From my college days I had been attending meetings of the Ad-Dharma Mandal and also occasionally contributing small articles to the Adi-Danka.

In the crucial days of the Round Table Conference held in London in the early thirties for the purpose of hammering out a new political set up for our country, Babu Mangu Ram worked enthusiastically shoulder with the greatest leader of the underdog, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who was representing the Untouchables of the County at the Conference, to strengthen his hands in his historic struggle for securing political rights for his people on the basis of their being a separate and distinct political entity. Babu Mangu Ram will be long remembers as the devoted pioneer in the crusade against social and political injustice. He fought relentlessly even in the face of crippling heavy odds for the achievements of the goal. Whatever rights we have been able to snatch so far is entirely due to these great men.

There is needed to look back lest we should forget our benefactors-the brave soldiers who fought our battles.

Courtesy: Souvenir, 1985 Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia 99th Birth Anniversary, By Mr. C. L. Chumber

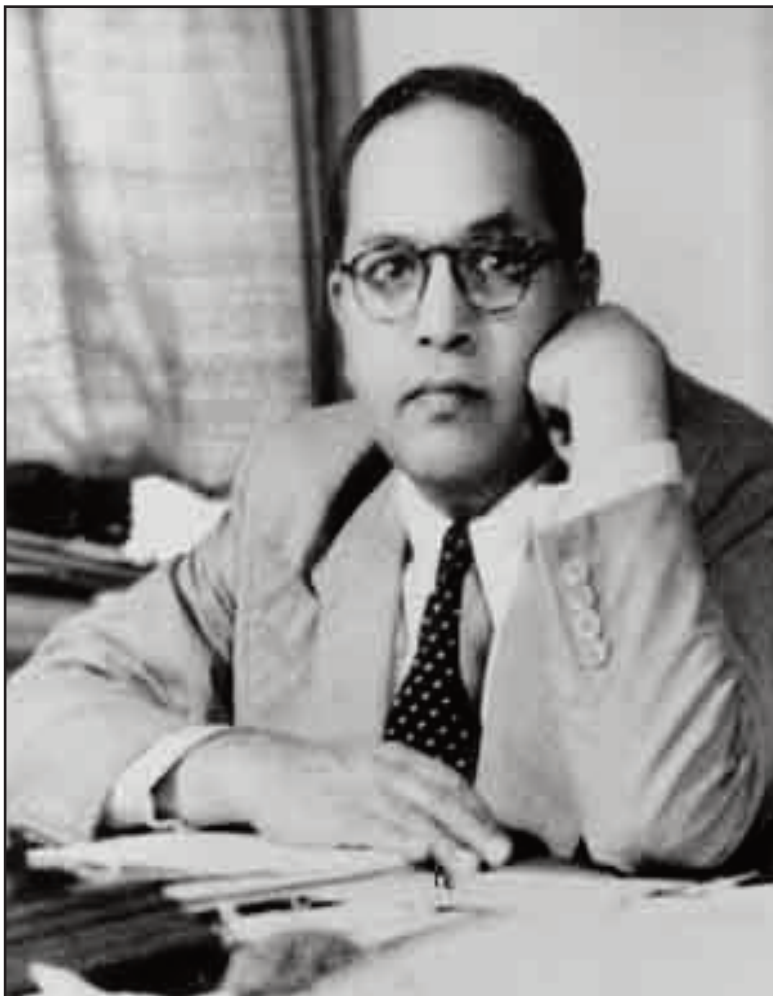
# HINDU CODE APPLIES TO SIKHS, JAINS, BUDDHISTS

Source Courtesy: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 14 Part Two (Section IV)

Dr. Ambedkar and the Hindu Code Bill

Following passages:

"The peculiarity about the Hindu religion, as I understand it, is this, that it is the one religion which has got a legal framework integrally associated with it. Now, it is very necessary to bear this thing in mind, because if one has a proper understanding of this, it would not be difficult to understand why Sikhs are brought under the Hindu religion, why Buddhists are brought under the Hindu religion and why Jains are brought under the Hindu religion. When the Buddha differed from the Vedic Brahmins, his difference was limited to matters of creed. The Buddha did not propound a separate legal system for his own followers; he left the legal system as it was. It may be that the legal system that then prevailed was a good system; that it had no blemishes and no faults. So, he did not direct his attention to making any changes in the legal system in consequence of the changes that he introduced in certain



religious notions."

