

UNHEARD VOICES

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AYODHYA : A NEW SOCIAL BEGINNING



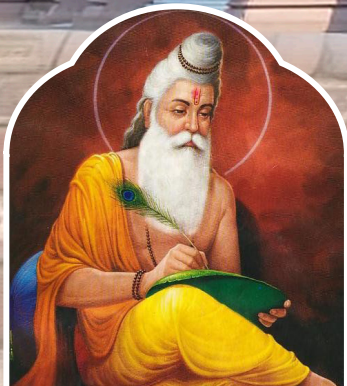
Prime Minister
Narendra Modi



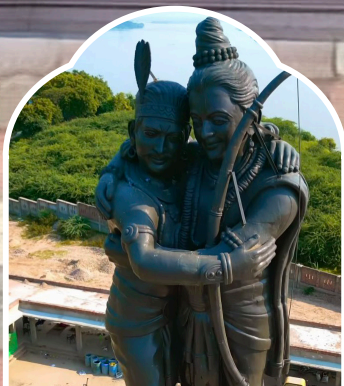
Supreme Court



Kameshwar Chaupal,
Trustee of Shri Ram Janma
Bhoomi Teerth Kshetra,
who performed sheelanyas
of the temple



Maharshi Valmiki



Raja Nishad



Shabari Mata



EDITORIAL

AYODHYA: A SILENT SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Consecration ceremony at Ram Janma Bhoomi in Ayodhya is all set to have a prodigious impact on the Indian psyche. Struggle for emancipation of Ram Janma Bhoomi has been going on for almost 500 years. It is a serious topic for social scientists to search what was the motivation for this struggle. It is another topic how the struggle kept going on during this period when Hindu society was seriously handicapped with social ills like caste discrimination and untouchability. All the well-wishers of this society are expected to have a serious study and evaluation on this topic without any prejudice and bias.

Despite having a history of 500 years, Ram Janma Bhoomi movement got momentum four decades back. People participated in large numbers in this agitation as it was the first serious struggle in independent India. People had high expectations from polity as they genuinely felt that the issue would be resolved in independent India. It did not happen and the rest is history.

Ayodhya agitation is largely seen from a political perspective. No doubt this movement has political implications. Its political impact is still experienced. But it is not surprising as we are inter-woven society. Anything happening in any other field leaves its major or minor impact on politics. For example, economic decisions by the government have political impact. Similarly, any socio-religious decision or movement is bound to have political effect because of inter-dependency. For example, the Shah Bano case was fundamentally legal/religious in its character but it left behind a huge political impact.

It would be unfair to assess Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation merely from a political perspective. Political will is expressed through voting in democratic set up. But the political will is determined by several non-political factors including social, economic, religious etc. Democratic set up has a mechanism to express popular will only in the political sphere while other aspects do not have such a platform in India. Therefore, impact of Ram Janma Bhoomi movement

needs to be evaluated keeping aside political angle.

In all fairness, we must admit that Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation was a major social happening in post-independence India. Two others were the anti-emergency struggle and Mandal Commission. Anti-emergency agitation was political in nature and gave push to anti-Congressism. Mandal Commission agitation was socio-political in nature and its impact is still seen occasionally. But the uniqueness of Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation is that its impact graph is going high continuously, which is not restricted to politics only.

This would not have happened unless the Ayodhya movement had a strong popular support from all quarters of the society. The popular support is evident if one looks at the ground reality. In other words, Hindus have supported the cause, brushing aside all the traditional considerations. They include the so-called upper caste and the people, who were socially and economically deprived class. We have published an interview of Kameshwar Chaupal, who performed 'sheelanyas' of Ram temple. Chaupal belongs to the Scheduled Caste community and his experience and views need to be considered seriously.

Reality is that Hindus kept aside caste sensitivities for the cause and Bhagwan Ram brought them together. Ayodhya agitation, thus, is the extension of Bhakti movement, which started in the seventh century and spread all over India in course of time. Equality is the essence of Bhakti movement. We have not imported the principle of equality from Europe. The Bhakti movement has been working for equality for centuries in different ways, which are not known to the European world.

Therefore, it is the right time to have a holistic approach towards the achievement of Ayodhya agitation. It is the right time to have a new perspective to assess its social impact and qualitative change, which it brought. It is the right time to have a 360-degree approach to judge its impact on the future.

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While the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement helped to reduce caste sensitivities and develop a sense of equality, another major achievement is that it increased participation of women in public life, giving them equal status. Women are handicapped by double trouble in many cases. Firstly, they are handicapped by caste and secondly, they become victims of gender inequality. Ayodhya agitation helped to bring about a silent revolution in this respect as women, who were not permitted to go outside the homes, were seen in the struggle. Ayodhya agitation increased socialization of women, which was absolutely necessary for a healthy society. Women, who used to use 'pardah' or 'ghungat' were seen along with males in the agitation. Many of the women joined politics and rose to national or state level. The moment was an indirect and spontaneous initiative in empowering women. Women are normally more devotional than men. Religious aspect of the movement might have proved instrumental in

bringing about this change. One should not object to any vehicle, which is serving the purpose. It needs to be seen in a healthy manner. If religion is helping to inculcate a sense of gender equality among the masses, it needs to be welcomed.

Ayodhya movement, in other words, is a serious self-correction exercise, which needs to be welcomed. It has successfully diluted caste sensitivities for which Hindus are taking relentless efforts for centuries. What is the harm if Hindus are taking initiative to eradicate inequality? In fact, it is the right course of action if such self-correction courses are spontaneous and natural instead of an outsourced remedy. Such self-correction exercise is more sustainable and qualitative. Social cohesiveness, manifested in Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation, is expected to accelerate our efforts to establish a society, which is free from the clutches of any discrimination and filled with a feeling of fraternity.

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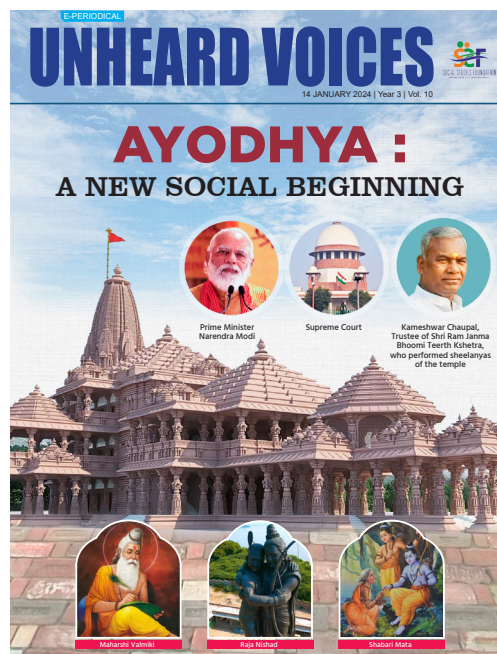
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Vaikom Temple



Kalaram Temple



Patit Pawan Temple

Kala Ram Mandir to Ayodhya : A journey towards social cohesion

We had a time when certain people were denied entry in the temple. This was against all the principles and unethical. Depressed class had to struggle to fight for entry in the temple and perform any rituals. Today, the situation has changed a lot. Sheelanyas of Ram Janma Bhoomi temple was performed by a person belonging to Scheduled Caste, indicating a sea change in the mindset of Hindus.

Pramod



Come 22 January 2024, Bharat will be creating a history! The consecration ceremony at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the birth place of Rama, means a lot in terms of a social revolution which has been taking place in the background, rather subtly than with a bang! In the year 1930 a group of people who were looked down upon, merely because they were born with certain caste labels (generally regarded as lower castes) and denied equal rights as any other Bharatiya nagarik, conducted a satyagrah to get entry in to the Kala Ram Mandir of Nashik. Their leader was none other than Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar! This satyagraha went on for a long period of about five years but with no success. And here we are, in the month of January 2024, about to dedicate the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya (the birth place of Rama), the foundation stone of which was laid by a person (in 1989) belonging to the Scheduled castes, to the

Nation! This was, therefore, in no way a small event. The trend continues today also where special invitees to the consecration ceremony will have people from all castes! Moreover, they will be participating in the traditional rituals to be carried out for the pranpratisha of the idol of Ram Lalla. It will not only be a temple which adds to the rich heritage of Bharat but also a point where all the differences will dissolve into the spirit of oneness. It will, therefore, serve as a milestone in achieving social harmony and setting aside the feeling of divided-by-castes. It will show to the world that Hindus are capable of handling their social issues on their own.

The journey hitherto has been very long and difficult. Today's common Bharatiya nagarik may not be knowing the hard facts of Bharat's history where a section of our own society, who were regarded as 'untouchables', had to fight a long battle merely



to get an entry into the temple! It will therefore be more than appropriate to look back into the history, trace the important events which have finally led to and culminated into building of Ram Mandir and also understand the social implications of the same.

Untouchability: A curse to the Hindu Society

Bharat has a society which is delicately woven into a caste system. The number of castes in Bharat is estimated at about 3000, popularly known as 'Jatis'. These Jatis are further knit by sub-castes which are about 25000 in number. Each of the caste has its own values, social culture and traditions. However, from times unknown, some of the castes which were mainly engaged in cleaning activities like scavenging, sweeping and washing started being treated as 'untouchables'. It meant that people from other castes would not even touch the people who were regarded as 'untouchables'. The practice brought in huge discrimination against people belonging to castes which were treated as untouchables.

The discriminatory practices were not only against the basic tenets of Hinduism but were also inhuman in nature. Political, civil and religious rights were grossly denied to the, so-to-say, untouchables. Prohibition on eating together with other caste people, separate seating arrangements in schools for untouchable students, prohibition to use common roads, separate burial / cremation grounds for untouchables, prohibition on taking / drinking water from common water taps/wells, prohibition on entering public worship places were some such practices.

The Temple Entry Movement

Due to the social prohibition on entering public worship places, those regarded as untouchables were not able to enter temples and worship the Deity even though they believed/followed the same deity. Great seers, social reformers therefore looked at Temple entry as one of the effective means to remove untouchability. With this view, temple entry movement was started in the late 19th century and gained momentum in the 20th century. It can be traced back to the 1888 when Sri Narayan Guru and Kumaran Asan made an attempt for the, so-to-say, lower castes' people to get entry into the temple. This was known as the Aruvippuram movement. On the day of Shivaratri (1888), Sri Narayan Guru took a stone from Neyyar river and installed it as Shivalinga at Aruvippuram (Kerala). The act was to demonstrate that consecration of idol was not only limited to, so-to-say, the upper castes.

Vaikom Satyagraha (Travancore) 1924 was the next in the movement. It was led by K. P. Kesava and launched in Kerala demanding the opening of surrounding roads to the temple to those who were regarded as untouchables. This movement was backed by jathas (groups) from Punjab and Madurai. Mahatma Gandhi had also visited Kerala to support the movement. Further in 1931, poet Subramaniyam Tirumambu (the 'singing sword of Kerala') led a group of volunteers to the Guruvayur temple demanding

entry for the so-called untouchables. Finally, in 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore issued a proclamation throwing open all the government-controlled temples to all Hindus.

The movement later spread to other states of Bharat. In 1932 the movement was started in Odisha. In 1933 four temples – Pareshwar temple at Paradeep, Raghunath temple at Berhampur, Gopinath temple at Remuna, Shiva temple at Kujang in Cuttack opened their doors to those regarded as untouchables. A movement to gain entry in the famous Jagannath temple of Puri was started in 1934. The practice of not allowing those who were regarded as untouchables to enter the Puri temple, after long struggle, has withered away, more particularly, in the post-independence period. The most prominent visitor to the Puri temple in the post-independence period has been the then Union Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram. In 1939, the then Madras Presidency, passed the Madras Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act, under the premiership of C. Rajagopalachari. This Act allowed entry to the untouchables and other lower caste people.

The state of Maharashtra also been very important insofar as the temple entry movement is concerned. The state saw various movements at places like Ratnagiri, Amravati, Pune, Nashik, Kolhapur, Pandharpur, Nrusinhawadi etc. In a period of four years from 1925 to 1929 temple entry movement gained momentum under the leadership of Swatantryaveer V D Savarkar. Veer Savarkar, with an intention to bring in core social reforms, initiated and spearheaded multiple types of efforts, one of which was to fight for gaining entry for people regarded as untouchables in various temples of Ratnagiri and the vicinity. Vithal temple of Ratnagiri, Hanuman temple of Shirgaon, Radhakrishna temple of Ratnagiri and Vithal temple of Devrukh. Savarkar's efforts yielded limited results where while he was successful in getting entry for those who were regarded as untouchables in Vithal temple of Ratnagiri and Devrukh, Hanuman temple of Shirgaon, he was partially successful in getting entry upto a certain point (stair of Namdeva) in the Radhakrishna temple. He further built, with financial aid from one Shri Bhagoji Keer, a temple for people who were regarded as untouchables – the Patit Pawan temple. However, after sustained efforts from Savarkar, this temple became a temple for all. Similar efforts were made by Pandurang Sadashiv Sane alais Sane Guruji in 1946-47 which was successful and the government legally opened all temples in the Bombay Province to the so-called untouchables.

