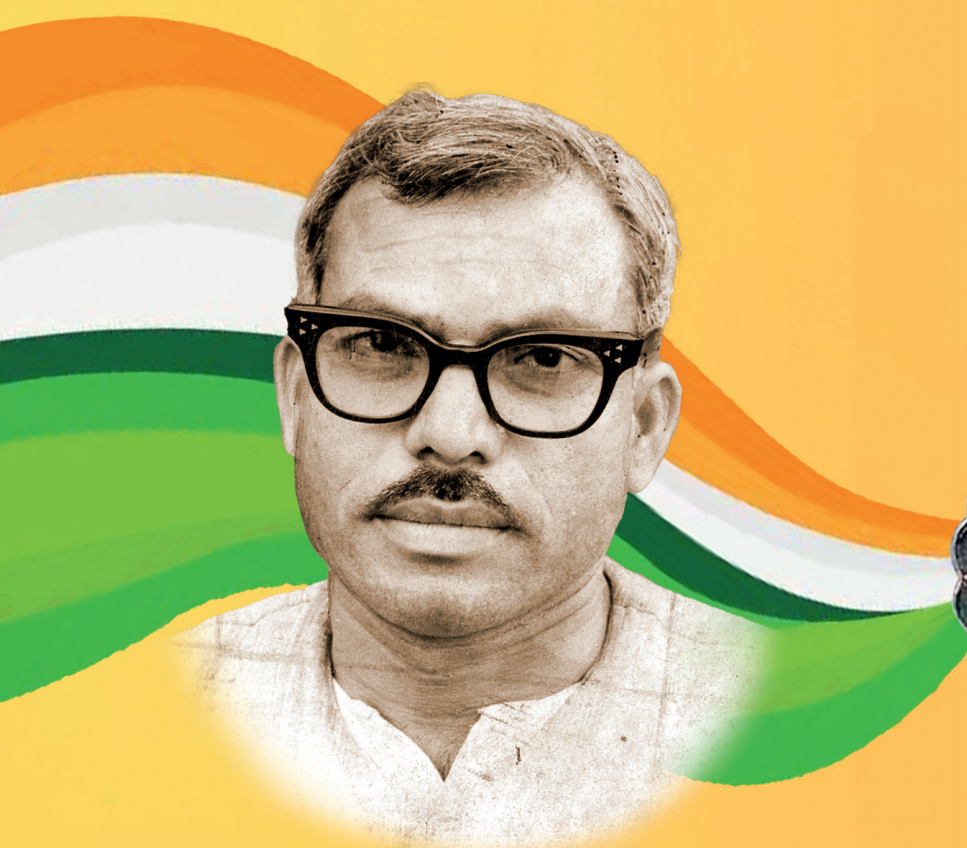


# UNHEARD VOICES

14 FEBRUARY 2024 | Year 3 | Vol. 11



*A messenger of Social Justice*

**BHARAT RATNA**

**Karpuri Thakur**



**Honouring deprived with 'Padma'**

## Subclassification: Holistic approach needed

The Supreme Court is currently deliberating on the issue of sub-classification within Scheduled Castes (SCs). This pertains to the question whether sub-classification is constitutionally permissible. The case involves a debate whether it is valid to have sub-categories within reserved categories like SCs. The centre has expressed its commitment to reservation and sub-classification within the SC category. The outcome of this case will determine if further sub-classifications within reservations can be allowed, enabling states to provide benefits to specific groups within these communities. The Supreme Court has reserved its verdict on this matter, with implications for the interpretation and application of reservation policies in India.

The issue of sub-classification is crucial as it is concerned with the core value of getting opportunities and justice to the people from deprived classes. It is also related to the principle of equality. India is the only country where affirmative action is taken a long time back to remove social disparities. Provision of reservation exists for more than seven decades. This is the right time for self-assessment and to take self-corrective measures before the issue takes a serious turn.

