



Ambedkar Times Weekly

Editor-in-Chief: Prem Kumar Chumber Contact: 001-916-947-8920 Fax: 916-238-1393 E-mail: chumbermedia@yahoo.com, editor@ambedkartimes.com

VOL- 15 ISSUE- 23 August 16, 2023 California (USA) www.ambedkartimes.com www.deshdoaba.com

DR. AMBEDKAR AND THE QUESTION OF CASTE IN INDIA OF 21 CENTURY

Prem K. Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: www.ambedkartimes.com

No one till date has been able to analyze the question of caste in India in such details and struggled so meticulously against its oppressive structures as Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He was of the opinion that caste is central to the Indian society and polity. Its economy is also inextricably tied with the elusive phenomenon of caste in India. Irrespective of long boasts of the pristine Indian (read Hindu) civilization and its so-called non-mundane concerns, it remains highly segmented especially on the basis of birth; a unique social malady afflicted millions of Dalits in India and abroad. What does it matter to them whether India achieves 8 or 9 per-cent growth rate? When there remains rampant social exclusion in all walks of life. Over and above the widespread phenomenon of globalization has further pinned them down. It is based on the idea that the welfare state is a hindrance in the way of the global market; it is presumed that the marginalized need not be supported by the state at all as they used to be earlier. This has further deepened marginalization and exclusion of the marginal groups and communities that were traditionally vulnerable and excluded. The rapid pace of transformation in the context of the market forces in the contemporary world has not only heightened the exploitation of the marginalized, but also severely limited the possibilities of their emancipation. Globalization may have opened up enormous opportunities but one has to map the emphasis on the 'opportunities'. In fact, in the asymmetrical world in which we live, such opportunities open many doors for the haves by further marginalizing the interests of the have nots.

The Dalits have been excluded from social, economic and political rights including the right to education and employment, other than the traditional forced and customary undignified labour, precisely because of their birth in the untouchable castes. They also suffered from social exclusion because of their geographical segregation. They were forced to live on the outskirts of the villages towards which the wind blew and sewage flowed. Their houses were dirty, dingy, dark, and unhygienic where poverty and squalor loomed large. Until 1990, there had been some improvements in the lives of the Dalits in terms of education and employment opportunities, increase in wages, fall in poverty, access to land, water, health, education, housing and other resources owing to the State's affirmative action. However, the trend was reverted and sidelined with the onset of the economic reforms under the process of globalization. The economic policy in India has undergone a major transformation since the beginning of the early 1990s, under the paradigm of liberalization, privatization, and globalization. One of the main concerns of this new paradigm is to facilitate the process of the roll back of the welfare State and prepare the space for the operation of the unrestrained market forces and open international trade. This pro-market and capital stance of the process of economic globalization has led to the widening of the gap between the privileged few and the large mass of the marginalized, and among them the Dalit laborers, daily wage workers and workers in the informal sector suffer the most.

For Dalits and other marginalized sections of the society in such adverse times, if still there is any hope to seek their genuine human rights and chances to livelihood that is the egalitarian, peaceful, rational and social-democratic philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who had devoted his entire life for the cause of the uplift of the downtrodden. His interpretations about the origins of caste and untouchability are not only rational but are grounded in grass-roots reality of which he himself was an integral part. He devoted his entire life for the annihilation of caste from this sub-continent size of India by deploying democratic and peaceful methods. He was a thorough democrat in his approach and strategy. He wanted this evil to go for ever. For him the question of caste is not an individual question of the Scheduled Castes only, it is in fact an all India question which is very closely tied with the larger questions of Indian nationalism and real growth of India. If India has to come forward to play an important role in the emerging new post 9/11 world order, she has to exorcise its deadly specter of centuries-old caste.

The institution of Dr. Ambedkar Chair (Constitutional Law) in Columbia University from where he learnt his lessons of social equality, liberty and democracy under the guidance of reputed scholar Professor Dewey is a great and true tribute to messiah of downtrodden.

