

UNHEARD VOICES

14 AUGUST 2023 | Year 3 | Vol. 5



**India :
Marching
Ahead**



NEW AWAKENING ON CRUCIAL ISSUE

A significant sign of new awakening is seen in India. Taking a break from established narrative, few people are seen addressing the issues, pertaining to Scheduled Caste people, with a more realistic and sensible approach. Suraj Yendge and Dilip Mandal have recently expressed their views on extension of reservation to converted people, who previously belonged to Scheduled Castes. Both Yendge and Mandal are vocal on the issues of depressed classes and their opinions certainly have value. Yendge and Mandal have expressed strong resentment against extension of reservation to converted SCs.

Yendge has suggested that India has national consensus on having reservation only to those communities, which were affected by caste discrimination and untouchability. He points out that followers of two Abrahamic religions never pressed for reservation as they do not want to associate themselves with Scheduled Caste people. He has even raised the question why followers of Abrahamic religions want reservation without giving up their religious identity. He has aptly viewed that extensions of reservation to converts would create a new identity in India and would encourage further division. He has questioned whether converted people will contest the election with their religious identity or SC status.

Dilip Mandal, in his article, has candidly confessed that he had earlier erred in supporting extension of reservation to converts. Mandal needs to be congratulated for showing rare intellectual honesty. Such probity is much needed in public life. Mandal has stated that SC list was never intended to be religion-neutral. Mandal has admitted that support to Rangnath Mishra Commission recommendations was also wrong. Mandal has even gone a step ahead by stating that two religions were more engaged in securing their religious, cultural and educational rights in the post-colonial period.

India needs such honest intellectual debate where intellectual untouchability has no space. Points raised by two scholars need to be addressed more

seriously as the issue has the potential to change the very fundamental character of India. Considering the current socio-political nature of the country and also past experiences, emergence of any new identity, particularly along the religious line, would result in complicated problems. Indians ought to check the intention behind the demand when minorities are already getting benefits of their 'minority status' in addition to inclusion in the OBC category. The issue is not merely restricted to encroachment on rights of Scheduled Caste people, but involves the ethos of India. Mandal has rightly questioned on maintaining religious identity and asking for SC benefits simultaneously. Many fear that demand for SC status for reservation to converts would eventually turn into separate political representation as demanded at the time of independence. Is it in the long-term interests of India? Advocates of extension of SC status take shelter under constitutional provision of religious equality to push their agenda. But as mentioned by Mandal the issue has to be understood and addressed with historical context. Any tampering with historical reference would result into further complicated situations. We must admit the fact that converts were never untouchables after change in their religion. Extension of SC status to converts would amount to interference in their religion. Is it acceptable to them? Are they ready to accept such interference in other religious or civil matters? Experience and history show otherwise. What is the moral standing for the new demand? It is for the precise reason that people look at the demand with great suspicion.

It is the time to raise above all narrow considerations and think about the country instead of short-term benefits. It is time to check certain elements, which take advantage of constitutional provisions for their own agenda instead of larger national interests. It is time for all right-thinking people to voice against the issue of reservation for converts. Yendge and Mandal have initiated the debate in the right direction. Such debate is necessary to awaken and educate the people.

For feedback please click the below link : <https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>

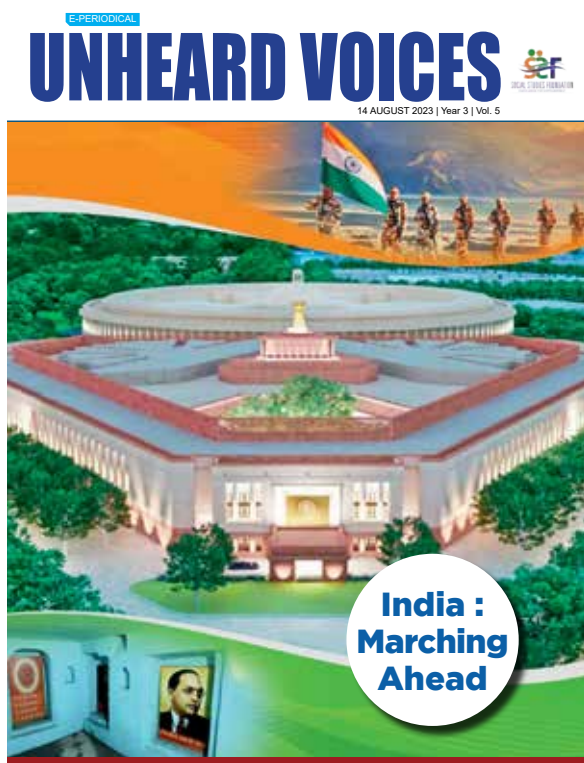
'Unheard Voices' monthly publication is owned by Social Studies Foundation, Printed and Published by Hari Sowani, Printed at Sanwad Trade Prints, Gowaikar Bldg, 595, Shaniwar Peth, Pune- 411030 and Published at 1196, Sadashiv Peth, Pune- 411030.

Editor : Vijendra Sonawane

Advisory Editorial Board : Dr. Aditi Narayani Paswan, Edward Mendhe, Prakash Raj

Disclaimer : The views expressed in the periodical are personal views of the author.

The editor & publisher may not agree to it.



CONTENTS

- 04** Spreading Social Message Through Bhajans!

- 09** Art used as a mode of expressing sentiments

- 11** Journey of Indian democracy

- 13** Backward class leadership at threshold

- 16** Mukta Salve : The revolutionary who is relevant even today

- 18** Enabling the youth for employment and Equality

- 20** Umaji Raje Naik's struggle after fall of Maratha empire

- 22** Unsung women freedom fighters

- 26** Ahilyadevi allowed widows to adopt children

Appeal for financial assistance



Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

"UNHEARD VOICES" is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly. Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

CIT EXEMPTION, PUNE/80G/2020-21/A/10158

Please contact : 9699644930, (020)29526979
or mail us to : uv@unheardvoices.co.in

For feedback please click the below link :
<https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7>



Spreading Social Message Through Bhajans!



Hemant Chauhan, a very popular folk singer from Gujarat, who has been awarded Padma Shri for his achievements, has been trying to spread social awareness through recitals of Bhajans. In this interview, he explains how Bhajans effectively spread awareness among the masses about ancient Indian philosophy besides helping curb social evils like dowry and addictions. Interaction finds that Chauhan is not merely a folk singer but also a scholar of Bhakti movement and Indian philosophy. Read on.

UV: - You have performed many programs in Gujarat, across India and even foreign countries too. What was the strength that folk music is a specialty of Indian music? Also tell us about your childhood and family background.

Hemant Chauhan: - I was born in Kundani village in Jasdan Tehsil of Rajkot District. It is a small village with about 100 houses. I was born there in 1955. Bhajan recitals were a part of the culture of my family. My grandfather, my father, my uncle, my grandmother, my mother, all of them sang Bhajans. Then the media was not available easily and the atmosphere was also different. Therefore, they could not reach out to a large number of people. But they taught me a lot. I sang Bhajan for the first time when I went to attend school to pursue my studies. My grandfather was a knowledgeable man. He was able to talk about art for hours. His personality was also impressive. He lived for 107-108 years. He would take me wherever good programs were organized, and explain to me the meaning of difficult Chhand (quatrains), folk art has very difficult Chhand which are difficult even to pronounce, and how to present it. Then I went to Rajkot and stayed in a hostel. Gandhian philosophy and good values were imbibed on me there. I studied classical music at the Sangeet Natak Academy for three to four

years during that period. The music teachers there were brilliant. They found out that I did not possess the qualities required for classical music and decided to teach me folk music. There I learnt a bit. Then came the Radio Station. I passed the scrutiny for performance on the Radio Station and started performing on radio. Ten years after that, I started performing on television. When Doordarshan was launched, the medium was new. Not many channels existed. Doordarshan was the only channel. Later on, the era of cassettes arrived. Thus, I worked hard and learnt from Sadhus, Sants, knowledgeable and talented people. I aspired to present the art as it was from my perspective. Since I was used to reciting folk music, I chose to perform folk music. Folk music is the music of people. It has made its place in the hearts of people. Therefore, when we recite folk music, people accept it immediately and get connected to it. Therefore, I studied the works of Kabir Saheb, Rohidasji, Bhan Saheb, Trikam Saheb, Morar Saheb, Ravi Saheb, Ganga Sati, Lakhalan, Jesaltoraldasji, Saurashtra has at least 50-100 saints of its own. I went and met Sants, knowledgeable people, elderly people, Bhajan singers to understand the proper composition and meaning of Bhajans. After understanding the meaning of Bhajans, I chose simple Bhajans which conveyed a



message to the world. People liked it immensely because Kabir Saheb's philosophy is too hard for common people to understand and I had chosen the easy-to-understand Bhajans, which conveyed a message for people from all works.

UV: - You said folk music is close to the hearts of people. Please elaborate on this. Secondly, you have studied works of many Saints. What are the criteria you apply while choosing Bhajans to recite? It has two aspects, firstly the social message and secondly the musical aspect of the Bhajan.

Hemant Chauhan: - Classical music is singer specific. Classical music gives prominence to the singer's preparedness, his Riyaz, his Gaayaki. Folk music gives importance to not only singing but also the lyrics. We would not use Raaga, Aalap and Taan of Classical music while signing the works of Sants. We ensure that the message reaches to the core of the audience. Recital of bhajans of Kabir, Rohidas or Meera comes from within. You rely on your inner self and decide that this Bhajan conveys a good message, so it would appeal to the audience. We got lyrics composed on ills of social evils like addictions, trafficking of women, and dowry for marrying. In one of the Bhajans, a daughter expresses her sad feelings to her parents saying you have got me married and sending me away, but instead of enjoying the pleasures of married life, now I will have to work hard because they have paid money for marrying me. This Bhajan spreads a message against the evil custom of selling daughters by accepting dowry and getting her married. Such evil customs, addiction to liquor and cigarettes etc. have plagued Saurashtra for years. We opposed them through Bhajans. We

got heart touching works penned by a poet namely Apabhai to spread the message against selling of daughters, addiction, social ills, corruption etc. and spreading thoughts of social reform in appropriate tone, manner and words. If you condemn a person for alcoholism, he would be more drawn towards alcohol. However, if you draw the addict's attention towards the plight of his family, he would take it to his heart and quit drinking. We sang such Bhajans. We used Bhajans to promote religiousness among people. Today, when western culture is polluting the atmosphere, people are getting drawn towards dance music and pubs instead of Bhajans of Narsi Mehta, Kabir Saheb, Meerabai. People ask me to what extent my efforts could be successful? I don't know if we are going to be successful, but it is our duty to make efforts as God has granted life to us. Western culture will ruin us. We need to protect ourselves and achieve social progress. The government has not awarded Padma Shri to me just for singing. It is for the impact we have been trying to make, the feelings we spread, our efforts for building the nation. All singers must have such commitment. We have been blessed by Mata Sarasvati. What would have been our worth had we not been good at singing? We should utilize this ability for social good.

UV: - You talked about religiousness and said problems are arising because religiousness is getting weakened. What are your opinions on religiousness and on whether the social evils would be curbed by promoting religiousness?