Let us accept the reality that some communities, which vary from state to state, have managed to get maximum benefits of reservation. A quick look at these communities suggests that communities, which were more educated and aware in the fifties, are the biggest beneficiaries of the reservation. In many cases, the numerical strength of these beneficial communities is also bigger. Because of higher levels of awareness and education, these communities got vocal and effective leadership, which also played a decisive role.

As a result, these communities were far ahead than other communities when reservation was introduced. The consequences of this social reality have surfaced now, which we need to deal with seriously, without having any political considerations.

Another side of the issue is also equally important and pertains to ensuring social justice and equality. We have number of castes or social groups all over the country, which are entitled for reservation but lag behind in the competition due to various reasons like numerical strength, low level of awareness and education and lack of effective leadership. Seven decades after the introduction of reservation, these communities have become aware now thanks to multiple reasons. One can experience uneasiness or disturbance among these communities as they do not get adequate share in the reservation. These communities carry a sort of resentment that benefits of reservation are received by a particular community. Therefore, a demand has surfaced that all the communities should get benefits of reservation in proportion to their numerical strength. The Supreme Court, in 2004, had ruled that all SC communities, which suffered ostracization, discrimination and humiliation for centuries, represented a homogeneous class, incapable of being sub-categorized. The issue under consideration was also whether the state government was empowered for sub-classification. The union and state governments have sought review of this judgement, because of which issue has come up again.

The issue needs to be resolved in a constitutional framework but needs to be addressed, considering social realities and its far-reaching implications. Reality is that numerical strength plays a decisive role in

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democracy. For example, the population of scheduled castes is around 17 per cent today. This numerical strength makes them more powerful in shaping formal and informal decisions. Sub-classification would make them weaker as their identity would further reduce to a particular caste instead of a bigger identity as 'Scheduled Caste'. In the process, their bargaining power is likely to get affected. For example, OBC has emerged as a crucial and decisive identity in politics because of their numerical strength. OBC's numerical strength makes them powerful as they do not have sub-classification. SC or ST may weaken their voice if sub-classification takes place.

But the issue needs to be addressed beyond strategic moves, constitutional interpretations

and provisions. The core issue is further fragmentation of society, which is not desirable for sure. Any judicial judgement will make this fragmentation a formal structure, which may not be good from a holistic point of view. At the same time, we have to pass benefits of reservation and other social schemes to the real needy people. Reservation or its sub-classification is not the only solution to the problem but we ought to think of other options for the upliftment of needy people. This is social responsibility of all the citizens, irrespective of their castes. A meaningful dialogue with all the stake holders is the only solution through which we can ensure social justice/equality without further fragmentation of society.

E-PERIODICAL

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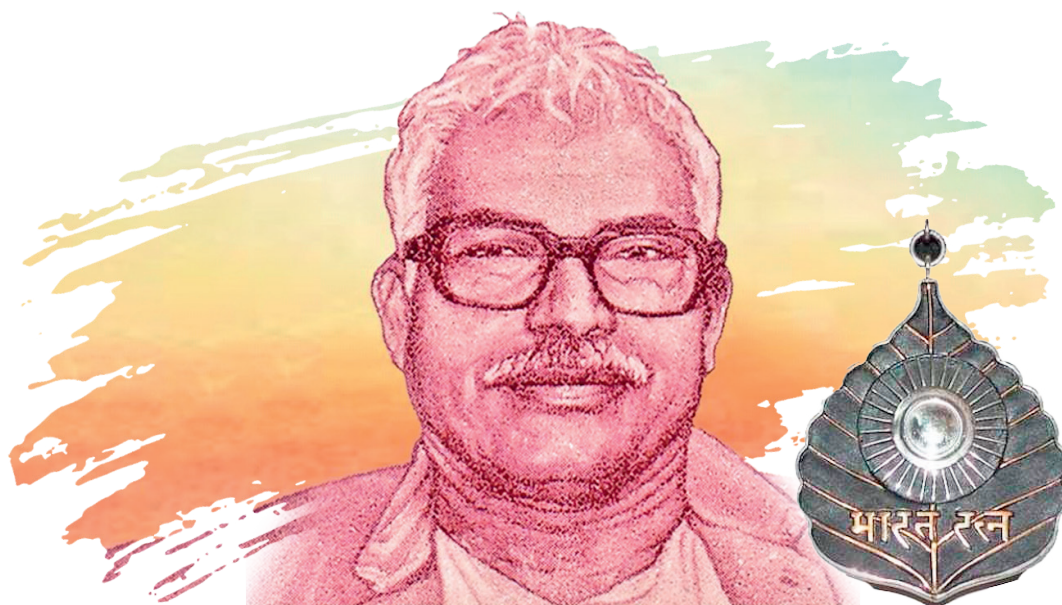
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## Karpuri Thakur: a leader super rich with virtues

