



Ambedkar Times

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BABASAHEB DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR, BUDDHISM AND DALIT EMANCIPATION

Prem K. Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism at the historic public ceremony in Nagpur on October 14, 1956. The decision to embrace Buddhism by Dr. Ambedkar was not at all a sudden attempt. It took him more than two decades (from Yeola Conference, October 13, 1935, where he took the vow that 'even though I am a Hindu born, I will not die a Hindu', to the historic Nagpur conversion ceremony, October 14, 1956, the day he embraced Buddhism with thousands of his followers) to translate his vow for conversion into reality. He decided to embrace Buddhism after thoroughly exhausting all possible ways of reforming Hinduism from within and exploring the possibility of conversion to Christianity, Sikhism, and Islam for overcoming the oppressive structures of Brahminical social order (BSO) in India.



Dr. Ambedkar being Administered Deeksha by Ven. Bhante Chandramani of Kushinara at Nagpur (MS) on October 14, 1956.

Converting to Buddhism, in fact, was a unique and meticulously calculated move. It was a unique move in the sense that though there have been many instances of individual conversions to Buddhism, the real credit for systematically organizing collective conversion to Buddhism on a mass scale in India, beyond doubt, goes to Dr. Ambedkar. The historic conversion ceremony at Nagpur assumed further importance with the publication of The Buddha and his Dhamma shortly after the demise of Babasaheb on December 6, 1956.

Dr. Ambedkar discovered in conversion to Buddhism the most desired and reliable way of overcoming the centuries-old system of social exclusion. According to Babasaheb, the central thesis of the Buddhist philosophy revolves around two major problems: the first problem was that there was suffering in the world and the second was how to remove this suffering and make mankind happy. Since caste and caste based social exclusion dehumanizes the Dalits, Babasaheb underlined the urgency of caste annihilation. It is in this context that conversion to Buddhism becomes meaningful. Another aspect that underlines the importance of conversion to Buddhism encourages strategic alliance between the non-Brahminical/ Shudras/ Bahujan Samaj/ artisans and the Dalit/Ati Shudras sections of the Indian society and calls for their united front against the oppressive and hegemonic structures of Brahminical social order. Forging unity among the victims of the 'Varna order' in turn aimed at reclaiming India on the basis of the neo-Buddhist identity. The very fact that Dr. Ambedkar founded three political parties (the Independent Labour Party, All India Scheduled Castes Federation and the Republican Party of India), and the leading role that he played in drafting the Constitution of independent India, vindicated his active involvement in the polity and society of the country even after denouncing Hinduism publicly in 1935 and later on embracing Buddhism in 1956.

Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar used to emphasize on the application of scientific approach to solve the question of caste and social exclusion. His movement also became very popular in Punjab. He visited Punjab thrice. It was during his last visit in October 27-29, 1951 that he spoke at length to his people in Punjab about his approach and ways of Dalit empowerment. He delivered speeches at Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Patiala and also addressed the students of D.A.V. College Jalandhar. Though the people of Punjab were well impressed by his great movement but they could not follow him so closely in relation to conversion to Buddhism. Late D. C. Ahir, a renowned Ambedkarite Buddhist and world reputed scholar of Buddhism, was of the opinion that due to deep faith of Scheduled Castes population of Punjab, especially of the Doaba region, in the teachings and spirituality of Saheb Shri Guru Ravidass Ji, Buddhism could not become so popular in this state. Another possible reason behind the deep popularity of the teachings of Saheb Shri Guru Ravidass in Punjab could be the concerted efforts of Babu Mangu Ram Murgowalia and the mass appeal of his famous Ad Dharm movement. The popularity of Ad Dharm can be known from the fact that some of the scholars of late started advocating that the principles of "Ad Dharm" are also followed in Buddhism.

CONSTRUCTED OVER 20 ACRES OF LAND THE PROJECT WILL HELP IN REDUCTION OF INCIDENCE OF PADDY STRAW BURNING

CM BHAGWANT MANN AND HARDEEP PURI DEDICATES INDIA'S LARGEST BIO ENERGY PLANT TO PEOPLE

Daljeet Kaur Bhawanigarh

Bhuttal Kalan (Sangrur), October 18, 2022: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, along with Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri, today dedicated India's largest Bio Energy plant constructed at a

lakh Metric Ton of pollutants and 20,000 MT of fly ash currently produced due to paddy straw burning. He further said that this unit will also give employment to 1000 youth and affect more than 5,000 families. Bhagwant Mann said that the



cost of Rs 230 crore over 20 acres of land.

Describing it as a red letter day for the state, the Chief Minister said that this step will go a long way in wiping out the menace of paddy straw burning from the state. He said that Verbio Group has strong association with state as its Indian subsidiary Verbio India Private Limited as this is largest biofuel (Biomethane/ Bio-CNG) production units in India with 33 TPD (tons per day) and 550 TPD per year of Bio-CNG capacity adding that this Bio-CNG project of 80,000 m³/day capacity will produce biogas by anaerobic digestion process and is a great way to solve the problem of stubble burning. Bhagwant Mann said that the annual straw consumption in this unit will be 1.30 lakh ton adding that it will help in solving the vex problem of paddy straw burning. The Chief Minister said that set up over an area of 20 acres of land this unit will contribute to an annual reduction of 1.50

acreage of soil enriched from Biomanure will be 2150 acres. The Chief Minister further said that the verbio group has evinced keen interest in setting up more such plants in the state. He said that once successful the verbio group will set up 10 more such plants in the state. Bhagwant Mann said that the target is to make Punjab free from the menace of paddy straw burning. The Chief Minister said that with the intense cropping pattern of wheat and paddy, Punjab is facing the problem of disposal of crop residues particularly the paddy straw and stubble which have no other usage. He said about 18 Million Ton of the straw/stubble is generated every year but only 5 Million Ton is being used in biomass power plants, industrial boilers and plywood industry. Bhagwant Mann said that the rest of 13 Million Ton is being burnt by farmers in the fields as no other safe disposal techniques are available.



Judge Satnam Rattu

Picture credit to the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom (CA)

Many Congratulations

Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba forum congratulate Mr. Satnam Rattu, 42, of Folsom, on his being appointed Judge in the Sacramento County Superior Court. Earlier, he has had the honor to serve as a Deputy District Attorney at the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office since 2008. He also served as a Law Clerk at Freidberg & Parker from 2006 to 2007. Mr. Rattu, a Democrat, earned a Juris Doctor Degree from McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific.

The forum wishes him great success in his new responsibility.

Prem Kumar Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: "Ambedkar Times" & "Desh Doaba"

Complete High Speed Rail Failure

As I come to the close of my sixth year on the Board of Supervisors, I have seen many issues fall and rise in terms of importance for the residents of Sacramento County. For example, homelessness went from an issue that I barely ever received a phone call about when I first entered office, and transformed into one of the biggest issues on most people's minds. But one issue has remained troubling to Sacramento County residents since the day I entered office until now, and that is the deplorable condition of Sacramento County roads.

I fully sympathize with these concerns because I am also upset. My house backs up to Madison avenue, and every single day that I leave my home I am driving on road conditions that are frankly embarrassing. And due to this, one of the primary questions I receive from people when I speak in my community meetings is "why can't you fix the roads in the County?" I wish it were that simple, because if it were I would have done it years ago. So I want to take this opportunity to explain why it's not so simple, and what we can do to change things.

What many people do not understand is that the vast majority of funds that are spent on local roads are from the state and federal government. Not only that, but many of these funds are competitive dollars, meaning we are only going to win those funds for major projects that have nothing to do with resurfacing, like the road widening happening right now on Hazel Avenue. So even if I wanted to prioritize local road resurfacings, the money Sacramento County could divert towards roads would be insignificantly small compared to what the state and federal government have the ability to do.

The problem Sacramento County is experiencing with our roads is not localized to just our county or even region. This is a problem afflicting the entire State of California, as of last count our state had over \$47.3 billion in road maintenance that has been postponed due to not having enough money for our roads, highways, and bridges (also called deferred maintenance). This enormous deferred maintenance bill would feel more understandable if California was broke, but at the same time we have this bill we are spending outrageous

amounts of money on California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR), which in my opinion is only a fraction as important as having reliable roads. CAHSR has the potential to benefit a small fraction of the population, specifically those that would use it to commute. Meanwhile, roads are used by everyone, including passengers, freight, fire service, police service, etc. To top it off, the train doesn't even come close to Sacramento County, as the furthest north it goes is San Francisco.

When voters approved CAHSR in 2008, it was supposed to cost \$34 billion and be completed by 2020 connecting San Francisco to Los Angeles. Four years ago this price tag had risen to \$79 billion, earlier this year the 2022 draft business plan estimated it would cost \$105 billion, and just three month later the "final plan" raised the estimate to \$113 billion. And not only do these costs continue to rise, but there is still no certainty the complete project will ever get built. Just the Merced to Bakersfield section of the project (which is supposedly the "easiest" section to build) has an earliest competition date of 2029, but this is a date that just keeps getting extended,

as four years ago that date was 2024.

Even if we let CAHSR continue

to build the central valley line and we abandoned CAHSR after that, we would save enough money to pay for every cent of deferred maintenance for all roads, highways, and bridges in California. The California Legislature and the Governor have the capacity to fix our roads, they just need to change their priorities and focus on what California needs the most.