What changed the face of the temple entry movement, was the temple entry effort made by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at the Kala Ram Mandir at Nashik in the year 1930. This movement was different from the movements happened hitherto, in a way, as the other temple entry movements were spearheaded mostly by the, so-to-say, upper caste people, the Nashik movement was headed by none



other than Dr. Ambedkar himself! Dr. Ambedkar led this satyagraha along with a few of his associates. The satyagraha went on for about five years but with no success in gaining entry to the temple. Later Dr. Ambedkar decided not to participate in any such temple entry satyagraha. In one of his speeches, he clearly articulated the objectives of satyagraha – “Whether the Hindu mind is willing to accept us as human beings, this is the question to be tested through this Satyagraha. We wish to know whether those very Hindus would give us the status of man or not. This Satyagraha is one of the efforts for bringing about a change of heart among the high caste Hindus. Hence the success of this effort depends on the Hindu mind-set.” This speech of Dr. Ambedkar is not only heart-wrenching but also an eye-opener for the so-to-say upper caste Hindus.

Besides the above states, temple entry movement had also impact on Jammu & Kashmir. Maharaja Hari Singh was pro-active in taking all the measures in ameliorating the evils associated with untouchability. On 31 October 1932, he issued a proclamation “throwing open all state temples to the depressed classes for Darshan and prayers.

Overall, it can be said that the temple entry movement instilled new energy and confidence in the people which further grew and manifested in many ways in the social life of Bharat.

Ram Mandir – A subtle revolution

The present day Ram Mandir will be thrown open to public for worship from 23 January 2024 onwards. About four decades back, in the year 1986, a district court in Uttar Pradesh ordered opening of the gates of the ‘disputed structure’ (commonly known as Babri mosque) and allowed worship by Hindus therein. The gates were opened within half an hour of the court order. Later in the year 1989, Ram-shila (stone/brick) puja was conducted in thousands of villages and other places in Bharat. The worshipped ‘Ram-shila’ were then sent to Ayodhya through the kar-sevaks. The foundation stone was laid for the present day structure at the hands of Shri Kameshwar Chaupal, a member of the scheduled caste community. This was a huge moment in the revolution that was taking place in the background. It is to be noted that neither the priests nor the so-to-say upper caste Hindus objected to the idea of a scheduled caste community member laying the foundation stone of Ram mandir. Further, there is not a smallest indication of resistance in the society at large to visit the temple on this pretext (that the foundation stone was laid by a scheduled caste community member).

The shila-pujan ceremony (1989) in villages and other places was attended by people from all castes and strata of the society thereby cutting across all lines and differences dividing the castes. The differences just dissolved and the Hindu society got united like never before. Later in the year 1992, when the ‘disputed structure’ was demolished, lakhs and

crores of people came together, walked together, dined together and stayed together harmoniously in their journey to Ayodhya. The movement for Ram Mandir therefore assumes a never-before like importance.

The Valmiki community, descendant of Mahirshi Valmiki, which is primarily engaged in cleaning of toilets, drainages and the like does not, normally, find acceptance in day-to-day life of ordinary citizens. It is even more surprising that Mahirshi Valmiki, the sage who scripted the Ramayana, did not hitherto find a place in some of the Ram temples across the country. People used to object to even placing of the sage’s photo frame in a temple. And here we are today with a temple planned for Mahirshi Valmiki in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir complex itself! It is also a matter of great pride that Ayodhya airport has been named as ‘Mahirshi Valmiki Airport’!

The Ram Mandir complex today will be housing temples, among others, for Jatayu (a bird demigod, who tried to save Sita from being flown to Lanka by Ravana) and currently regarded as representative of all those who sacrificed their lives including the kar sevaks, Mata Shabari (an ascetic woman from the Bhil community who received blessings from Rama), Nishadraj, the sailor who sailed Rama through the river Ganga on his way to exile. All this will help to bring together the Hindu society and spread the message of social harmony in a big way!

The Hindus are gradually seen to be doing away with the inhuman practices followed against a section of the society. The boards notifying ‘entry to all without any discrimination’ which used to be displayed by many of the hotels and restaurants in cities in the past have disappeared now. This is an indication of the society accepting the change. Dining together, working together no longer remains a taboo. The Hindus have also started accepting, to some extent, the ‘Beti-vyavahar’ – the inter-caste marriages. The inter-caste culture has begun to be celebrated in many ways.

Dr. Ambedkar had said in one of his speeches “It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry “We must do something for the Untouchables”. One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying ‘Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu’. It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the Untouchables”. In the present day context, this means that the mindset of the privileged class should change. And this, precisely seems to be happening. A self-correction course seems to have been taken. However, complete social harmony still remains a goal to be achieved. It is a ‘comma’ in the journey and not a ‘full stop’.

Ram Mandir, will no doubt be considered, as a tangible representation of a social revolution!

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Prabhu Shri Ram is key to social integration : Chaupal



“Mark my words, this work for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram would bring a revolutionary change in the society,” says a Kameshwar Chaupal, who belongs to Scheduled Caste community and trustee of the Shri Ram Janma Bhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust. In this interview with ‘Unheard Voices’ ahead of the installation of the idol at the Prabhu Shriram temple at Ayodhya, the VHP joint general secretary in charge of Bihar’s tribal-dominated districts, who hails from Bihar’s Mithila region and who laid the temple’s first brick at the Sheelanyas site, tells how he has experienced the Prabhu Shri Ram temple movement is bridging fissures in Hindu society. Read on...

UNHEARD VOICES: - The day 9th November 1989 is a very important day because the foundation stone of Shri Ram Temple was laid by you on that day. Some people think it symbolises a new India. What is your take on it?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: - Personally, for me, it is an unforgettable moment. Wide gaps prevailed between my community and other cross sections of the society. On the day on which I was given the opportunity to lay the foundation stone (Sheelanyas), I felt the sages (Sants) honoured me and my community in the same manner in which Prabhu Shri Ram had restored the honour of Devi Ahilya. I could see a major social transformation happening and a powerful message being spread. There is a perception that the Hindu community cannot take a stand against the perversities that had sneaked into it in the Middle Ages. However, with lakhs of sages (Sants) from across the country deciding at the Dharma Sansad that a person

belonging to the depressed classes would lay the foundation stone at the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram, was a sea change, a giant leap to vitalise the stagnated society and a ray of hope that the fissures in the society can be bridged. Thanks to the positive initiative, over a dozen Social work activists have come forward from the hostel where I studied. Several good, dedicated activists including myself are associated with it to this date. This could happen because of the values inculcated in us by them. The issue of a divided society had come up in the past too and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar too expected the sages (Sant) to profess unanimously that there is no space for discrimination in the Hindu religion. Had the society woken up to it at that time, several unfortunate incidents could have been averted. Now even the sages (Sants) have proclaimed the brotherhood of Hindus at the Dharma Sansad and that nobody is inferior. The message that all Hindus are equal is spreading fast. With such integrity, we



would be able to bridge the fissures in society that have developed during the thousands of years of conflict.

UNHEARD VOICES: - What was the reaction of your family, your relatives, and your friends to you being given the opportunity to lay the foundation stone (Sheelanyas)?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: My friends were always positive. My personal experience is that society too was positive. The rich, influential and educated people used to distance themselves from us. That resulted in awkwardness. When I returned home after laying the foundation stone (Sheelanyas), the village headman, Baldev Jha whom we call Baldev Babu, called on me at my house. Since I had gone out, he told my father to ask me to meet him. When my father told me that and suggested that I go to see him, I was in two minds. Since a dignified person from the village wanted to meet me, it would have been appropriate for me to visit him. However, I had several apprehensions such as where he would make me sit and how he would treat me. Until then, we were not allowed to sit with prominent people. Customarily, we were required to sit on the floor. But I was pleasantly surprised that when I reached his house, he came forward to greet me, ushered me to the place he was sitting and offered me a seat. Moreover, he summoned all the children of the house and told them that since I was older and like a brother, they should touch my feet. Then he offered a cup of tea. I kept thinking about where I would wash my teacup. But the moment I finished my tea, he took my empty teacup. Both of us were overwhelmed. I had never received such treatment earlier. I could see the revolutionary change in society reaching our village too. Today, all the people of my village participate in celebrations of any community and share food. Those who discriminate are treated with contempt by society. Therefore, I think that the decision changed the entire society. Though our area was a forte of the socialists, only Brahmins would perform auspicious rites. When people saw the sages (Sants) taking the decision, they were disillusioned. Today, the casteist mindset has reduced in all cross sections of Hindus and the feeling of Hindutva has risen strongly.

UNHEARD VOICES: What was the social mindset in your experience before the laying of the foundation stone (Sheelanyas)?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: Before the laying of the foundation stone (Sheelanyas) we often experienced discrimination. We were not permitted to sit with, mix up with or share food with influential people. Let me recall an experience I had while in school. The schools were not public in those days. We used to run campaigns to enrol students. Teachers and students would go together to convince parents to enrol their children. During such a campaign, we had a night camp at a house where we were to have food supper too. The owner of the house whisperingly asked the

teacher castes of the students accompanying him. When my caste was revealed, he was distraught. Plates to serve food to me were brought from the hamlet of the Dalits nearby. I had to sit on the ground near the door and have my meal while the teacher savoured the food inside. Such were the experiences. However, after this campaign I never had any such experience or even heard of discrimination from any of my friends.

UNHEARD VOICES: Could you please tell your family background and how you came in contact with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: I was born in the erstwhile Bhagalpur district in the Mithilanchal region. Today, the district is restructured and renamed as Supaul. My birthplace was in the area affected by the Kosi River, known as the 'Sorry of Bihar' because it brings massive floods. Educational infrastructure was non-existent in that area. When we were children, our father called a teacher, who had passed the Class 8 examination, to our village and that heralded the educational revolution in the village. Later on, I moved out of the village for further studies where initially I stayed with a relative. Subsequently, I moved in with a teacher, who shared accommodation with three to four students.

Thankfully, our teacher had a big heart and therefore I did not face any discrimination. Later on, a teacher Hriday Narayan Yadhav joined our school. He was associated with Congress party but also a RSS activist. He gave the training to three or four of us in the name of the parade. I came to know about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh from him. When I passed my matriculation examination, he advised me to study further and gave me a recommendation letter. Clutching that letter in my hand, I went to Madhubani. The letter was addressed to a person from Madhubani. He helped me find accommodation at a hostel and enrolled me with a college. That was when I came to know that Hriday Narayan Babu too was a social activist. Later, we started meeting regularly in the hostel. Our gatherings were extremely good. I also participated in the protest against the emergency.

After the emergency was lifted, I attended Officers Training Camps. I worked as Tehsil Pracharak and Zilla Pracharak as full-time activist (Purna Kal Swayamsevak). Later, in 1980, I was asked to work for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. I worked at various levels up to the Pradesh Sanghatan Mantri with Vishwa Hindu Parishad. After the laying of the foundation stone (Sheelanyas), I was asked to join politics. I worked in the political field for 12 to 14 years. I remained associated with the movement for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram and continued to work for the RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad even while I was in politics. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad leadership kept me associated with the central leadership. I would attend meetings of Vishwa Hindu Parishad



**Kameshwar
Chaupal,
performing
'Sheelanyas'
at Ram Janma
Bhoomi Temple
in Ayodhya.**

even in those days. In short, due to the inspiration and encouragement from the society, I have been working in other fields too.

UNHEARD VOICES: Critics often object that the Shri Ram Janma Bhoomi movement is political. Do you think the scope of the movement is vast and that it has played a major social role?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: The real fact is that the people opposing us have a very strong bias against Prabhu Shri Ram and us, the people devoted to Him. So much so, they are not willing to accept even the existence of Lord Shri Ram. They go to the extent of saying that Lord Shri Ram is a myth and his existence is not a historical fact. How will they admit that society has transformed due to the movement for Lord Shri Ram? How would they admit that the people devoted to the movement for Prabhu Shri Ram are doing good work and that too effectively? However, I have experienced a social transformation. The Ram Janma Bhoomi movement has reduced casteism. In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the states where we live, caste politics prevailed. That would result in caste conflicts. People of one caste would attack people of other castes. However, people from urban as well as rural areas, people of scheduled castes, backward classes, and upper castes, all came together due to the movement for Prabhu Shri Ram. Consequently, the people indulging in caste politics lost their strength. They are angry because of that. The visible proof of this is that the people indulging in caste politics in Bihar have been restricted to second or third place. Prabhu Shri Ram Movement has nurtured patriotism and Hindutva in the minds of people.

UNHEARD VOICES: This is a political point of view. What is your experience on the ground level?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: I am talking of things

beyond politics. Recently a procession (Yatra) was organised in Bihar to bring a boulder from Nepal to carve out the idol for installation at the temple of Prabhu Shri Ram. I was bringing the boulder from Nepal. No propaganda was made, no posters or banners were put up, and no announcement was made using loudspeakers but it was an unprecedented procession (Yatra). People of all age groups thronged the entire route from Janakpur to Ayodhya and waited through the night to have Darshan. Devotion to Prabhu Shri Ram helped people overcome caste and language differences and unite. The first village to enter Bihar from Nepal has a predominantly deprived community population and is known for the influence of communists.

However, when we reached there, we found out that all roads in the village had been washed spotlessly clean and decorated with garlands. The place where the chariot carrying the boulder was to be parked overnight had been decorated with flowers. This scene made the journalists accompanying us so emotional that their eyes welled up with tears. If a boulder from which the idol of Prabhu Shri Ram is to be carved gives rise to such affection, devotion, and harmony among people, no wonder that the entire nation got united for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram. This is no political phenomenon.