Hemant Chauhan: - We have not seen the Sants in person. We have only read about them in books. Going by their thoughts described in the books, one





can imagine their concern about the conditions that prevailed some 500-600 years ago. They have not only attacked the social ills, but also sounded alert for us and urged through their works that we are fortunate to be born as human beings and we must spend our life worshipping the god. Such is the message in the Bhajans of Kabir Saheb and other Sants of Saurashtra, who composed Bhajans on the lines of Kabir Saheb but in languages other than Hindi. If thoughts of Kabir Saheb are eliminated from the creations of the Sants, nothing will be left in it. This is the essence of the tradition of Sants of Saurashtra. Saurashtra has followed various schools of thought like Nirad, Radha swami, Nijar which means abstinence from all ills and which was propagated by Baba Ramdeo. The Nijar school of thoughts propagates dos and don'ts relating to social conduct, religion, health, making achievements, building character etc. through Bhajans. People listen to such Bhajans. In a Bhajan, Ramdeoji Baba advises his disciple Harji Bhati that lust gives rise to ills. Lust can ruin the entire life of a man. Therefore, one must destroy

We accept the authority of Sants in folk music because initially they were ignorant but found knowledge within. There was Sant Dasi Jivan, who prefixed the title Dasi before his name though he was a man. He did not read or write anything. But he met his guru Bheem and attained knowledge overnight. He did not read or write.

the feeling of lust. Follow your religion. Evil deeds would ruin your life. Therefore, one should focus on reclusion (Vairagya). Gurudas has also written a Bhajan propagating Vairagya where he says you face many hurdles in attaining Vairagya. Gold and bodily pleasures are the biggest obstacles in one's search for God. One who succeeds in overcoming them becomes a Sant. Once Dharmadas, a rich disciple of Kabir Saheb, approached Kabir Saheb with a request to accept him as a disciple. Kabir Saheb asked him to get rid of his wealth by distributing it and devote his mind to the Guru. If one leaves nothing for himself, Sadguru will take care of him. Dharamdas disposed of his estate worth crores of rupees by distributing it to people. There is a Bhajan on this. There is another Bhajans propagating dedication that says even if I peel off my own skin, colour it golden and make a pair of shoes out of it for my Guru, I would still be under debt to my Guru. Thus, the religious tradition gives rise to the feeling of dedication, sympathy, equality, and respect for all and protects one from ills. The message in Vedas, Shastras, Puranas was restricted to a specific class of elite people,

who knew Sanskrit. When the same message was translated in common language, it got spread to the masses. The message of Shastras, Puranas, Vedas was translated in common man's language through Bhajans. The Sants described their personal spiritual experiences in Bhajans. The Vedas describe the God as out of the world, unattached, devoid of quality and form. Sants experienced it and explained it to the people. Kabir says how one can prove the existence of God when He exists if I believe in Him and not if I don't believe in Him. Narsi Mehta said there is only one God in the world. But Kabir Saheb says God is not countable. One can only experience his existence. Kabir Saheb uses Aham, Koham, Soham etc. five words for God. They are adjectives. God is one. Thus, God's experience can only be experienced. He is not visible to eyes, audible to ear. Kabir Saheb said the entire world is a form of God. I can see with my eyes that God is everywhere in the world. Some denounce worshipping idols saying God is formless. Sants say God is omnipresent and therefore it is in every particle of idol too. Now science has proved that the ratio of electrons and protons revolving in a particle is 1 to 14. So, they revolve a million times in a moment. Therefore, it is not static. Our eyes are static and our intellectual ability limited. God is present in every particle.

UV: - You said just now Sants are social reformers. They explained the philosophy of Vedas that was restricted to the elite class in the common man's language. Do you think simplification of the knowledge in Vedas and making it accessible to masses is capable of making an impact?

Hemant Chauhan: - Of course, there would be an impact of it. Only a limited elite class can understand Sanskrit and read Vedanta. Sanskrit was the commonly used language at that time. There were no local languages. Therefore, the Vedas were written in Sanskrit. What is in the language? It is only a medium. Seeking God, finding God is the fallout of Guru Parampara. Those who follow teachings of the Guru make progress. If I read a book on the history of America, I would think it might be true. But if an elderly person, whose son is in America visits America and narrates what he saw there to all, you may ask where did you stay in the USA to which he may say he does not know. He may not know the name of the street too. But in whom will you believe? You would believe in the one who has been there, not a student, who had read about it in a book. He has seen only the map but the one who has visited America has seen it all himself. Similarly, the works of Sants are backed by their own experiences. They are important because they have experienced it themselves and then told society about it. We accept the authority of Sants in folk music because initially they were ignorant but found knowledge within. There was Sant Dasi Jivan, who prefixed the title Dasi before his name though he was a man. He did not read or write anything. But he met his guru Bheem and attained



knowledge overnight. He did not read or write. But his Bhajans are full of the philosophy of Vedanta. While referring to the original nature of the God, a Bhajan says, God is father of all but son of nobody. One who is born as a son is not called God. Sant Dasi Jivan was born in a family belonging to the Chamar caste at Ghoghavadar near Gondal near Rajkot in Rajasthan 250 years ago. He prefixed Dasi to his name instead of Shri. The Sants were great authorities but some called themselves Dasi, Das or Raj which means a small particle. Works of Sants are not merely read by them or taught to them. They come from within as a result of their own experiences. The Sants did not withdraw themselves to isolation in caves after attaining knowledge. It may have benefited them but not the society. Sants remained attached to the society and spread messages. Sants like Rohidas Ji, Kabir Saheb, Dasi Jivan got married just like ordinary people and passed on the message of God to the masses. This tradition has continued in Saurashtra for the last 500 years. Works of Sant Tukaram, Sant Eknath, Guru Nanak is less known in this area. But Kabir Saheb is known to the masses because his works are easy to understand. In one Bhajan he explains the pointlessness of worldly pleasures saying, constructing compound walls and big walls of house is unnecessary. The house is only three and

a half feet long. The Sants spoke unpalatable truth to the masses the way a mother administers bitter medicine to her child.

UV: - You have studied not only music but also philosophy of Sants in depth. How do you manage to strike a balance between music and philosophy of Sants?

Hemant Chauhan: - If we have no experience, music reduces the exercise of the throat. There would be no difference between a film song and a Bhajan without the experience. Bhajans contain the knowledge and message that need not be explained separately to the audience. One just needs to sing it and the listener would understand the meaning.

UV: - Do you take special efforts to study the philosophy of Sants? For example, you mentioned Sant Kabir. How do you decide which Bhajan of Sant Kabir has a message that is relevant and needs to be presented by you?

Hemant Chauhan: - Right from the beginning, I had decided that I would not sing anything other than Bhakti Sangit. So, my attention was only on Bhakti Sangit. As I focused on it, I kept on gaining knowledge from Sadhus, Sants, knowledgeable people, listeners etc. I kept on comparing. For example, a particular Bhajan of Kabir Saheb and Garib Sahib has the same message and how they have explained it. Bhajans of Sant Rohidas are not sung much in Gujarat because they are in Hindi and that language too is very complicated. When I studied, I came to know Kabir Saheb respected him. After having so much devotion, he said in a Bhajan now what should I sing. The river makes sound only till she conflates with the sea. Oh God! What should I sing? Everybody strives to be with God. Rohidas Ji says I have given up that wish too. I don't aspire even to occupy the topmost place. I have already experienced it in my life. What can I wish for after death? A Gujarati Bhajan says I have been to the place where I aspired to reach after death during this life. We make progress in attaining Moksha as we get rid of Kam, Krodh, Lobh, Moh, Mad, Matsar etc. If you want to reach Ahmedabad, first you will leave Rajkot. Then you will have to travel to Chotila. But once you cross Chotila, you would not see Chotila again. Then there would be Vaghodara which also will be crossed by you. Similarly, as you try to attain Moksha, you will easily get rid of Kam, Lobh, Moh etc. Then what remains is the pure spirit of self which is a part of Parmatma. When you mix two flames, it becomes a single flame. Whole world would turn into a single flame once the screen of Maya is removed. What does Moksha mean? It is getting rid of all these shortcomings.

UV: - Folk music can play a vital role in the revival of Indian philosophy. What is your perspective on this?

Hemant Chauhan: - Occasionally I attend camps. Kabir Yatra is held in MP. It goes on for 8-10 days and 500-100 people participate in it as a moving



audience. Besides, there is a local audience too. Satsang and recital of Kabir's Bhajans is organized there. The illiterate people, who are unable to understand the philosophy of Vedanta understand the philosophy through folk music. Since they are illiterate, if you give them Gita, they will worship it but not read it. Most of the folk music prevalent in Rajasthan and Malva is Bhakti Sangit and the atmosphere of Saurashtra is charged with Bhakti Sangit. Bhajans are recited at thousands of places during the Mela of Shivratri and each of them are attended by thousands of listeners. Folk music can spread a message to a vast number of people because only a limited number of knowledgeable people understand Sanskrit. But folk music will be sung by all.

UV: - Folk music like Kirtan in Maharashtra is seeing the good glorious days again. Do you think this will usher in good changes?

Hemant Chauhan: - Hundred percent there will be results. We enjoy hotel food occasionally, not as a regular diet. Folk music is easily digestible. Therefore, it would never disappear. Though the internet and modern communication media was not available, it has prevailed for 500 years. Nothing could eliminate it. Not a single Doha could be proved wrong. Such is the strength of Bhajans, experiences of the Sants. Nobody can defeat it.

UV: - The glory of folk music and Indian philosophy shall prevail in your opinion.

Hemant Chauhan: - Of course! Kabir lovers like Prahlad Tipaniya in Madhya Pradesh, Bhajan singers of Meghwal community in Rajasthan spread a lot of awareness about Bhakti Sangit. Devotion is the first step towards seeking God. It gradually leads to knowledge. Acquiring knowledge directly may lead to ego, but Bhakt knows no ego, he is modest. Gradually Bhakti leads to gain of knowledge. Nobody can stop that process.

UV: - For how long have you been giving performances?

Hemant Chauhan: - I have been giving performances for the last 42 years.

UV: - What has changed in this period?

Hemant Chauhan: - A lot of changes have taken place. Initially 500 people would attend my Bhajan recital but they would attend the program till the end. Now 25,000 listeners come but they do not attend the whole program. Entertainment, art, and craze has sneaked into the minds of people. Family atmosphere is also worsening. Foreign culture is invading our minds. Parents take pride in sending their wards abroad. But the foreigners themselves come here to study Adhyatma. Look at the foreigners in the Hare Ram Hare Krishna sect. But, notwithstanding the changing times, truth has a tendency to prevail.

UV: - You have sung so many Bhajans. Which Bhajan do you cherish the most?

Hemant Chauhan: - Bhajans are experiences

of Sants. I consider myself lucky that I sing the expression of experiences of the Sants. I shall never deviate from this. Bhajans have Para, Pashyanti, Madhyama and Vaikhari. It contains Para wani and among Vaikhari, Bhakti Marg is considered the best because one loses his own self in it and dedicates himself to the God. It is the initial stage. Dasi Jivan preferred Dasi to his name but he did not sing only Bhajans dedicated to Bhakti. He sang Bhajans dedicated to Karma, professed philosophy and later he also expressed his spiritual experiences.

UV: - Which is your favourite Bhajan?

Hemant Chauhan: - I myself immensely like a Bhajan of Dasi Jivan. It is dedicated to devotion but contains deep philosophical messages. It says, why remember God time and again when God is within me. Such pure, simple works of Sants shall never be forgotten. I am an instrument to propagate it. I am resolute that I shall not sing anything other than Bhakti Sangit. We are not able to listen to Kabir Sahib's voice or the way Rohidas Ji or Meera Bai sang their Bhajans. Then there were no means to record and preserve. Now they are available. What we sing now shall be preserved. A priest from the temple of Kabir Saheb would upload Bhajans sung by him on the internet. I asked him why doesn't he hand over the responsibility to someone else. He said if I do less Jap, Kabir Saheb would tolerate it but nobody would do this. Look at his dedication that he wanted to ensure that only the best Bhajans would reach the people. I worked a lot with Akashwani. I sang 700-800 Bhajans on Akashwani. They were all pure traditional. All of them have been preserved. Professors of Saurashtra University called me to talk about this. I spoke on the tradition of Bhajans in Saurashtra for 3-4 hours there.

UV: - You have sung a Bhajan of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar too.

Hemant Chauhan: - Yes, I have sung many Bhajans of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

UV: - Why did you recite Bhajan composed by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar?

Hemant Chauhan: - I sang Bhajans of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar because he continued the work started by the Sants by writing laws. His work is as important as the works of 1000 Sants. It is considered that Parmatma has two types of Avatars, first is Nimitta and the other is Nirmitt. Nimit means great men like Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, who work for the whole society. Ram, Krishna did not descend on earth to complete a single task. They did a lot of work. When ordinary people fail to curb evil, such great people descend on earth. Therefore, these great men cannot be considered ordinary people. They are not mere mortals, but the God himself has descended on earth in their form. Therefore, such great people should not be reduced to mere subjects of politics. I learnt this 40 years ago.