In this article, Dr Sanjay Paswan, Former Minister of State, Govt. of India, who was close to Karpuri Thakur, recollects the giant contributions made by the leader for whom Bharat Ratna was declared recently and says India must adopt the Gandhi, Lohiya, Dr. Ambedkar and Deendayal culture to make progress for all. He says Karpuri Thakur material needs to be researched to chalk out the way ahead.

**B**harat Ratna to Karpuri Thakur is a great feat for the Biharis. I am from the same district from where Karpuri Thakur came. Though Samastipur and Darbhanga are presently two different districts, it was the same district at that time. I consider it my good luck that I have met and talked to Karpuri Thakur and we have dined together on many occasions. I was among those, who carried his mortal remains during his funeral procession. Having watched Karpuri Thakur working so closely, I find it apt that he is being honoured with the highest civil award of the country.

Unfortunately, with passing time people were getting totally oblivious about the personality of Karpuri Thakur. Thanks to the present regime's decision to felicitate him with Bharat Ratna, memories of his great personality and contributions will be rekindled and his thoughts will come to the forefront again. Now it is possible to initiate a new narrative, start a new discourse and make new inventions about Karpuri Thakur. Indeed, it is a moment of pride and pleasure for Bihar.

Speaking of Karpuri Thakur's contributions, the first thing I think of is that he brought



simplicity to politics. In those days, politics was a bastion and passion for the big landlords. In the 1950s and 1960s, the British legacy had left India and big landlords were holding the keys to power. At such a crucial time, Karpuri Thakur came up. He had numerically very low strength. The barber caste has extremely low numerical strength. This caste is numerically so low, I think this caste will have the lowest number in Bihar. Two Thakurs from Bihar have made their mark. One of them is C P Thakur, who is a Bhoomihar Brahmin and the other is Karpuri Thakur. Of course, the name Thakur is found in the third caste too, the Rajput's. In spite of his numerically low background and economically feeble background, Karpuri Thakur made this great achievement and could rise to this position.

The other quality he possessed was that he was an excellent orator. His oratory skills were almost like Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji. His Hindi too was par excellence. He was extremely well versed with the sayings, adages and figure of speech. He delivered immensely effective speeches using the folklores and the folk adages. That made him a great orator.

Another remarkable thing about him was his commitment and his understanding of the social fabric of India. I think that was unparalleled. I think it was even more than the understanding and findings of B P Mandal of Mandal commission. Prem Chand, a great litterateur, had understood the society. His understanding was almost near Prem Chand's understanding. Prem Chand was a name in literature because of his deep understanding of the society. If Karpuri Thakur would have been in the field of literature, then he may have surpassed Prem Chand.

Yet another quality he possessed was that he was a craziest warrior. He was not outrageous like us. He was craziest. He had the moral strength and courage to say a false and to say a real a real. Once his party declared candidates for all seats of MLA leaving one vacant. As a president, he asked why one seat was left vacant. His friends told him that the seat has been left for his son. He said very clearly that then he will not fight. He said if the party wishes that my son Ramnath should fight, then I will not fight. Such was his commitment. This is how he countered the family fiefdom.