UNHEARD VOICES: Though the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement has reduced the inequality, and discrimination in Hindu society, some say it is symbolic. What is your take on this?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: Those who are raising doubts are pained deeply in their hearts because their conspiracy to divide based on castes has failed. The number of Brahmins was almost negligible among the people travelling in the chariot during the



procession. Most of the people, who travelled from Janakpur to Ayodhya with the chariot belonged to the depressed community and members of backward classes. Nobody thought of caste. Everybody felt that Prabhu Shri Ram helped them overcome the hate. The devotion to Prabhu Shri Ram bridges the gaps and people belonging to all cross sections of the society mix up, sit together, and work shoulder to shoulder. Prabhu Shri Ram once invoked such unity and now the organisations working for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram are doing the same. Prabhu Shri Ram, in his lifetime, obtained unanimous support from people belonging to the depressed classes, spread the feeling of oneness and made them self-confident. With the support of women and distressed classes, he gained victory over Ravana, the mighty terrorist of his time. Thus, people have now become confident that the name of Prabhu Shri Ram can unite the distressed people and the legacy of Prabhu Shri Ram can bring Ram Rajya to this nation.



UNHEARD VOICES: As a trustee of the Shri Ram Janma Bhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, what are your plans to ensure that this atmosphere prevails in future too? How this social message be reflected in the daily rituals and other programmes being organised at the temple?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: Ensuring that Prabhu Shri Ram remains at the depth of the heart of the people is essential for the purpose. We cannot follow the ideals of Prabhu Shri Ram unless we are devoted to Him. People are now getting devoted to Prabhu Shri Ram. When one devotes himself to Prabhu Shri Ram, he follows His ideals. Thus, the entire society will follow the ideals of Prabhu Shri Ram. People belonging to all cross sections of the society are engaged in the work of constructing the Ram temple. People belonging to deprived classes are engaged in the work in such large numbers that newspapers have carried reports that the people belonging to the backward classes have taken over the entire work. The people who felt they would be able to engineer fissures in the society in the name of caste are becoming restless. Nobody would be able to distract the people now. The tendencies and behaviour of people are changing. Now when people go on pilgrimage, they realise that the aggressors could violate our temples and our dignity because

we were divided. The movement for the cause of Lord Shri Ram has bridged fissures in society effectively. With such an atmosphere prevailing, the devotees of Prabhu Shri Ram would embrace the members of deprived classes and say we are all brothers. They would reach out to the poor mothers in the society the way Prabhu Shri Ram reached out to Mata Shabari. People are already getting united. People have now understood that Prabhu Shri Ram became the legend that he is because he reached out to the depressed, distressed members of the society.

UNHEARD VOICES: Do you feel the temple of Prabhu Shri Ram at Ayodhya is a symbol of society's integrity?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: The temple and the name of Prabhu Shri Ram is the key to doing away the social inequalities and ushering in equality. Our children used to enjoy picnics on January 1. This year, on January 1, a total of 1 lakh 37 thousand youths arrived at the temple of Prabhu Shri Ram for darshan and resolved to follow the ideals of Prabhu Shri Ram in their lives. Today the youth is making a beeline at the temple. This shows that in days to come, more and more people will adopt the ideals of Prabhu Shri Ram and it will end inequality.

UNHEARD VOICES: This means the movement for the temple of Prabhu Shri Ram has given a major boost to the work of removing inequality.

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: We still have to do a lot of work for social integration. I do not feel that social inequality has been done away with. However, the work for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram has given a major thrust. People would adopt the principle of social integrity.

UNHEARD VOICES: You explained how you have experienced that the work for the cause of Lord Shri Ram is uniting the people. Do the people at the grassroots level have the same feeling?

KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL: Recently Samarpan Abhiyan was held. I visited a couple of places in Bihar to launch the Samarpan Abhiyan. When we went there, we visited the colonies of the people at the lowest strata of the society like the conservancy staff. The people, when they came to know we were approaching for the cause of Prabhu Shri Ram, cleaned and washed all the streets to welcome us. They were overwhelmed. They displayed such generosity that if a woman approached us to contribute Rs 100, her husband too offered us Rs 1,000, the amount he had borrowed from someone, insisting that we should accept the entire amount both were offering together. Seeing this, I came to believe Mata Shabari is still alive, waiting for someone like Lord Shri Ram to reach out to her. And, many followers of Prabhu Shri Ram are now coming forward to reach out to such Mata Shabari's waiting for them. Mark my words, this work for the cause of Lord Shri Ram would bring a revolutionary change in society.

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Shift in Hindu social dynamics & journey towards inclusivity

The Ayodhya movement, which gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was a watershed moment in Indian history. While the political aspects of the movement have been widely discussed, it is essential to explore its social implications, particularly in fostering a more inclusive approach within the Hindu community. This article delves into the transformative journey that the Ayodhya movement triggered, leading to a significant shift in social dynamics, increased participation of marginalized sections, and a more inclusive Hindu society.

Yogesh



As seen across the globe, some moments in a nation's life have the power to alter the trajectory of history. The of Babri Masjid was one such moment that set-in motion a string of transformative events for Hindu society as a whole. Today, as the Ram Mandir is ready to be inaugurated in Ayodhya, it stands not just as any temple structure but an assertion of Hindu solidarity. In a way, what could not be achieved through several years, was done by Ram Janma Bhoomi andolan.

Historical Background:

The roots of the renewed Ayodhya movement can be traced back to the late 20th century when various Hindutva organizations began championing

the cause of the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. The movement gained momentum in the 1980s and the outburst took place in 1992. However, amidst the political turmoil and religious fervour, a silent social revolution was taking shape.

Pre-Ayodhya Movement Social Landscape:

Before the Ayodhya movement, the leadership in North India was predominantly controlled by Brahmins and Baniyas, creating an urban-centric narrative. The power dynamics were such that certain sections of society, especially women and the deprived classes, found themselves on the fringes, victims of social discrimination. This skewed power



structure became a focal point of criticism, with leaders like Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), highlighting the exclusionary nature of the existing social order.

Transformation of Social Dynamics:

The Ayodhya movement inadvertently became a catalyst for change, steering Hindu society towards a more inclusive and participatory model. The fervent call for the construction of a Ram temple acted as a unifying force, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds under a common religious banner. This unity extended beyond traditional social hierarchies, paving the way for a new generation and a new breed in social transactions.

During Karseva, many of the foot soldiers were from traditionally depressed classes and some of them later rose to become prominent faces not just in the Ayodhya movement, but in social activities, including politics. Thanks to Ayodhya movement, there is a special place for traditionally suppressed classes and OBCs in the evolved Hindutva matrix.

Ayodhya movement was the increased emphasis on education as a means of empowerment. The movement inspired the younger generation to actively participate in socio-religious activities while simultaneously pursuing education. This dual focus on cultural identity and educational advancement contributed to a more enlightened and empowered generation that sought to break free from the shackles of traditional social norms.

In preparation for the Rath Yatra a year later, on the 9th of November 1989 — a date carefully selected by the RSS and the VHP for the Sheelanyas, the foundation laying ceremony of the envisioned temple — a kar sevak, belonging to Scheduled Caste, was selected to place the inaugural stone. Despite the preferences of numerous saints who had lined up for the Ram Mandir Sheelanyas, Kameshwar Chaupal, a member of the VHP and a resident of Samastipur in Bihar, went against the grain by personally laying the foundational brick for the Ram Mandir. Chaupal, 67, who had previously served RSS pracharak in Madhubani region and organisation secretary of the VHP, is currently a member of the Ram Janma Bhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust for the construction of the temple.

In one of his interviews during 2020 after Supreme Court verdict on temple, Chaupal recalled that former VHP chief late Ashok Singhal often used to get emotional when he saw him. “He told me

repeatedly that there was no such thing as 'Dalit', as all Hindus were one,” Chaupal had said. Chaupal unsuccessfully contested the 1991 Lok Sabha polls on the BJP ticket from Rosada in Bihar. Next, he contested the Bihar assembly elections in 1995 from Begusarai, but lost again. However, in 2002, he got elected as a Member of Legislative Council (MLC).

Following the Supreme Court’s 2020 verdict, as the Ram Janma Bhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust embarked on preparations for the construction of the Ram temple, the VHP undertook a symbolic yet crucial initiative. They gathered soil from significant Valmiki temples and noteworthy locations, including Nagpur where Babasaheb Ambedkar embraced Buddhism, the Sant Ravidas temple in Kashi, the Tantya Bhil temple in Madhya Pradesh, the Maharshi Valmiki Ashram in Sitamarhi, and the Valmiki Ashram in Delhi, where Mahatma Gandhi had spent over a month.

Participation of Women:

One of the noteworthy outcomes of the Ayodhya movement was the increased participation of women in the socio-religious discourse. Traditionally relegated to the domestic sphere, women found a voice and a role in the movement. The narrative of ‘Ram Rajya’ resonated with many women, drawing them into the fold of the movement. The transformation was not merely symbolic but manifested in tangible ways as women actively participated in rallies, meetings, and discussions, challenging the traditional gender roles that had confined them. Women serving kar sevaks, shading pardah, was a very common scene in movement.

When the Ayodhya movement was at its peak, Sadhvi Ritambhara and Uma Bharati established themselves as the aggressive leaders. Audio-cassette recordings of both the women leaders were sold like hot cakes. The people used to wait for them for hours. Many such meeting were held in the midnights, which was indicator of their popularity and large-scale social acceptance. They repeatedly invoked Sita to protect Ram, in a clear reversal of conventional roles, and made acceptable the idea of feminine, saffron-clad aggression. While the Karseva had mostly the men, but women across India took off their gold bangles and donated them. In many cities, women worked extra to offer meals to kar sevaks. Their involvement in serving kar sevaks was significant as it crossed all the traditional grounds of discrimination.

Empowerment of Deprived Classes:

The Ayodhya movement brought about a significant shift in the participation of the deprived classes, who were historically marginalized within the Hindu social structure. The call for the construction of the Ram temple became a rallying point for people across caste lines. The movement provided a platform for the assertion of identity and agency by those who had long been relegated to the periphery. This inclusivity marked a departure from the past and



Vijaya Raje Scindia



Uma Bharti



Sadhvi Ritambhara

contributed to a more heterogeneous representation within the broader Hindu narrative.

Critique and Shift in Hindutva Movement:

The initial criticism from leaders like Kanshi Ram regarding the urban-centric and exclusionary nature of the Hindutva movement was not unfounded. However, the Ayodhya movement acted as a turning point, forcing a re-evaluation of the movement's focus and outreach. The face of the Hindutva movement underwent a transformation, becoming more inclusive and accommodative.

One such example is Kalyan Singh, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Singh, a member of Lodh caste under Other Backward Class (OBCs), personified the BJP-RSS' blend of caste and Hindutva, which helped the saffron party come to power in Uttar Pradesh. Besides Kalyan Singh, other leaders like Uma Bharti and Vinay Katiyar broadened the social base of Hindutva movement. At the height of the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement, two women, Sadhvi Ritambhara and Uma Bharti, vocalised the anger of Hindus. These leaders were seen sharing dais with established leaders like Murli Manohar Joshi, a Brahmin, and Lal Krishna Advani, a Sindhi Hindu.

BJP during the movement and in subsequent years

The shift from an urban-centric focus to a more rural and semi-urban outreach was also a conscious effort to connect with the grassroots. This shift was not merely a strategic manoeuvre but reflected a genuine desire to include diverse voices and perspectives within the larger framework of the Hindutva movement. The movement began addressing the concerns and aspirations of people from varied socio-economic backgrounds, transcending the earlier narrow confines.

Inclusivity in Religious Practices:

The Ayodhya movement also triggered a re-

examination of religious practices, encouraging a more inclusive approach. The emphasis on the construction of the Ram temple led to increased engagement with religious rituals and ceremonies by a broader cross-section of society. Temples, once considered exclusive spaces, started welcoming devotees from all walks of life. This change in religious dynamics contributed to a sense of belonging and participation among previously marginalized communities.

Educational Empowerment:

Another significant outcome of the Ayodhya movement was the increased emphasis on education as a means of empowerment. The movement inspired the younger generation to actively participate in socio-religious activities while simultaneously pursuing education. This dual focus on cultural identity and educational advancement contributed to a more enlightened and empowered generation that sought to break free from the shackles of traditional social norms.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Ayodhya movement, while rooted in a fervent religious and political context, had far-reaching implications for Hindu society's social fabric. It acted as a catalyst for change, breaking down traditional barriers and fostering a more inclusive approach. The increased participation of women, empowerment of deprived classes, and the shift in the Hindutva movement's focus marked a departure from the past, creating a space for diverse voices within the larger Hindu narrative. The legacy of the Ayodhya movement lies not only in the bricks and mortar of a temple but in the transformative journey it set in motion, shaping a more inclusive and participatory social landscape for generations to come.

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In this interview, ahead of the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, General Secretary of Shri Ram Janma Bhoomi Teerth Kshetra and International Vice-President, while discharging major duties like Joint General Secretary, International General Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad Champat Rai explains how the idea of the temple is not merely sacramental but also showcases unity of entire India at one place. Shri Champat Rai has not only been a main advocate of the cause but also a party in the hearing of the ongoing Ram temple case in the Supreme Court.