Thank you for reading – and as always, if you want to contact me, call me at 916-874-5491, or e-mail me at SupervisorFrost@saccounty.net.

Sacramento County Supervisor Sue Frost represents the 4th District, which includes the communities of Citrus Heights, Folsom, Orangevale, Antelope, North Highlands, Rio Linda, Elverta, and Rancho Murieta.



Supervisor Sue Frost

NEW GRANTHI JATHA FOR SHRI GURU RAVIDASS TEMPLE PITTSBURG



Report: O. P. Balley



Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Pittsburg (CA) is blessed to have its New Granthi Jatha from India. Their names are Bhai Sahib Bhai Balwinder Singh, Bhai Satinder Singh and Bhai Karamjit Singh and have joined their official duties in Gurughar on October 16th, 2022.

On behalf of the Managing Committee and the entire Sangat of Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg, they are welcome to our Guru Ghar with our earnest hopes

and prayers for their professional services as new spiritual counselors to Sangat.

Sangat is also requested to provide their full support to the new priests and help in maintaining the renowned image of our Guru Ghar.

"Nanak Nam Chardi Kala Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala"

Managing Committee

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Pittsburg

The problem of paddy stubble burning in Punjab: some aspects

Around October 15, paddy harvesting will begin in many parts of Punjab and by the end of October, the work will be completed in most parts. For quite some time in Punjab, the news of burning the paddy stubble after harvesting the paddy crop and the resulting air pollution has been making headlines in the newspapers. Smoke, and unburnt smoke particles, carbon dioxide gas are in large quantities in this air pollution. This pollution has been creating many problems for humans and all kinds of other creatures living mainly in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi. Different political parties and farmer organizations keep giving their own statements for the responsibility of this problem and its solution. The National Green Tribunal is giving instructions in this regard.

To understand the causes of this problem and suggest solutions, it is necessary to look at the historical aspect of paddy plantation in Punjab. Before the introduction of paddy plantation in this state on a large scale, the crop-combinations were suitable for all types of life due to their variety and adaptability to its agro-climatic conditions.

After the independence of the country, the Planning Commission was formed in 1950 and from 1951 the First Five-Year Plan was introduced. To solve the food grains problem that has been ongoing since the country's independence, in the First Five-Year Plan (1951-56), the main priority was given to the development of the agricultural sector, as a result this problem could be controlled to a large extent. During the Second Five-Year Plan (1956-61), the main priority was given to the development of the industrial sector, due to which the food grains problem in the country resurfaced. The drought during 1964-66 made the shortage of food grains very serious. The central government had imported food grains in huge quantities under PL 480 from America which costed the country a lot. The central government has decided to introduce the 'New Agriculture Technology' in the country to solve the problem of food grains scarcity. This technology was a package of high yielding variety seeds, assured irrigation, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, machinery, and modern methods of farming. After discussions at various levels regarding the

implementation of this technology, the central government decided to introduce it on priority in Punjab. This decision was made taking into consideration the courageous farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans, and rich natural resources of Punjab. Among the rich natural resources of Punjab, its fertile soil, quality and level of ground water, and agro-climatic conditions were much better than in other states of the country.

In Punjab, the 'New Agriculture Technology' was started with the cultivation of wheat. Due to the hard work of the courageous farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans of Punjab, and the excessive use of



natural resources here, the shortage of food grains in the country could be solved. Due to the excellent contribution of wheat to the Central Pool of Food Grains, the central government imposed the paddy crop on Punjab from 1973 through the Minimum Support Prices policy. The favourable Minimum Support Price and production and procurement certainties were the main reasons for adopting paddy plantation in Punjab. Before the introduction of this technology, basmati paddy was being planted in the Shiwalik foot-hill areas of Punjab. From 1973, paddy plantation began in almost all the areas of Punjab where maize and cotton were the main crops.

While plantation of paddy along with sowing of wheat in Punjab has filled the Central Pool of Food Grains, it has created many serious problems for Punjab and in the coming period these problems are seen to become more serious. Before the large-scale plantation of paddy in Punjab, the ground water level of Punjab was very good. Today, in more than three-fourths of Punjab's community development blocks, the ground water level has gone down to a dangerous level. The author,

Dr. Surender Singh, and Harvinder Singh conducted a research study 'Ground Water Development in Punjab'. The study has revealed the fact that the ground water level has dropped to dangerous levels in those community development blocks of Punjab where wheat-paddy sowing/plantation dominate the cropping pattern. The pond-irrigation system is mostly used for paddy plantation in Punjab. During 1960-61, the number of tubewells in Punjab was 7445 which is around 15 lakh today. Monoblock motors stopped working due to the lowering of ground water table which forced the farmers to get submersible motors.

The cost of these motors is high and the bores required for them have to be deepened again and again. Such a phenomenon is becoming a reason for further increasing the debt faced by farmers. The Punjab government is giving free electricity to the farmers for irrigation, the economic burden of which is falling on the treasury of Punjab. When the irrigation needs of the farmers are not met with the free electricity provided by the Punjab government, they are forced to use their own or rented generators, which is one of the reasons for the increase in their production cost.

Before the large-scale plantation of paddy in Punjab, mainly maize and cotton crops were sown during the kharif season. These crops provided employment to farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans. With the introduction of paddy crop in Punjab, the employment generated by sowing maize and cotton crops has reduced significantly. This change in the cropping pattern is one of the reasons responsible for increasing debt on small farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans.

The paddy plantation in Punjab was started to meet the food grain requirements of the country for which Punjab is forced to pay a huge price. Farmers in Punjab are forced to set fire to the paddy stubble and they are the first to bear the brunt of the resulting pollution and many other aspects. There can be no doubt about it that this type of pollution is very harmful to the life of all kinds of living beings.

Methane gas is produced

mainly due to the prevalence of pond-irrigation for paddy crop in Punjab. Burning of paddy stubble releases carbon dioxide gas, smoke and unburnt smoke particles into the air and pollutes the

environment. All this phenomenon creates many unbearable problems for all kinds of living beings.

There are short-term and long-term possible solutions to problems arising from paddy stubble burning in Punjab. As a short-term solution, the central government should give adequate compensation to the farmers of Punjab for disposing of paddy stubble and the Punjab government should come forward to contribute its due in this regard. While doing so will bring some relief to the farmers, it is only somewhat natural that there will be some increase in the days of employment of the agricultural labourers. The central and state governments should provide financial assistance to the industrial units which use paddy stubble as fuel. The central and state governments should come forward on research projects to generate electricity from paddy stubble. However, it is not possible to solve all the problems related to paddy crop through short-term solutions.

This problem can be solved by long-term measures. The paddy crop is suitable for areas that have plenty of water for irrigation. In such areas, by planting only paddy crop throughout the year, its stubble will automatically be added to the soil, which will also increase the fertility of that soil. According to the agro-climatic conditions of the kharif season, such Minimum Support Prices of competing crops to paddy should be given to the farmers of Punjab, so that the farmers can get rid of the paddy crop. While doing this, it is very important to keep in mind that the income of the farmers does not fall.



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Goodie Takhar, PhD

UNPUBLISHED PREFACE THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA

Source Courtesy: Columbia University
www.columbia.edu

April 6, 1956

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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6-4-56

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

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

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

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

RSS Chief on Varna and Caste – A cursory Analysis

RSS Sarsanghchalak, Mohan Bhagwat, an icon of India's socio-political and socio-cultural setup; particularly from the Hindu point of view and the main stream of the society is currently in news – his address at the RSS citadel in Nagpur on the Vijay Dashmi on October 5 and his very candid and thought-provoking statement on the 'Varna and Caste' system in the Indian society. Mohan Bhagwat touched many aspects of the Indian polity and the society like 'population control' and addressing the 'imbalance' in the demographic change inviting sharp reaction from the Muslim minority and others. But I would focus on the second news about 'Varna and Caste' in this cursory analysis, not as an expert but as layman and a common citizen

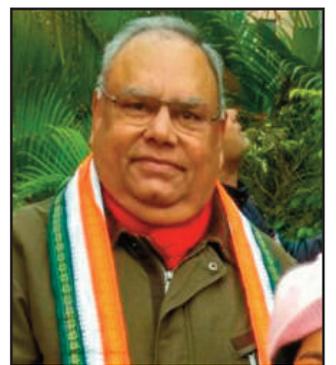
expressed in the book had outlived their relevance in the changed socio-political scenario in India and we must see the things in their current perspective. Mohan Bhagwat deserves all appreciation and support in his endeavors to 'integrate' and 'transform the Indian social order as diverse and different from the thinking of the past. He has shown 'courage and vision' of a statesman to change the traditional thinking of RSS, and rightly so, to meet the challenges of the future. I would not shy away from the truth to make my point in favour of Mohan Bhagwat. I quote a few lines obtained from the Google Guru, "On February 6, 1950, the Organiser carried an article by a retired High Court Judge Shankar Subha Aiyar titled "Manu Rules Our Hearts."