"In the same way, when Mahavir founded his own religion he did not create a new legal system for the Jains. He allowed the legal system to continue and I think Sardar Hukam Singh will correct me if I am wrong when I say that none of the ten Gurus ever created a law book as such for the Sikhs. The trouble is—you may call it trouble; you may call it good fortune; you may call it misfortune; I am not particular about words—the fact

is this. In this country, although religions have changed, the law has remained one. That is why the Sikh follows the law."

"The Jains come and ask, "What are you going to do to us? Are you going to make us Hindus?" The Sikhs say the same thing. The Buddhists say the same thing. My answer to that is this: I cannot help it. You have been following a single law system and it is too late now for anyone to say that he shall reject this legal system wholesale and will have nothing to do with it.

That cannot be done. Therefore, the application of the Hindu Law and the Hindu Code to Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs is a historical development to which you and I cannot now give any answer."



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# The Indian Express

VOL. XIX NO. 107. MADRAS: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1951. 8 PAGES: 1-1/2 ANNAS.

<p><b>FOREIGN SHIPS FOR FOOD TRANSPORT</b></p> <p><b>High Level Talks With Other Countries</b></p> <p><b>NO ENCOURAGEMENT OF CASH CROPS, PARLIAMENT TOLD</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">NEW DELHI, Feb. 7.</p> <p><small>FOOD Minister Munshi said in Parliament today that the arrival</small></p>	<p><b>Steel: Liberals To Vote With Tories</b></p> <p><b>ATTLEE GOVT. MAY BE DEFEATED</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">LONDON, Feb. 6.</p> <p><small>The nine Liberal members of Parliament decided today to vote against the Labour Government in the steel debate in the Commons today.</small></p> <p><small>This decision could result in the Government's defeat.</small></p> <p><small>The vote will be on a motion by Mr. Churchill censuring the Government for proceeding with its plans to nationalize the steel industry on Feb. 15 despite the rearmament programme.</small></p> <p><small>The latest "Gallup poll" shows a terrific slump in Labour popularity—38 per cent of those polled—in contrast to a big rise in Churchill's Tory popularity—to 51 per cent. It is the highest figure for the Conservatives since the war, while</small></p>	<p><b>HINDU CODE FOR ENTIRE INDIA OR NOT AT ALL</b></p> <p><b>Ambedkar's Firm Stand: Sikhs, Buddhists Can't Be Excluded</b></p> <p><b>CRITICS TOLD CIVIL CODE CAN BE PRODUCED IN TWO DAYS</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">NEW DELHI, Feb. 6.</p> <p><small>THE Law Minister, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, intervening in the clause-by-clause discussion on the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament</small></p>
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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1951.