Shri Ram: Symbol of oneness of inner self across India

UV: - It is said that the Ram Temple is being viewed as an epitome of Hindu unity cutting caste or varna lines. Could you please elaborate on this in detail from the architectural point of view?

Shri Rai: - This information is accurate. Let me inform you that the idol of Jatayu was installed in that temple today. Jatayu was a contemporary of Lord Shri Ram. He wilfully fought against Ravana and kept himself alive till he informed Lord Shri Ram about the location of Devi Seeta. Though Jatayu is considered to be a bird, this has a social importance attached to it. Lord Shri Ram could not carry out the last rites of his father. However, he offered the oblation of water mixed with sesame (Tilanjali) to Jatayu.

Known as the First Poet of India (Adi Kavi of Bharatvarsh), Maharshi Valmiki was a contemporary of Lord Shri Ram. Maharshi Valmiki was the first one to describe the consummate personality of

Lord Shri Ram. He fostered Mata Janaki. He gave comprehensive training to both sons of Mata Janaki including the acumen of war. Therefore, his life must be known, understood and celebrated. Maharshi Valmiki's temple will be constructed on the Ram Janma Bhoomi Temple complex. That too has social significance. Rishi Vashishtha was the teacher of Lord Shri Ram's entire kindred (Kul Guru). However, Maharshi Vishwamitra taught the acumen of war to Lord Shri Ram. Therefore, temples of both these sages will be constructed. Rishi Agastya, the sage from South India, had taught the Aditya Uday Stotra to Lord Shri Ram when the war against Ravana began so that Lord Shri Ram emerged victorious. A temple of Maharshi Agastya will be constructed. The social importance of this can be understood by recalling the social classes (Varnas) these people belonged to.

When Lord Shri Ram went to live in the forest (Vanvasa), he needed a ferryman to cross the river



Ganga at a distance of some 150 km from Ayodhya. Raja Guha or Nishadraj was a king of the community of ferrymen. The community living along the banks of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna is known by the titles of Kewat, Nishad, bind etc and it has remained socially, educationally, and economically backward even today. Nishadraj was the first person with whom Lord Shri Ram bounded and he helped Lord Shri Ram cross the river on his terms and conditions. So much, he seeks Moksha for himself. The Temple of Nishadraj will be built.

Lord Shri Ram found a mother in Mata Shabari during his stay in the forest (Vanvasa). She tasted fruits herself before offering them to Lord Shri Ram. Her temple will be built. Rishi Patni Ahilya had turned into a stone due to a curse. Lord Shri Ram touches the stone and she returns to life. Her temple will be built.

What was the stature of Nishadraj, Shabari, and Jatayu in comparison with Lord Shri Ram, who was an ascendant of the Sun himself, a prince born to a sovereign (Chakravarti) emperor? Lord Shri Ram all of them as a part of his own self. The world needs this message today. Therefore, these temples will be built there to give this message.

Several thousand years ago, Shankaracharya foot-walked from Kerala to Badrinath understanding all aspects of the society worshipping many categories of Gods and Goddesses. He used the term of five sacred deities (Panchayatan). The first deity in the Panchayatan is Lord Vishnu, the second is Shankar, the third is Bhagvati, the fourth is Ganapati and the fifth is the Sun (Surya). Shankaracharya said to install any one of these in the middle and build temples of the remaining four around that deity. Thus, he unified the worshippers of all deities.

UV: - And what about Hanuman?

Shri Rai: - Lord Shri Ram received maximum support from Hanuman, the servitude personified, during his stay in the forest. Break the term Wanar used to describe Hanuman and you get Wa and Nar, a man living in forest. Lord Hanuman's temple will be built. All these are architectural components of the temple.

Lord Shri Ram, during his entire life, never differentiated among people. The Ramayana authored by Rishi Valmiki is called Valmiki Ramayana. However, in South India, Ram's life is depicted through Kamba Ramayana. There is Adhyatma Ramayana in Malayalam. And, in North India, Sant Tulsidas authored Ramcharitmanas in the local language 500 years ago. If we look through the length and breadth of India, we find the life story of Lord Shri Ram written in every language. It is said there are 60 versions of the life story of Lord Shri Ram. Lord Shri Ram has called Lord Shankara his father and Lord Shankara considers Lord Shri Ram as his father. This advocates oneness in two different methods of worship (Upasana Paddhati). Thus, Lord Shri Ram reaches far ahead of integration and emerges as an apologue for the oneness of the

inner self.

Lord Shri Ram is worshipped in every state of India. Though Lord Shri Ram was born in North India, Kamba Ramayana and Adhyatma Ramayana are recited in every household in South India, some 2,000 km from Lord Shri Ram's birthplace, during the month of Shravana. The life story of Lord Shri Ram binds all cross sections of the society with a common bond. We experience this here every day. There are around 3,000 temples of 32 types of castes in Ayodhya. Lord Shri Ram is worshipped in all these temples including the Brahmakund Gurudwara where Guru Nanak had stayed 500 years ago. Guru Nanak Dev too belonged to the ancestry of the God Sun to which Lord Shri Ram belonged.

Ayodhya is considered the birthplace of five saviours and spiritual teachers of the Jain dharma (Tirthankars). The first Tirthankar, Rishabh Dev, was also a descendant of the God Sun (Suryavanshi).

Recently we carried out a fund collection drive (Nidhi Samarpan Abhiyan) for the construction of the temple. Our volunteers approached a politician from Mizoram. The politician exclaimed Ram is even in the name of our state - Mizo + Ram - and made his contributions to the construction of the temple. The Buddhas too contributed to the temple. Some 10-crore people from across the country have contributed to the creation of the temple.

Lord Shri Ram symbolises national integration and the oneness of the inner self. We would recreate things which were witnessed in the life of Lord Shri Ram here in the form of idols made of stone and fibre. Thus, our idea of a temple is not merely sacramental; it is the concept of showcasing the unity of the entire India in one place.

UV: - How have you conceptualised the programme scheduled on the 22nd keeping this idea in mind?

Shri Rai: - Installation of the idol (Pranpratishtha) is on January 22, the period when North India has coolest, cloudy, foggy weather. Our effort is to ensure that Sages and pontiffs of 125 traditions of India attend the function. These include sages and pontiffs of people from seven sister states of the North East, aboriginal communities, known as Adivasi, Valmiki, Ravidasi, Banjar etc communities, people living by the sea shores, traditions of Gurus, schools of philosophy, priests from all linguist states etc all parts of India. Their names are being compiled and they are being contacted through various means such as telephones. Besides, meritorious people from all fields such as sportspersons, scientists, writers, litterateurs, poets, journalists, corporates who are working for self-reliant India, former administrative and police officers who dedicated their lives to the nation, military officers who have been honoured with gallantry medals for guarding the borders and their family members, families of all those who laid down their lives for Ram Janma Bhoomi - many of them might not be even known to people, successful



people belonging to various cross sections of society such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and etc, one representative each of Indians living in 50 foreign countries will attend the function. This homework is being done to ensure that the entire India is represented at the function.

Of course, there are some limitations. There is limited space to sit at the construction site. We attempt to provide seating arrangements for 8,000 people. However, work on clearing space to make seating arrangements has commenced. Chairs will be placed in available space.

When Lord Shri Ram went to live in the forest (Vanvasa), he needed a ferryman to cross the river Ganga at a distance of some 150 km from Ayodhya. Raja Guha or Nishadraj was a king of the community of ferrymen. The community living along the banks of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna is known by the titles of Kewat, Nishad, bind etc and it has remained socially, educationally, and economically backward even today. Nishadraj was the first person with whom Lord Shri Ram bounded and he helped Lord Shri Ram cross the river on his terms and conditions.

UV: - What are efforts made to allow people who cannot reach Ayodhya to participate?

Shri Rai: - We are appealing to the people to assemble at any temple at the place where they might be at or around 10 am on Monday, January 22nd 2024 and perform worship of the deity of that temple to celebrate the occasion. All deities have one spirit. Thus, we are providing an opportunity to worship for everyone. We have to show the oneness of India to the entire world.

People are also appealed to light five lights in front of their houses after sunset. We have yielded success in restoring the honour of India after 500 years of incessant struggle. A foreign aggressor had hurt the pride of India by demolishing a temple 500 years ago. We have restored it.

UV: - Are you making efforts to attract the people, separated from the religion due to various reasons, back to the religion on this occasion?

Shri Rai: - We prepared sacred rice grains (Akshat) at Ayodhya and sent them to 100 centres across India. Volunteers from each of the 100 centres arrived at Ayodhya, each performed pooja of the sacred rice grains (Akshat) and took them back to their

respective centres. Now they will be distributed in all districts and every village. These sacred rice grains (Akshat) will be provided to every house from January 1 to 15 by the local volunteers. We have sent the sacred rice grains (Akshat) to places as far as Ladakh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Besides, lakhs of volunteers are longing to visit Ayodhya. This is a tiny town, but 3,000 temples are situated here. We have finalised dates district-wise for the volunteers to visit Ayodhya to avoid overcrowding. We have made arrangements for 5,000 volunteers per day to visit Ayodhya from 26th January to 26th February in a disciplined manner so that accommodation and food can be provided to them. We expect two lakh visitors per day. We would operate at least 40 community kitchens across Ayodhya to serve food. This will also help bind the nation together. A Muslim family from Ayodhya has approached us offering its land with all the facilities to operate a kitchen there. We have accepted that offer. We have asked volunteers to contact medical colleges and 150 doctors have volunteered to arrive at Ayodhya to provide medical treatment to the needy.

UV: - But some elements are trying to mislead the people. Propaganda is on that the Ram Janma Bhoomi Andolan is strong in North India and has no effect in South India. How do you counter it?

Shri Rai: - There is no need for us to counter it. People from Chennai have approached with the offer to feed people free of cost. People from Nagpur and other parts of Tamil Nadu have also approached. Of course, the disgruntled dying for credit will try to spread negativity. But they too are Bhaktas of Lord Shri Ram. There would be some differences in such a vast society. We have to tolerate it. Our experience shows that such things make no impact on society.

UV: - Do you or any other Hindu organisation have plans to strengthen this spirit after the work of temple creation is completed?

Shri Rai: - I believe spreading awareness about the life of Lord Shri Ram would give a message in itself. We are trying to do it. All books depicting the life of Lord Shri Ram will be procured and preserved here. People would be able to see them. Right now, only the construction of the temple and its infrastructure is going on. The work may take a couple of years. Attention will be paid to other things after that.

UV: - The Ram Janma Bhoomi Andolan has been on for forty years now. Why did it take such a long time?

Shri Rai: - The Shastras have the adage that there are big hurdles in big work. Indians struggled incessantly for almost 1,000 years in different ways to free India from slavery to see the dawn of 15th August 1947. Here we are calculating from the aggression of Muhammad bin Qasim in Sindh. People of Ayodhya, sages and kings have been struggling incessantly since 1578. Even women have fought,



riding horses and wielding swords. We gradually advanced in every battle. Our society forgets easily and immediately. Many times, people keep quiet in the name of God's wish. The effort to awaken them was done in eight years from 7th October 1984 till 6th December 1992. The legal battle started in 1950. The first civil case was in 1950. The second civil case by a sage was in 1950. The second civil case by an ancestry of sages was in 1959. The community established its right on the spot in 1949. Muslims filed their first civil suit in 1961. Surprisingly, the Muslim community did not do anything from 1949 till 1961. Another surprising fact is that 25 Muslims of Ayodhya-Faizabad have never assembled on the street against the Ram Janma Bhoomi. There is a Muslim population in the surrounding area but not even five Muslims never walked down to Ayodhya to protest. They opposed while sitting inside their houses through the journalists. Still, it took time from 1950 to 2019 to wind it up using legal resources. Now, when the work is accomplished, there is no point in criticising.

UV: - How much has the Ram Janma Bhoomi campaign contributed to uniting the Hindus by overcoming caste differences etc?

Shri Rai: - Let me give an example of my own experience as to how the name of Lord Shri Ram united people. While I was working in the Agra area in 1989, I had a meeting of people of all castes living in Agra. Some youths asked me to speak on a specific incident in the life of Lord Shri Ram. I remained quiet because I did not want to indulge in any negativity. But an elderly man said, 'Sit down, this is not about politics. Let me recall another experience in Agra, where I worked with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for five years. I found that people, who earlier never chanted slogan of Jai Shriram, were seen raising the

same slogan. I was curious why the change had taken place. When we sought information, it came to light that the change had come because the women had insisted on chanting the name of Lord Shri Ram. We must respect this feeling of the society.

A procession is taken out in Agra on the birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. In 1985-86, RSS received information that the Dr Ambedkar Birth Anniversary Procession does not wind through a particular market. Our volunteers talked to the traders operating on that route. They had no objection to the procession, but an unfortunate incident had taken place long past in 1946-47. The procession started going through that market after our mediation. To date, the Dr Ambedkar Birth Anniversary Procession passes through that market.