I wrote in my blog on April 28, 2020 about the mind and thought of Mohan Bhagwat some years ago sensing the things to come after my two long meetings with him in Jalandhar and Nagpur. I quote here from my blog which may be accessed for ready reference and perusal at (<https://diplomaticitbits.blogspot.com/2020/04/corona-lockdown-food-for-thought.html>)

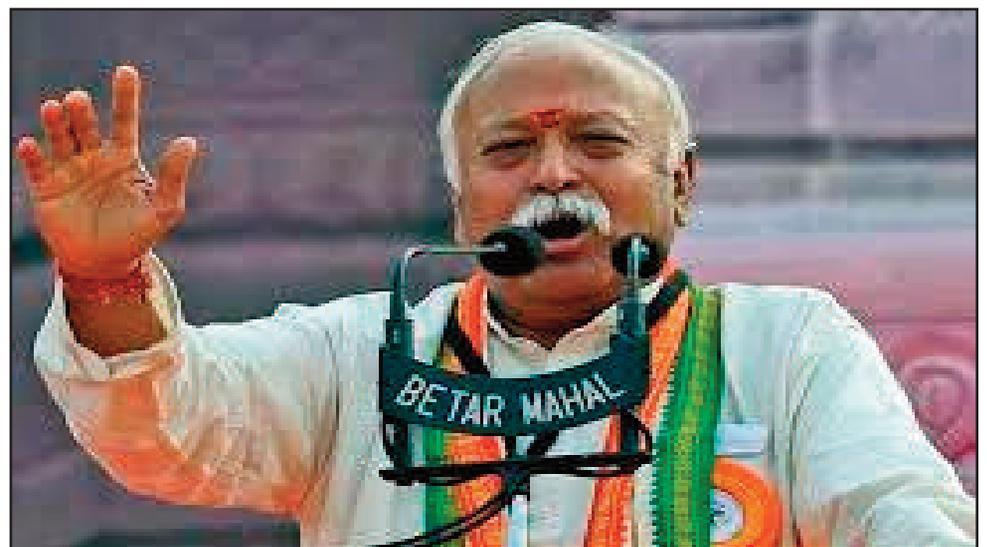
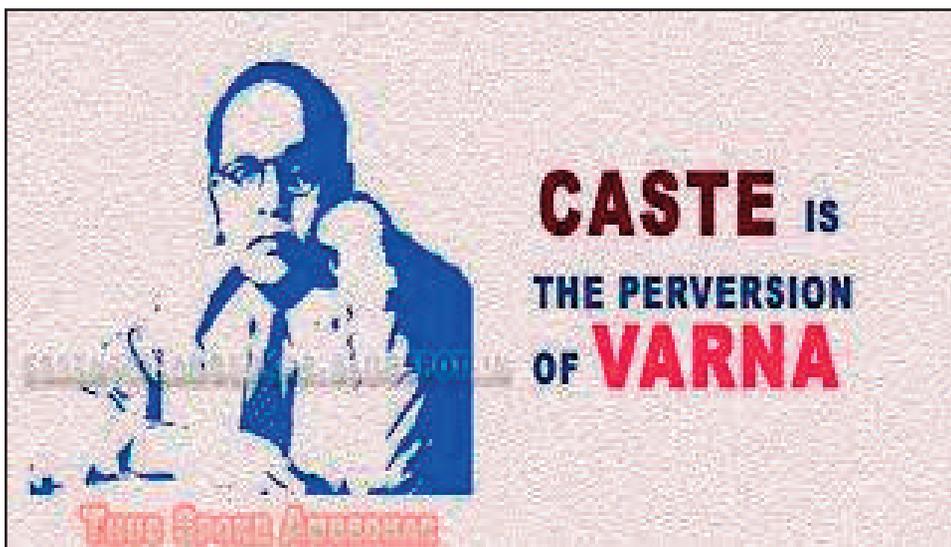
Quote "Second, the address of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat provided me an immediate instigation to write this and share with you. He spoke with understanding, concern and vision, as always. Amid the background of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, as reported in the Tribune of April 27, the RSS Sarsanghchalak pitched on 'swadeshi'(indigenous) and

Buddha to make his point to continue to do well in spite of setbacks. He also n a m e d Babasaheb Ambedkar and the

constitutional norms to deal with the situation. It is slowly becoming clear to which direction the wind will blow in the days to come. RSS Boss Mohan Bhagwat, it is increasingly becoming evident, is a man of vision with accommodative and liberal approach. He stands for, I think, the 'Middle Path' of Gautam Buddha and



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of Bharat.

While launching a book on October 7 at Nagpur, Mohan Bhagwat made an important and ground breaking statement on Chaturvarna and Caste which would tend to entirely change the hitherto perceived ideological plank of RSS with regard to the Hindu social order. It would, it is hoped, also set the things in their right perspective to strengthen and pursue the lofty ideal of RSS - 'Samrasta' – Social Harmony. He said that the concepts of 'varna' and caste "should be forgotten" because they are a thing of the past. The RSS chief further said, "Social equality was a part of the Indian tradition, but it was forgotten and this led to damaging consequences. The previous generations made mistakes everywhere, and India was no exception," he said. "There should not be any problem accepting those mistakes. And if you think that by accepting that our ancestors made mistakes they will become inferior, that won't happen because everybody's ancestors made mistakes", Mohan Bhagwat added. He further said, "Everything that causes discrimination should go out lock, stock and barrel." "It is a bold statement of a 'man of vision', Mohan Bhagwat, Chief of the largest socio-cultural organization of the world. I also vividly recall his statement, with regard to the book 'Bunch of Thoughts' of one of his predecessors, M.S. Golwalkar made at Vigyan Bhawan a couple of years ago that some of the thoughts



He wrote that "Even though Dr. Ambedkar is reported to have recently stated in Bombay that the days of Manu have ended, it is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even in the present day affected by the principles and injunctions contained in the Manusmriti and other Smritis. Even an unorthodox Hindu feels himself bound at least in some matters by the rules contained in the Smritis and he feels powerless to give up altogether his adherence to them." Mohan Bhagwat's latest statement and take on Varna and Caste has completely negated the traditional RSS stance to deal with the issue. It is a welcome and much needed change which would prove beneficial to the society in the years to come.

'svavlamban' (self-reliance) to meet the challenges of the future. I was happy to note that he also touched the communal aspect which was unduly being highlighted by the media and vested interests. He said, "It is not correct to blame the entire community because of something some people may have done because of 'bhay' and 'krodh' (fear and anger). We do not help with difference in human beings. We must help with a feeling of togetherness and affinity. We are not doing any favour to anyone; we are working for our own people.

You would observe that in these thoughts of Mohan Bhagwat, there is a clear tinge of the Gandhian thought. In his speech, he also referred to a story of Tathagat Gautam

constitutional and social pragmatism of Babasaheb Ambedkar and also earthy wisdom and moral authority of Mahatma Gandhi. Here we may find some "Food for thought" to prepare for the coming scenario in the aftermath of Corona Virus. We are to 'watch and see'.

Let me conclude with my loud thinking – RSS, the strongest outfit of the majority Hindus, is standing on the crossroads. While preserving and maintaining its core agenda of Hindutva, they ought to pursue the agenda of "Samrasta"- Equality, Justice and Fraternity by owning the legacies of both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar, the two icons of contemporary India, to make India prosper and happy and the 'world leader' of the 21st century." Unquote.

The stock and appraisal of Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat has gone much high in my estimation. I only wish the RSS cadres and the society at large sincerely and truly adopt and execute the thoughtfully laid policy of Mohan Bhagwat with regard to Varna and Caste for the larger good of the country and society. Let us not harp on the past instead look ahead to secure the future:-
Zara Dekh Uss Ko Jo Kuch Ho Raha Hai, Hone Wala Hai
Dhara Kya Hai Bhala Ehd-e-Kuhan Ki Dastnon Mein.

(Pay attention to what is happening and what is going to happen
What good there is in repeating the tales of the old glories?)

Future of Parliamentary Democracy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Contd. on next page)



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

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

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

patrakaGrahakas. Unfortunately, we have lost this entire past heritage that was good. Historians of India must tackle this question as to why these parliamentary institutions disappeared from our land. But I find that they cannot or do not want to find out the reasons for it. Ancient India was the master of the world. There was such intellectual freedom in ancient India as was nowhere else to be found. Then why was it that this ancient civilization went to the dogs? Why was India subject to autocratic monarchies? We were familiar with parliamentary institutions, we knew about votes, voting, committees and other things related to parliamentary institutions. Today the Parliamentary system of government is alien to us. If we go to a village, we will find that the villagers do not know what it is to vote, or what a party is. They find it something strange something alien. It is, therefore, a great problem as how to preserve this institution. We will have to educate the public; we will have to tell them the benefits of Parliamentary Democracy and of the Parliamentary system of Government. We know what Baggot means by Parliamentary government. But today his definition is of no use, it is utterly inadequate. There are three main things inherent in the Parliamentary system of Government. Parliamentary Government means negation of hereditary rule. No person can claim to be a hereditary ruler. Whoever wants to

Sahib Kanshi Ram and Dalit Emancipation

Prem K. Chumber
Editor-In-Chief:

www.ambedkartimes.com

Sahib Kanshi Ram devoted his life for the eradication of caste from the domestic structures of Indian socio-religious realm. The sole aim his life-long struggle was to facilitate the Bahujan Samaj to acquire power through the medium of ballot. He was a firm believer in the nonviolent power of democracy that he inherited from the teachings of Babasaheb Dr B.R Ambedkar. A chance reading of one of the numerous valuable writings of Dr. Ambedkar transformed his vision and he did not only prefer to live unmarried but also renounced his family life once for all. After he plunged into social struggle for the acquisition of political power for his people he did not look back at all toward his home in village Khauspur in Rupnagar district of Punjab. He did all this for helping his people to stand on their own feet to get rid of centuries' old slavery and blind faith in the Chaturvarna system of social hierarchy, which deny them their bare minimum human rights. He ingrained among his people that the political power is the only key to Dalit emancipation and empowerment in the real sense of the term.

Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji was an innovative thinker and a charismatic mass leader who coined new political vocabulary for the mobilization of downtrodden. The slogans he chiseled adroitly caught the imagination of all and sundry throughout the length and breadth of India. He told

his people unless and until they formed their own social and political organizations, no upper caste political party will allow them to come to rule India. And he was confident that given the 85 percent strength of Bahujan, if the latter joined hands no one in the world can stop them reach Delhi. His untiring efforts and firm faith in his people brought success though in some parts of the country. But as far as awareness among the Bahujan is concerned his was a great success. Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba weekly newspaper pays sincere tributes to Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram Ji on his 11th death anniversary and solemnly resolve to continue struggling following into his footsteps. Posted at www.ambedkartimes.com

Some points from

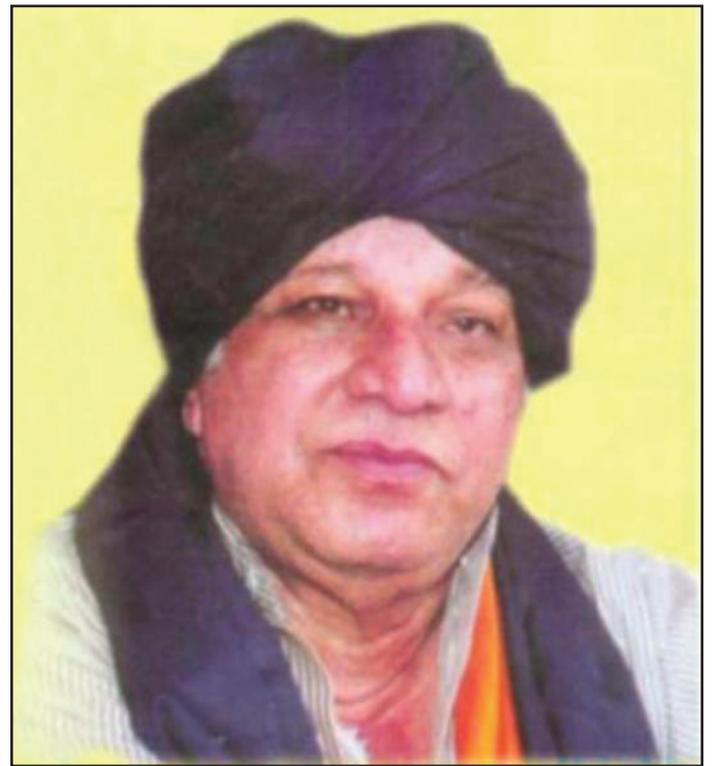
Sahib Kanshi Ram's Speech –

- The Ad-Dharm movement was the movement of rebellion against the Hindu religion. It was the movement against the Manuwad.
- Ad-Dharm movement was the revolt against the Manuwad.
- We as a community must understand what Ad-Dharm movement was and 75 years ago what movement was started by our forefathers, how Ad-Dharm movement ran for 75 years, what next needs to be done and what future holds for us, for the movement.
- One thing I know is that if Guru Ravidass Ji's teachings were not included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, no one would have ever known about Guru Ravidass.

• BSP is a party of weakest (section of the society) but its fight is with those who are powerful. How to fight these powerful parties? By developing the right thinking/mentality.

We need to become ruling class if we want to form a casteless society

Sahib Kanshi Ram said– In 1936 Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was invited by the "Jat Pat Todak Mandal, Lahore" to present his essay on the subject of caste. But the organizers of the conference did not allow Babasaheb to present the essay. Later on, Babasaheb published the essay in a form of book titled as "Annihilation of Caste". When I first read this book in 1962-63, I felt that annihilation of caste is certainly possible. But later on, when I started thinking deeply and began to study the subject of castes, caste system and behavioral patterns associated with the caste system, my understanding of caste began to change. My study of Caste is not merely based on reading books but it has emanated from my real life experience with the castes. There are millions of people who leave their



villages and migrate to metro cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and other big cities. These people do not bring anything else with them; the only thing they bring with them is their caste. They leave behind in their villages their small huts, a small plot of land, etc.

But they cannot leave behind their caste in the village; the caste invariably accompanies them to the cities where they begin to stay in dirty shanties along the side of railway tracks and nallahs. If the caste is so dear to the people then how can we annihilate the caste? Therefore I have stopped thinking in the direction of the annihilation of caste.

Future of Parliamentary Democracy

(Continue from page 6)

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

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

alities in both these countries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Valmikiya Ramayana – Bird's Eye View

The social media is abuzz with large number of stories about one of the most popular Hindu deities Lord Rama these days. A much talked about video relating to an episode of killing of Shambooka – the Shudra by God Rama is viral on the social media. Shambooka was killed for his alleged sin of performing hard Tapasya (austerities) to achieve godhood as it was transgression of assigned role of the Shudra Varna in the Hindu Social Order. Only the twice-born (High Castes) people had the privilege of undertaking such austerities. The video is the filmised version of the episode 'Shambooka Vadha' (Murder of Shambooka) contained in the Valmikiya Ramayana.

The Valmikiya Ramayana says that after the episode of defeat of Ravana, said to be the ten headed Rakshasa (demon) king of Lanka and retrieval of wife Sita from his custody, God Rama, the king of Ayodhya returned to the kingdom on completion of his exile term. Rama was a nominal King as the administration was entrusted by him to his brother Bharata. He had freed himself from the cares and worries of his kingdom and his subjects. He spent most of the time in merry making in the company of women and jesters. He never observed the ancient rule of Indian kings of hearing the wrongs of his subjects and attempting to redress them. Only one occasion has been recorded in the text when Rama personally heard the grievance of his subjects. The incident is known as the 'Shambooka Vadha' – murder of Shambooka. Valmiki says that in Rama's reign there were no premature deaths in his kingdom. It happened, however, that a certain Brahmin's son died in a premature death. The bereaved father carried his body to the king's palace. Placing the body at the gate, he cried aloud and bitterly and reproached Rama for the death of his son saying that it must be the consequence of some sin committed within his realm, and that the king himself was guilty if he did not punish the sinner. He finally threatened to end his life there by sitting on dharna (hunger-strike) against Rama unless his son was restored to life. Rama thereupon consulted his council of eight learned Rishis led by Vasishtha. Narada amongst them told Rama that some Shudra among his subjects must have been performing Tapasya (austerities), and thereby going against the Chaturvarnya Dharma (four varna system), for such austerities could be performed by the twice-born alone, while the duty of the Shudras was to only serve the twice born. Rama was thus convinced that it was the sin committed by a Shudra in transgressing Dharma in that manner which was responsible for the death of the Brahmin boy. So, Rama mounted his Pushpak Vimana (aeroplane) and scoured the countryside for the culprit. At last, in a wild region far away to the South he espied a man practicing rigorous austerities by hanging himself upside down. Rama introduced himself to the man and

enquired of him of his caste and the purpose of such hard austerities. The man informed him that he was a Shudra by the name of Shambooka practicing austerities with the aim of going to heaven in his own earthly person to achieve godhood. Hearing the word 'Shudra' Rama instantly took sparkling sword out of its sheath and beheaded Shambooka. Lo and behold! That very moment the dead Brahmin boy in distant Ayodhya began to breathe again. The Gods rained flowers on the king from their joy at his having prevented a Shudra from gaining admission to their celestial abode through the power of Tapasya which he had no right to per-



form. The gods also appeared before Rama and congratulated him on his deed. Rama thence proceeded to the nearby Ashrama of the sage Agastya, who commended his feat, and presented him with a divine bracelet. Rama then returned to his capital (Valmikiya Ramayana, Geeta Press Gorakhpur, 16th edition, Uttarkaanda, Sargas 73-76 and 82 and Writings and Speeches of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (BAWS) Vol. 4, pp. 331, 332).