*As told to Satyajit.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Art used as a mode of expressing sentiments

Dr. Aditi



Jhora dance

In India, depressed art has been instrumental in empowering backward communities, challenging the deeply ingrained caste systems, and promoting social change. Artists have used a variety of media, including visual arts, literature, music, and theatre, to convey their struggles, celebrate their cultural heritage, and address social injustices. Artists use the visual arts to depict the challenges and everyday lives of the SC population.

Art of depressed class is an artistic expression deeply rooted in the sociological dynamics of caste-based marginalization in India. It serves as a potent tool for backward communities to articulate their struggles, aspirations, and resistance against centuries-old systems of social, economic, and political discrimination. This piece delves into the sociological significance of art as a mode of expression and symbolic resistance, focusing on specific examples like the drum playing of the Madigas and other forms of depressed artistic expression.

The historical context of caste-based discrimination and the collective resistance activities of socially backward people are intimately linked to the development of art. These socio-political movements, which started with the anti-caste movements of the 19th century and the Dalit Panthers movement in the 1970s, inspired the depressed and encouraged them to declare their identity and rights. Alongside these movements, the artists started using a variety of creative genres to question social mores, assert their cultural identity, and promote social justice. Backward class artists use art as a potent vehicle to communicate the experiences, histories, and ambitions of their underrepresented communities. These artists hope to evoke empathy and increase awareness of the deeply ingrained caste-based hierarchies among the public by using symbolism, colour, and composition.

Another important medium for backward voices is literature. The authors use their writing to express the experiences of their community, frequently employing strong metaphors and allegory. These literary works offer a window through which to comprehend the psychological effects of caste oppression on the community lives. Scheduled Caste authors seek to affect societal change by challenging prevailing narratives, criticizing hegemonic conventions, and sharing their own stories. Theatre and music have also been important mediums for depressed expression.

For instance, the Madigas, a backward sub-caste, have a long-standing drumming practice that has significant socioeconomic significance. The Madigas challenge the imposed inferiority and invisibility through their drumming, expressing their cultural identity, and opposing caste-based discrimination. As a method of protest, the drums' steady beats encourage cooperation among SCs and other marginalized communities. Art of depressed class people transcends



being a mere mode of expression; it embodies an act of symbolic resistance. By reclaiming their narratives, these artists challenge the dominant cultural, social, and political structures that perpetuate caste hierarchy. Their artistic endeavors serve as an assertion of agency and an effort to reclaim their identity, dismantling the imposed inferiority and invisibility.

Additionally, depressed art is essential for creating collective resistance and community building. It aids SC people in developing a common cultural identity, enhancing their feeling of identity and agency. For instance, the artists organize exhibitions, performances, and literary festivals to establish spaces that honor their heritage, confront oppressive structures, and promote social justice discussions. Additionally, it serves as a tool for promoting social awareness and education, bridging the divide between the upper segment of society and the marginalized communities, and bringing to the attention of a larger audience the challenges encountered by depressed people.

In India, depressed art has been instrumental in empowering backward communities, challenging the deeply ingrained caste systems, and promoting social change. Artists have used a variety of media, including visual arts, literature, music, and theatre, to convey their struggles, celebrate their cultural heritage, and address social injustices. Artists use the visual arts to depict the challenges and everyday lives of the SC population. A compelling example of art may be seen in the creations of activist and artist Jatin Das. His artwork "Bhikhari" illustrates the dehumanizing poverty and marginalisation of SCs experience, bringing to light the systemic disparities pervasive in society. Similar to this, Subodh Kerkar, an artist and sculptor, focuses on the deprived class experience in his works. His installation pieces, "Dalit Blood" and "Dalit Hair" challenge the visitor to confront the brutal reality of caste-based persecution by symbolically representing the violence and injustice experienced by socially backward people. A key medium for artistic expression and social opposition is Dalit literature. The writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the designer of the Indian Constitution, are important in this regard. His book, "Annihilation of Caste" laid the groundwork for the literary movement by critically analysing the caste system and arguing for its abolition.

Famous Bengali author Mahasweta Devi has dedicated her writing career to capturing the sufferings of underrepresented groups. Her book "Draupadi", which emphasizes the interconnectedness of caste and gender, tells the tale of a young woman's struggle against persecution and caste prejudice. Depressed performing arts and music have been crucial in empowering communities, sparking uprising, and nurturing cultural pride. This is best illustrated by the Madiga, drumming culture, a sub-caste in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Various ceremonies are accompanied by the vivacious beats of the Madiga drums, which express the community's resiliency and

cultural identity. The Madigas question social norms, proclaim their identity, and commemorate their illustrious history through their music.

In *Sita Sings the Blues*, an animated video by Nina Paley, Indian mythology and folk music are combined to offer a feminist and Dalit interpretation of the epic Ramayana.

Art by depressed people in India is a rich tapestry of artistic expression that amplifies the voices of underrepresented groups and promotes social change. Artists from deprived class have recovered their identity through the visual arts, literature, music, and theatre by rejecting conventional expectations.

The devotional poetry of Sant Ravidas has great significance in North India, especially in places like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Poet and venerated Sant Ravidas wrote the *Ravidas Ke Pad*, poems with greater emphasis on equality, social justice, and spiritual enlightenment. It is common in places like Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh for the Chamars to execute the traditional dance style known as *jhora*. This powerful dancing style, which is characterized by rhythmic footwork, is a means of both cultural expression and resistance. Through *Jhora*, they reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their existence.

Balmiki Mandali, a theatre group formed in Punjab, showcases socially and politically charged plays. The performances address issues such as untouchability, caste discrimination, and social inequality, bringing them to the forefront of public consciousness. The theatre group uses satire, humour, and thought-provoking dialogues to challenge existing power structures and advocate for social change.

Powada is a type of historical folk poetry that has been written in Maharashtra for centuries. This form has been adopted by backward communities, particularly the Mahar community, to represent their struggles, history, and goals. *Powadas* frequently highlight the accomplishments of social reformers by retelling their inspiring stories of Jyotirao Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Annabhau Sathe, a poet, writer, and performer from Maharashtra, used folk music and poetry as a means to raise awareness about caste oppression. Sathe's compositions shed light on the harsh realities faced by backwards and advocate for social justice. His performances, often accompanied by traditional musical instruments, provide a platform for deprived class voices to be heard and understood.

These artistic expressions act as potent vehicles for individual expression, cultural rediscovery, they provide a platform and inspire communities to work for social change. Artists in these areas efficiently communicate their experiences and foster knowledge and understanding among larger audiences by showing their difficulties, aspirations, and cultural heritage.

*Author is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Laxmibai College, DU
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Journey of Indian democracy



Since the Vedic times emphasis on people's consciousness has been an integral part of the political system. If the society lacks the social conscience, then the fundamental rights merely become the trappings of democracy. If the fundamental rights were not accepted by the society, then no law or government or state could safeguard them for the citizens in real term. Thus, the fundamental rights should be such that they are inalienable to the individuals.

Dr. Neha Singh



Whether in the country or abroad, we Indians have proved ourselves with our hard work. We are proud of our constitution. We are proud of our democratic traditions. The mother of democracy, India is still moving forward by strengthening democracy. India, rich in knowledge and science, is leaving its mark from Mars to the moon."

Thus, this Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsava is an initiative taken by the government of India to celebrate the people's movement. A movement that is completely dedicated to a common citizen's evolutionary power to realize Atmanirbharta or self-reliance. The question that poses here is that what kind/notion of democratic structure are we as 75 years of independent nation celebrating? We all must agree to the fact that democracy is essential for sustainable human development. It aids in empowering people to seek for better policies, more participation in the decision-making process and more accountability in the governance process. "The general picture of Indian democracy stands as a reminder that there is no linear progression to democracy, [that] India's post-transition history has produced multiple trajectories of democratization." We need to explore the multiple trajectories of Indian democracy in the last 75 years of India's independence.

Surinder K Shukla opined that "India strayed into

democracy as a result of a long association with the British as a part of the British Raj. It underwent myriad adaptations." Caste, class, regionalism, language etc. defined the social peculiarities of the country. The nation even saw the political journey from one party dominance to the multi-party system. Economically too we moved from a centrally planned economy to the market economy seeking for self-reliance or Atma Nirbharta. Thus, India has undergone extensive political, economic and social metamorphosis. Still the uniqueness of Indian democracy is the fact that "India has preserved its ancient civilization and never lost sight of the ideals that gave her strength through countless centuries...the nation of over one billion continues to live with some of its traditions that go back 4,000 years, and more.... India has demonstrated its inherent resilience. This strength comes from its composite culture that has made India a truly vibrant democracy."

Since the Vedic times emphasis on people's consciousness has been an integral part of the political system. If the society lacks the social conscience, then the fundamental rights merely become the trappings of democracy. If the fundamental rights were not accepted by the society, then no law or government or state could safeguard them for the citizens in real terms. Thus, the fundamental rights should be such



that they are inalienable to the individuals that fulfil two objectives. First all citizens should be in the position to ascertain their rights. Two, it should be binding on all governmental authorities to guarantee them. Thus, while understanding the plural nature of Indian society, "Ambedkar believed that democracy was inconsistent with the presence of suppressed classes in society. A strong opposition, equality before the law, administration, constitutional morality, a strong and active moral sense in society and the presence of public conscience were also essential prerequisites of democracy.

Further, there should be a real social democracy which was based on the three main principles that were- Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Ambedkar felt that there was a need for national solidarity. He also argued the fact that how can people divided into thousands of castes be a part of a single nation. To seek for a solution thereby the framers of the Indian constitution believed that it was only through the social democracy that policies like affirmative actions will be able to curb inequality, eliminate oppression of underprivileged groups, eradicate poverty and offer an equal access to the public services like health, child's care etc.

A social democracy based on political democracy could only reconstruct the society. But again, Indian political democracy rests on the balance between an individual and the community. Political democracy will have no meaning if social democracy fails in the country. "The idea of representation therefore, carried within it the seeds of profound alteration in the existing configuration of social relations. Representatives not merely in the making of the public decisions, but also, largely deciding, how the public decisions have to be made. Besides, modes of decision making may prop up a social group to interact with others, seriously questioning the identity and strivings of another."

Here, the concept of representation can be seen as a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Neera Chandoke in her paper Crisis of Representative Democracy writes that, "the marginalized groups find it difficult to directly engage with parties and representatives; there is the fact that the inclusion of representatives from disadvantaged groups in the legislature has failed to deliver policies for the well-being of their communities." The best example of this argument could be the analysis of the inclusive approach of the women's interests by the women leaders or the effectiveness and efficiency of the 73rd and the 74th Amendment Act. According to Peter D Souza, "it is difficult to present a general macro picture on the achievements and failures of panchayati raj because much depends on regional and localized factors." To assert K K Kailash in his work explores how during the 1990s the Bahujan tended to express social opinions significantly more than they do political ones. This 'paradox' in the democratic upsurge may explain why increased rates of political participation

by the Bahujan have not led to fundamental political change in India."

In order to preserve the recognition of the individual and representation of the community, it's fascinating to see how the use of e-governance has revived the bottom-up approach to Indian political democracy. The use of technology has aided in reformation of the justice system, has enhanced the institution's efficiency, increased civic participation etc. The e-governance has the potency to draw parallel between development and democracy to which even emphasized in the 2020 anniversary of ministerial of the Community of Democracies.

Yet for drawing the parallel between development and democracy the economic basis of an Indian social democracy should target the creation of economic opportunities and social protections. "Without a social democratic vision as an electoral option, the desire for redistribution will be pursued in other ways.

Already in rural India, Maoist unrest marks a sharp rejection of electoral politics. At industrial plants, labour activism is on the rise, with management the target of physical attacks." "Economic democracy based on social democracy thus proposes a component of larger socio-economic ideologies, as a stand-alone theory and as a variety of reform agendas. For example, as a means to securing full economic rights, it opens a path to full political rights, defined as including the former."