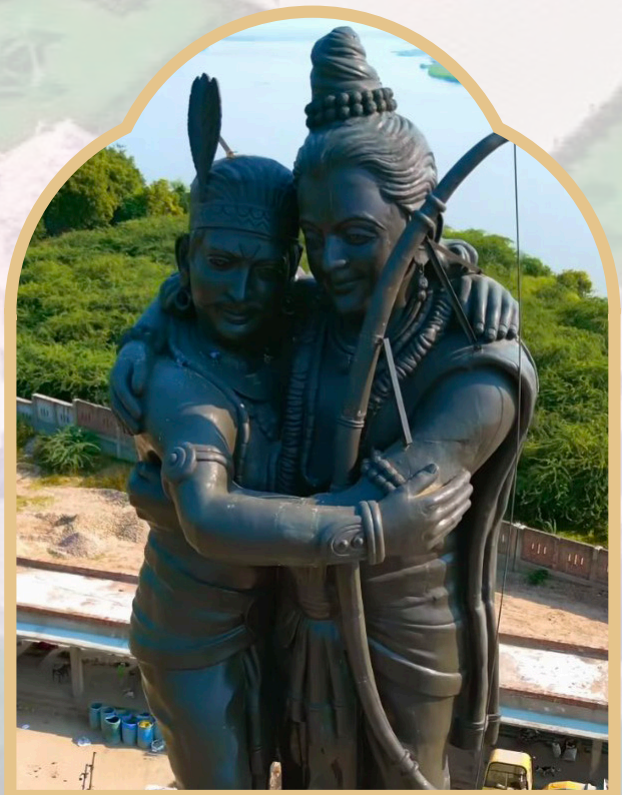
Four temples of Lord Shiva are situated on four sides of the town. The custom of offering worship at all four temples in the month of Shravan prevails for years. People from all mohallas do Parikrama of Ayodhya. This is the real India. Thanks to my association with Vishwa Hindu Parishad, I have had many such experiences. While I was in Agra, 50 youths from each mohalla were selected to do a Cycle Yatra of the entire area. We were shouldering the responsibility of providing accommodations to them in temples. Cycles of all youths went to the office of Prabhu Dutt Brahmachari, he gave Prasad to everyone, served food to them and provided accommodation to them in his Ashram.

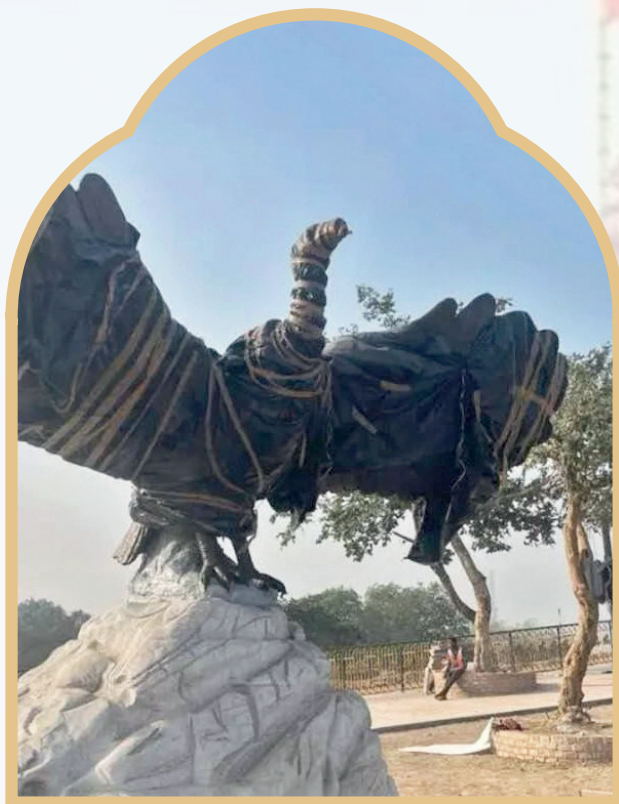
After witnessing all this, I strongly believe that all negative thoughts in our minds will evaporate if we preserve and revere Lord Shri Ram and his life in every house.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi performing bhoomipujan of Ram Janma Bhoomi temple in Ayodhya.while RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat looks on.





Ram Janma Bhoomi temple complex in Ayodhya will have a series of temples. The temple complex will be a unique example of social cohesiveness. The main characters in the life of Prabhu Ramchandra, who mainly helped him in exile, have been identified for the purpose, Exile of Prabhu Ramchandra is believed to be an indicator of his affection and love for all the people. Ayodhya temple complex will have a memorable temple of Maharshi Valmiki, who is considered as the greatest poet of the world. Valmiki Ramayana is still considered as the most authentic version of Ramayana. Besides, temple complex will also have temples of King Nishad, Jatayu, Devi Ahilya and Shabari Mata.



Tamil Nadu heading for a sea change

Viyasai K. Ravi



Contrary to the popular perception that Tamil Nadu has very few takers for Hindutva, Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation evoked far better response. Tamil Nadu was the state, which sent the largest number of kar sevaks in Ayodhya. In four decades, workers experienced considerable change in the psyche of Tamil people. General impression outside Tamil Nadu is that it is a state, which is influenced by atheist ideology. Thanks to the Dravid movement, it felt that people of Tamil Nadu had no affection for Prabhu Ramchandra or Bhagwan Shrikrishna. However, the reality is something else. Tamil Nadu is the state, which sent the highest number of Kar Sevaks in Ayodhya in 1992 Kar Seva.

As against the popular perception, created by politicians, Tamil Nadu is a very religious and orthodox state. Tamil Nadu is the state, which has the highest number of temples, many of them from ancient times and great history/tradition. Large numbers from all over India visit these temples every day. All of us will find a Bhajani temple in every village, where devotees could be seen singing Abhangas of either Prabhu Ramchandra or Bhagwan Shrikrishna. Ram is a very common name in Tamil Nadu, indicating peoples' affection towards Prabhu Ramchandra. Tamil Nadu has a very long tradition of Theru Koothu, meaning street show. These shows present characters from Ramayana or Mahabharat. Tamilians believe that Kush and Lava, two sons of Prahuramchandra, visited several places in Tamil Nadu. Kushapur village, situated near Chennai is believed to be visited by Kusha, who is believed to have performed pooja of Bhagwan Shankar. There is another place named Thiruvannamiyur to the South of Chennai. Origin is like this - Thiru-Valmiki-Ur, which means the location of the temple of Valmiki. People believe that Maharshi Valmiki undertook 'tapshacharya' here.

Thus, Tamil Nadu is the state, which is connected with Prabhu Ramchandra like any other states in India. People do not express these feelings mainly for political reasons. Prabhu Ramchandra occupies the space among the hearts of Tamilians. People preferred to keep their sentiments in their individual lives for obvious reasons. But Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation proved exceptional in this regard. People expressed their feelings publicly as they were suppressed for years because of some reasons. I remember the problems, which we faced at the initial stage as people were a little scared to come out in the open to support the cause. But it vanished in the course of

time and we got support. The support was from all the people and it was not from dominant castes but so-called depressed class people also came forward in large numbers. We were welcomed with great enthusiasm and devotion whenever we go to any locality, dominated by depressed class people. This was a little unexpected as people were taught to think in a particular manner because of the political system in Tamil Nadu. We had some bitter experiences, when our activists were beaten up by a few people, during the signature collection campaign. Later, we came to know that these people were political activists. But the common man had complete sympathy and affection for our cause. We experienced it even from the people, who were told to stay away from our activity, by political leaders.

Currently, we are inviting all the people for the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. They include people from the depressed class also. But nowhere we meet any kind of opposition. In fact, we can experience more love, affection and sympathy for our cause. People have changed their minds in the course of time. This change is very very significant for us as people used to oppose the concept of Hindutva. People were encouraged to maintain caste discrimination. But Ram Janma Bhoomi has brought about a visible and significant change in the Tamil psyche, where no discrimination is found.

The change is the result of some service work, which we continue to carry out despite opposition. We are determined to work in all the hostilities. In Kolathur, we were not even allowed to stand at the door step during the first kar seva in 1990. But today we are invited by the people of Kolathur when we are inviting people for the consecration ceremony.

This change has not come overnight. Our workers are working all the time. They concentrate mainly on service work, because of which our credibility has been underlined. The most remarkable change is that the younger generation is very receptive to us while their parents were either hostile or cold towards us. People are so enthusiastic that they contact us to ask for Akshatas to invite people for the consecration ceremony. North Chennai has a lot of localities, dominated by Scheduled Caste people. All our functions are getting good response in these localities. We found that Scheduled Caste people are more involved in religious and devotional work. They have a great amount of faith in God, including Prabhu Ramchandra.

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Kadubai Kharat: A singer with social media sensation

The life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar-based Bheem Geet singer aka Bheem Kanya Kadubai Devadas Kharat, a social media sensation among the anti-caste activists, who has left lakhs of fans across the state spellbound, is a story of incessant struggle. Though illiterate, the gutsy woman artist has been living up to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's motto "Educate, Agitate, Organize". In this candid interview with Unheard Voices, Kadubai Kharat says she foresees a great future for the equality movement because the masses are getting educated and studying the ideologies. Read on...



Unheard Voices: Please tell us about your family background. How did you develop an interest in singing?

Kadubai Kharat: Both my parents used to perform recitals of Bhajans (traditional devotional songs). I was still a child when I started singing Bhajans with them. Later, my husband would also play the Khanjiri (Ektara) instrument. He passed away after I gave birth to two sons and a daughter. My parents too had expired. Sapkal Master used to teach me to sing and also play the harmonium when I started singing Bhajans.

Unheard Voices: What type of Bhajans do you sing? What kind of Bhajans did your parents sing?

Kadubai Kharat: My father would recite Haripath (Marathi traditional devotional songs dedicated to Lord Vitthal). He would sing various types of Bhajans such as Sampradayik Bhajan, Ektari Bhajan, Atmadnyani Bhajan, and Jagran (Jagrata), I too have performed Jagratas in the past.

Unheard Voices: Which Bhajan sung by you in those days was popular?

Kadubai Kharat: The audience likes me singing the Bhajan 'Tumhi Naka Jau Sodun O Pran Pati'.

Unheard Voices: What was your age when you were singing Bhajans with your father?

Kadubai Kharat: I started singing when I was 8-9 years old. Today I am 45 years old. It was some 35-40 years back.

Unheard Voices: Where did you live when you were a child?

Kadubai Kharat: We used to live at Avhaha village in Bhokardan Tehsil of Jalna district of Maharashtra. I was enrolled on school but I never attended the school and studied. Both my parents were aged when I was born to them. All their previously born children had died. Therefore, my father was overprotective. He feared that someone might kill me too if I was not under his watch. I was naughty and used to teach everyone a lot. However,



my parents would not allow me to go out of their gaze out of that fear. Therefore, they did not allow me to go to school.

Unheard Voices: What was the occupation of your father? What did your mother used to do?

Kadubai Kharat: He would recite Bhajans. Earlier, when he was young, he was a member of Haribhau Anvikar's Tamasha (Marathi folk art form) troupe. He was also a member of Bhau Babu's Tamasha troupe. He would perform recitals of Gan and Gavlan (devotional folk songs which are performed as a part of conventional classic Vagnatya). My mother too was a Bhajan singer. She came from a family of artists. Her family owned a musical band troupe. My grandfather used to give performances with his musical band troupe. I was not born when my father was a member of Tamasha troupes. Later on, when he became old, he would stay at various places where the fans would provide him patronage for months. He would also rear the cattle of his patrons. I got married at an early age. My parents had grown too old to rear cattle by then. I told them that though I was unable to attend to their needs after my marriage it would not be difficult for them to sustain themselves by staging public recitals of Bhajans since they had mastered the art of singing Bhajans. In those days, being Ghar Javai (a man living with his in-laws) would be frowned upon. Therefore, I and my husband moved to the village where my parents were living only when their health deteriorated.

Unheard Voices: You use an Ektara instrument whenever you sing. Is this habit related to you reciting Haripath in your childhood?

Kadubai Kharat: Almost all folk artists, who recite Bhajans start with learning to play Ektara. It is an instrument that goes well with all types of songs. I have my Ektara with me even now. You can see it. This instrument goes well with the recital of Haripath, devotional songs and many other forms of songs. Only, it takes the mastery of the singer over the vocal skills. All notations can be played with the cords of Ektara.

Unheard Voices: Tell us about your married life.

Kadubai Kharat: I got married at an early age. I was married in the family of my maternal cousin. I was studying in the first standard at that time. I was wearing my school uniform while the rituals of my marriage were performed. The rituals took place at the house of my paternal aunt. My father was the maternal uncle of the groom. My husband He was an agricultural labourer. He was not inclined towards devotional music. I took him to Pandharpur and many other pilgrim centres with me. He would be annoyed with me singing. He felt artistic performance did not pay well. He did not like art performances. He did not support my artistic journey.

Unheard Voices: Did you stop performing because of it?

Kadubai Kharat: No. Notwithstanding this, I kept on performing. It was so compulsive! The sound of

Bhajan's recital drew me towards it. When I would return home after that, I would be thrashed up. However, that did not deter me. The moment I heard sounds of harmonium or Tabla, I would get drawn towards it. My aunt was good-natured though. I took her to Pandharpur. I took even my husband to Pandharpur. There he saw people performing and realised that it was senseless to stop a good performer like me from reciting. Subsequently, he himself started playing the Khanjiri instrument.

Unheard Voices: When did you start giving your public performances?