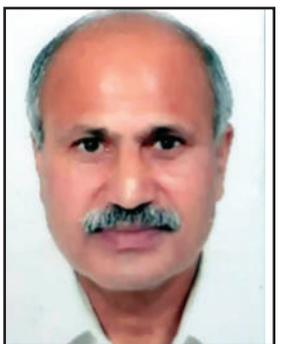
The Valmikiya Ramayana is an eye opener for everyone if it is read dispassionately with open mind. Valmiki starts his Ramayana by emphasizing the fact that Rama was an Avatara - incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu. It was on the prayer of all gods to Vishnu to save them from the mighty Ravana – the demon king of Lanka and great grandson of Lord Brahma, who along with other demons was torturing them day and night, and who was given a boon by Lord Brahma that he would not be killed by gods etc. Ravana had two brothers name Vibheeshana and Kumbhakarna and a sister named Shoorpanakha. Lord Vishnu decided to take birth as son of Dashratha, the king of Ayodhya for the purpose of killing Ravana and destroying his clan, and serving the mortal world for 11000 years. Dasharatha, who had

three wives, Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra besides several hundred concubines, ruled the kingdom for over 60,000 years, but was childless for a long time. He performed a Yajna – sacrifice under the supervision of Rishi Shringa (one-horned sage) at the fag end of his reign to beget a son. When the Yajna was underway, a lustrous dark complexioned and red faced giant person dressed in red with long and soft hair and bedecked with divine ornaments appeared from the Agnikunda - Yajna fire pit with a gold salver filled with Pinda or divine kheer (sweet delicacy made of rice cooked in milk). He told the king that his queens would conceive and de-

liver sons after eating the divine kheer. He disappeared in the fire after delivering the delicacy. Accordingly, Dashratha gave half of the kheer to Queen Kaushalya, half of the remaining portion to Sumitra and remaining portion to Kaikeyee and Sumitra (Sumitra is said to be the concubine not queen of the king in some other texts of Ramayana). On eating the divine kheer, all the three ladies conceived. Kaushalya gave birth to Rama, Kaikeyee to Bharata and Sumitra to Lakshmana and Shatrughana in due course of time. Brahma asked the gods to create powerful associates of Rama, Avatar of Vishnu for the success of his mission. The gods agreed to carry out the command and engaged themselves in wholesale acts of fornication not only against Apsaras who were prostitutes, unmarried daughters of Yakshas and Nagas but also against the lawfully wedded wives of Vidhyadharas, Gandharvas, Kinnars, Vanaras and bears, and produced vanaras, bears and chimpanzees etc. as associates of Rama who were equal in valor to their father gods. Brahma himself produced bear Jambvana, Indra produced vanara (monkey) Vaali, Surya vanara Sugriva, Brahaspati vanara Tara, Kubera vanara Gandhmadan, Vishwakarma vanara Nala, Agni vanara Nila, Ashwani Kumaras vanara maind and Dwivida, Varuna vanara Sushena and Pawana vanara Hanumana. They were extremely giant and powerful like elephants and mountains. They could fly high in the sky, catch the clouds and cross over the ocean. This is how Rama, his brothers and associates took birth (Valmikiya Ramayana, Balkaanda, Sarga 8-18, 20, p. 74 and BAWS, Vol. 4, pp. 324, 325).

In due course, all the four sons of Dashratha and Avatars of Vishnu were married at the same time in the family of Janaka, the king of Mithila. Rama, the eldest of the three brothers was married to Sita.

Valmiki says when King Janaka was ploughing the land in preparation for a Yajna, he found a female baby covered with soil in the furrow. That baby was brought up by him as a daughter, and having been



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found from the furrow was named Sita (the trench dug with plough) (Baalkaanda, Sarga 66 and Ayodhyaakaanda, Sarga 118). Rama was about 13 years and Sita about 5 or 6 at the age of marriage (Baalkanda, Sarga 20, Aranyakaanda, Sarga 38, 47). When Rama came of age, Dasharatha thought of resigning the throne in his favour and retiring from kingship. While this was being settled, Kaikeyi raised the issue of fulfilment of a vow by the king which he had promised long time back to satisfy her any two demands when she wished. She demanded that her son Bharata should be installed on the throne in preference to Rama and Rama should live in forest for 14 years. Dasharatha agreed with great reluctance, and he died soon after. Accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, Rama went to live in the forest. In the forest, Shoorpanakha, the sister of Ravana, proposed to Rama. He asked her to approach Lakshmana saying that he was already married (Lakshmana was also already married). Lakshmana cut her nose and ears at the behest of Rama. In order to take revenge, Ravana the king of Lanka, decided to abduct Sita intending to make her one of his wives. Disguised as a sage, he went to Rama's abode. He was welcomed as a guest and hosted by Sita. She offered him a seat, worshipped him as a Brahmin guest and served food. She also urged him to wait till Rama and Lakshmana returned from the hunting expedition with variety of fruits and meat of ruru (black buck), goha (big lizard) and varaha (pig) etc. for appropriate hospitality worthy of sages. Disclosing his true identity to Sita, Ravana revealed his intension and abducted her (Aranyakaanda, Sarga 17-19, 31-36, 45-49). He kept her in the Ashok Vatika under the care of maids and asked her to make up her mind about his proposal. Rama and Lakshmana then started search for Sita. They came across Sugriva and Hanumana, two leading personages of the Vanara (monkey) race and formed friendship with them. With their help Sita was located and rescued after defeating Ravana in a big battle in Lanka. Rama's army comprised of trillions and trillions (asankhya or numbers beyond human counting) of monkeys, bears and chimpanzees/gorillas under their various mighty

(Contd. on next page)

The Valmikiya Ramayana – Bird's Eye View

(Continue from page 8)

leaders. The population of Rakshasas (Demons) of Ravana's Lanka ran into more than 10 kharabs or a trillion (Kishkindha kaand, sarga 35-39). Ravana's brother Vibheeshana switched over loyalty and Rama happily accepted him in his camp. Ravana was killed in a fierce battle causing floods of bloodshed on both the sides.

Rama arranged his last rites and attended the coronation of Vibheeshana before meeting Sita. Rama suspected Sita's character and refused to accept her back, and asked her to go anywhere. He declared that he had fought with Ravana for his honor and not to rescue her. He ultimately ordered her to pass through the fire to prove her purity and chastity. She came out unscathed from the fire but called Rama low and mean, and told him quite plainly that she would have committed suicide and saved him all this trouble had he conveyed the message through Hanumana when he first came that he had abandoned her on the ground that she was kidnapped (Yuddhakaanda, sarga 115, 116). By that time fourteen years had elapsed and they returned to Ayodhya. Rama became the king of Ayodhya and ruled for 11000 years (Yuddhakaanda, sarga, 128.95 and Uttarakaanda, sarga 104.12).

After coronation, the royal couple moved to royal pleasure resort named Ashokvanika. Rama spent half of his day in performing religious rites and duties, and the other half in the harem in the company of females and court jesters. His food, according to Valmiki, consisted of all kinds of delicious viands which included flesh, fruits and liquor. He drank himself copiously and made Sita also drink madhu (liquor or wine) the way Indra used to make his wife Shachi drink sudha or madhu. There were Apsaras, Naga girls and kinnaris to entertain the king Rama with their dancing and singing skills. There were other beautiful women brought from different parts to entertain Rama with their dance performance under the influence of intoxicating drinks. Rama sat in the midst of those drinking and dancing women and garlanded them being pleased with their performance. Sita conceived in the process (Uttarakaanda, Sarga 42, 43 and BAWS, Vol.4, pp. 327, 331). Seeing Sita in the family way some residents of evil disposition began to calumniate her suggesting that she must have conceived from Ravana while she was in Lanka and blaming Rama for taking such a woman back as his wife. This malicious gossip in the town was reported by Bhadra, the Court joker of Rama. Stung by this calumny and overwhelmed with a sense of disgrace, Rama ordered Laxmana to abandon Sita in the jungle without friends, without provision, without even her notice but with the knowledge of his brothers. When Lakshmana abandoned her in the jungle to die at the behest of Rama, Sita was shell shocked to learn that she was punished for none of her faults (Ut-

tarakaand, Sarga 43-48).

Having been abandoned and left to die in a jungle, Sita goes for shelter in the nearby Ashrama (hermitage) of sage Valmiki. The sage provides shelter and protection to her. There in course of time Sita gives birth to twin sons, called Kusha and Lava. Valmiki brings up the boys and teaches them to sing the Ramayana which he had composed. The boys lived in the Ashrama of Valmiki not far from Ayodhya where Rama continued to rule. Never once during those 12 years Rama cared to inquire what had happened to Sita whether she was living or was dead. After twelve years Rama meets Sita in a strange manner. He decides to perform a Yajna and issues invitation to all the Rishis to attend and take part in the Yajna. But no invitation is extended to Valmiki although his Ashrama was near to Ayodhya. Accompanied by Kusha and Lava, Valmiki goes to the Yajna place of his own accord and introduces the twins as his disciples.

While the Yajna was going on, the two boys performed recitations of Ramayana in the presence of the Assembly. Rama was very pleased with their performance. It is only when he makes enquiries about them that he comes to know that they were sons of Sita and that what he had done to her. He sends a message to Valmiki that if Sita was pure and chaste she could present herself in the Assembly to prove it thereby remove the calumny cast against herself and himself. Valmiki brings her to the Assembly of all the prominent gods, vasus, sages and people of all varnas, extremely powerful demons and vanaras, serpents and eagles etc. who came from far off places. Valmiki declares there that being 10th son of Pracheta (Varuna) he never tells lies, and that Sita was chaste and worshipped her husband as a God, and Kusha and Lava were Sita's twin sons. Notwithstanding Valmiki's testimony, Rama asks Sita to prove her chastity in the public so as to dispel all doubts about her character. With eyes cast down on the ground and with hands folded Sita swears "As I never thought of any man except Rama even in my mind; I always loved Rama in words, thoughts and deeds, let mother earth open and bury me".