<p><b>DRAFT 5-YEAR PLAN</b></p> <p><b>Commission Invites Non-Official Opinion</b></p> <p><small>NEW DELHI, Sept. 20: The Planning Commission has sought co-operation from important organisations, institutions, and the press for assessing the draft Five-year Plan so that their reactions could be studied before the final report is prepared.</small></p> <p><small>Careful study of the draft Plan by as large a section of the public as possible, the Commission feels, is a prerequisite to democratic planning, as in that way alone the Plan can have a national character which its framers seek to impart.</small></p> <p><small>Already, a very large number of comments are available to the Commission from newspapers, institutions, organisations and individuals. These are being studied closely by the Commission. It is understood that in order to make a scientific study of these</small></p>	<p><b>HINDU CODE APPLIES TO SIKHS, JAINS, BUDDHISTS</b></p> <p><b>Ambedkar Answers Critics In Parliament</b></p> <p><small>NEW DELHI, Sept. 20: Parliament today took the first concrete step towards codification and reform—for the present confined to marriage and divorce—of Hindu law by passing clause two of the Hindu Code Bill.</small></p> <p><small>The clause, which defines to whom the bill will apply, had been under discussion for seven days spread over two sessions. The bill is applicable to all Hindus, including Veerasaivas or Lingayats,</small></p> <p><small>provisions of Article 25 of the Constitution.</small></p> <p><small>Dr. Ambedkar said it was so, but he was replying to the argument that the House was discriminating one community against another.</small></p>	<p><b>DISSIDENTS CAN'T RETURN</b></p> <p><b>'WILL MEAN MERE OPPORTUNISM'</b></p> <p><b>CONGRESS WEAKENED, SAYS KRIPALANI</b></p> <p><small>NEW DELHI, Sept. 20: In a signed article in the latest issue of Vigil under the caption "Gain or loss," Acharya Kripalani says if the common man's feeling is of any consequence, then the process that led to the latest changes of personnel in the Congress organisation and the apparent unity achieved in it has weakened the Congress morally instead of strengthening it.</small></p> <p><small>"For," he says, "when those who had been supporters of Mr. Tandon deserted him wholesale and chang-</small></p>
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# Dera Ballan Sect Head Writes to Modi, Seeks Separate Ravidassia Dalit Identity

While some have praised the move, others have accused that it is an attempt to 'divide' Dalits in the state.

Jalandhar: A letter written by the head of the Dalit dominated Dera Sant Sarwan Dass Ji Sachkhand Ballan sect in Jalandhar to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to include a separate column of 'Ravidassia' in the 2021 Census for the Scheduled Castes (SC) community in Punjab has led to social and political debate.

Sant Niranjn Dass wrote to PM Modi:

"All the followers of Guru Ravidass Ji are called Ravidassia, as they follow Ravidassia religion. In the last population Census 2011, lakhs of Ravidassia had to write Ravidassia in the 'Other' column. Therefore, we humbly request your good-self to include a religion column and allocate unique code for Ravidassia religion in the upcoming population census of 2021 and in all future population census, so that the Ravidassia word may also be written in the column of list of SC as well as in the SC column of Census Form." (sic)

In the letter, a copy of which is available with The Wire, the sect head asks PM Modi to take the "revolutionary step" to give Ravidassias their own identity.

The decision behind this move dates back to May 2009, when the deputy head of the Dera, Sant Ramanand, was killed in a gurdwara in Vienna, Austria by Sikh hardliners who were opposed to the Dera's practice of touching the feet of their 'guru' in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. His killing led to widespread violence in Punjab, especially Jalandhar.

As a result, a section of Dalits separated themselves from Sikhism and announced their religion as Ravidassia and began following the religious scripture Amritbani on January 30, 2010, the 633rd birth anniversary of Guru Ravidass at Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi. By the 2011 census, around 88,650 Dalits had registered themselves as 'Ravidassia'.

However, 10 years down the lane, not only are the Dalits known as 'Ad-dharmis' or 'Ravidassia' in common parlance from Punjab's Doaba belt (Jalandhar, Nawanshahr, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala districts) divided over the issue of following Guru Granth Sahib or Amritbani, even political parties are maintaining silence.

As some elders from Jandu Singha village in Jalandhar pointed out, their village has two Ravidass gurdwaras now. "Some people wanted to replace Guru Granth Sahib with Amritbani but we stopped them from taking such a step. Later, they constructed a new Ravidass gurdwara to place Amritbani as their holy book."

Interestingly, the Sri Guru Ravidass Sadhu Samperdaye Society of Punjab, a body which controls 300 Dalit Deras in the state, is strongly opposed to this move.

In its mouthpiece Adi-Dharm Patrika dated July 23, the society em-

phasised that the followers of Guru Ravidass should write 'Adi-Dharm' as their religion in the 2021 Census. A campaign on this issue by various Dalit factions was picking up pace on social media.