<http://www.ambedkartimes.com/Editorial%20Page%202.htm>

Welcome to the Feather River Temple Yuba City

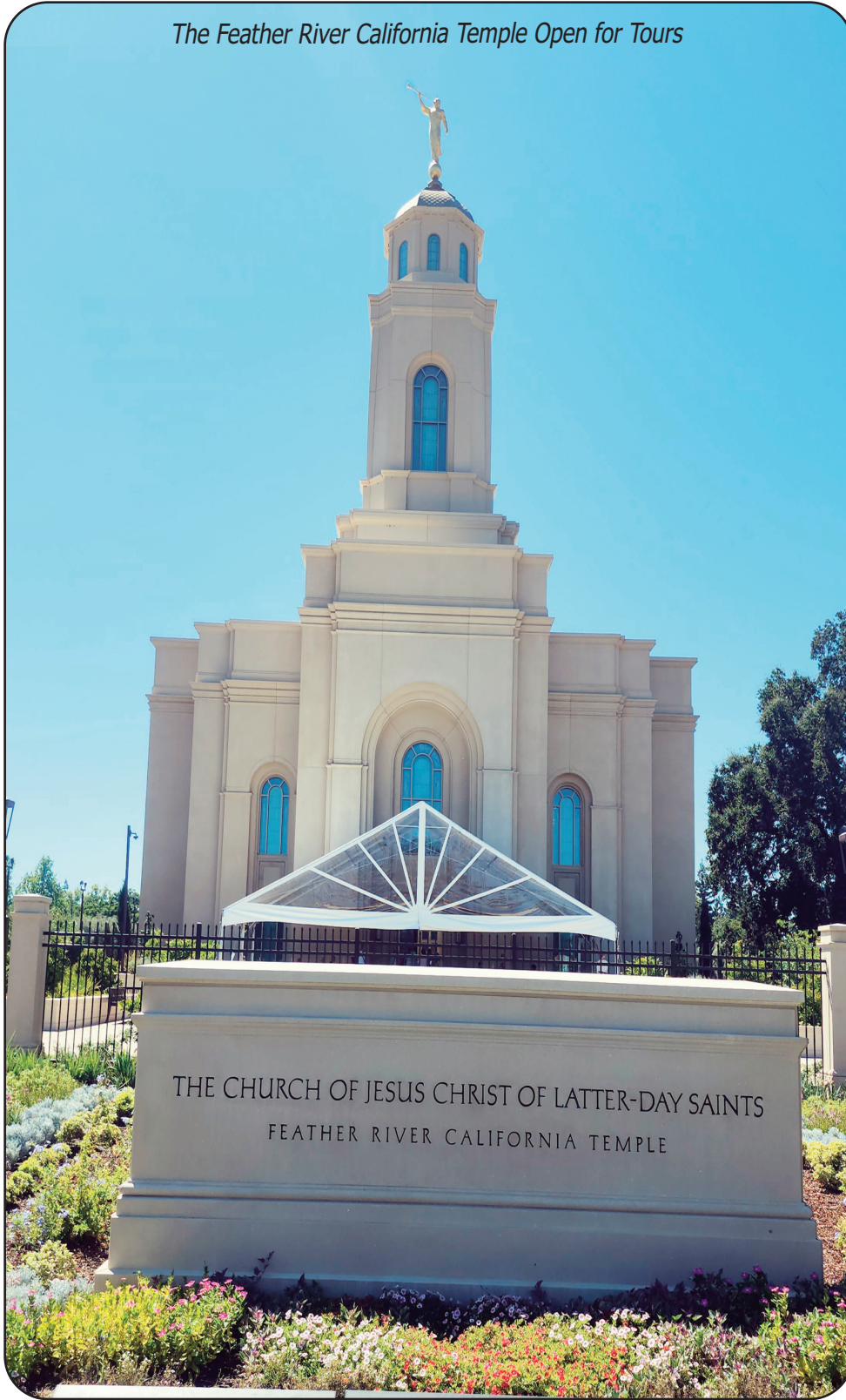
Yuba City- The Feather River California Temple in Yuba City will serve LDS members from Redding, Chico, Biggs, Gridley, Yuba/Sutter, Ukiah and Placer County. The open house and public tours will be held beginning Saturday, Aug. 19, through Saturday, Sept. 9. The 38,000-square-foot Feather River Temple sits on a nine-acre site in Yuba City, in the heart of California's Central Valley. It will be the eighth temple in California, which is home to more than 700,000 Latter-day Saints in nearly 1,200 congregations. It is the first temple in California since 2006, when the

Sacramento Temple opened.