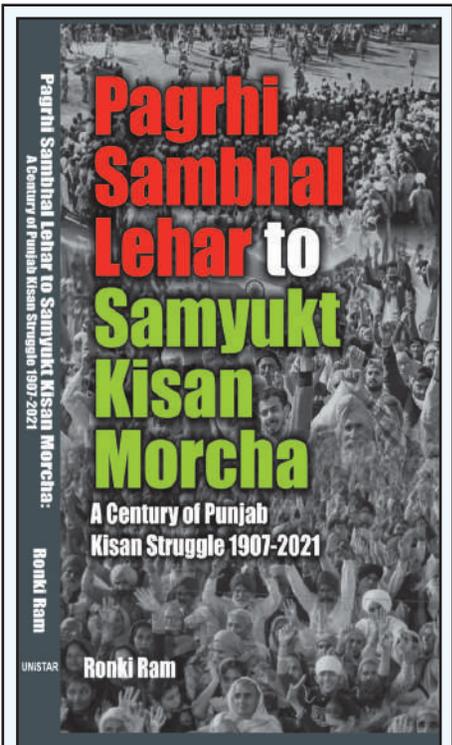
Instantly a divine-jewel studied divine throne resting on the hoods of serpents appears from the earth and carries Sita to the nether world of death. Thus, she preferred to die than to go back to Rama. This way the life journey of about forty four years of Sita comes to a tragic end. Such is the tragedy of Sita and the crime of Rama the God. (Uttarakaanda, sarga 49, 66, 93-97 and BAWS, Vol. 4, pp.330, 331)

After the death of Sita, Rama lived with his sons. He did not remarry. He would use Sita's image made of gold in a Yajna where wife was required to be present. Rama performed Yajnas for ten thousand years and gave countless gold mudras – coins in Dakshina (gift or fee) to Brah-

mins. His mothers Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra left the mortal world long time thereafter (Uttarakaanda, sarga, 99).

The story of end of Rama and his brothers is dramatically tragic. It has been lucidly narrated by Valmiki in Uttarakaanda from sarga 103 to 110. The story goes that the death-god approaches Rama for a dialogue on the condition that if anyone heard or saw them talk he/she would be liable to be killed by Rama. Rama places Lakshmana at the entrance gate with strict instructions not to allow anyone to hear or see them talk and that if some happened to violate the condition he/she would be killed by him. The death-god conveys the message of Lord Brahma that Rama, incarnation of Lord Vishnu, had fixed the period of 11,000 human years to live in the mortal world and that period had since elapsed and the purpose of his mortal life accomplished. He, therefore, should leave the mortal world and assume his original form if he wished. In the meantime, sage Durvasa comes to see Rama urgently and declares to Lakshmana at the gate that if he was not allowed to see Rama instantly, he would destroy Rama's entire family by his curse. Lakshmana prefers to save the family and conveys the message of the sage to Rama while he was still in conversation with the death-god. The condition of dialogue having been broken by Lakshmana, the death god leaves Rama. After consulting his ministers and advisers, instead of killing Lakshmana, Rama disowns him which was equal to his death. Lakshmana goes to the bank of river Saryu, holds his breath and stops breathing. Rama conveys to his two brothers and other family members his wish to leave the mortal world. They coronate their sons (all the four brothers had two sons each) and join Rama to leave the mortal world. All the people of Ayodhya, vanaras, bears, demons and birds also join Rama in his pursuit. Hanumana, Vibheeshana, Jambvana, Mainda and Dwivida are ordered by Rama to stay back till the onset of Kaliyuga. Rama along with his brothers, people of Ayodhya, vanaras, bears, chimpanzees, demons and birds who were produced by various gods and sages, immerse themselves in the waters of Saryu and leave the mortal world. The God Rama, thus, dies along with his brothers, people of Ayodhya and vanaras etc. They all board crores of the divine airplanes provided by Brahma, and take flight to the heavens. Thus concludes the great epic Ramayana! The readers may draw their own conclusions.

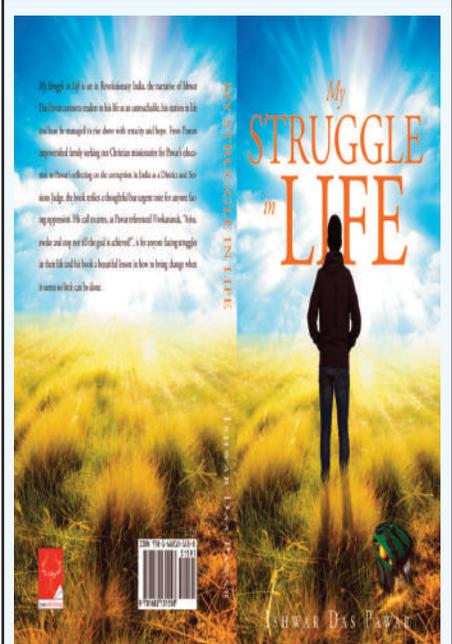
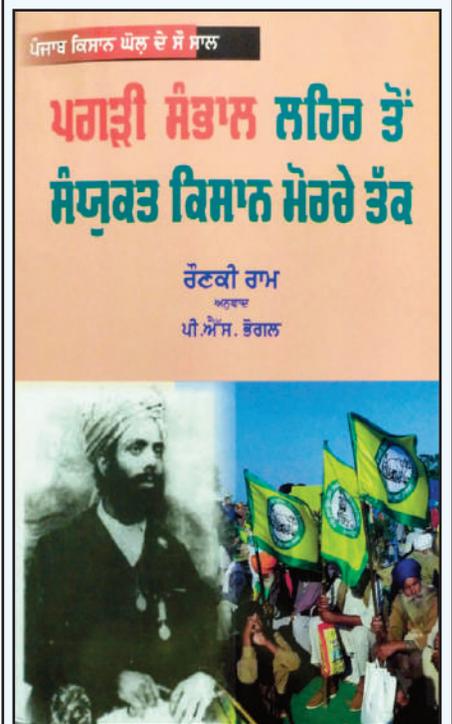
It is just a bird's eye view of the epic which comprises of 24,000 hymns with large number of episodes. The curious may like to read the Valmikiya Ramayana themselves to have complete picture of the epic story. Many questions may arise in the mind of readers about the story, which call for an answer. Such questions will be shared soon with the readers who may find the answer themselves.



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The Question of Identity among Sikhs: Daya Singh Arif's Sikhi

Introduction

The rise of the Sikh religion in the sixteenth century Punjab was a radical social movement, challenging the age-old hierarchical social structures engineered by the brahmanical ideology in the Indian subcontinent. Several important landmarks in the evolution of the Sikh religion raised the question of identity. The question of identity has assumed different dimensions over a period of time but it has never been free of contentions. 'Who is a Sikh?' has been an unresolved question in the history of Sikh religion; several institutional attempts in the past hundred years notwithstanding. Differences of caste, class and gender continue posing serious challenge to the religious ideology. Sikh pluralism stands juxtaposed to the exclusivist Tat Khalsa identity. The conflict between institutionally authorized definitions and democratic self-perceptions on the question of religious identity continue to engage the vibrant living religion of the modern times. I try to raise this complex question of identity through the life of an eminent Dalit poet Sadhu Daya Singh Arif who lived in the first half of the twentieth century. The first part of this article looks into the early life of Sadhu Daya Singh Arif, his quest for knowledge, attainment of mystic height of brahmgyani as an ascetic. The second part deals with his poetic vision while the third part critically looks at his Sikhi. The last part analyses his erasure from the pages of history in his historiographical practice.

Sadhu Daya Singh Arif: Early life, education and orientation

Sadhu Daya Singh Arif was born as Deva Singh to Ram Deyee and Santa Singh on 26 December 1894 in Jalalabad Poorbi, a village in the Ferozepur district. His grandfather Bhoopa Singh, had migrated from his ancestral village Khaja Khadak to his sister's village in 1875. Quite contrary to the material as well as cultural condition of his Dalit family, Deva Singh as a child learnt Gurmukhi letters from the granthi at his village gurdwara; getting formal school education for Dalit children was very difficult in those days. Deva Singh's inquisitive attitude led him to seek knowledge from the gurdwaras/deras/ashrams, individual teachers like granthis, sadhus, maulvis, and even revenue officials. Constant rebukes and occasional physical punishments by his father failed to dissuade Deva Singh from his passion and turned him into a recluse. For reading and understanding the entire Guru Granth Sahib, he started visiting Baba Hari Singh, a senior granthi at the gurdwara in the adjacent village Cheema which was about four kilometers from his village. This step was largely influenced by Baba Hari Singh who also belonged to the Mazhabi (untouchable Sikh) caste. Beginning his knowledge about the Gulabdasi sect from a blind sadhu at Khaja Khadak village, he approached the renowned Gulabdasi proponent of the area, Saen Sewa Singh for full in-

structions and spent several months at his Dera in Dharamkot.