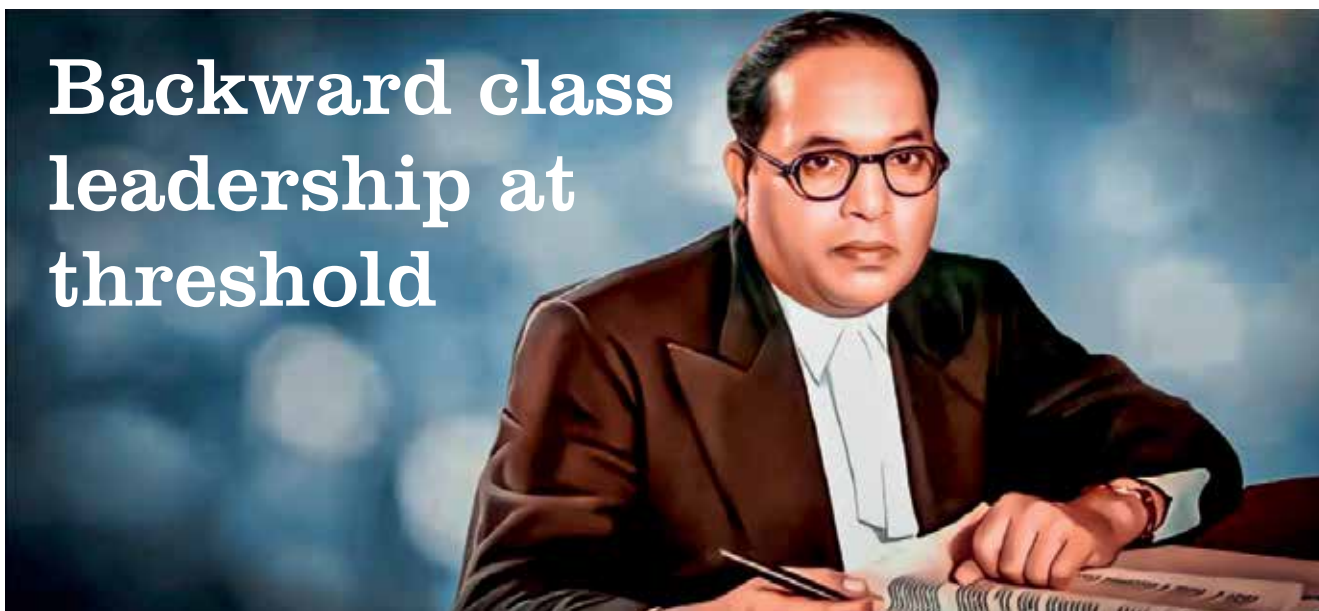
"The societal reach of economic progress in India has been remarkably limited', adding that the agenda for political, economic and social democracy remains unfinished because of continued disparity between the lives of the privileged and the rest and because of persistent ineptitude and unaccountability in the way the economy and society are organized. It is thus evident that 'Democratic mobilization, while it has produced an intense struggle for power, has not delivered millions of citizens from abject dictates of poverty.' Thus, the de jure "WE, the people" in the first line of the Preamble is in reality a fragmented 'we', divided by yawning gaps that remain to be bridged."

Thus, on the occasion of Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsava, thinkers like Ambedkar need to be revised who talked of reform from social to political to economic to ensure the recognition of democracy in true sense. Influenced by the French Revolution, Ambedkar thus stressed on the reconstruction of the social and the political based on democratic socialism. He envisioned provision of a government that was dedicated to the consolidation of social, political and economic justice within the framework of liberty, equality and fraternity. He found democracy as the best form of government that could entail rights of its citizens in the best possible way. He thus viewed democracy as a way of associated life that was dependent on public/moral consciousness.

*Author is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Ramanujan College, DU
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Backward class leadership at threshold



As we commemorate 75 years of India's independence, the narrative of SC leadership underscores the essence of democracy— a constant struggle for justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, as enshrined in our Constitution. It reminds us to keep the quest for a more inclusive, equal, and fair society alive, ensuring that the leadership of Scheduled Castes and all marginalized communities continues to grow, diversify, and make a mark in the Indian socio-political landscape.

Vijendra



As India celebrates its 75th year of independence, it is a time for deep introspection and understanding of our socio-political evolution. Amongst the myriad aspects of this transformation, a significant thread to follow is the changing leadership dynamics within the Scheduled Castes (SCs), a historically marginalized community in India.

The early years post-independence saw leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who himself belonged to the Mahar Scheduled Caste, laying the groundwork for a future of equality and social justice. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar ensured the inclusion of key principles such as the abolition of untouchability (Article 17) and reservation for SCs and Scheduled Tribes in legislatures, education, and government jobs (Articles 330-342).

Dr. Ambedkar's political leadership was primarily marked by his advocacy for the rights of marginalized groups in Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936, which won 15 seats out of 13 reserved in the Bombay legislature. In 1942, he formed the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF), which aimed for socio-political and economic liberation of the deprived classes. However, the SCF did not achieve significant success in the 1946 elections. After the independence of India, Ambedkar accepted the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first

Prime Minister of India, to serve as the country's first Law Minister. Later, due to differences with Nehru and other leaders on the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to reform Hindu personal law, he resigned from the cabinet in 1951.

In 1956, shortly before his death, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism and initiated a mass conversion of Scheduled Castes to escape the caste system. He also founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha and drafted a constitution for it. Dr. Ambedkar's political leadership was critical in shaping modern India, particularly in establishing social justice and equality. His writings and speeches have had a significant impact on Indian law and society, and he continues to be celebrated as a symbol of resistance against social discrimination.

Leadership in the initial years focused mainly on social emancipation and upliftment, battling the centuries-old chains of untouchability and caste-based discrimination. Babu Jagjivan Ram, a SC leader who served as India's Deputy Prime Minister, worked relentlessly to uplift the marginalized sections of society. His tenure in various ministerial capacities saw the promotion of initiatives like the Green Revolution and labour rights, impacting the SCs profoundly.

In the following decades, a shift was noticed in SC leadership. The emphasis moved toward political



representation and assertion. Political outfits like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) started gaining momentum under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and later Mayawati. The BSP's emergence signified the growing political empowerment of the SCs, reflecting the community's aspiration for a political voice and recognition. Mayawati's four-term tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, marked an era of SC assertion and identity politics. Her leadership heralded a new wave of deprived classes consciousness, leading to increased self-confidence and political participation among SCs.

While the political leadership of SCs has been ascending, there have also been remarkable strides in various other sectors. Be it the bureaucratic representation by S.R. Sankaran, known as the people's IAS officer for his extensive work in uplifting SCs, or Udit Raj, the ex-IAS and SC leader who brought the atrocities on SCs to light. Leaders like Bezwada Wilson, who spearheaded the Safai Karamchari Andolan, fought relentlessly against manual scavenging, highlighting the intersectionality of caste and occupation.

Economic empowerment is crucial for political empowerment. Implement policies for socio-economic development tailored explicitly for the SC community. This could include initiatives for entrepreneurship, skill development, land redistribution, and access to credit.

In academia, scholars like Gopal Guru and Sukhdeo Thorat have contributed immensely to understanding caste dynamics in India, providing much-needed insights for policy formulation and academic discourse. Yet, the journey is far from over. With India stepping into its 75th year of independence, it is essential to acknowledge that while significant strides have been made in SC leadership, considerable challenges remain. SC leaders continue to

fight for a level playing field regarding quality education, dignified employment, and social equality. Caste-based discrimination and atrocities persist, with Scheduled Caste communities often bearing the brunt of these acts of violence. The question of land rights, with many SCs still being landless laborers, needs immediate attention. Furthermore, political representation at the grassroots level, particularly for SC women, continues to be a significant concern.

Leadership among SCs in the last 75 years has transformed from a struggle for survival to a fight for dignity, rights, and representation. It is a testament

to the community's indomitable spirit and relentless quest for equality. However, it's also a reminder of the road that still needs to be travelled, the battles that need to be fought, and the victories that need to be won.

As we commemorate 75 years of India's independence, the narrative of SC leadership underscores the essence of democracy—a constant struggle for justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, as enshrined in our Constitution. It reminds us to keep the quest for a more inclusive, equal, and fair society alive, ensuring that the leadership of Scheduled Castes and all marginalized communities continues to grow, diversify, and make a mark in the Indian socio-political landscape.

Unravelling the Crisis in Scheduled Castes Leadership in India

The historical struggle for equality and justice by the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India has seen significant changes over the past decades. Yet, it is evident that leadership within the SC community is grappling with several challenges and crises. Some of the key reasons behind this crisis are as follows:

Fragmentation of Identity: The SC population in India is not a homogeneous group; it consists of numerous sub-castes, each with its unique identity and issues. This fragmentation often leads to a need for more unified leadership, as each sub-caste may have its leaders fighting for specific rights and causes. As a result, the broader SC leadership often struggles to consolidate these fragmented identities into a single voice that can advocate for the community.

Political Co-option: There is a persistent problem of mainstream political parties co-opting SC leaders without genuinely addressing the core issues of the community. SC leaders affiliated with these mainstream parties often need help to address caste-based problems due to the broader party's ideological leanings or electoral considerations.

Caste-Based Discrimination: Despite constitutional safeguards and progressive legislation, the deep-rooted social discrimination against SCs continues. This discrimination extends to SC leaders, often limiting their influence and effectiveness within the political and social systems that still bear the remnants of caste hierarchies.

Lack of Educational Opportunities: Access to quality education continues to be a significant issue for the SC community, directly impacting the emergence of informed, influential leaders. Education is necessary for potential leaders within the community to avoid significant barriers to leadership roles in public life, academia, or other sectors.

Economic Marginalization: Economic status often correlates with political power. However, a large segment of the SC population still lives in poverty. This economic marginalization limits the ability of SC leaders to wield significant influence or effectively lobby for their community's interests.

Inadequate Representation: Despite reservations



Kanshiram



Mayawati



Ramvilas Paswan

in legislatures, the representation of SCs in decision-making roles still needs to be improved. SC leaders often find themselves confined to representing 'reserved' constituencies, limiting their appeal to broader electorates and constraining their political influence.

Leadership Development and Mentorship: More platforms are needed to foster leadership development and mentorship for aspiring SC leaders. These supports make it easier for potential leaders to navigate the intricacies of the political and social systems, which are crucial for effective leadership.

Gender Disparity: Gender disparity is also critical in SC leadership. SC women, who face the dual oppression of caste and gender, are often sidelined in leadership roles, despite being active participants in social movements.

Addressing these crises requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders. This would involve promoting education within the community, fostering grassroots leadership, ensuring equal opportunities for women, and combating caste-based discrimination. Only then can the leadership crisis among Scheduled Castes be effectively addressed, leading to a more inclusive and equitable representation of this historically marginalized community.

A Path Forward

The crisis in the leadership of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India requires comprehensive and inclusive solutions that address systemic and structural issues. Here are some proposed strategies:

Promote Unified Representation: Encourage the amalgamation of diverse SC identities under a common umbrella to facilitate a unified political voice. This can be achieved through inter-caste dialogues, community meetings, and shared platforms that aim to bridge the gap between various sub-castes.

Invest in Education: Facilitate access to quality education for the SC community. Education can be a powerful tool for social mobility and leadership development. Special scholarships, easy access to educational resources, and well-equipped residential schools can be instrumental in achieving this.

Empower Grassroots Leadership: Encourage and empower grassroots leadership within the SC community. Local leaders understand their community's specific needs and issues and can

effectively represent them. Capacity-building programs and leadership training should be provided to these grassroots leaders.

Promote Socio-Economic Development: Economic empowerment is crucial for political empowerment. Implement policies for socio-economic development tailored explicitly for the SC community. This could include initiatives for entrepreneurship, skill development, land redistribution, and access to credit.

Gender-Inclusive Policies: Create policies and programs that encourage the active participation of SC women in leadership roles. Women should be included in decision-making processes at all levels. Gender sensitization programs can also be beneficial in altering societal attitudes toward women leaders.