Kadubai Kharat: My husband passed away in the year 2007. My parents too had expired. I started reciting Bhajans after that. I was living in Walgangvi village at that time. Then I moved to Avhaha village where Tejraoji Sapkal Master was living. He taught me to sing with harmonium. Once, we heard an old man reciting 'Tumhi Khata Tya Bhakarivar' song at a place and jotted down the words. He tried teaching me to sing it. However, I could not master it. Later on, I heard Sanvidhan Dada, singing it on YouTube. He taught me how to sing it properly.

Unheard Voices: You have no formal training in vocal art or formal education. Still, you leave thousands and lakhs of people spellbound. Is it because of your melodious voice and the feelings you can express through the songs?

Kadubai Kharat: In the early days, I would recite Bhajans and narrate folk stories. Those story narrations would go on for one to one and a half hours. The entire solo programme would be three to four hours long. If I staged Sampradayik Bhajans, Sapkal Master would accompany with harmonium and another artist Prakash Dandge on Dholki. Our troupe would tour giving performances. At many places, we would get only a coconut and petty amounts such as Rs 50 or Rs 100 as an honorarium for an entire daylong performance. Some would even give us food grain as an honorarium. Still, we were happy. Subsequently, famous folk artist Meerabai Umap called us to Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar to perform with her. She would pay Rs 300 per programme to me and Sapkal Master towards our honorarium. That amount was not enough even to pay the house rent. To overcome the poverty, I started playing Ektara and reciting songs in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and spreading awareness about his thoughts at various places in Aurangabad. Then Sapkal Master was not with me. I was living in a slum here and used to perform in areas like Bhavsinghpura, Ambedkar Nagar, Rahul Nagar, Sanjay Nagar etc. One such song recited by me became extremely popular. The people of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar really gave their rock support to me. I would walk the streets while singing. People would pay me money on their own. They would also offer me tea. Women in these areas became my good friends.

Unheard Voices: Now, when you recite Bheem



Geets (songs composed and recited in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar), do you still perform Haripath recitals?

Kadubai Kharat: No. I do not perform Haripath recitals any more. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar did justice to me. If I am alive, it is because of him. Had he not been there, I would have died with my children. He stood by truth and justice. He ensured that justice was done to my art. He has done a great favour to my entire community.

Unheard Voices: When did you come to know about the thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and how?

Kadubai Kharat: It all started on a rainy day. I was singing a Bhajan of Lord Vitthal with my Ektara. It was a day of Ekadashi. Some women gave me a small amount of flour after I sang Bhajans for them. Suddenly, a woman living there came out of her house and started appreciating my singing. I still remember, her name was Sumanbai. She asked me to sing a song in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. I agreed and sang a song composed in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Pleased, she gave me a container full of wheat, sorghum (jowar), a saree and Rs 500. I thought since singing a single song in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was providing me so much, why should I sing Bhajans? Thereafter, I would go and perform wherever I saw the blue flag of the movement. I am resolute to continue singing the song that led me on this way.

Unheard Voices: How many programmes have you performed to this date? Do you get paid adequately for it now?

Kadubai Kharat: When I perform, I think from all perspectives. I was going through bad times when the legacy of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar came to my rescue. I feel responsible for 10 people, who can sustain themselves because of me. Therefore, I am not adamant. To this date, I have not changed. I am on my own. Even today, I am not paid an honorarium for some programmes. I cannot tell how many performances I have given so far, but I stage a lot of programmes in the month of April. YouTube did not prove money-making for me. My song 'Sonyane

Bharali Oti' became viral on WhatsApp. Somebody else took benefit of it. I cannot read or write. He approached calling me Maay (mother), launched his channel and got benefits for himself. I got nothing from him.

Unheard Voices: How did you understand Ambedkar thoughts?

Kadubai Kharat: When I was a child and living in our village, a Bhante Ji would arrive there. I would listen to him preaching. An idol of Bhagvan Gautam Buddha was installed just outside my father's house though my father had not converted to Buddhism. It was a public statue. Every morning, we would clean the vicinity of the statue. I started becoming aware of this ever since, but I did not understand much of it. People were too superstitious in those days. Even my father was superstitious. We had Devara (a place to worship Hindu deities) at our house. Unfortunately, the people of those times did not understand the humanity that Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar taught us. Though it took time, I realized it over time. Singing one song in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar gave me all that I got. It was justice done to me by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. I am grateful to my community for doing that.

Unheard Voices: Who writes the songs you sing?

Kadubai Kharat: I sing songs written by any poet. Master has written a couple of songs. Master taught me the song 'Tumhi Khatya Tya Bhakarivar'

Unheard Voices- Do you see any change in the social conditions of the days when you started singing Bheem Geets 17 years back and today?

Kadubai Kharat: Yes. A major difference is that then we were on the verge of starvation and today I am doing my shows.

Unheard Voices: What are the changes the society has undergone in this period?

Kadubai Kharat: Those were the days when I was all by myself. My parents had expired. I have no siblings. I was frustrated and depressed. I was worried about how to raise my two children. Now, with the solid support of society, I have found many near and dear ones. People of my community adore me and come to meet me.

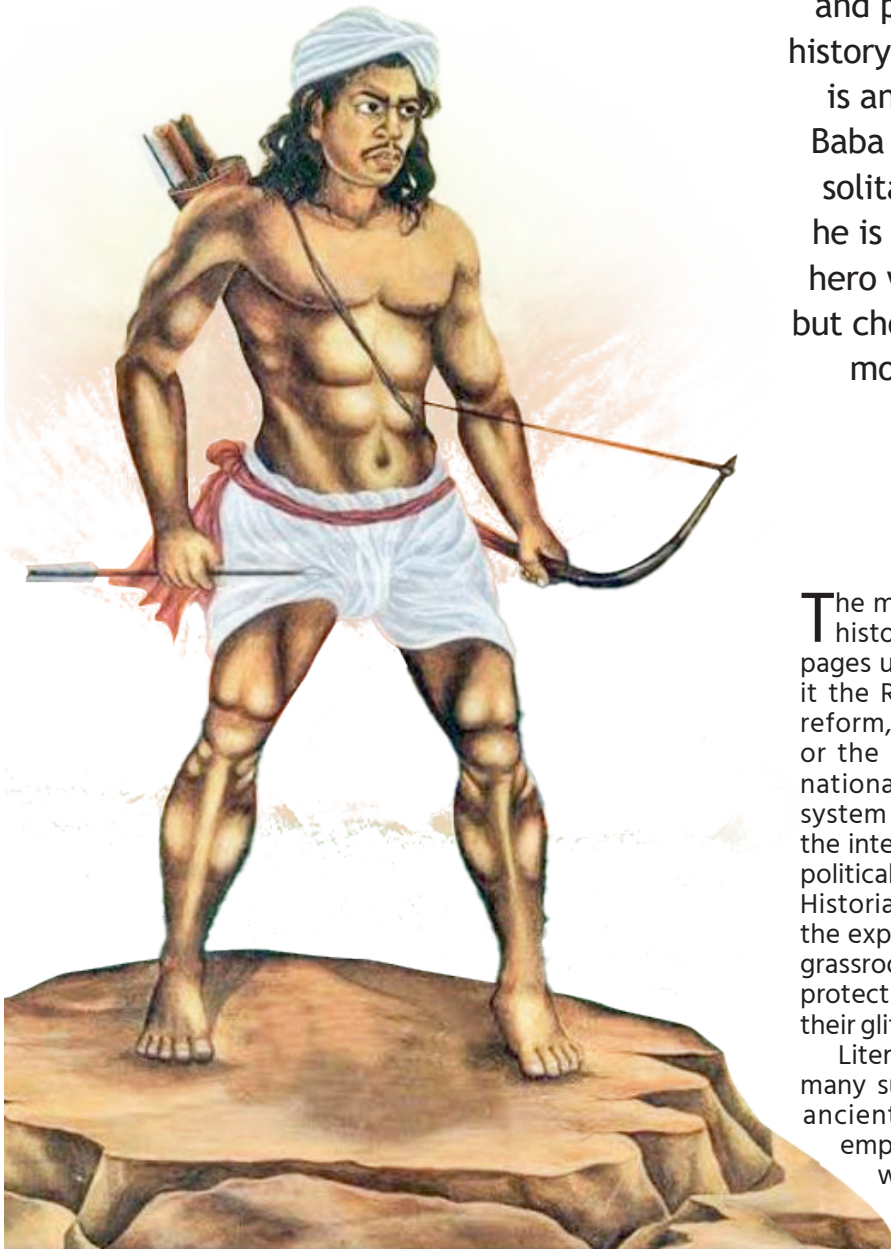
Unheard Voices: Do you see any difference in the conditions prevailing in the society in 2007 and that today?

Kadubai Kharat: The movement inspired by the thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar has become strong now. Earlier, it was not visible. But now, the masses are getting associated with it. The people of the other community too are organizing my programmes now. The masses are getting drawn to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. They are awakening now. They have access to education. Now they understand everything. I see a great future for the movement. Today, my programmes attract more than 10 lakh people. Therefore, I foresee bright days of movement ahead.

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Baba Tilka Manjhi: An example of rebellion, conscience & homeland



Tilka became immortal, turning into an example of conscience and protecting one's land. In the history of public revolt, Tilka Manjhi is an icon of revolution; hence, Baba Tilka Manjhi- An example of solitary and dedicated struggle, he is unique and incomparable. A hero who knew the consequences but chose to sacrifice his life for his motherland and community.

Indal Kumar



The movements and revolutions to which history has given a special place on its pages until now are all mediocre efforts. Be it the Renaissance movement or religious reform, be it the American social reform or the French Revolution, the efforts for nationalist unity of Italy-Germany or the system change of Japan- Russia-China, all the intellectuals, thinkers, industrialists, and political aspirations; they were all explosions. Historians did not pay much attention to the explosions that took place amongst the grassroots and the lower class, who tried to protect their identity and traditions amidst their glitter, noise, and widespread influence.

Literature and traditions have mentioned many such small spark-like incidents since ancient times. The East India Company, empowered by weapons and treasures, was opposed by a poor and resourceless man and his people. For them, it was a question of life



or death, preservation of their identity as well as their culture and traditions. Many such incidents of tribal unrest are recorded in history and religious texts, the first such example in modern times has been recorded in the form of Baba Tilka Manjhi's movement, situated on the banks of the Ganga in Bhagalpur, Bihar region. Unlike other published and broadcasted movements, no writer, thinker, or intellectual was behind this rebellion. The difference between self and others was not an important feeling. No efforts were put into these thoughts and suddenly seeing their existence and self-respect in danger, Tilka and his young companions turned anxious and attacked the British Superintendent Cleveland with a poisoned arrow. This incredible incident was never recorded by any of these "intelligent people".

Undoubtedly, nothing can be said regarding this rebel, except for the fact that Tilka and his companions believed that the British were strangers, a threat to their prestige, traditions, and existence. They insulted their women, and there was no middle ground with them. Tilka's movement was not a demand for any administrative reforms or rights. After all, who were the Englishmen, and what demands were to be made from them? They were strangers and must be evicted. With Tilka and his companions there existed no plan or expectations, just firm determination. This movement was an example of the complete spontaneity of one's emotions, unyielding to any adversity.

The village where this spark was born is called Tilkapur today. Surrounded by forests, Sultan Ganj, Bihar has been etched in history because of this child. Tilka Manjhi was born on 11 February 1750, to Sundara Murmu and Panno Murmu. He was also known as Jabra Pahadia. Even today, it can't be said if Tilka Baba was tribal or non-tribal. If he was tribal then was, he Santhal or Pahadia? Investigating this may be a political objective now, but it cannot dismiss the importance of his sacrifice. Wise people see the bravery of the brave but do not investigate its origin. Many scholars reject the fact that at the beginning of the 18th century, a permanent settlement of Santhals was formed in Sultanganj, and their rule was established which led to the establishment of Tilka Manjhi. Some scholars believe that the Pahadia community was so detached from the government and politics that they were not to be trusted with any political activity of any sort. There are many controversies but, in my view, this should be ignored.

The truth is that Maratha and Mughal soldiers used to come to the areas of Bhagalpur to collect money as revenue. The British East India Company acquired the right to collect revenue. They became the Diwan of Bengal in 1765 but did not have enough resources to collect land revenue. In 1769, the British started administrative interference in the Bhagalpur area. In 1770, Bengal was suffering from famine, and this was the most affected area, leading to the death of 10 million people due to starvation. The British

Company's pressure on the starving people and incidents of atrocities increased, and the soldiers of the company were also notorious for their ill-temperament. When patience ran out, Tilka's arrow expressed a public sentiment that led to the death of District Superintendent Cleveland. Then, the orgy of company soldiers started; General Eyer Koot was given command since the company knew that if the spark was not suppressed, this wildfire would destroy British rule. Therefore, all limits of barbarity were crossed in the repression of Tilka and his companions. Tilka fled with his companions in the forest of Damini-e-Koh. Later, they were ambushed by the soldiers of the Company in the middle of celebrations for Cleveland's murder.