While studying the Sikh scriptures, Daya Singh's appetite to learn about other religions increased several folds in a short time. The predominantly Muslim social surroundings attracted his curious mind to the world of Islam. As a result, he learnt Urdu from a local teacher Maulvi Muhammad Ibrahim in his village madrasa. He did not face any major problem with learning Persian language from Sunder Singh Patwari, Munshi Ram Khatri and Qanungo



Mian Nazuruddin. His Arabic teacher Maulvi Ali Ahmad Khan, however, was punished by the local Manjharput Muslim brotherhood and was sacked from the mosque for teaching an untouchable. For studying the Quran and Islam, Daya Singh approached the local Sufi Shadi Khan, a sound scholar of Islamic studies who had his own religious establishment (takia) amidst an orchard. Shadi Khan taught him with unreserved attention; the result was that Daya Singh emerged as a sound scholar of Arabic, Persian and the Quran. This is reflected in his poetry where several ayets (verses) from the Quran and wide references from Islamic traditions appear abundantly. Baba Sawan Das Bairagi of the nearby town Dharamkot readily taught him Sanskrit. He then learnt Vedanta from Baba Prabhati Das, the younger brother of Sawan Das who had studied Vedas at Kashi for ten years. Daya Singh possessed to his credit the laudable traits of dedication, devotion, diligence and service and his social background became irrelevant. As a result, he can be seen as an outstanding exception in getting educated by the upper caste teachers.

Thus, Sadhu Daya Singh acquired all his education during his teens. He had become hafiz and would complete reading the Quran in one day. After studying religions, he started reading the secular literature

of Punjab especially the qissas. He devoured Kishan Singh Arif's Hir, Puran Bhagat of Pandit Maan Singh Kalidas of Gujranwala, Yusuf Zuleikha by Maulvi Abdul Sattar and Daulat Ram's Roop Basant. According to the testimony of his son Kultar Singh and his favourite disciple Bhai Rala Singh, the legends of Puran Bhagat and Yusuf-Zuleikha greatly inspired him to write poetry and this is how he preferred the Punjabi poetic genre of qissa.

II. Poetic Vision of Daya Singh Arif:

Long spells of solitude in left

Daya Singh ample time for reading and contemplation, but this also led him to a state of mental disturbance that ultimately erupted in profound poetry. His first poetical work Fanaa-dar-Makan (Doorstep to Destruction) was published by an Amritsar publisher Pandit Devi Dayal when he had just turned twenty years old. This was written in Sadh Bhasha and emphasized the quintessential element of mortality in the human existence. It is worth mentioning that this first composition appeared under his given name Deva Singh. Due to somewhat difficult language and style of composition he is said to have been advised by Baba Sawan Das, his Sanskrit teacher, to revise it and write in simple language. Full of creative energy rather than revising it, he altogether produced another qissa entitled Fanaa da Makan (House of Destruction), and got it published in the same year under his new name Sadhu Daya Singh. The prefix was adopted as he came to be popularly known as Sadhu in his locality. Within a short time, Fanaa da Makan became very popular throughout the Punjab.

The work that made Daya Singh popular throughout Punjab happened to be Zindagi Bilas (Discourse on Life), completed on 23rd August 1916. It is in this work where his vast religious, spiritual and secular knowledge is amply manifest. Taking the average human life of 100 years as per the ancient wisdom, Daya Singh composed lyrical poems about each year of human life. The impermanence of human existence is reemphasized to impress upon the reader's mind the importance of good deeds and moral conduct. Overall, Bilas is a touching didactic poetry that caught the imagination of Punjabi masses. In a few years time it became the most read and heard poetic creation next to Varis Shah's much celebrated Hir. On a conservative estimation, over 500,000 copies had been sold by publishers in six decades. The impact of Daya Singh's poetry could be seen not only on the commoners listening to all kinds of readers and singers, but also on the educated creative writers. In this case the testimony of a cele-

brated Punjabi litterateur Nanak Singh is very instructive. In his letter of 17th Dec 1967 written at Preet Nagar, Nanak Singh re-

As much as I was a child to Sadhu

Daya Singh in age, being 18-19 years, my work 'Satgur Mahima' looked very small against his very big granths.... Perhaps it was 1918-19 when I first came to Amritsar from Peshawar. While daily going to Darbar Sahib, I used to witness huge gatherings near Guru kaBagh. One blind singer clad in saffron robe used to render Sadhu Daya Singh's Zindagi Bilas in very melodious and touching voice. The entire granth was in his memory. Sometimes the number of listeners would reach the critical number to jam the traffic. For one, I was soaked in vairag those days and to top that, the poetry of Zindagi Bilas used to captivate me. The result was that sometimes I would forget going to Darbar Sahib.

Due to his increasing popularity, Daya Singh added his penname 'Arif' in his next major poetic work Suttar Bilas (Discourses for the Son), published in 1922. Written in the same genre, this is also a didactic work of great aesthetic value.

Sadhu Daya Singh succeeds in reinforcing the moral thrust of the medieval spiritual saints in a fast changing objective reality, when there was a rise in the acquisitive tendencies irrespective of the means adopted. His poetry is full of spiritual knowledge found in Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and in the works of Sufi poets and Bhagats. He talks of the unity of human soul with God and throws light on its philosophical dimension. His poetry effortlessly emphasizes the element of mortality; the reader is constantly reminded of the greatest truth—death. Good deeds and moral conduct are persistently impressed upon the reader's mind through all his poetry. He uses his poetic talent for character-building and cleansing of the inner self via spiritual regeneration. Among moral issues, he lays high premium on the ideal of 'truth', which can be seen in his advice to his son in Suttar Bilas. Daya Singh considered alcoholism, gambling and prostituting as the main reasons for moral degradation. In this connection he also speaks loudly against thievery. He stresses the importance of practice against precepts of meditative thought against empty knowledge; of practicing what one preaches. This is present in all his works. Daya Singh is disturbed at the prevailing communal division in the society and like all bhagats, sants and sufis advocates harmony and peace

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Dr. Raj Kumar Hans

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among diverse communities. He holds Brahminical ritualism and associated ideas with the same contempt as did bhagats and Sufis.

The importance of Sadhu Daya Singh as a poet is manifold. First and foremost, he is the first Dalit Punjabi poet to attain the widest possible popularity in the print age, the kind of popularity enjoyed by Varis Shah since late eighteenth century. Secondly, he gives the qissa genre a freshness in the subject matter. Until then, the qissas were woven around outstanding legendary heroes and heroines whether they were ashiqs (lovers), bhagats or brigands. He moves from the particular to general, the quintessential human life. Thirdly, he reinforces what was moral and ethical when it was desired most. Objectively speaking, two centuries of political swings after 1700, there had been depletion of this force in the Punjabi society. Casteism especially untouchability that had substantially weakened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became very strong. Daya Singh's stress on the moral force in this respect was in continuity with the reform movements of Punjab in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Fourthly, Daya Singh's poetry is free from any kind of sectarianism and is thoroughly secular in the prevailing communal environment.

III. Daya Singh's Sikhi

Daya Singh was born in a Sikh family; his informal education in the five different languages was in the traditional Indian pedagogical methods at the hands of individual teachers with religious orientation. He was open to learn and receive knowledge from all available sources to him including non-religious intellectuals belonging to Gulabdasi tradition. Hence, he appears to have intellectually grown with universal and humanistic values and ideals. This is manifest in his poetry that he had composed and published till he turned 27. Thereafter, one sees his definite turn towards Sikhi, the family faith and inheritance. This is reflected in one of his unpublished composition, where he elevates Sikh doctrine as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib to a supreme position on a comparative scale:

Studied all the Vedas and Puranas, not the end of world's scriptures.

Immersed in Smriti I read countless Shastras, read and sung poems of poets many.

Bani rendered by Nanak Nirankari, poetry of poetry, it praises the Lord.

Neither seen nor to be seen Daya Singh, ecumenical is the message of Shri Guru Granth.

Devoured many tomes including Manusmriti that codifies the highs and lows.

Society divided into four varnas, flouted are Creator's commands. Bhagwat Garud brings duality, corrupted get the thinking saints.

Neither seen nor to be seen Daya Singh, ecumenical is the mes-

sage of Shri Guru Granth.

Daya Singh gave up the ascetic life and settled down to a married life in 1918. After the publication of the last of his major poetic work *Sputtar Bilas* (1922) addressed to Kultar Singh, eldest of his six sons and two daughters, he turned to composing poetic material for the Sikh traditions, legends and anecdotes, which he would render as a kavishar in a Dhadi Jatha (band of singers) that he had formed for living. This seems to be his best choice; given his poetic talent and vast knowledge of history and mythology, especially of the Sikh religion that he had painstakingly acquired. He excelled in the art of composing and singing at religious and other popular festivals. He also used to serve as a 'granthi' for 'akhand paths.' And somewhere in this transition he had become an amritdhari, a baptised Sikh. Travelling across Punjab with his band earned him so much popularity that he got invited in 1928 by the Sikhs that settled on the western coast of Malaya. Daya Singh was accompanied by his friend Bhai Genda Singh who served as a granthi in Malaya. Daya Singh had taken numerous books on Sikh history and religion with him that he used for gurnat parchar (spreading the message of the Gurus) in different parts of South East Asia wherever he was invited. He was highly respected and was adequately rewarded by the Sikh congregations.

After coming back to Punjab, probably elated in his role as a Sikh missionary in Malaya, Daya Singh committed himself to the mission within Punjab. He constructed a gurdwara in the Mazhabi quarter of his village. Constantly moving, his Dhadi Jatha had traversed almost all parts of the undivided Punjab. Occasionally his minstrel group travelled and performed in Calcutta, Assam, Gwalior, Mathura and other places. As an amritdhari Sikh, he was always seen wearing white robes. Daya Singh's poetic compositions in the second half of his life were mainly about Sikh history and legends to cater to the needs of his vocational band of the Sikh troubadours. Numerous unpublished works known as prasangs from the Sikh history were composed in the 1930s. However, some of the prasangs were also published in the tract format by Budh Singh Press, Amritsar. These include *Guru Nanak Nazara* (Spectacle of Guru Nanak), *Shaheedi Nazara* (Spectacle of Martyrdom), *Masseya da Ashnaan* (Bath on the Dark Moon) and *Zamane da Haal* (Condition of the World).