Legislative Changes: Advocate for legislative changes that enhance the representation of SCs in decision-making bodies. This could include lobbying for more excellent representation in non-reserved constituencies and high-ranking bureaucratic positions.

Political Independence: Encourage the political independence of SC leaders. Mainstream political parties should not merely co-opt SC leaders but provide them with platforms to voice the unique concerns of their community.

Strengthen Anti-Discrimination Laws: Ensure the effective implementation of anti-discrimination laws. Stringent action against caste-based discrimination and violence should be taken to create a safe and respectful environment for SC leaders.

Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship programs where experienced leaders can guide emerging leaders from the community. This would equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate political landscapes effectively.

Sensitize Society: Finally, broader society needs to be sensitized about the challenges faced by the SC community and the importance of their representation in leadership positions. Social awareness campaigns, media representation, and educational curriculums can significantly bring about this change.

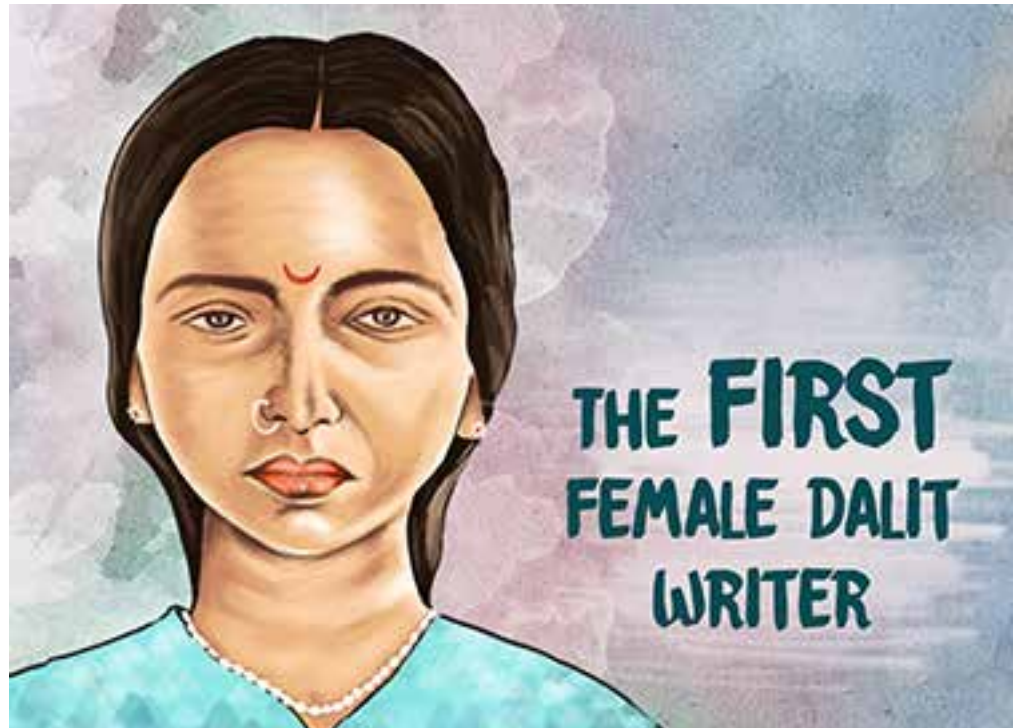
The crisis in SC leadership is a multifaceted issue that requires a multipronged approach. We can see more diverse and representative leadership in India by collectively addressing these challenges.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



Mukta Salve : The revolutionary who is relevant even today

Mukta Salve, niece of Krantiveer Lahuji Salve, is known for carrying forward legacy of her uncle. Her thoughts were far revolutionary of contemporary times. We publish about her thoughts and work in two parts. Here is the first part.



Prof. Bhagwan, Maharashtra



The niece of Krantiveer Lahuji Salve, daughter of a teacher with the first school for depressed masses started by Mahatma Phule and disciple of Mahatma Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule had wished that every religion that promotes discrimination vanish way back in 1853.

The term 'transformationalism' has a deep meaning in the context of India's history. We need to understand it in the context of the thought-provoking works of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. It needs to be understood in light of the essay authored by the premier revolutionary Mukta Salve, which expressed the aspiration of wiping out the religions that differentiate between human beings. It needs to be interpreted in the light of the history of India wherein despite many great philosophers having professed the philosophy of transformation while opposing the contemporary society that exploited and refused all types of freedom, rights, justice and self-dignity to the depressed forced to face hardships, women and majority members of the society to maintain Brahminical supremacy and invented the concepts of rebirth and Karma, thus destroying them totally and

monopolized rights and wealth. Indeed, the roots of Indian transformationalism can be traced back to the thought of equality professed from time to time by series of thinkers. Mukta Salve, the niece of Krantiveer Lahuji Salve and daughter of Ganu Shiva Mang _ the teacher with the first school for depressed masses started by Mahatma Phule in 1948, has carved out her own space in the progressive history of Maharashtra as a revolutionary transformationalist. Born on January 5, 1839, Mukta Salve was nine years old when she was enrolled in the school. She was the first girl student in the school launched by Mahatma Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule. In her student life, she would be always engrossed with her studies. Savitribai would often organize elocution, debate and essay competitions to enhance the writing and debating skills of girl students. Mukta Salve appeared for the examination of her Class III on February 12, 1853. She read her famous essay titled "An Essay on The Distress of Mang-Mahar's" for the first time as a part of that examination at the school. The essay was published in the education report published by the then British Government in 1855. Later on, the Dnyanodaya



periodical that was published by American Mission reprinted it. The Editor of Dnyanodaya, Rev Harry Ballantine himself was present to hear the essay on the distress of Mang-Mahar. The essay impressed him to such an extent that he published it in two parts published on February 15, 1855 and March 1, 1855 serially. Moreover, famous author and historian N V Joshi again reprinted Mukta Salve's essay in his Marathi book "Pune Shaharache Varnan" in 1868. Indeed, the essay on the distress of Mang-Mahar's that analyses the conventional concepts of Indian Gods and religion and annihilates the monopolists of the Religion is a contumacious piece that minces no words that express serious concerns and proves to be a guiding light.

The report of Satyashodhak Society published in 1873 categorically states, "Mukta has developed her intellectual capabilities. She has realized the immense importance of philosophy in one's life. The girl student has perfectly understood how practicing outdated values ruin the lives of common people. The revolutionary essay authored by Mukta Salve not only destabilized the established supremacists but also made the progressive reflect and threw light on various ways to usher in revolutionary social reforms. The year 1853 was in the era that carried the great influence of Manu Smriti, the bogus scripture created by the Brahminical monopolists of religion and professed to be the command of God himself, resulting in casteism, superstitions and social as well as cultural inequality. Those criticizing God and religion faced the risk of being silenced by brutal means, especially in Pune where heresies ruled, in those days.

Under such circumstances, Mukta's challenge to the contemporary concepts of God and religion, conformational Brahmins monopolists of Hindu religion and their creation Manu Smriti through her essay was no less courageous than a rebel. Mukta, through her essay, rebelled against not only the social ills but the entire era of orthodoxies. Educated by none other but the mother of Indian education Savitribai Phule herself, it was no wonder that Mukta Salve joined the transformational movement. In her adult life, she became a teacher at night school which imparted education to hundreds of untouchables and made them capable of being seekers of the ultimate truth. Moreover, she dedicated herself to Mahatma Phule's Satyashodhak movement and came to be renowned as a true transformationalist. Her entire life is a story of transformation that no transformationalist movement can ever ignore. When we reflect on Mukta Salve's essay, we must keep in mind that 1853, the year in which she read her essay, was also the year in which Mahatma Jyotiba Phule authored a compilation of his poems 'Nirmikacha Shodh' (Quest of the Creator).

The essence of Mukta Salve's essay can be summarized in two assertions – 1. We have no book of the religion of our own and 2. We have no religion.

This is the reason for which Mahatma Phule founded Satyashodhak Samaj, the organization that strived to seek the ultimate truth and lived by it, thereby providing for a new social structure, in 1873. The Satyashodhak Samaj was the first social voluntary organization in the country that had unwavering faith in scientific values and reason. Consequently, in 1989, when he was 62 years old and ailing with paralysis, he authored Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak, the new scripture that aspired to free all common people from the religious slavery of the Brahminists and usher in social equality to guide human beings on how to live a rational life and create an equality-based society. In his book Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak, Mahatma Phule professes the principle 'Satyameva Jayate' (The Truth Prevails) and advocates seeking and living by the ultimate truth. Published on 1st April 1989, the book Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak aspired to steer the masses to lead an ethical life while constantly seeking the eternal truth, help them get rid of the conformist concepts of God and religion as well as ignorance so that they would be drawn to the realities of the world and realise as to how the conventional concept of God and religion, the autocracy of Brahminical priests was exploiting the masses. Before that, in the year 1853, Mahatma Phule denounced that concept of God and professed the concept of an all-inclusive Creator through his book "Nirmikacha Shodh". This concept gives the topmost priority to nature. Mukta Salve too adopts the same concept of the Creator in the prelude of her essay.

I find it necessary to divide Mukta Salve's essay into seven parts and elaborate in detail on each of these seven parts essential to study the essay systematically. One finds himself unable to do justice to the essay without doing so. Therefore, I restructured Mukta Salve's essay into seven parts. While invoking the name of the God, who has filled the heart, of a poor and powerless girl like me, with the realization of the pain and suffering of my people - the Mahar's and Mangs, considered to be even lower than an animal, I have undertaken the uphill task of writing this essay to the best of my capabilities.

To rebut the arguments advanced by those who hate us citing the authority of the Vedas...

These gluttonous Brahmans claim that the Vedas are their domain, their exclusive property. If we consider this, it clearly shows that "we do not have a book of religion" if the Vedas are only for the Brahmans... Is it not seen that if we have no freedom to see the book of religion, "we are without any religion"? Where only one person is privileged and the rest deprived, "let that religion vanish from the earth and let it never enter our minds to boast of such a religion."

*Author is professor and Head Botany research center Department of Botany, Maharashtra Mahavidyalay, Nilanga- Latur
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Enabling the youth for employment and Equality

Jobs bring security and stability in life, but securing one is no small feat, especially for the youths coming from disadvantaged social classes and rural areas. For the last 16 years, Gujarat-based Samata Education Trust has been enabling the youths to secure jobs by providing affordable coaching, and also inculcating values like equality and fraternity among youths belonging to diverse cross sections of society. Now the organization plans to spread its wings over Uttar Pradesh and Punjab too. Founder of the trust, Mr. Punamchand Narsingh Bhai Patel, explains his model of ushering in equality and fraternity through education in this interview. Read on.



UV: - Please tell us how the seed of this concept was sown in your mind, and why?

Mr. Patel: - My family had some land and we had a dispute with another party. Question used to come to my mind is why people do not support each other during the time of crisis. We founded Samata Nirman Seva Trust in 2007 to address it. It is an inter-caste federation to help people belonging to SC/ST category. Subsequently, we started coaching classes and set up a library too. We also undertook other initiatives like tree plantation drives and providing financial help to needy persons. In 2013, we brought 70 students from the villages close to the Pakistan border aspiring to get jobs as police constables to provide them coaching for the examination. We provided accommodation to them in the building of my house, where we run a library today. Later on, we acquired a private property for coaching. We provided them with not only coaching but also food and accommodation, all free of cost, for three and a half months. Of these 70 students, 15 cleared the examination successfully and got government jobs. Later in 2015, we purchased this land and founded

Samata Education Trust. We chalked out plans to work across Gujarat and inaugurated it in 2017. We have built a hostel building consisting of 125 rooms in 2020. Today, students from every district of Gujarat come here. We also provided coaching to 21 girls who came in from various districts. That was when we acquired more six acres of land to construct buildings for the girl's school and hostel. We also undertook tree plantation drives and created a Smritivan in memory of all national heroes such as Babasaheb Ambedkar, Phule, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad. Now we are working on a Rs 20 crore project to build a community hall and a hospital. Today, we have 300 students.