He had no fascination for where he was staying, what he was eating, what he was riding. He had no craving for big cars, big houses. Whatever he used to do, he used to enjoy. You can say his beauty was simplicity.

His beauty was humility. His beauty was nobility. He was super rich with all these virtues.

Bihar is the land of experiments. Be it the case of communist culture, be it the case of the casteist culture or be it the case of the feudalistic culture, Bihar has done experiments in it. Bihar has been a bastion of all these things because of its passion. Biharis have the passion to get engaged and to get enraged. That enagement creates the Naxal movement. The engagement creates Karpuri Thakur. Now-a-days the influence of various Senas in Bihar is diminishing. Of course, the credit goes to Karpuri Thakur. In the earlier days, there was one sena of the landlords and other sena was of the landless. That face and facades are changing now. Casteism and feudalism has always been there. People have been fighting

**Karpuri Thakur also thought of the reservation for women. In fact, he was the first one to think of the reservation for women. More importantly, he introduced the concept of Economically Weaker Sections. The Economically Weaker Sections clause was searched by Karpuri Thakur. Thus, he provided the reservations for women, Economically Weaker Sections and Backward Class.**

with that in different ways. But it no longer exists in the block headquarters. Now it is in the judicial headquarters. It is now in the secretariats. It is now in the judiciary. It is now in higher education. Thus, in the villages it has vanished and emerged in some new power institutions. Today's politics is knowledge driven. Politics is not a game of strong-arm tactics (Bahubal) or wealth (Dhanbal) any more. However, mental strength (Manobal) is essential.

In my opinion, corporatism, outsourcing, contractualism and casualism are the new enemies of society. Karpuri Thakur used to fight all these in his own way. He used to convince and persuade people in his own way. Common people are empowered now, thanks to Karpuri Thakur.

He was a great supporter of Hindi. Supporting Hindi does not mean being against

Marathi or being against Tamil. It means being supportive to the local language, being the son of the soil. In a sense, he had a snub aside policy. He was pro-Hindi though he himself was very versatile with the language because he used to hate English. He used to hate English because it represents the British legacy. English speaking people are considered more powerful. It is a general perception. At that time, especially in the matriculation examinations, students used to fail because of English. One might be good in Mathematics and Science but still he could fail in the exam because his English was not good. Karpuri Thakur, as an education minister, advised, proposed and fought for abolition of the condition of passing in English paper to clear the examination. That was his commitment and conviction to his mother tongue. He did away with English as a compulsory subject and



made it optional. That is a great contribution of his that the Bihari people still remember. How can people with poor background, people from village backgrounds learn English? He always thought of the poor people, backward areas, backward people.

When it comes to the issue of reservation or the issue of positive discrimination, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's intellectual legacy has helped a lot to the successive generations. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's commitment and conviction for the reservations meant affirmative action. B P Mandal, Kaka Kalelkar and Thakkar Bappa, who was an eminent

social thinker very popular in our state, too were committed to the affirmative action, positive discrimination, diversity policy of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Thakkar Bappa made his contributions for the reservations on the basis of affirmative action for castes and groups in the Thakkar Bappa documents.

When Karpuri Thakur established the Mungeri Lal Commission, it was very important. The Mungeri Lal commission, Thakkar Bappa documents and Karpuri Thakur's political standpoint paved the way to form the Mandal commission. So you can say Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Thakkar Bappa, Karpuri Thakur and Mungeri Lal were the four icons, the pillars of the reservation system for the needy ones. That is why they must be remembered. While the Mandal commission addressed only the Other Backward Classes, Karpuri Thakur provided reservation for both the Other Backward Classes and the Economically Backward Class. He classified the needy into Backward Class 1 and Backward Class 2. Therefore, Backward Class 1 and Backward Class 2 categorization happened in Bihar. Backward Class 1 means the most or extremely Backward Castes and Backward Class 2 means the simple backward class, the poor but not so poor.