## How 'Ad-Dharm' started

The Ad-Dharm Mandal was started by Mangu Ram Muggowalia, a Dalit person from Muggowal village in Hoshiarpur district in 1926. Dalits, who were then called 'untouchables', declared the founders of Ad-Dharm were Guru Ravidass, Valmiki, Namdev and Sant Kabir. The term 'Ad-Dharm' means 'Original Religion/Ancient Religion' of the indigenous inhabitants, the 'Adi-Dharmi' of India.

Talking to The Wire G.C. Koul, whose PhD was on the 'Philosophical study of Guru Ravidass', said that Babu Mangu Ram approached the government to register 'Ad-Dharm' as a separate religion in the census on October 10, 1929.

"At that time, a total of 4,18,789 lakh Dalits registered as Ad-Dharmis. The then chief minister

Sikander Hayat Khan pioneered the move, which was followed in the 1941 census too," said Koul, the former head of the department of Punjabi at the DAV College in Jalandhar.

Koul also said that even the first president of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, had mentioned about the independent identity of 'Ad-Dharm' in his book India Divided. "At that time, Dalits were settled in Jullundur followed by Multan and Lahore divisions of the undivided Punjab," he added.

He said that the Dera Ballan's move represents its 'vested interest'. "There are 37 sub-castes registered under the list of notified SCs in Punjab. Even if the government attempts to include Ravidassia as a sub-caste, it requires 2/3rd majority to bring an amendment in the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976. Saints are meant to unite society, not divide it. But the Dera is weakening it," Koul said.

## The Dera's viewpoint

Dera Sachkhand Ballan spokesperson Sat Paul Viridi defended the decision, saying there are already 6,000 SC communities across the country. "We are not changing our religion. All we want is a status, recognition and identity for the followers of Guru Ravidass, which should be Ravidassia. People should understand that 'Ad-Dharmi' is a caste and 'Ravidassia' is a religion. Dalits have been

subject to injustice. The Dera management's decision would make us count in the country," he said.

However, when asked about the opposition from within the community, Viridi said that around 88,000 Dalits had registered themselves as Ravidassia within six months of the religion being announced in 2010. "After 10 years, the total number of Dalits who adopted the Ravidassia religion is approximately 10 crores across the world," he claimed.

When questioned about allegations that the Dera's decision was taken at the behest of the BJP-RSS, Sat Paul Viridi vehemently denied them. "This is not true. We are merely seeking justice and our rights. The reality is that we

also wanted to become Sikh, but did they accept us? It is the Sikhs who will be affected. They ignored us and are responsible for this fallout," he added.

## Dalit votes and politics

The census 2011 reveals that 31.94% of Punjab's population is comprised of SCs, the highest among all states in the

country. Notably, the Dera Ballan got a temple constructed at the birthplace of Guru Ravidass at Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi, which is considered as the Mecca of Ad-Dharmis and other religions, sects and castes which follow the saint.

The significance of the Dera Ballan among Dalits could be gauged from the fact that politicians of all colours, from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his Punjab counterpart Amarinder Singh, and ex-CM Parkash Singh Badal, have visited this religious place during elections, hoping to swing the polls in their favour.

While many politicians preferred not to speak on the issue, Bahujan Samaj Party's Punjab general secretary Balwinder Kumar didn't mince words. He said that if one interprets the sequence of events, it is a move by the BJP-RSS to fragment the Dalits for the purpose of 'vote bank politics'.

He argued that when there is no unanimity on Amritbani among Dalits, how could the Dera decide about the entire community's identity? "Moreover, a large number of Dalits who were working in the Gulf nations were forced to come back because of the COVID-19's economic impact and consequent job losses. They are staring at joblessness, but the Dera's management is busy think-

ing about religion, which shows their misplaced concerns," he said.



**Kusum Arora**

Bahujan Front Punjab in-charge Sukhwinder Kotli also reiterated that after Sant Ramanand's killing, Dalits realised that they were still not accepted in Sikhism. "We (Dalits) left the Hindu religion because of their orthodox practices and untouchability and adopted Sikhism. The Dalits are devoted to Guru Granth Sahib but did the Sikh preachers ever make any efforts to bring us together and bridge the social gap? The end losers will not only be Dalits but Sikhs too. And the solution lies in the unity of Dalits and Sikhs," he said.