UV: - What was the thought behind your decision to founding the trust?

Mr. Patel: - When Babasaheb Ambedkar's sacrifice was for the welfare of people from all cross sections of society. He did not restrict himself to his caste. He believed in equality and fraternity. We are working to uphold the same values. We think help must be provided to needy persons, notwithstanding their castes.



UV: - Does Samata Education Trust give admission to youths belonging to upper castes?

Mr. Patel: - Yes, we believe in equality. But our first priority of admission is SC/ST students. However we welcome students of EBC. In past, we gave admission to such students and provided them with coaching and training. Around 200-300 students use our library in Ahmedabad. We also conduct coaching classes. approximately 25 students from surrounding villages attend it. A total of 125 students have been provided accommodation in the hostel. Around five per cent of our students belong to the Other Backward Classes and upper castes.

UV: - What activities do you undertake to inculcate the value of equality?

Mr. Patel: - Firstly, we do not ask for the caste of students. We only ask for their names, educational background and requirements. We also organize programs to motivate them. IAS, IPS officers come here and motivate them and imbibe in them the importance of equality, fraternity and other values emphasized in the Constitution of India. They explain to the students that the 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' model is the only way to achieve progress for all.

UV: - Do you find any difference in their social approach between ex-students of your hostel who have become officers and other officers? What is the perception of your students about the value of equality?

Mr. Patel: - National heroes like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar overcame the caste barricades and worked for the welfare of people belonging to all cross sections of society and women. Our students are aware of it. They feel they should treat everyone equally and work for all instead of focusing only on their community.

UV: - What facilities are provided to students here?

Mr. Patel: - Students are provided accommodation, tea and snacks in the morning, lunch, tea again at 4 pm, evening meal, library etc. We also invite professionals as visiting faculty. We admit students of Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering and all other streams. We design coaching courses for them after considering which competitive examination they want to appear for.

UV: -What is the approach of your past students who have now settled down in life towards the institute?

Mr. Patel: - Around 2,000 of our past students have secured government jobs. Most of the students who secure jobs, donate their first salary to the institute. They remain associated with the organization and come here as visiting faculty too. They feel gratitude. That increases our support base.

UV: - What modern technology is available here and how do the students of backward classes adapt to it?

Mr. Patel: - Organizations working on enabling

disadvantaged students to use modern technology refer some students to us. These organizations pay their fees too. However, most of the students coming here do not understand even the basics of Mathematics. We start coaching them from the basic level. The family members of most of the students here are illiterate. Some students have quit private jobs with a salary of 8,000 to 10,000 because they aspire to secure better jobs after getting coaching here.

UV: - What is the ratio of rural students in your institute?

Mr. Patel: - About 15 to 20 percent of students come from urban areas and the rest are from rural backgrounds.

UV: - What are your future plans?

Mr. Patel: - We are working on providing free-of-cost education to all communities of the SC/ ST category. We have been to Punjab and people from there have been asking us to set up an institute there too. Presently we are talking to people in UP too. Some people in Punjab say they can help us. If kind-hearted persons provide us with land, we would set up an institute with the participation of members of local communities and work on providing both education and healthcare facilities. Our model is applicable across India.



UV: - What is the peculiarity of your model?

Mr. Patel: - Many government schools in Gujarat are closing down. Since real estate prices are soaring, institutes are being closed down and their properties are being sold. Besides, though Gujarat has many private universities, there is not a single institute for SC/ ST communities. We believe that privatization will increase in the time to come. We must prepare ourselves for that. Considering the increasing cost of education, only the rich will have access to education in future and the poor will be left out. We are trying to address that too.

UV: - Do you see the need to change the curriculum? Do you feel social values are given adequate importance in the present curriculum?

Mr. Patel: -The new education policy provides for more thrust on social values, technical education, and employment-oriented training. That is a good policy.

As told to Vijendra.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



Umaji Raje released a manifesto against the British. It was addressed to the entire country. He urged every Indian to pose a united resistance against and asked not to co-operate with them. The conditions prevalent back then were not suitable for them to bring that manifesto into reality. But it indeed gave some direction to the Indian freedom struggle. Umaji Raje's struggle inspired many freedom fighters. His children Tuka and Mahakal fought against the Britishers after his demise. He was no less than a hero for those who resorted to armed resistance against the Britishers.

Umaji Raje Naik's struggle after fall of Maratha empire

Pravin

The death of Peshwa Madhav Rao was the most serious blow to the Maratha empire. According to British historian Grant Duff, the death of Madhav Rao proved more detrimental to the Maratha empire than their defeat in the battle of Panipat. The British decided to take advantage of this condition of the Marathas and started building their empire.

After the death of Madhav Rao, his younger brother Narayan Rao was promoted as Peshwa. But Narayan Rao had to face a lot of difficulties during his tenure. Meanwhile, Britishers were getting stronger day by day. Raghunath Rao, a cousin brother of Madhav Rao, was a great warrior. But his greed for power forced him to go against Narayan Rao. Narayan Rao fell prey to the conspiracy hatched by Raghunath Rao. The loyal men of the Maratha empire, like Nana Fadanavis, Mahadaji Shinde, Sakharam Babu Bokil, Moroba Sadnis, Maloji Ghorapade, Raste, and Patwardhan were not at all happy, and they decided to align against Raghunath Rao. This alignment is often called the 'Barabhai Mandal. They ensured that Raghunath Rao didn't get the post of Peshwa. This Barabhai Mandal declared the son of Narayana Rao, often known as the Sawai Madhav Rao, the next Peshwa.

Raghunath Rao fled to Surat, where he joined a British camp. It was an open invitation for Britishers to interfere in the Maratha empire. With British support, Raghunath Rao waged war against the whole Maratha empire, which led to the first Anglo-Maratha war. This war continued for seven long years, which caused much harm to the Maratha treasury. Internal

disputes caused more damage to the Maratha empire than anything else. Meanwhile, the senior leaders of the Maratha empire, like Mahadaji Shinde and Nana Fadnis, were fighting tooth and nail to save the Maratha empire. Sawai Madhav Rao died on October 27, 1795, which paved the way for Bajirao II to come to the throne.

Bajirao II was the elder son of Raghunath Rao. Bajirao II proved so incompetent and irresponsible that it led to the downfall of the mighty Maratha empire. His tenure was filled with internal disputes between the different branches of the Maratha empire. Internal conflicts resulted in the weakening of the kingdom. They started ignoring the ideals on which Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had built this empire. The kingdom was established for the welfare of the people, it was supposed to protect the people from foreign invasions. But instead of that, they started hatching conspiracies against each other. Britishers were closely observing the state of the Maratha empire. The collapse of the Maratha empire was just a matter of time.

The acceptance of the subsidiary alliance by Bajirao II was the final nail in the coffin of the Maratha empire. Still, some loyal and senior leaders of the Maratha empire were trying to save the realm. But eventually, they also proved incompetent in front of well-armed and well-trained British forces. It was in the year 1818 when the Maratha empire came to an end.

The defeat of the Maratha army in 1818 was decisive as it led to the establishment of undisputed British hegemony over India. Though the mighty soldiers had



surrendered to the Britishers, the spirit of freedom and the consciousness that we were different from them was alive in the hearts of the common masses. This spirit gave birth to a true son of this land called Umaji Naik. Ideals set by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj inspired him to fight against the Britishers. Here we will experience and explore the extraordinary bravery of Umaji Naik.

Ramoshi is one of the tribal communities in Maharashtra. Ramoshi is said to be the corrupted form of Ramavanshi. Ramavanshi means those who belong to the clan of lord Rama. It is said that they were blessed by lord Rama when he was in exile. It has one more meaning which means those who dwell in the forest. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the total population of the Ramoshi community was 18000. Ramoshi was born in a valiant community. They were known for their unwavering loyalty towards their patron. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had employed Ramoshi people in his administrative setup. They were physically strong and tasked with espionage and protecting forts. Bahirji Naik, the most trusted spy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, belonged to the Ramoshi community.

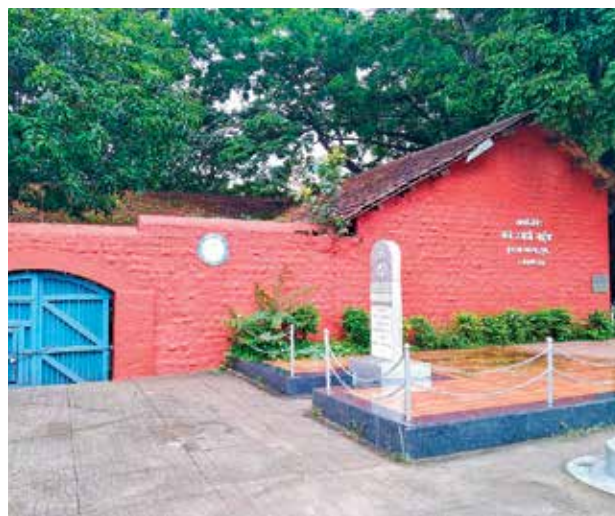
Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj used to give proper rewards and land area to the Ramoshi community members in exchange for their services. Purandar Fort was under the supervision of Ramoshi's from the time of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. But the conditions changed for this community during the tenure of Bajirao II. After 1818 Maratha empire was totally under the control of the Britishers. The British took over the empire resulting in the losing employment of Ramoshi's, which directly affected their livelihood. This is where the Ramoshi community organized themselves against the Britishers.

Those freedom fighters and the communities that threatened British expansion were declared robbers. Ramoshi community also fought valiantly against the Britishers. For the same reason, in 1871, according to the Criminal Tribes Act of India, the Ramoshi community was declared a criminal tribe. Britisher indirectly announced that every member of the Ramoshi community is a criminal. But today, the conditions have not changed for them. We also tend to assume them as criminals. It becomes imperative to discuss the plight of this community which was once an essential part of various departments of the Maratha administration.

Princely states, and the kingdoms had gone entirely under the control of the Britishers. This is when Umaji Naik organized Ramoshi community members under his leadership and resorted to armed resistance against the Britishers. He successfully plucked out his image as a robber from people's mind. India has always been the land of people who, with their extraordinary acts and unwavering focus, wrote their name with golden words on the pages of history. Every great personality from the past had his own beliefs and way of looking at things. Rather than

just using the extraordinary events from their lives for entertainment, we should also incorporate their message and teachings into our daily lives.

The resistance put forth by Umaji Naik was very unique. He was also accompanied by men ready to sacrifice their lives for him. The stories describing the bravery of Umaji Raje had become the trend. Different events from his life give a glimpse of his personality. The rebellion by the Ramoshi community was not at all for selfish gains. It had a much broader scope. Those Ramoshi people who served Britisher's were treated very well. They were also given land to fulfil their daily needs. Britisher's even offered a decent amount of money to Umaji. But instead of submitting themselves to the Britishers, he fought against them for the motherland's liberation. Britishers had established at least 152 police posts, and many regiments were deployed to arrest Umaji Raje. The reward money for Umaji Raje rose from 100 Rs to 10000 Rs. They also offered a small piece of land as the reward money. The efforts taken by them show how valiantly Umaji Raje fought against them.



On February 16, 1831, Umaji Raje released a manifesto against the British. It was addressed to the entire country. He urged every Indian to pose a united resistance against and asked not to co-operate with them. The conditions prevalent back then were not suitable for them to bring that manifesto into reality. But it indeed gave some direction to the Indian freedom struggle. Umaji Raje's struggle inspired many freedom fighters. His children Tuka and Mahakal fought against the Britishers after his demise. He was no less than a hero for those who resorted to armed resistance against the Britishers. Umaji Raje had already started armed resistance before the great rebellion of 1857. His struggle instilled self-confidence and pride in the hearts of Indians. Umaji Raje's struggle against the mighty British empire continues to inspire us.

*Author is an Educator and was selected under PM Yuva Author scheme
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Unsung women freedom fighters

Indian independence struggle was marked by participation of the common people for a long period. They include men, women and children irrespective of caste and language. We portray some freedom fighter women, who belong to deprived class.