This open house offers the public a rare look inside these sacred edifices. Open houses with public tours are held when a new temple is built and, oftentimes, after an older temple has gone through a restoration.

This special media day will allow journalists to get the first public look inside before other tours begin. To learn more watch this video The Feather River California Temple Open for Tours. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecmPcte1kuk&t=325s>

The Feather River California Temple Open for Tours



Guru Ravidass and the Main Stream of the Society

Guru Ravidass, 14th century mystic saint and social reformer, of the Bhakti Movement was the harbinger of equality and fraternity in the society which the leadership of the main-stream of the Hindu society including RSS and BJP, now a days, call 'Samrasta'. The great Guru's egalitarian message stood against the birth based caste-system and pleaded for brotherhood as stipulated in his lofty Vani (poetry) which is, partly, enshrined in the Shri Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs:-

Keh Ravidass Khalas Chamara;

Jo Ham-sehri So Meet Hamara

(Ravidass, the lowly of the low,

says that every fellow citizen of mine is my friend)

It is a matter of satisfaction that the very principles of having a healthy society as followed and preached by Guru Ravidass found place in the 'secular, socialist and democratic' constitution of India written under the stewardship of Babasaheb Ambedkar who was greatly impressed by the thoughts and legacy of the Guru to establish an inclusive society. Babasaheb Ambedkar dedicated one of his books, The Untouchables, to Guru Ravidass. Guru Ravidass's teachings set the ball in motion to establish an egalitarian society and welfare state in the Sabad (Vani):-

Begumpur Shehar Ka Naon; Dukh Andoh Nahin Jis Ke Thaon

(The name of the State which should be created shall be 'Begumpura' (a place without misery and sorrow) where there would be no pain and suffering)

He clearly laid the foundation of democratic socialism in the present parlance and said:-

Aisa Chahun Raj Mein;

Yahan Mile Saban Ko Ann;

Chot- Bade Sab Sam

Vashen; Ravidass Rahe

Prasan.

(I wish that kind of governance and establishment where no one remains hungry. All, low and high or rich and poor live in a just social order. It keeps Ravidass happy)

With this background, I may add that my immediate motivation to write about the current relevance of Guru Ravidass to create an inclusive society and integrate the socially weaker sections with the main stream of the society. The ruling outfits of the

day, ostensibly, are engaged in the process to appease and woo the followers of Guru Ravidass by honouring and recognizing the role and contribution of the great Guru. Let it be as long as it helps in transforming the society to bring about 'Samrasta' in the society at large. In fact,

I have no hesitation in registering my candid support to the lofty idea of Samrasta in my own humble way as I am a firm believer in 'fraternity and brotherhood' as a humble Ravidassia and Ambedkarite.

PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the prestigious project of Guru Ravidass Temple in MP's Sagar district and performed the ground breaking (Bhoomi Pujan) ceremony at Sant Shiromani Ravidass Memorial Sthal. The programme

also marked the culmination of the ruling party's ongoing 'Samrasta (harmony) Yatra', seen as an attempt by the saffron outfit to reach out to Dalits ahead of the crucial polls in Madhya Pradesh. Doing the honours, PM Modi said, "Today I got the opportunity to lay the foundation for Sant Ravidass' temple and I believe that he will give me the opportunity to inaugurate the same when it is completed in the next one-and-a-half years." Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said he has full faith that the project will prove to be a milestone in popularizing the education and thoughts of Sant Ravidass for the benefit of the society.

It is a welcome initiative of the MP Govern-



ment and of the ruling dispensations. I have been writing about these and related matters such as;

the followers of Guru Ravidass, not only in north India but beyond too, to integrate them with the main stream of the society both genuinely to transform the Hindu society and to woo them as vote banks. I don't see any wrong in the process both on account of social action and also political strategy. But to put it candidly, the selective approach in this regard is counter-productive. One cannot eat the cake and have it too.

A temple at the cost of 100 crore as a memorial of the great Guru on one hand and uncalled for and lopsided behavior in Tughlakabad in demolishing the ancient temple built himself by Guru Ravidass on the gifted site by the then ruler, Sikander Lodi are not understandable. These self contradictory approaches do not go well with the masses. Sincere and clear hearted actions by the high caste Hindus would go a long way in registering their interest in creating an inclusive society as 'Samrasta' their agenda and goal.