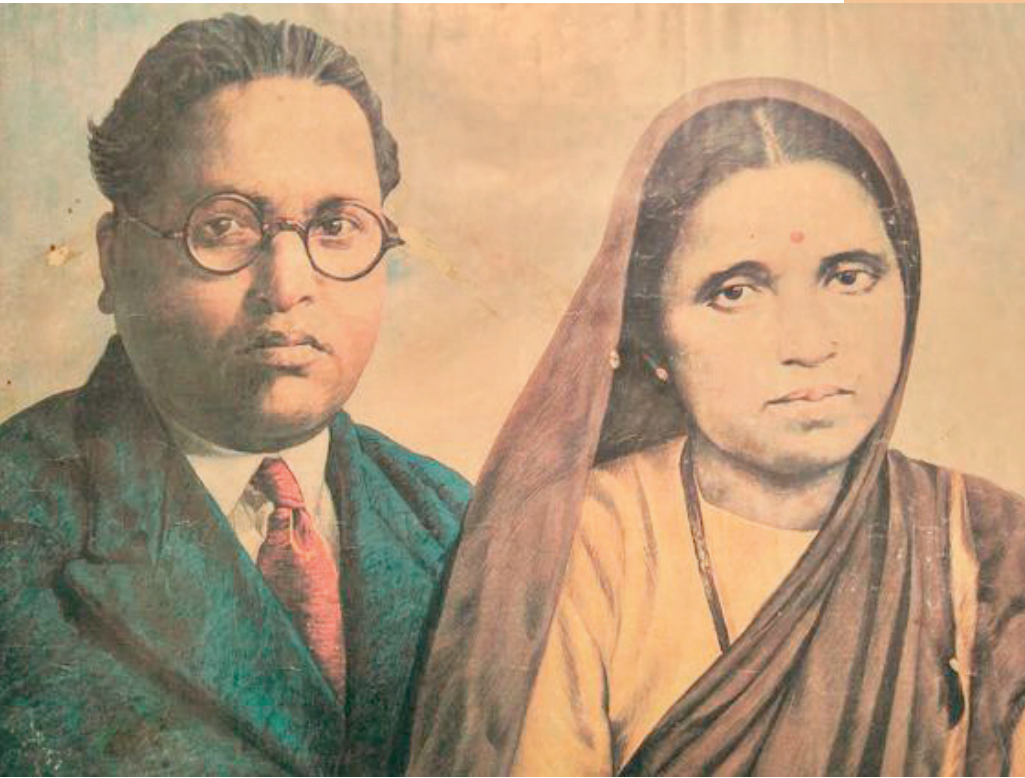
The British East India Company acquired the right to collect revenue. They became the Diwan of Bengal in 1765 but did not have enough resources to collect land revenue. In 1769, the British started administrative interference in the Bhagalpur area. In 1770, Bengal was suffering from famine, and this was the most affected area, leading to the death of 10 million people due to starvation.

Many of Tilka's companions were killed and many were captured, but Tilka Manjhi and some of his allies managed to escape. For months, they kept fighting the bloodthirsty British army in the dense forests and ravines of Sultanganj.

Subsequently, Tilka was caught, tied, and dragged to Bhagalpur by horse. The blood-soaked Tilka was still alive when they reached Bhagalpur, with the same anger and fire in his eyes. The trial was staged and he was hung from the branch of a huge banyan tree, which is called Baba Tilka Manjhi Chowk today. Tilka became immortal, turning into an example of conscience and protecting one's land. In the history of public revolt, Tilka Manjhi is an icon of revolution; hence, Baba Tilka Manjhi- An example of solitary and dedicated struggle, he is unique and incomparable. A hero who knew the consequences but chose to sacrifice his life for his motherland and community.

Historians still need to research more into Baba Tilka Manjhi. In the era where the British East India Company easily gained its supporters, when the affluent and "conscious" communities were eager to rule their offices and army, Tilka Manjhi appeared as the voice of the groaning land and distressed people. Such an example of selfless and dedicated consciousness is not found anywhere else in history.

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Babasaheb and Ramabai faced not only societal challenges but also the profound, personal grief that accompanies such heartbreaking losses. Amidst the trials and tribulations, she stood steadfast beside her husband, providing unwavering support and encouragement. Her role went beyond being a life partner; she became a pillar of strength for Dr. B. R. Ambedkar during these trying times. In the midst of their own personal sorrows, she ensured that Babasaheb's work and studies were not hindered.

Ramabai Ambedkar: A tale of resilience, love & sacrifice

Vijendra



In the chronicles, behind every great man, there often stands an equally remarkable woman. Such is the case with Ramabai Ambedkar, the unsung partner in the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Born into poverty and facing numerous challenges, her life story is one of resilience, love, and sacrifice.

Ramabai Bhimrao Ambedkar's early life unfolded against a backdrop of poverty and adversity. Born into a destitute family in the Maharpura township in Vrindagaon, she faced the harsh realities of life from the very beginning. The financial struggles of her family were compounded by the challenges of living in an economically disadvantaged environment.

Tragedy struck early in Ramabai's life when she lost her mother to illness during her formative years. This emotional blow was followed by another profound loss – the death of her father. As a result,

young Ramabai, along with her siblings, found herself thrust into an uncertain future.

However, the story takes a turn with the entrance of compassionate family members, particularly Valangkar uncle and Govindapurkar Mama. Recognizing the vulnerability of the children left orphaned, these relatives stepped forward to shoulder the responsibility of their care. In a display of resilience and familial support, they made a pivotal decision to relocate the family to Mumbai. The move to Mumbai marked a significant chapter in Ramabai's life. The bustling city, with its myriad opportunities and challenges, became the backdrop against which her destiny would unfold.

Mumbai, presented a contrasting landscape to the humble beginnings along the banks of Maharpura. The decision to move to Mumbai was not



merely a change of residence but a crucial turning point that shaped Ramabai's future. It set the stage for the twists and turns that awaited her, eventually leading her to become an integral part of the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The struggles of her early years, marked by poverty and loss, laid the foundation for the strength of character and resilience that would define Ramabai Ambedkar in the years to come.

Ramabai's Marriage:

Subedar Ramji Ambedkar, who was looking for a suitable bride for his son Bhimrao, noticed Ramabai. The union was set in motion, and in April 1906, at the tender age of nine, Ramabai married a fourteen-year-old Bhimrao, who was then in the 5th English class. Ramabai's early years as a wife were marked by both concern for her husband's studies and the responsibility of caring for their family. Despite the challenges, she supported Babasaheb unwaveringly.

Life's Challenges and Loss:

Ramabai Ambedkar's journey with Babasaheb was a testament to the strength of their bond and the resilience they exhibited in the face of formidable challenges. The couple encountered various trials, and their life together was marked by both shared triumphs and heart-wrenching losses. Financial hardships were a constant companion in the Ambedkar household.

Despite Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's brilliance and tireless efforts in advocating for social justice and equality, the couple often found themselves grappling with economic difficulties. This financial strain added an extra layer of complexity to their lives, demanding fortitude and resourcefulness to navigate through each day. The most poignant chapters in Ramabai's life were written in the ink of profound personal sorrow. The couple experienced the devastating loss of three sons and a daughter. The heartbreak of losing one's children is an unimaginable burden to bear, and yet, in the face of such profound grief, Ramabai exhibited remarkable strength. The loss of their children undoubtedly cast a shadow over their lives, but Ramabai's resilience and support became a source of solace for Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Together, they faced not only societal challenges but also the profound, personal grief that accompanies such heartbreaking losses. Amidst the trials and tribulations, she stood steadfast beside her husband, providing unwavering support and encouragement. Her role went beyond being a life partner; she became a pillar of strength for Dr. B. R. Ambedkar during these trying times. In the midst of their own personal sorrows, she ensured that Babasaheb's work and studies were not hindered.

Her commitment to his pursuits in the face of their shared adversity speaks volumes about her character and dedication. Ramabai Ambedkar's ability to provide strength to her husband during these difficult moments showcases the depth of their connection. It is a testament to her enduring commitment to Babasaheb's mission and her

unwavering belief in the ideals they both held dear. In the midst of life's darkest moments, Ramabai's steadfastness stands as a powerful symbol of love and support that transcends even the most profound challenges.

Legacy of Ramabai Ambedkar:

Ramabai's life was characterized by her virtuous and religious instincts. Her desire to visit the famous Vitthal-Rukmani temple in Pandharpur, despite societal restrictions, showcases her unwavering spirit. Her sacrifice, resilience, and support played a crucial role in the life of Babasaheb Ambedkar, contributing to the legacy of a man who would go on to shape the destiny of a nation.

On May 27, 1935, tragedy struck as Ramabai Ambedkar passed away, leaving a void in the heart of Babasaheb. More than ten thousand people joined in mourning her departure. Babasaheb shaved his head and mourned the loss of a life partner who had shared in the struggles of poverty and misery.

Conclusion:

The life of Ramabai Ambedkar unfolds as a poignant narrative, encapsulating the essence of resilience, unwavering support, and the indispensable role played by supportive partners in the lives of extraordinary individuals. Her story, marked by trials, loss, and triumphs, serves as a testament to the enduring strength of character that defined her existence.

Ramabai's legacy is not merely a historical footnote but a silent force that reverberates through time, shaping the remarkable achievements of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. As the wife and confidante of one of India's foremost architects of social justice, her influence transcends the pages of history. Her steadfast commitment to her husband's mission and her unyielding support in the face of personal and societal challenges were instrumental in his journey.

The pivotal role of supportive partners in the lives of great individuals is exemplified in Ramabai's unwavering dedication to Babasaheb. Beyond being a life partner, she became a source of strength, a silent force that propelled Dr. B. R. Ambedkar forward in his tireless pursuit of justice, equality, and the betterment of society.

While Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's achievements are widely celebrated, Ramabai's influence remains somewhat in the shadows, a silent yet significant contributor to the narrative of their shared journey. Her story underscores the importance of recognizing the often-overlooked contributions of supportive partners in the success of great leaders.

Ramabai Ambedkar's legacy stands as a beacon, reminding us of the profound impact that supportive partnerships can have on the trajectory of greatness. Her life story serves as an inspiration, urging us to acknowledge and celebrate the silent forces that play an instrumental role in the lives of those who leave an indelible mark on the world.

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Empowering marginalized 'Mooknayak' in digital age

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy extends beyond the realms of constitutional law; it is deeply embedded in the fabric of Indian journalism. His groundbreaking newspaper - 'Mooknayak', established in 1920, served as a powerful medium for articulating dissent against prevailing social injustices, particularly caste-based discrimination. As Mooknayak approaches its 104th anniversary, the historic significance of this publication is undeniable, but the question of representation for marginalized communities in mainstream media persists. However, with the advent of the digital age, a new frontier has emerged - one where social media, Dalit rap, and digital platforms become powerful tools for empowering the marginalized.



In 1945, Dr. Ambedkar astutely critiqued the Indian press, accusing it of being an accomplice to the Congress party and subscribing to a dogma that shielded the Congress from criticism. This bias, he argued, compromised the integrity of the media, leading to a selective reporting of news consistent with Congress's ideology. This critique, unfortunately, remains relevant today, as evidenced by a 2006 survey that highlighted the stark absence of Dalit representation in influential media positions. Jeffrey (2012) further emphasizes the ongoing betrayal of constitutional guarantees of equality within newsrooms.

Mooknayak, however, was not merely a newspaper; it was a movement that encouraged the marginalized to unite and stand against injustice. Dr. Ambedkar's vision of 'Samta, Bandhuta, and Manavata' (Equality, Fraternity, and Humanity) resonated through its pages, inspiring a sense of community among the oppressed. As the newspaper nears its 104th year, its role as a beacon for the marginalized cannot be overstated.

Contemporary media grapples with the challenge of representation and diversity, perpetuating a narrative that fails to encapsulate India's diverse realities. However, in the age of digital media, new platforms have emerged as powerful tools for marginalized voices. YouTube channels like National Dastak, Bahujan TV, National India News, Awaaz India TV 1, Dalit Dastak, SM News, Dalit News Network,

Mulnivasi TV (MNTV), Bahujan Hub, Samyak India TV, Samta Awaz TV, Voice News Network, Dalit Camera, Dalit Song, Jai Bhim Channel, The Think, The News Beak, Dalit Times, and Forward Press actively voice concerns regarding caste, gender, inequality, fair representation, and affirmative action.

Having spent 13 years in mainstream journalism, particularly covering politics and policy from the national capital, I can affirm that the digital age has transformed social media into a powerful weapon and an additional pillar of media that strengthens Indian democracy. Hence, there is a need to adapt and train for the new media landscape, exploring diverse mediums of expression from social media to Dalit rap - a manifestation of the hip-hop culture that is gaining popularity.

Dalit rap, with performers like Ginni Mahi, has become a potent vehicle for raising the voices of the 'voiceless'. These artists are the new Mooknayaks of the new era, carrying forward the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar's journalism. Dalit rap, with its raw and unfiltered narrative, addresses issues of social injustice, discrimination, and the struggle for equality. It resonates with a younger audience, bridging the gap between generations and providing a platform for the marginalized to express themselves in an authentic and powerful way.

In this era of digital activism, the fusion of traditional and digital media becomes crucial for the empowerment of marginalized communities. The Mooknayaks of today are not confined to the pages of a newspaper; they are the voices that echo through YouTube channels, social media platforms, and the beats of Dalit rap. These mediums serve as democratic spaces where ideas, concerns, and narratives can be freely expressed, challenging the prevailing norms and amplifying the voices that have long been silenced.