His early poetic works had very few Sikh references, but coming from a Sikh family and having started his education in Guru Granth Sahib, Daya Singh had a clear perception of the identity of Sikhs. The poetic discourse on the 60th year of human life in *Zindagi Bilas* is all about Sikh identity. To him the true Sikh is the one who follows the Sikhi of the Gurus; who sacrifices one's life like Sahibzade (allusion to the martyred sons of Guru Gobind Singh); who is

as fearless as Jeevan Singh (Bhai Jaita); who offers his head in sacrifice silently; who follows the example of the Five Beloved; who suffers for the sake of religion; who submits to the Guru with all humility and who does not look behind when fighting for the religious cause. To him to be a Sikh is a long patient journey, not merely posing and pretending to be a Sikh.

The prevailing atmosphere of religious politics in the 1930s is very important to understand Daya Singh's full turn to Sikhi. The Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj movements had apparently little effect in his early growth as a spiritual seeker. As an ascetic he remained unaffected by the broad national movement either led by the Indian National Congress or by burgeoning leftists in the Punjab. But the Punjab specific religious movements of 1920s—Gurdwara Reform Movement of the Akali Sikhs and Ad Dharm Movement of Punjabi Dalits—seem to have exercised some impact on his deeply religious personality. Meanwhile, the intervention of Dr B. R. Ambedkar in the political and cultural life had its reverberations in the Punjab. His move for separate electorate for the 'untouchables' in the 1930s created some ripples in the electoral politics. At the time of elections to the provincial assemblies in 1937, the untouchables were to be enlisted separately in the voters lists. Daya Singh along with other Mazhabi leaders strongly opposed this separation, saying they were Sikhs and there was no 'caste' system in the Sikh religion. By then Daya Singh was a confirmed Sikh. Even though he was acutely aware of the prevalence of caste among Sikhs, he was ready to overlook this while taking cognizance only of the theological view of Sikh religion.

An interesting facet of Daya Singh's Sikhi is that despite him becoming an amritdhari Sikh, a granthi, a kavishar and having constructed a gurdwara of his own, he was not an orthodox Sikh, not a nitnemi. His childhood orientation towards Sufi mysticism remained intact throughout his life. He used to be lost in a prayer during his solitude. His son Baldev Singh offered a long prayer to Surjit Chander Sharma, who completed his doctoral dissertation on Daya Singh. The prayer opens with these lines:

Bismillah Rehman Rahim, ghat me Surasti jeebha mein taalim
Sar par punj peer peshvan ka, saabat rahe yakeen
Chalton zaban kya hai, imaan mera Quran asto, gulistan zaban asto
Bismilla ke maane dena, bismilla jo parhi hai, aval-e-pak Rasul

If Surasti (Punjabi for Saraswati) is taken out from the above composition, the prayer seems to be of a devout Muslim. In the entire prayer there is no allusion to other mythological or historical images either from the Hindu or Sikh tradition. The researchers of Daya Singh, namely, Atam Singh Hamrahi and Surjit Chander Sharma, had no personal reason to overstate their subject's ori-

entation in Sufi maarfat (journey towards knowing God). Likewise, the sons of Daya Singh professed Sikh religion had no particular reason to suppress the catholicity of their father as far as his personal religious orientation was concerned. There seems to be a contradiction in Daya Singh's approach to religion. But if one doesn't accept the usual binaries, seeing individuals in constructed identities, there is no ambivalence in his approach to life. One can be a Sikh with deep faith and still be catholic to other religious traditions. Daya Singh shows a spiritual orientation towards religion. He does not reject alternative ways to connect with the divine as he performs his social obligations as a devout Sikh.

IV: Historiographical Neglect

Daya Singh Arif died on 6th August 1946. I could not find any mention of his death in contemporary literary circles and magazines. The country was passing through the last phase towards freedom from the foreign rule and it is just possible the print media and the litterateurs were absorbed by conflicting strands of politics. It is also possible that the poet being resident of a village, away from the urban highways and junctions, the news would not have reached the right quarters in time. What is more astonishing is the refusal by the historians of Punjabi literature to recognize this great poet of the twentieth century.

The first path-breaking *A History of Punjabi Literature* by Mohan Singh Dewana appeared in 1932. Daya Singh Arif was Dewana's contemporary and by the time the latter wrote his history the former had already made his mark as one of the most popular poets of his times. It is unlikely that Dewana would be ignorant of Arif's work. He does not mention his name even in the chart he included in his book, mentioning several minor poets, his contemporaries. One can give him a benefit of doubt in his first edition. But omitting Arif in the second edition of his history in 1956 is not easy to understand. Dr Dewana was a pioneer, the trend-setter in the historiography of Punjabi literature. If he included or excluded someone in/from the history, his successors would not do otherwise. This is remarkable for the culture of history writing in Punjab.

After a decade of Dewana's history of Punjabi literature, Gopal Singh came up with *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas* in 1942. Surinder Singh produced the same title in 1950 and Piara Singh Bhogal wrote *Punjabi Kavita de Sau Saal* in 1955. Heera Singh Dard published his history under the title *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas* in 1956 while Jeet Singh Seetal produced *Punjabi Sahit da Alochnatmak Itihas* in 1979. This is to count only the major ones. Most of them followed Dewana with no mention of Daya Singh in their histories. It was in 1971 that Kirpal Singh Kasel in the second volume of his *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas* devoted three lines to Sadhu

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Daya Singh. The historian admits that Daya Singh wrote so well that he had been very popular among common people. But even in these three lines Kasel errs on the titles of both the works that he cites. He writes Zindagi Bilas as Zindagi Vilas, a minor error, and Fanah da Makan as Fanah da Muqam.

Diwana's exclusion is carried through decades to an authoritative work of historiography of Punjabi literature produced by Sahitya Akademi, Delhi in 1992. Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal like Dewana, do not mention Daya Singh even as a minor poet in their A History of Punjabi Literature. Although in the interregnum, a well-researched monograph on the poet had appeared in two prints (Hamrahi, 1990, first published in 1970). Sant Singh Sekhon, a towering Marxist figure of Punjabi literature, had turned towards writing history of Punjabi literature. Sekhon in his second volume of A History of Punjabi Literature (1996) shows no less generosity than Kasel had done in 1971. He just picks up from Kasel

without correcting the errors. There is a gap of nearly 60 years between Dewana's and Sekhon's histories. Much water had flown in the river of Punjabi literature in between. But the treatment meted out to Daya Singh in neglecting him seems to have been cemented by successive historians. Some Punjabi generosity is visible in Rajinder Pal Singh's Adhunik Punjabi Kavita da Itihas (2006) that constitutes the eighth volume in the 'series of History of Punjabi Literature' published by Punjabi Sahit Akadmi, Delhi. He gives eight lines of information on Daya Singh. This in short, is the history of 'coverage' of Daya Singh Arif's works in the 80 years of historiography of Punjabi literature. Indeed, it is a history of selective 'silence', of neglect and above all exclusion. Being born a Dalit was a sufficient reason to be excluded from the charmed circles of high-caste writers.

Conclusion:

What 'kind of Sikh' do we find in Sadhu Daya Singh Arif? He was born in an ordinary labouring Mazhabi Sikh family which was considered 'untouchable' by the upper-

caste Sikhs. He had his first education in Gurmukhi, that too of Guru Granth Sahib, at the hands of granthis. Having definite imprints of Sikhi on his childhood mind, Daya Singh moved in different quarters to seek knowledge of other religions. It is understandable that with his vast readings and knowledge of religious, spiritual and social life he had transcended narrow sectarian ways of looking at the world, which is clear from his impressive poetic expressions. But does that mean he had ceased to be a Sikh?

After his celebrated work Zindagi Bilas was released, Daya Singh got married to a Sikh woman and gave all his children Sikh names. From an early ascetic life he turned to a domestic family life in the true Sikh tradition; he became a granthi, paathi, kavishar, a Sikh missionary spreading the message of Sikhi. Moreover, quite contrary to his disposition he also assumed a role of a Sikh activist opposing a political move to count the Mazhabi Sikhs as untouchable caste, forcefully asserting that there was no caste among

Sikhs. Perhaps this is the only suppression of social truth one could see coming from Daya Singh, a great advocate of ethics, morality and truth. It shows his firm faith in the Sikh doctrine while overlooking the social practice of 'caste' and 'untouchability' in the Sikh world.

Looking at the colourful shades of Daya Singh's persona with his catholic outlook as a Sikh, can he be denied his own identification with Sikh religion? He did not bother about what others or even other Sikhs thought of him. The open world, democratic choices, constitutional protections and diasporic conditions pose modern challenges to the 'traditional' frames in which the identity question assumes a central importance. Sikh religion is a young living religion with complex interplay of faith, history and memory. With its fast expanding educated following worldwide, the religion needs re-imagination for its own viable sustenance. Daya Singh's pluralistic approach to Sikhi becomes a best antidote to its threats, both from within and without.



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