Karpuri Thakur also thought of the reservation for women. In fact, he was the first one to think of the reservation for women. More importantly, he introduced the concept of Economically Weaker Sections. The Economically Weaker Sections clause was searched by Karpuri Thakur. Thus, he provided the reservations for women, Economically Weaker Sections and Backward Class. He fought relentlessly for it during his tenure as minister and also during his term as Chief Minister.

This not only supported social cohesion, social harmony, and social collaboration, but also enlightened and enriched democracy. Democracy is delegation, decentralization and deliberation of power. It has got devolved, though not to the lowest rung. It is powering down slowly. Politics has its own pace. Society has its own speed. But we can safely say democracy went deeper and deeper through these mechanisms. It not only supported social cohesion but also fulfilled the democratic ethos. The process is still on in the sense that the people are thinking, the government is thinking how further categorizations can be done in the Scheduled Castes. Even the court has given instructions or observations to that effect. Thus, it also has come into discourse. All these things will ultimately help politically





with the democratic system and to the social cohesion and assimilation of Indian society.

Let me tell you very clearly that the poorer sections, the subaltern groups had participated in the movement for freedom of India. Of course, Gandhiji was the first individual, who took up these issues. Gandhiji must be celebrated for that. Thakkar Bappa too was a Gandhian. It is the Gandhi legacy. This is the idea of Gandhi-Lohiya-Ambedkar-Deendayal's India \_ GLAD. If India is to be glad, Gandhi, Lohiya, Ambedkar, Deendayal must be remembered. Still, we are SAD- S stands for Sigmund Freud, A stands for Adam Smith and D stands for Darwin. We left out our Avatar and accepted Darwin's theory that mankind evolved from the apes. Therefore, collimations must be done from SAD to GLAD. We must leave this Sigmund Freud-Darwin culture and embrace Gandhi, Lohiya, Ambedkar and Deendayal culture. That is what Karpuri Thakur did. Although Deendayal Upadhyay's philosophy was not popular at that time, the period was the same. I am sure that they must have met each other in Bihar at some point of time. Karpuri Thakur was the fusion of Gandhi, Lohiya, Ambedkar and Deendayal. The research on parity between Deendayal Upadhyay's concept of Samajpurush and Karpuri Thakur's ideology must be understood. To understand Indian society and to eradicate the inequality in Indian society, we must try to go through the details, nuances of Karpuri

Thakur. His contributions, his letters, his write ups, his speeches in the houses must be researched. It must be documented well so that the problems faced by the most backward communities can be addressed.

Babasaheb was a proponent for the upliftment of the Dalits. Karpuri Thakur's caste was intermediary caste. Dr Ambedkar was for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, but Karpuri Thakur dedicated himself for all including even the Savarna poor and women. This was the difference between them. He was a socialist, and especially a socialist who worked among the backward classes. Lohiya also did the same things. Therefore, Babasaheb Ambedkar's contributions were mostly for the most deprived. Karpuri Thakur's contributions were for the deprived and the most deprived. So, the level of commitment of Babasaheb Ambedkar was par excellence. That is a big difference. You can say in the changing scenario, Karpuri Thakur was the man who forwarded and expanded the mass base of philosophy of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Considering the current scenario, beyond social justice, there should be distributive justice now. That is an ongoing process. That percolation of power from upper to lower is still going on. How can that percolation of power be accelerated? That is being done currently.

*As told to Prasanna  
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# Ayodhya: A temple of national unity and cohesiveness

Yajmanas of Ram Lalla idol consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony at Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Ayodhya confident that Ram Temple will boost national unity and cohesive Hindutva...

Besides bestowing the status of a pilgrim centre to the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram, the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony of the Ram Lalla statue at the temple at Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Ayodhya has emerged as a standing proof of the national integrity of India and cohesiveness inherent in Hinduism.

The decision taken by the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to make people belonging to different castes, coming from varying social, and economic backgrounds and different parts of the country is a major shot in the arm of unity, integrity and cohesiveness in India. It is proving to be a befitting reply to the narrative built over the centuries that plagued by socio-economic inequalities, the Hindu religion can never unify people.