Rushikesh



MULA GABHARU

She is one of the many neglected warriors from the north eastern part of India. Mula Gabharu was the daughter of Assam's king Supimpha. Her husband's name was Frachengmung Borgohain. Assam was invaded many times during Islamic invasions of India. During 1528 and 1532, Assam was invaded twice by Turbak Khan. Both the armies were powerful but somehow Assam's army started receiving setbacks.



Considering the deteriorating condition of Assam's army, Mula Gabharu's husband, Frachengmung decides to join the battle against Mughals. But to the regret of the Assamese army, he gets killed at the hands of Turbak Khan. Mula Gabharu was deeply saddened by her husband's death. Mula Gabharu decides to take revenge for her husband's death and joins the Assamese army. In 1532, Turbak Khan invaded Assam a second time. Mula Gabharu looks at it as the chance to kill Turbak Khan and avenge her husband's death. This time Turbak Khan had come with more force in order to take over the entire Assam.

Looking at his mighty army, Mula Gabharu gave a call to all the people of Assam to join the war with 'Hengdang'(sword) in their hands. A fierce war ensued. The war lady killed many Mughal soldiers. Along with her, the soldiers of Assam and her friends including Mahila Jayanti, Pamila and Lalita also showed the valour of Assam to the Mughal soldiers. While fighting

the Mughal army, she came across Turbak Khan, the killer of her husband. She attacked him with all her might and fought valiantly. But in the end, she also gets killed by him. Mula Gabharu had inspired people of Assam by showing her valour. The Mughals fought with Assam to expand their power.

UDADEVI PASI

She was a freedom fighter from a deprived community in Uttar Pradesh. She was martyred while fighting against the British during the rebellion of 1857. Udadevi Pasi and her husband Makka Pasi both took part in the Indian war of independence of 1857.



Udadevi and her husband Makka Pasi were part of Begum Hajrat Mahal's army. Makka Pasi gets killed while fighting against Britishers. To avenge her husband's death, she reached out to begum Hajrat Mahal. Begam mahal made her the commander of the women's battalion. On 16 November, a British officer

named Colin Campbell attacked the Indian soldiers at Lucknow. He had stationed his army at Sikandar bag. Colin Campbell had earlier saved the entire garrison of British soldiers from Indian soldiers. So, it wasn't an easy task to face Campbell. Udadevi decided to use guerrilla tactics against him. On 16 November 1857, Udadevi climbed a banyan tree and disguised as a man. She killed 32 British soldiers. When the British army took control of Sikandar Bagh, they noticed a



pattern of injuries caused due to bullets. The British suspected that the one who killed them must be hiding behind the nearby Banyan tree. The British fired at the papal tree and shot her dead. Even Britishers were shocked to see that the one who killed their soldiers was a lady. Every year on 16 November the people from the Pasi community come together in large numbers to commemorate the anniversary of Udadevi's martyrdom. The construction of a 100 feet tall statue of Udadevi was announced, in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. A park and a memorial dedicated to the Pasi icon are also being planned.

KUYILI

Kuyili is one of those unsung warriors of the Indian freedom struggle. She was the close aide of queen Velu Nachiyar of Sivagangai. She belonged to the Arunthathiyar caste. After her mother's death, her father took her to Shivagangai. She soon came in contact with the queen Velu Nachiyar. It won't be



an exaggeration to say that she was an inborn fighter. She once saved the queen from an infiltrator. Her intuitive behaviour made her doubt her own Silambam teacher, who later turned out to be a spy. Impressed with Kuyili, Queen Velu Nachiyar made her a personal bodyguard. She is considered as the first woman

suicide bomber of India. After the victories in the battle of Plassey and Buxar, Britishers turned their eye towards the southern part of India.

Queen Velu Nachiyar posed a challenge to their expansionist policy. Kuyili was already made the commander in chief of the women's army. She was very well aware of this fact that the power of Britishers lies in their advanced weapons. So, she decided to destroy their arsenal stored in Sivaganga fort. Women were allowed to enter the fort on the occasion of Vijayadashami festival. She decided to use this opportunity to plan a sudden attack on Britishers. Women warriors dressed as devotees, had hidden their weapons in fruit and flower baskets. Kuyili realized that the British could lodge a counter attack. So, she decided to burn down their entire arsenal. She applied ghee and oil and her body and jumped into the British arsenal and immediately set herself afire. Thus she destroyed the entire storage. It's very unfortunate that the story of this brave lady is yet to become the topic of discussion.

KA PHAN LONGLAIT

Ka Phan Longlait is another unsung warrior from the north eastern part of India. She belonged to the Khasi community of Meghalaya. She actively participated in the Anglo Khasi war. This region of Khasi hills was ruled by the king U Tirot Singh. Just like other rulers of India, U Tirot Singh also had to face the

brunt of British expansionist policy. The actual tussle between the Khasi community

started when Britishers tried to encroach in their territory. Britishers wanted to construct a road from Khasi Nangkhlaw territory, which the Khasi community didn't like. They were well aware of how Britishers treat the colonized people. Meanwhile this Ka Phan Longlait experienced molestation



from Britishers. This event of molestation of Ka Phan spread like wildfire among Khasi territories. It gave a massive boost to her struggle against Britishers. U Tirot Singh was also preparing for the war against Britishers. Ka Phan started gathering the army of women warriors from Khasi territories. She soon emerged

as a leader and constantly reported to Tirot Sing about the continuing exploitations and injustices done by the British at the expense of the people of Nongkhlaw. Khasi warriors fought till their last breath. They didn't let the British take over their land very easily.

Both sides suffered a lot during this prolonged war, which lasted for four years. Nangkhlaw was the centre of Khasi dominance. Captain Lister from the British side decided to attack this territory. He had to face a lot of resistance from villages like Moirang and Nongramai, which was also the birthplace of Ka Phan Longlait. Due to continuous wars British soldiers felt tired. So, they decided to take a rest at a waterfall for a while. This waterfall was later renamed Ka Phan Longlait waterfall.

Ka phan decided to take advantage of their condition. She came in front of them as a local village lady who was searching for some mushrooms. She was carrying an intoxicating drink with her. Charmed by her beauty, Britishers also demanded that drink. As it was intoxicated, dizziness soon overpowered their senses. By the time they could understand what happened to them, Ka Phan Longlait had already thrown their weapon in the deep pool below the waterfall. She immediately summoned her Khasi warriors, who were hiding in a nearby area. With rage and anger the Khasi warriors descended upon the helpless soldiers who were killed with no mercy. This incident,

which took place on April 2, 1829 marks the height of the Khasi resistance in their attempt to defend British penetration to Nongkhlaw. After the killing of 32 British soldiers, Ka Phan Nonglait was arrested and was kept under house detention first at Mairang and later at Nongkhlaw. It was during the course of the Nongkhlaw Massacre that she managed to escape from the British lock-up. After escaping from jail she reorganised the Khasi warriors at Moirang and later at Nangkhlaw. With the death of Triot Singh in the battle of Nangkhlaw Anglo khasi war came to an end.

uv@unheardvoices.co.in



Meaningful change is still waited

When a person reaches the age of 75, their entire lifetime gets unfolded before them. In the context of a country, 75 years can pass by in an instant, akin to the blink of an eye. The fleeting nature of this period highlights the substantial changes that can occur within a nation over the course of seven and a half decades. Despite the era of British colonial rule, India managed to stand resilient. Even amid the oppression imposed by the British Empire, the destiny of lower castes gradually shifted. The question arises: What became of the aspirations of these marginalized communities during those 75 years? While the perception of their oppression might have transformed in the people's minds, have the underlying sentiments and wisdom truly evolved? Unfortunately, the answer remains a resounding no.

In rural areas, the depressed class society experienced significant growth primarily due to the expansion of the real estate industry. Both villages and cities expanded in size, leading to the integration



of deprived class settlements on the outskirts with urban centres. This spatial transformation was accompanied by a visible alteration in the appearance of these settlements, with the distinctive blue hues of their homes becoming more prominent. The statues of eminent figures like Dr. Ambedkar, Phule, Shahu, and Buddha were established across villages and beyond national borders. However, even today, the populace's emotions appear entrenched in the same historical sentiments. Remarkably, there is hardly a state in the country where incidents of atrocity against SCs & STs have not been documented. Despite unforeseen legal changes, the government has struggled to eradicate the oppression faced by socially backwards.

I had the opportunity to visit the village of my international agricultural economist friend, Dr. Parshuram Patil, situated in Kolhapur district. The Vadar community primarily inhabited this settlement. Notably, a statue of Dr. Ambedkar stood within this community. My surprise prompted me to ask Dr. Patil whether a statue of Dr. Ambedkar was present in their village despite their relatively small numbers. His response was telling, "Show me a village in this country where a statue of Dr. Ambedkar isn't found."

Dr. Ambedkar's legacy has spread widely, but meaningful change still needs to be discovered. Unfortunately, the challenges faced by the backward community have persisted over the past 75 years. The

situation remains dire. The burgeoning population has yet to be matched by proportional resource allocation. Intensified competition has unfolded. While fair competition can lead to the progress of both upper and lower segments of society, an uneven playing field transforms competition into a matter of survival. In this context, both these segments have perpetuated the suppression of the deprived class community.

Former Union Minister Kiran Rijju's statement in Parliament resonates: 'There was no reservation policy, but the government had communicated with Chief Justices of High Courts, urging them to consider disadvantaged groups while recommending appointments of judges. Until now, there has been just one judge from the ST community.'

Regrettably, the economic and justice realms have remained largely unchanged over the past 75 years. Let us now shift our focus to the representation of government employees. Out of 89 secretaries at the central level, only one belongs to the Scheduled Castes (SC). In contrast, three belong to the Scheduled Tribes, according to the latest government data presented in Parliament. A report on the role of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions in shaping and overseeing the reservation policy underscores the glaring underrepresentation of STs and SCs at various hierarchical levels. These figures fall well below the constitutionally mandated 15% and 7.5% quotas, respectively. The panel, led by BJP member Kirit Premjibhai Solanki, submitted its findings in the Lok Sabha. Despite an increase in the presence of SC and ST candidates in higher bureaucracy from 458 in 2017 to 550 in 2022, the progress still needs to be improved. Most SC and ST appointments were at the deputy secretary or director level, rising from 423 in 2017 to 509 in 2022. However, at the senior level of the Joint Secretary, the current count of 12 additional secretaries and 25 joint secretaries' pales in comparison to the sanctioned numbers of 90 and 242, respectively, for the SC and ST categories, as per ministry data. In the deputy secretary or director category, only 79 officials hail from SC or ST communities out of 509 authorized positions.

This paints a picture of the past 75 years. As we scrutinize an extended era of governance, the Congress party shoulders a significant responsibility for the present circumstances. As we reflect on the preceding 75 years, it becomes imperative to envision the next 25 years for our nation. To uplift the economic and social strata at the foundation, the development journey should be guided by the benevolent spirit of Buddha.

*Author is Pune based journalist.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Telangana HC decision

The Telangana High Court has delivered a notable verdict allowing citizens to exclude details about their religion and caste from birth certificates. Citing the need for the legal system to evolve with changing times and citizens requirements, the court has directed the state government to include a no religion and no caste option in birth certificate applications. Justice Lalitha Kanneganti, while addressing a plea by a couple seeking a non-religious and no- caste identity for their child, emphasized that citizens possess the right not to adhere to any religion, a right implicitly protected under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. The court underlined the obligation of authorities to act in alignment with citizens constitutional rights. It rejected the notion of forcing citizens to profess a specific religion or caste, terming it a violation of fundamental rights. In response to the couple's petition, the court ordered the inclusion of a no religion and no caste column in the online application format for birth certificates. It affirmed that individuals hold the right to reject any religious or caste affiliation.

Union Minister calls for reservation in judiciary

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale has raised the issue of reservation in the judiciary, advocating for increased representation of scheduled caste judges in high courts and the Supreme Court. Athawale highlighted the underutilization of deprived community members, who are qualified as advocates, judges, and magistrates. He urged the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to recognize the potential for excellence within the scheduled caste community and consider their inclusion in the higher judiciary.