Two-time Congress MP from Jalandhar and Dalit leader, Santokh Singh Chaudhary, dodged the query. He said that it was Mangu Ram and his father Master Gurbanta Singh who got 'Adi-Dharm' included as a religion in the 1931 census.

"Ad-Dharmi, Ravidassia, Ravidassia castes were already included in the schedule of the SCs. This move is possible only if the Punjab government recommends it, state and Centre commissions verify it. Only then, it could be presented in parliament," he added.

Similarly, a prominent Dalit leader of SAD and two-time MLA Pawan Kumar Tinu said that at a time when the nation is tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, the need of the hour is to ensure health and education and generate employment. "Religion is secondary," he said.

However, another SAD leader, requesting anonymity, said that this move was clearly aimed at dividing the Dalits and pointed fingers at the BJP-RSS. "We know at whose behest this decision has been taken. It is an open secret that a large number of Dalits still follow Guru Granth Sahib, which indicates the ground reality," he said.

But refuting such queries, the BJP vice-president Rajesh Bagha said that the party has never been against SC/ST reservation. "Rather we want a society free of casteism. Sanu Bhartiya banan di lod hai. Bhartiya Sanskriti de nal ek hon di lod hai (We need to become Indian. There is a need to become one with the Indian Culture). Such a movement is required. Since centuries, we remained the slaves of the Mughals and Britishers. We need dialogue to realise 'Begampura' as envisaged by Guru Ravidass. Casteism should come to an end." Guru Ravidass envisaged Begampura as a city which is 'casteless, classless and does not have un-

(Contd. on next page)

# Dera Ballan Sect Head Writes to Modi, Seeks Separate Ravidassia Dalit Identity

(Continue from page 7)

touchability'. Even renowned Dalit writer Des Raj Kali said that Ad-Dharmi, Ravidassia, Ramdasia, Balmiki, Mazhbi already exists under the list of notified SCs in the census. "When these castes already exist, what are you (Dera authorities) trying to achieve? Shaheed Bhagat Singh had written an article 'Achut Da Sawaal' (The Question of Untouchables) in Kirti newspaper' in 1925/26, where he emphasised that Dalits should not get into the game of ethnic politics. If this topic is being discussed even in 2020, then we are going 100 years back," he said.

Another Dalit leader Darshan Lal Jethumajara justified the decision, saying that Ravidassia was registered as a religion in 2010. "Why is this demand causing an issue now? Either the government should not have registered [the religion] or accept the current demand," he said. He added that the community is politically advanced and no division will occur.

# Kusum Arora

is an independent journalist.

Source Courtesy: The Wire, 11th August 2020



## S is for Soham

Source Courtesy:

A to Z for Diaspora Dalits

Dated Saturday 7th February 2009

Soham, meaning 'Thou are That' was adopted by the Ravidasia Adi Dharam movement of the early 1920s in the Panjab to indicate their equality with other groups in the Panjab. Report of the Ad Dharam Mandal 1926-1931 pages 11 1.d and 14 para 15 respectively read:

"Our sacred word is Soham".

"We are not Hindus. We strongly request the government not to list as such. Our faith is not Hindu but Ad Dharam. We are not part of Hinduism and Hindus are not part of us".

[Source: Religion as Social Vision by Mark Jurgensmeyer, University of California Press 1982 pages 299-301.]

In the 1970's and 1980's, the word Soham was very popular amongst the Ravidasis both within Indian and overseas. Even Dalits in the pay of upper castes were describing Guru Ravidas as the first socialist in India and writing essays on the meaning of the word Soham. Posters were produced with a burning torch logo with the letters making up the word put on the edges of a circle. Everyone knew what the word Soham stood for (for the very young please refer to the end of this article for an explanation of the word Soham).

The last 10-15 years have seen a dramatic change. Word has it that a decision was taken (when, where and by whom?) to register the word Hari as the logo for the Ravidasi community. Quietly the word Hari crept in without it being noticed. We are told by some Ravdasias that this is what Ravidasi community should be following without questions. We are not told why the word Soham has been quietly dropped or why its use has been minimised. We are not told why we should be using the word Hari.