Yajmana is a Sanskrit term for the "sacrificial patron who employs priests for a ritual". This means yajmana is the person or patron on whose behalf the priest performs the ritual or yajna. In the context of the rustic agrarian traditions prevailing in India since time immemorial, it represents the reciprocal social and economic relations between families of different castes within a village community in India. However, evils that infiltrated the Hindu way of living in the form of customs such as inequality and untouchability over the centuries have

affected the harmonious relationship between various castes, often causing contradictions and conflicts.

While Laxmikant Dixit of Varanasi is the head of priest rituals for the Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha ceremony held on 22nd January, the Ram Janmbhoomi Theertha Kshetra Trust, formed by the government designated 15 couples as yajmana for the ceremony. These couples were from different parts of India and belonged to various castes and socio-economical strata ranging from the Dalits, tribals and OBCs to the successors of royal families. Interestingly, the families of all these yajmanas take pride in their historic relations with Lord Shri Ram.

Ever since these yajmanas have returned home after participating in the ritual, they have been experiencing a sea change in the approach of people toward them and their castes. Overwhelmed, the yajmanas to whom the Unheard Voices spoke days after the consecration ceremony expressed confidence that the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will not only give a major boost to the cohesiveness and unity in various cross sections of Hindu society but will also promote the national unity. Among the yajmanas to whom we spoke was Anil Chaudhary, the Dom Raja of Kashi. The Dom





Raja of Kashi is in charge of funerals in Varanasi. Since Kashi is considered one of the seven Mokshadayikas (places where by death one attains Moksha or Nirvana) by the Hindus, a large number of last rites are performed at the Harishchandra Ghat and Mankarnika Ghat at Varanasi. The members of the Dom community burn corpses using the sacred fire believed to be the purest of the pure. The keeper of the sacred fire known as Dom Raja is the “king” of cremation ghats. According to Hindu mythology, Dom Raja Kallu, the ancestor of the present generation, had employed Lord Shri Ram’s ancestor known for his penchant for truth, nobility and charity Raja Harishchandra as an apprentice after the latter gave away his kingdom, sold his family, and agreed to be a slave – all to fulfil a promise he had made to the sage Vishvamitra.

Anil Chaudhary and his family have been associated with the Ram Janmbhoomi movement too. In 1994, the then ‘Dom Raja’ of Varanasi hosted a community lunch for spiritual gurus, which was attended by top leaders of the Ram Janmbhoomi movement including Ashok Singhal, Vinay Katiyar, Champat Rai and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. “The lunch was attended by many prominent spiritual gurus and leaders. My mother Rajmata Jamuna Devi had cooked food for them,” recalls Anil Chaudhary.

Studied up to class 12, Anil Chaudhary took up his job at the Varanasi ghat at the age of 20 years. He had gone to Ayodhya to attend the ceremony with his wife Sapana Devi and mother Jamuna Devi. They stayed in Ayodhya for three days. Chaudhary says, “People from the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust came to my house and gave me the invitation to be yajmana on January 10th. We left for Ayodhya on January 20th in my four-wheeler. When we



reached Ayodhya, the atmosphere there was charged with devotion to Lord Shri Ram. The Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust had made arrangements for food and lodging for all yajmanas. We all lived there together and had food together. We sat together for pooja too. I and my wife, along with other yajmana couples, reached the temple at 10.30 am on January 22nd.

My mother could not attend the pooja but she had darshana the next day. The trust people and the administration helped us.

He recalls, “While the pooja was on, I thought how fortunate I was to get the opportunity. My job knew no bounds. That is the highest honour I have received in my life. I was witness to the Lord returning to his rightful place after a wait of 500 years. When I saw the temple, I was overcome with emotions and tears welled up in my eyes. I felt that God himself had arrived to bless us and uplift our lives. It was as if we were living in the glorious era of Treta Yug.”