The discussion around judicial reform and transparency in appointments gained traction recently when the Supreme Court collegium proposed the transfer of around 24 high court judges. Led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, the collegium recommended transfers from various high courts, aiming to improve the administration of justice across different states. The process of judge appointments and transfers in India operates under the collegium system, consisting of

the Chief Justice of India and senior judges of the Supreme Court. This system has been subject to debates on transparency and efficiency, often leading to delays in addressing vacancies and pending cases. Former Law Minister Kiren Rijju has stressed the importance of establishing a clear and standardized framework for appointments and transfers to ensure a fair and efficient selection process. Athawale's call for greater representation of scheduled caste judges underscores the ongoing discussions on diversity and inclusivity within the Indian judiciary.

Social activist dies during debate

Milind Makwana, a prominent Indian-American activist, passed away after suffering a heart attack during a city council meeting in Cupertino, California. Makwana was vehemently opposing the recent anti-caste discrimination bill, SB403, in the California State Assembly. He collapsed shortly after passionately speaking against the bill, raising concerns within the Hindu American community.

Makwana, known for his dedication to justice for underprivileged communities, challenged the bill's branding of the Hindu-American community based on caste. He believed that such legislation would further divide the community. His wife, Purvi Makwana, called on the community to continue his mission for justice, harmony, and a caste-free society.

The tragic incident prompted a fundraiser that collected over \$280,000 to support Makwana's causes. He was a fervent volunteer at Sewa International USA, contributing to relief efforts in Tamil Nadu during devastating floods in 2015. Makwana's untimely passing serves as a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of caring for well-being. His legacy lives on through his advocacy and contributions to various social initiatives.

NSFDC Workshop Expands Financial Support for Scheduled Castes

The National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC), a PSU under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, has taken significant steps to empower marginalized communities. Shri C. Ramesh Rao, GM shared details about the recent workshop-cum-management programme aimed at enhancing financial assistance for Scheduled Castes.

NSFDC has been providing subsidized interest rate loans to SCs with an annual family income of up to Rs. 3.00 lakhs for income-generating projects and education. The organization has released over Rs. 7648.89 crores for around 85.90 lakh households under credit-based schemes. An additional Rs. 274.26 crores have been sanctioned for Skill Training Programmes, benefiting nearly 190,000 beneficiaries.

*Compiled by Prajvalant.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



Ahilyadevi allowed widows to adopt children

Widows could not adopt any child after their husband's death. Ahilyadevi changed this rule and allowed them to adopt a child if they desired. She decided to take care of those widows and adopted children. This rule led to the emancipation of many widows. Now the widows became the sole owner of their property. She gave employment to the widows of soldiers who lost their lives during the battle of Panipat. The marriages of their children were also carried out under state patronage.

Rambhau Lande



She built thousands of water tanks, Ghats, public rest houses and wells. Barav, a special kind of wells were also constructed which were used for various purposes. In wartime, these Barav were used as military stations. These Barav were usually constructed in Shivalinga shape. One unusual benefit of this Barav was that it stopped the infiltration of wild animals in residential areas as it fulfilled their need for water.

Medicinal plants were also planted near these Barav in order to keep the water pure which eventually resulted in the better health of those who used to drink it. Along with construction of temples, she also built public rest houses in the periphery of those temples. These rest houses helped the traders, local saukars, and common folks, who used to travel long distances. These rest houses also generated employment and revenue.

Ahilyadevi and her husband Khande Rao Holkar were the ardent devotees of lord Vitthal and Rukhmini. They had made special arrangements for the daily worship of lord Vitthal along with the offering of Naivedya for which they had issued an

amount of 45 Rs per year. They had also sent gold ornaments to be offered at the feet of deity. She had sent an official letter on 6 April 1750 to the priests, informing about the consequences of their negligence towards their duty.

Shri. Vitthal and Rukmini are offered a tulusi garland daily. For this purpose, a tulusi garden has been constructed in Pandharpur, and from this garden, Shri. Vitthal and Rukmini are offered a tulusi garland every day. On the occasion of Mahashivratri, for the Ganga water anointment, the Kawad pilgrimage was started. For this Kawad, twenty-nine rupees and eight paise were given, while for the food shelter started for the Varkaris in Pandharpur, a contribution of one thousand rupees was made from Bohali, Paragane Kashegaon of Pandharpur. There is a Ram temple in Bohali, and the donated land associated with it is solely kept for cow dung and for the habitat of animals and birds. For the occasion of Mahashivratri, a Kawad is sent to the Shri. Gangotri region, among which one Kawad for Shri. Soroti Somnath was initiated by Ahilyadevi Holkar, for which she contributed twenty-two rupees. She ruled Malva



for nearly 28 years. During her rule she ensured the welfare and prosperity of her people. Significant portion of Malva was under forest where a tribal group called Bhills used to loot and rob the traders, travellers and common people. She handled this matter carefully and made the Bhills the protector of those people. She also gave them the land for cultivation. State patronage was also given to their festivals and rituals. She made special rules for the farmers and the debt related matter. Ensured that the farmer doesn't lose his land in debt matters. She also made it compulsory to inform the state about the debt. These rules came as a big relief for farmers. She used to distribute the seeds among the farmers before the season. She also made an arrangement for trade of turmeric and spices to distant places. She conducted training sessions for farmers to bring awareness about the new ways of farming. Her tenure was no less than a golden period for farmers. She would not force farmers to pay the taxes in case of any harm done to their fields by any reason or natural calamity. She would also help them with seeds. She encouraged farmers to experiment with their farming.

Malhar Rao Holkar had bought a large part of land near Pune, which was used as a grazing field for sheep. The crops grown in those farm lands were transported to nearby territories and the palace at Indore. The Mangoes grown in the areas Wafgaon, Andavgan, Kambi, Chandawad and Nifad were transported to the palace at Indore. Ahilyadevi used to share it with her loved ones. The saplings of those Mango trees were also planted in the areas of Indore and Maheshwar kingdom. She also encouraged the farmers to plant the trees like Peepal, Mango, red sandalwood and many more.

She ordered the trees like Peepal, Mango, neem, tamarind on the roots connecting the cities like Chandwad, Jalakoti and Chanundi to Maheshwar. Even today we can see that these areas are laden with lush green beauties. The villages like Bhanapura, Rampura, Mahidpur, Nimbaheda and Malhargad were selected to create the ghettos of plants like Mango, and Teak. She ordered the mass plantation of trees on the streets connecting Jyotirlinga, Char Dham and other religious places. Plant nurseries were built to create the saplings of plants so that they can be planted in large amounts. She also used to send letters to those who took care of those plants to ensure that they were doing their duties.

Widows could not adopt any child after their husband's death. Ahilyadevi changed this rule and allowed them to adopt a child if they desired. She decided to take care of those widows and adopted children. This rule led to the emancipation of many widows. Now the widows became the sole owner of their property. She gave employment to the widows of soldiers who lost their lives during the battle of Panipat. The marriages of their children were also carried out under state patronage.

The rejuvenation of Kashi Vishvanaath temple

by her was a decisive moment. It ensured the safe practice of rituals on the bank of Ganga River. This act of her helped in restoration of confidence among the Hindus of Kashi which were suffering under Islamic rule. The priest class of Kashi was expecting some miracle to happen as the Hindu temples had suffered a lot due to foreign invaders. After visiting Kashi, Malhar Rao had also expressed the wish of rejuvenation of Kashi temple. He once again raised this issue after coming back to Maheshwar. But he was too busy to look after the rejuvenation of this temple. Also, he was busy with military expeditions. Ahilyadevi decided to fulfil this wish of Malhar Rao Holkar. It is interesting to note that the royal treasury of Maheshwar was used for this noble deed.

After the rejuvenation process, a Brahmin from Tarapur was appointed to perform the daily rituals in the temple. Slowly the priest class started growing in Kashi. Some group of priests and scholars met Ahilyadevi to construct a learning centre for Vedas in Kashi. They told her that it will create more Vedic scholars. She wholeheartedly accepted their demand and also gave them the land to build a Vedshala. A Holkar Wada (palace) was built for the teachers to stay. Along with Vedas, they were also told to teach the Upanishads, Dharmasankaras, Architecture, Mathematics, Economics and many more subjects. This priest class was also told to build the class of people, who are not only experts in religious rituals but also responsible towards building character of society.

People nowadays struggle to educate their children. The rampant commercialization of the education field resulted in the creation of a group of people, who are only focused on fulfilling their own needs. Such students, after some time, also tend to ignore their parents. They just lack this feeling that we owe something to this society.

That's why along with education one must have the knowledge about his/ her culture, which will ensure in creating a society based on some morals. Such a noble vision she was carrying in her mind while giving a grant to establish a Vedshala. Giving state patronage to Kashi Vishwanath Dham gave impetus to the building of unity, empathy, and humanity among the society.

Attainment of Moksha is considered as the final goal of human life. Visiting Kashi Dham once in a life is considered as the step towards attaining moksha. There are thousands of instances where people have left their home and family and left towards Kashi in order to attain moksha. Gaga Bhatta from Paithan, Samarth Ramdas Swami from Jambgaon and Brahmendraswamy Dhavadshikar had stayed in Kashi for attainment of knowledge. Keeping in mind the importance of Kashi temple, our prime minister has also contributed by rejuvenating the Kashi Vishvanaath corridor.

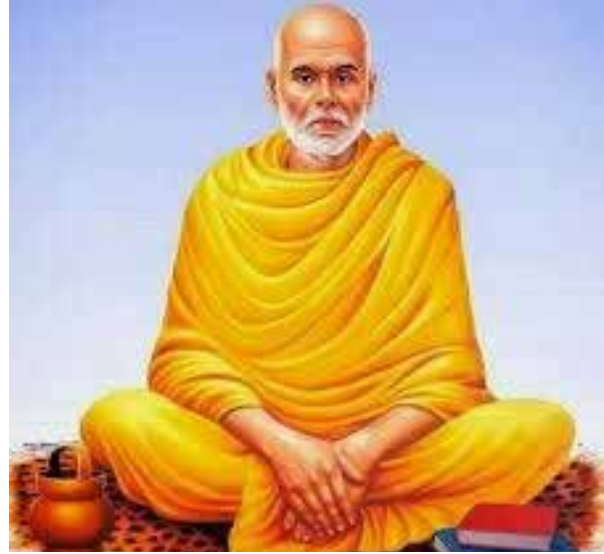
*Author is a Researcher of Holkar Dynasty.
uv@unheardvoices.co.in*



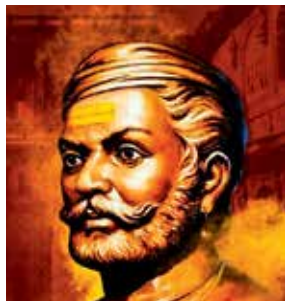
DINVISHESH

Sree Narayana Guru, a revered sage and social reformer from Kerala, India, emerged as a beacon of hope in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in 1856 to the marginalized Ezhava community, he defied societal norms by mastering Sanskrit and delving deep into spirituality. Distressed by the pervasive caste discrimination and untouchability, Guru envisioned an egalitarian society, encapsulated in his renowned mantra, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man." A true harbinger of change, he established temples in areas where lower castes faced exclusion from mainstream temples. Moreover, emphasizing the vital role of education in social upliftment, he founded numerous schools, making education accessible to the downtrodden. His profound impact on Kerala's social fabric was instrumental in the region's renaissance, bringing about pivotal shifts towards inclusivity and justice. Although he departed in 1928, Guru's legacy remains undiminished, inspiring countless individuals with his ideals of unity, equality, and spirituality. Today, his teachings and the institutions he established stand as testament to a life devoted to societal transformation.

Remembering Sree Narayana Guru



26th August
Narayan Guru Birth Anniversary



7th September
Raje Umaji Naik
Birth Anniversary



7th September
Sant Dnyaneshwar
Birth Anniversary

To subscribe us,
simply scan or click
on this QR code and
fill the form.