It is time that the stake holders, both the followers of Guru Ravidass and the leadership of the main stream of the Hindu society, should understand this – sooner the better. The followers of Guru Ravidass and the marginalized sections of the society should shed their inhibitions and stand for their due space in an inclusive and just society.

Particularly, the spiritual Deras should not contend themselves with escort security jeeps and fully armed guards and photo ops with the VVIPs but interact with the authorities to get and safeguard the rights and due space for the masses. Guru Ravidass's lofty Vani and his legacy is fully relevant and potent to bring about Samrasta in the society.

It is fully pragmatic to integrate the society as desired by our fore-fathers and stipulated in the constitution of India to create a just social order. The main stream of the society (Caste Hindus) must realize that the followers of

Guru Ravidass are increasingly understanding and imbibing the message of Guru Ravidass and would certainly apply it in their struggle for their rightful place in the society at large:-

Pradheenta Paap Hai; Jan Lyo Re Meet, Ravidass Dass Pradheen Se Kaun Kare Hai Preet. (Slavery is sin. Understand this; my dear fellows. Nobody loves slaves like Ravidass)

Guru Ravidass and his followers stand for brotherhood, Fraternity and Harmony that is 'Samrasta' in the country and the society at large. There cannot be better occasion to say this as the Eve of the Independence Day – the culmination of the year long Azadi Ka Mahautsav.

With this, I take this opportunity wish my fellow citizens – Azadi Mubarak



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

Representative Image of Guru Ravidass Temple and Memorial.



Guru Ravidass Tughlakabad (Delhi) Mandir which was destroyed and demolished by the DDA under the administrative control of the Urban Development Ministry of the central government, Development of Khuralgarh Sahib (Charan Cho Ganga) in Garhshankar of Hoshiarpur in Punjab, Development of Seer Goverdhanpur (birthplace of Guru Ravidass) in Banaras in UP, Naming of Adampur Airport in Jalandhar after Guru Ravidass in my blogs with a view to generate awareness and urge the authorities and the organizations like RSS and VHP to do something concrete to integrate the weaker sections and socially marginalized segments with the main stream of the society under the 'Samarasta' agenda. I am also aware that various agencies representing RSS and BJP are in touch with various spiritual Deras of

"The basis of my politics lies in the proposition that the Untouchables are not a sub-division or sub-section of Hindus, and that they are a separate and distinct element in the national life of India."

Bharat Rattan Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Debt relief to farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans is essential

The data on credit to farmers released by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on August 7, 2023 was presented in the Lok Sabha by the Union State Finance Minister. According to these data, the burden of debt on the farmers of Punjab is the heaviest. In Punjab, the loan per farmer family is Rs 2.95 lakh. Punjab is followed by Gujarat (Rs 2.28 lakh), Haryana (Rs 2.11 lakh), Andhra Pradesh (Rs 1.72 lakh), Kerala (Rs 1.47 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (Rs 1.40 lakh), Uttar Pradesh (Rs 1.13 lakh) and West Bengal. (80 thousand rupees) comes. These loans to farmers are from commercial banks, cooperative banks, and regional rural banks in various states of India. Apart from this, the farmers have loans from moneylenders, commission agents, traders, shopkeepers, relatives and friends, and other non-institutional sources.

Dr. Gian Singh (Author), Dr. Anupama, Dr. Gurinder Kaur, Dr. Sukhvir Kaur, and Dr. Rupinder Kaur conducted a survey in 27 villages in the south-western region, central plains region and Shiwalik hills region of Punjab for 2014-15 revealed that the per household debt for per marginal farm category was Rs.230700, small farm category was Rs.494051. Rs.609766 per semi-medium farm category Rs.609766, per medium farm category, Rs.786761, large farm category was Rs.1352696 and was Rs.54709 per agriculture labourer household, but the debt per acre on arable land was Rs.65169 for marginal farmers, Rs 55574, for small farmers, Rs 52839,, semi-midium farmers, Rs.Rs.45399 , medium farmers, Rs.50211and large farmers. These figures depict that as we scale down from the large farm category to the marginal farmers category , the burden of debt generally increases.

The origin of Agriculture Price Policy in India can be traced back to the Second World War. During this period, the then ruling government fixed Maximum Prices of some agricultural commodities to control the rising prices of food grains to protect the interests of the consumers, but Minimum Prices of some agricultural commodities to protect the interests of the farmers.