As we celebrate the 104th anniversary of Mooknayak, it is a moment to reflect on the progress made and the challenges that persist. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's journalism laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and just society. The torchbearers of this legacy, whether in traditional or digital media, continue to play a crucial role in shaping the narrative, challenging the status quo, and advocating for the rights of the marginalized. The journey towards true representation in the media is ongoing, and with the evolving landscape, there is hope for a more equitable and diverse future.

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Surge in inter-caste marriage in Bengaluru

Bengaluru has emerged as a trailblazer for inter-caste marriages in Karnataka, showcasing a consistent upward trend in the last two years. The data from the state government, reflecting couples applying for incentives to promote inter-caste weddings, underscores the increasing acceptability of such marriages, challenging the taboo that surrounded them in the past.

Over the last five financial years, Bengaluru reported a fluctuating but noteworthy trend in inter-caste marriages. In 2018-19, the city documented 762 such unions, with a slight decrease to 657 in the subsequent year (2019-20) and a further decline to 629 in 2020-21. However, a significant shift occurred in the following years, witnessing a rise to 725 inter-caste marriages in 2021-22 and a notable increase to 853 in 2022-23.

“Analyzing the percentage rise in inter-caste marriages in Bengaluru from 2018-19 to 2022-23 reveals a substantial spike of 11.94%. This data suggests a fluctuating pattern with a discernible upward trend, indicating a growing acceptance of inter-caste marriages in the city. Societal attitudes and evolving norms may contribute to this observed shift in marriage dynamics,” said an expert.

Over the same five-year period, Bengaluru contributed significantly to Karnataka’s overall inter-caste marriage statistics, reporting a total of 3,626 such unions. In comparison, the entire state recorded 20,365 inter-caste marriages, making Bengaluru account for approximately 17.8% of inter-caste marriages in Karnataka.

Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa stressed the government’s efforts to create awareness at various levels about the support for inter-caste marriages. He highlighted the financial incentives provided, stating that Rs 64.27 crore was disbursed in 2018-19, Rs 90.42 crore in 2019-20, Rs 171.84 crore in 2021-22, and Rs 94.62 crore in 2022-23. These incentives aim to encourage and support inter-caste marriages as part of the government’s broader social initiatives.

SC acts on alleged caste discrimination in jails

The Supreme Court has taken suo-motu action in response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by journalist Sukanya Shantha, highlighting caste-based discrimination and segregation of prisoners in jails. Notices have been issued to the Centre and 11 states, including Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu, where the PIL cites instances of specific castes being assigned particular tasks, such as cooking, while others were relegated to menial jobs like sweeping and cleaning toilets.

The PIL, rooted in a 2020 report by Shantha, seeks the repeal of provisions in state prison manuals endorsing such discriminatory practices. The bench, led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, has called upon Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to assist the Court in addressing this critical issue. Senior advocate S Muralidhar, presenting the petition alongside advocate S Prasanna, emphasized how work allocation in prisons was based on the prisoner’s caste, showcasing the entrenched nature of these discriminatory practices.

The court’s intervention signifies a crucial step towards addressing systemic issues of caste discrimination within prison systems and could potentially lead to reforms ensuring fair treatment for all inmates, irrespective of their caste backgrounds.

Compensation for deceased manual scavengers

The Gujarat High Court has criticized the state government for the non-payment of compensation to the families of 16 sanitation workers who died in manual scavenging incidents between 1993 and 2014. The court, headed by Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice Aniruddha P Mayee, demanded an affidavit explaining the delay and sought information on the state’s adherence to the 2013 anti-manual scavenging law.

The court also questioned whether the government continues to employ sanitation workers for such tasks. The directives were issued during the hearing of a PIL filed by NGO Manav Garima, urging the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. The court further allowed the petitioner to include a civic body as a respondent regarding a recent manual scavenging incident in Bhavnagar city, demanding detailed information. The court emphasized the need for transparency and compliance with the law, expressing concern over persistent manual scavenging practices despite legal prohibitions.

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Ahilyadevi: stood for financial discipline & transparency

Records show how Ahilyadevi brought financial discipline and transparency in the finance sector. She even introduced a special code to ensure clean administration. Principle of ‘checks and balances’ were also applicable so that officials were also checked.

Rambhau Lande



Ahilyadevi had instituted a system for the proper management of religious festivals and celebrations. In the twelve Jyotirlingas, four dhams, and seven pilgrimage sites in India, various works were carried out with special emphasis on financial arrangements. These places were considered sacred pilgrimage sites during that time, attracting people from all over the country. Pilgrims from distant regions used to come to these places. Temples, ghats, and religious institutions were constructed as a result of the developments in this region. This place became the focal point of Indian culture. The expenditure incurred primarily served philanthropic purposes.

Many scholars from Maharashtra and Central India found refuge in this state. They were provided with land specifically for their contributions. During the time of Ahilyadevi, when a ‘pargana’ had villages, it is noted that there was a total of 126 parganas in the entire Indore region, with 362 villages. The extensive expansion of the Holkar kingdom is evident from this reality. When Gautamabai first received a jagir (land grant), the annual revenue from the jagir was Rs. 2.63 lakh. The villages to the south generated a total revenue of Rs 36, 612. This means that the total revenue generated was Rs 2. 99, 010.

During Gautamabai’s time, savvy financial strategies were employed, including providing loans to farmers and merchants at reasonable interest rates. As a result, farmers were able to advance in their businesses with loans at favourable rates, leading to prosperity and an increase in the revenue from

agricultural produce.

Malharrao Holkar, the Subedar of Malwa, granted the right to Gautamabai Holkar to collect an annual revenue of Rs 2.99, 010 on January 20, 1734. Utilizing the revenue from this jagir (land grant), Gautamabai played a significant role in assisting the financial needs of the Savakars, contributing to religious activities. The parganas under her control included Maheshwar, Choli, Indore, Harodola, Saver, Barloi, Depalpur, Hatod, Mahitpur, Jagoti, Karanj and Makadon, from which she received an annual income of Rs 2.63 lakh. Additionally, from the southern region, Chandwad, Ambad, and Koregaon contributed a total of Rs 36,000.

Special meetings with various kings were arranged for Holkar. Ahilyadevi received gifts from southern kings amounting to Rs. 26,300, from northern India Rs. 87,500 from northern India and from Rs 27,316 from Rajput kings. A glimpse of the annual expenses reveals the extensive scope of Ahilyadevi’s work. All the details of income and expenditure were recorded. These records indicate how Ahilyadevi brought financial discipline and transparency in finance. She also implemented the principle of checks and balances in the administration.

During times of financial constraints, assistance is sought from the revenues generated. In this way, sometimes funds from personal wealth are used to fulfil the expenses. The difference between the generated income and the expenditures for the accounting year is allocated from personal wealth.



Fadnis Code in Administration

Ahilyadevi had a strict Fadnis Code in administration, and the rules were stringent not only in governance but also in accounting. If officials deviated, justice was swift and the laws of the Code were rigorously applied. Under the leadership of Ahilyadevi Holkar, several administrative codes were implemented, with the Fadnis Code enacted in the year 1779. This code provides detailed information about the responsibilities of Fadnis, Sabnis, Pagnis, and other administrative officials. The provisions of this code include guidelines for the work and accountability of Fadnis, emphasizing financial reforms and efficiency within the institution. The code, consisting of a total of 15 sections, is written in a straightforward and easy-to-understand. The provisions of the Fadnis Code are as follows:

Fadnis Code: A.D. 1779.

1) Fadnis, responsible for providing expenditure vouchers from the treasury to the basket and Jamadarkhanas, shall maintain records in the office. Fadnis shall send a letter and the due date shall be mentioned in it.

2) Conducting a thorough audit of the Mulki Mahal (State Property), Fadnis shall scrutinize the accounts, distinguishing between sanctioned and unsanctioned expenses. Fadnis shall instruct officials to verify the financial records, ensuring accuracy in the reconciliation. If there are disputes with revenue officials, they should be resolved by financial officials through discussions. After settling disputes, any remaining income and expenses shall be calculated. Fadnis shall note the date of the reconciliation.

3) To audit the military accounts, a detailed examination of the Hazari Barahukum finances shall be conducted by Fadnis officials, and subsequently, reconciliation shall be carried out by financial officials. Following this, the financial responsibilities shall be handled by the officials. The Hazari shall be jointly managed by Fadnis and Sabnis.

4) The expenses of the soldiers, as well as their daily and miscellaneous expenditures, shall be documented by Sabnis. Subsequently, an account of the monetary transactions shall be maintained, and the financial responsibilities shall be reconciled with the officials. Once the financial reconciliation is complete, Fadnis shall write a letter mentioning the achievement.

5) Prepare a detailed report of the finances of Mahalpote and Jamadarkhana within one day, and conduct an audit under the supervision of Fadnis. Other factories such as Jirayatkhana, Hatti khana, Ustrakhana, etc., will submit their accounts to Fadnis for examination. Fadnis, after scrutinizing the accounts and showing them to the financial officials, shall reconcile the accounts and complete the financial responsibilities of the officials.

6) Create a list of names for the Mahal, as per the prescribed format. Record this information extensively, noting the date, and have it verified by

the officials. The financial duties shall then be carried out by the officials.

7) Fadnis shall issue certificates or letters by writing them in the office, stating the purpose.

8) The list and accounts of acquisitions shall be submitted to Fadnis along with the government's related records. Fadnis shall make copies of these records and keep them on both sides for reference.

9) If there are any complaints or letters, they should be presented to Fadnis for scrutiny. If there is any issue to be addressed, Fadnis shall take care of it.

10) The accounts of clothing and other items in the Jamadar's office, along with their ledger, shall be audited by Fadnis and Potnis to ensure accuracy.

11) Phadnis should prepare accounts for the expenses incurred and present them to the Ahilyadevi.

12) Prepare the accounts diligently and explain them to Ahilyadevi.

13) The accounts of the plantation should be obtained, and Phadnis should scrutinize them.

14) Potnis should simultaneously settle Phadnis's accounts and instruct bearers to settle their accounts.

15) The expenditures should essentially be managed by settling the accounts with bearers.

In this manner, operate with the written instructions in fifteen columns.

If we consider the provisions and strict enforcement of this law, it shows how coordination would be among the officials. Taking into account the accomplishments of the Fadnis family, their meticulous oversight in the state must have been highly effective and up-to-date.

After the demise of Subedar Malharrao Holkar in 1766, his grandson Malerav became the Subedar of Malwa from the order of Shrimant Peshwa. However, following the sudden demise of Malerav, Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar received seventy-four lakhs and the lands from her mother-in-law Gautamabai Holkar. From the revenue collected from the allotted lands, various facilities such as military arrangements, salaries, weapon procurement, horse stables, silver expenses, various amenities in the prosperous villages, maintaining footpaths, roads, constructing ponds, granaries, providing oil lamps, etc., were incurred.

Due to the centralization of work, efficient management, responsibility for accounting records, and detailed audit reports, it was convenient to take accounts at the district and provincial levels. Keeping an eye on the government officials and troublemakers appointed for the work, detailed reports were regularly taken to ensure transparency. Under the employment of Kamavisadar and Phadnis, the management of military and financial affairs was efficiently undertaken, with emphasis on not delaying the initial stages. The start was marked by ensuring prompt handling of work during natural disasters or sudden crises.

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DIN VISHESH

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, as the Maharaja of Baroda, was known for his progressive views and commitment to education. He invited Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to Baroda to serve as the principal of the Government Law College, a position that Ambedkar held from 1917 to 1920. This association marked the beginning of their relationship.

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had an important and historically significant relationship, primarily centered around their collaboration on social and educational reforms. Gaekwad encouraged Dr. Ambedkar in his pursuit of education and supported his efforts to study abroad. Under the Maharaja's patronage, Ambedkar went on to pursue higher studies at the London School of Economics and later at the University of Bonn in Germany.

While their paths were more intertwined during Ambedkar's early career, their shared commitment to education and social reform left a lasting impact. The collaboration between Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is remembered as a positive force in the promotion of education and the upliftment of marginalized communities during a critical period in Indian history.

Both Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad and Ambedkar were advocates for social reforms, albeit in different contexts. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, in his capacity as the ruler of Baroda, implemented various social welfare measures, and Dr. Ambedkar, a prominent social reformer, focused on addressing issues related to caste discrimination and untouchability.

Remembering Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad



6th February
Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad
Death Anniversary



16th January
Mahadev Govind
Ranade
Birth Anniversary



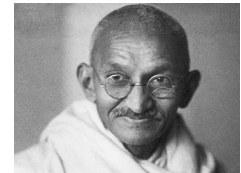
23rd January
Subhash Chandra Bose
Birth Anniversary



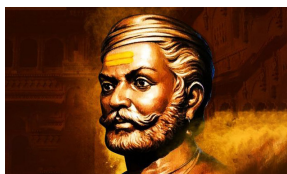
26th January
Republic Day



28th January
Lala Lajpat Rai
Birth Anniversary



30th January
Mahatma Gandhi
Death Anniversary



3rd February
Raje Umaji Naik
Death Anniversary



7th February
Ramabai Ambedkar
Birth Anniversary



11th February
Tilkha Manjhi
Birth Anniversary



12th February
Swami Dayanand Saraswati
Birth Anniversary

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