There are a number of Ravida-

sis who would wish to challenge it but they do not wish to upset anyone or create disturbance. Could not that matter be left at peace?

On the surface, it appears that this is purely nit picking. After all, almost all Sikh Gurus, Dalit Gurus and others have used the word Hari for God used by the Hindus to describe their God. This word Hari has been used widely in the anti-caste scriptures.

There are a number of problems with this explanation. We may also point out that the sacred book of the Sikhs also use the word Allah to describe God. The most frequently used word for God in spoken Panjabi is Rab and Rab is an Arabic word for God. But the Sikhs have not opted for these names for God originating with their ex prosecutors.

In medieval times both high caste Muslims and the high caste Hindus had formed an alliance to keep the plebs down. This alliance frequently manifested itself in the fatwas of the Muslim Mullahs and the complaints of the Hindu Brahmins to the higher ups that the anti-caste Gurus were preaching against Islam, or against God himself, in the case of Hindu Brahmins. Guru Ravidas was highly philosophical in his attack on the Hindu caste system. Kabir and Nanak observed no such niceties. They attacked caste and the Mullah Brahmin alliance more directly. Neither Hindu nor Muslim but human was their battle cry. Kabir was so direct in his attacks that at least one

world famous author of the Bhakti movement has described Kabir as atheist at times!

On their parts Brahmins and Mullahs did not stay still but did their best to persecute the anti-caste Gurus. For example Guru Namdev was thrown in front of a drunk elephant on the orders of the local ruler but he survived.

The teaching of the anti-caste Gurus was highly subversive. By Hari they did not mean Rama the hero of Ramayana and the defender of the caste system but the ultimate reality of Godhead. In their story telling the

young boy Parhlad worshipping Hari and for doing that, suffering from the hands of his demon father Hirnakshayap, was an allusion to the suffering of the poor, the meek and the oppressed of the day. The Gurus had to make use of these mythological symbolism to preach their message. Anti-caste Gurus were forced to use the names of Ram and Rahim in their scriptures to mean God. That was the need of the day then. So why use Hari as a symbol for the community now? Why have some people gone to all that trouble to oppose Soham and bring in Hari?

Unless you are trying to give the hymns of anti-caste Gurus a Brahminic character which was never intended in the first place.

The clue lies in the USA where the upper castes in the VHP tried to have the school textbooks in California changed to portray Hin-

duism in more liberal colours by taking out the references to the oppressive aspects of Hinduism. They upper caste Hindus were opposed very strongly, including by the more liberal Hindus and the VHP and their allies met with failure. They learnt their lessons well and applied these to the UK. By keeping low profile and working behind the scenes they succeeded in UK. They also played party politics with Dalits in the Panjab and these politics were imported into the UK. Again by keeping a very low profile they succeeded again in getting some misguided Dalit self styled 'leader' to register 'Hari' as a symbol for Ravidasis.

Dalits in the Diaspora need to be aware of these historical issues in order to bring some rational discussion to these controversies.

An explanation of the word Soham: Soham is made up of two words 'So' and 'ham' the meaning of which is 'I am It'. At the time of Upnishads it had a meaning of 'Thou are that' meaning that you are Brahman or that you are part of the ultimate reality. It has been interpreted to mean the basic unity of man and the cosmos but only if you were an upper caste. Upnishads were secret doctrine which were only available to the two upper castes, the Brahmin priests and the warriors and frequently it were the warrior caste which taught this philosophy to the Brahmins. In medieval times the great Sankracharaya taught that everything was Brahman or ultimate reality but (wait for it), at philosophical level ONLY. The different castes stayed different on the earthly plane. Guru Ravidas turned this upside down by saying 'Tohi Mohi Mohi Tohi antar kaisa' meaning that there was no difference between man and God and thereby between Man and Man.

[This article was first originally published on 7th February 2009 on the web portal of Dalit.Org.UK]