The survey also revealed that except for the big farmer category, all other categories of farmers and agricultural labourers are not able to repay their loans because their income is less than their minimum consumption expenditure. These categories of farmers and agricultural labourers are compelled to borrow money to maintain a minimum level of consumption, which they cannot repay on time, adding to their debt.

On the day of the country's independence on August 15, 1947, the second big news besides independence was the shortage of food grains. The Planning Commission of India was established in 1950 and the Five Year Plans were introduced from 1951. During the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) to overcome the scarcity of food grains

in the country, the main priority was given to the development of the agricultural sector. As a result the production of food grains increased so much that this problem was solved to a large extent. During the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61), the main priority was given to the development of the industrial sector instead of the development of the agricultural sector. During this period, the country again faced the problem of scarcity of food grains. The drought in the country during 1962-64 further increased the scarcity of food grains. During this period, the scarcity of food grains in the country had increased to such an extent that the government of that time had to face the challenge of wooing foreign countries to provide food grains to its people. In order to overcome this problem, the central government decided to introduce the 'New Agricultural Technology' in the country. After studying various regions of the country, the central government also decided to intro-



duce this technology in Punjab on priority. Behind this decision of the central government were the hard-working and courageous farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans, and the rich natural resources of Punjab.

Due to the hard work of the courageous farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans, and excessive use of natural resources of Punjab, the country was able to control the scarcity problem of food grains. Initially, the 'New Agricultural Technology' was adopted only in relation to wheat. The productivity and production of wheat increased to such an extent that the central government got rid of the trap of trying to get foodgrain from foreign countries.

The 'New Agricultural Technology' adopted in the country was a culmination package of high-yielding seeds, assured irrigation, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, machinery, and modern methods of farming. Adoption of this agricultural technology eliminated the huge scarcity of food grains in the country, but due to the high cost of this agricultural technology and continuously declining the need for labour, the cost of agricultural production increased and the employment opportunities for farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans declined significantly.

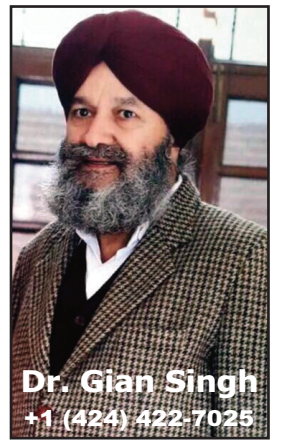
An important phase of India's Agriculture Price Policy began in 1965 with the establishment of the 'Agricultural Prices Commission' and the 'Food Corporation of India'. Since its establishment, the 'Agricultural Prices Commission' has been making its recommendations to the central government regarding fixing the Minimum Support Prices of some agricultural commodities and generally the central government has been accepting these recommendations. In order to increase the productivity and production of food grains in the country, the 'Agricultural Prices Commission' recommended a substantial increase in the prices of agricultural commodities for the five years 1965-69. But during a period of 53 years from 1970 till now, the recommendations made by this commission were against the interest of farmers. The 'New Economic Policies' adopted in the country since 1991 in favour of the capitalist/corporate world have made agriculture a loss making

the Government of India have reduced the net income of farmers. According to a study conducted by OCED and ICRIER has revealed that during the 17 years from 2000-01 to 2016-17, as the result of implicit taxes, the

farmers of the country have lost Rs.45 lakh crore which works out around Rs 2.65 lakh crore per year.

It is very important for the food security of the country that the debt of farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans should be written off once and necessary changes in agricultural and economic policies should be made thereafter. During 1951, about 80 per cent of the country's population was dependent on the agricultural sector for its livelihood, which was being given 55 per cent of the national income. Today, about 50 per cent of the country's population is dependent on the agricultural sector for its livelihood, which is being given only about 16 per cent of the national income. It is necessary to increase this share at least to such an extent that the basic needs of all the sections dependent on the agricultural sector—food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, clean environment, and social security—are met in a respectable manner. Employment under the MGNREGA scheme to the marginal and small farmers, agricultural labourers,

and rural artisans should be provided as per their needs and the wage rate under MGNREGA should be at par with the minimum rates of wages fixed by the Central and State Governments. Interest-free loans should be given to all the categories of farmers except the large farmer category, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans, according to their needs. Apart from the government measures, farmers have to adopt cooperative farming. According to a research study conducted by Professor Bina Aggarwal, there are more than 68,000 landless women cooperative-fasocieties in the state of Kerala. These landless women do cooperative farming by leasing in land on rentt. The agricultural production of these women is 1.9 times and the net economic profit is 5 times as compared to the ordinary farmers. Farmer, agricultural labourer,, and rural artisan organizations should make a meaningful contribution in this regard by educating farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans that suicide is not a solution to any problem, but a lot of misery for the rest of the family. Human beings can live without cars, bungalows, airplanes, costly smartphones, and other luxury items but not food. The government and the society should put every effort for the welfare of the different sections working day and night in the agriculture sector



Dr. Gian Singh
+1 (424) 422-7025

business. The prices of inputs used in agricultural production are increasing rapidly. The prices of two main inputs-DAP fertilizer, and diesel- used for agricultural production increased significantly which has led to a major increase in agricultural production costs. Due to increase in mechanization and use of herbicides for agricultural production, the employment opportunities for farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans have decreased to a large extent, resulting in a decrease in their income.

The research studies conducted in different regions of the country have revealed that most of the farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans are born in debt and poverty, live a hard life in debt and poverty, and leaving huge debt and abject poverty for the future generations, they either die a miserable death or when all hopes of their lives are cut off by the government and the society, they have also taken the path of suicide.

Farmers' children of Punjab, Haryana and some other states are migrating to foreign countries at a rapid rate. This migration is causing 'Brain Drain', 'Capital Drain', 'loss of Demographic Dividend' and many other problems for these states and the entire country.

The tax policies adopted by

Why Celebrate the Independence Day of India

A question that is often raised in some circles is, "Why should one celebrate Independence Day of India?" Although this is a rather complex topic that can't be answered simply, a broader reflection on pre-independence and post independence is needed. Upon reflecting, the following comes to my mind:

1. On June 9, 2000, the Honourable KG Balakrishnan was appointed to the post of Chief Justice of India. This was made possible when the then President of India, His Excellency, the Late Shri KR Narayanan, probed and asked a question as to why the list of potential candidates for the post of Chief Justice of India had no representation from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

2. In view of the recent Manipur Violence and Tragedy, the Chief Justice of India, Hon. Chandrachud, rightfully

intervened and raised questions. As a result, a number of measures are now being undertaken, including the appointment of the former Maharashtra DGP and NIA officer Mr. Dattatray Padalgikar to monitor the probe by the investigating agencies. (www.thehindu.com).

3. During a conversation in 1930, Dr. Ambedkar told Gandhiji: "I have no homeland... how can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own, wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink?"

Upon further reflections, questions that come to my mind are:

1. Do Dalits now believe they have a homeland?

2. Is the representation of Dalits enhanced in independent India in comparison to colonial India?

3. Are institutional pillars (judiciary, bureaucracy, and political leader-

ship) effective in implementing the values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity?

While there are incidents which suggest more effectiveness of these structures is needed, the overall trend suggests that there are now significant gains made in India for everyone.

Would these gains have been made in the colonial era? Perhaps not to the same degree, or for the same reasons.

For me, it is more important that the caravan of transformation be kept moving forward recognizing, the pace can vary from time to time. This will also add to the tributes for many people who sacrificed and lost their lives for independence- and during the days of partition.

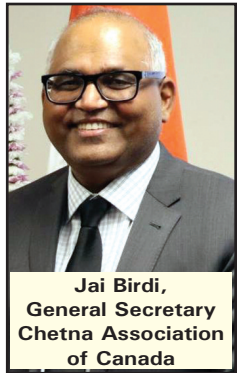
It is also important to see, at least on some occasions, a "glass half full"; celebrate accomplishments;

learn, strategize, and commit our pledged for continuous improvements at both the individual and the systemic levels.

With India's population of over 1.4 billion and a strong diaspora, there is untapped potential to work together and attain outcomes that are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Goals for 2030.

Let us celebrate the gains that India has made - and pledge to continue to strengthen the structures of democracy and achieve a more inclusive India!

Happy Independence Day and greetings to all for this occasion.



Jai Birdi,
General Secretary
Chetna Association
of Canada



Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD

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