Chaudhary says, “All members of my community were happy when I was invited to become yajmana. Very few fortunate ones get such an opportunity. After we returned to Varanasi, people organized functions to celebrate and felicitated us.” According to Chaudhary, “The decision to make people belonging to various cross sections of the society will make a deep impact on the social structure. It has unified all people and promoted cohesiveness. It will surely end caste differences. My appeal to people is to integrate and help the depressed and distressed. That would create a healthy society and build a strong nation. I have myself received differential treatment, though it is no longer a case after the ceremony.

The other yajmana couple we spoke to, Dilip Valmiki and his wife Manju Valmiki from Lucknow, felt their entire life changed the moment they received an invitation to become yajmana. A resident of the Papermill colony in Nishatganj, Dilip Valmiki is a retired sanitation supervisor of the Lucknow Municipal Corporation, while his wife Manju is a former Bank of Baroda employee. Unlike Chaudhary, they had no association with either the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust or the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Andolan. That is why, when they received a phone call to become “yajmana” they initially thought it could be a prank.

Members of the Valmiki community which is believed to have derived its name from Maharshi Valmiki who authored the Ramayana, Dilip Valmiki and Manju Valmiki were born and brought up in Lucknow. Dilip Valmiki passed his intermediate exam in 1974 and joined the Lucknow Municipal Corporation in 1978. Manju had joined the bank as a peon in 1975. They have a son and two married daughters.

Dilip Valmiki says, “We have been devoted worshippers. We feel that God has answered all our prayers. My father aspired to see us enjoying equal status with highly dignified people. His dream has come true.” He said, “On January 16 evening, we received a call from the Shri Ram

Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust saying they have been chosen as yajmana for the ceremony. Initially, I thought it to be a prank. We went to Ayodhya in our car with our son."

He added, "We went to the temple on January 22nd morning and the rituals of the pooja started. We were never allowed to



become yajmana of a pooja in the past though we regularly visit the temple at Hanuman Setu in Lucknow. People of our community are happy that we were invited as yajmana. Like Mata Shabari who waited for the arrival of Lord Shri Ram to her hut, the people of the Valmiki community were longing for such inclusion. After we returned, people invited us to celebrate. We have experienced a lot of differential treatment when we were studying. My father would tell us studying was the only way to improve our lives."

Manju Valmiki says, "Ever since we have returned from Ayodhya, we are being treated with respect by people here. People made a beeline to meet us. The women of our community said we were blessed to get the opportunity. While the pooja was on, I too kept thinking how fortunate we are to get this chance. We did not know anybody there. But we were treated with a lot of respect. We did not feel out of place there. I wished to be there forever." Manju Valmiki says the decision of the trust has given a boost to cohesiveness and social inclusion. "Education, cohesiveness and unity will help us achieve equality. I think now the people would be more inclusive and that would create harmony in society. Such ceremonies are necessary to build a cohesive society," says Dilip Valmiki.

Another yajmana, Mahadeorao Shyamrao Gaikwad from Latur - is a trustee of the Ghumantu community and has been working to provide education to children belonging to Dalit, nomadic communities and Vimukta Jamati's since the 1970s. He belongs to the Kaikadi community, which is a Vimukta Jamati. Thanks to encouragement from his father, he studied and has done two post-graduations and also a diploma in vocational guidance. He was a founder of the residential school for

children of nomadic tribes and Vimukta Jamati at Yamgarwadi in Tuljapur Tehsil of Dharashiv district in 1993. Presently he is a Shatabdi Vistarak with the Jankalyan Nivasi Vidyalaya at Harangul Budruk village in Latur district.

Gaikwad said, "I received the invitation to become yajmana of the ceremony some 10-12 days before January 22nd. the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust made all arrangements for our journey as well as our stay there. We left for Ayodhya on January 18th and reached Mumbai on January 19th. We departed from Mumbai on January 20th and reached Ayodhya on January 21st."

He added, "When we reached Ayodhya, the entire atmosphere was charged. On January 22nd, we left Teerth Kshetra Bhavan where we were staying around 9.30 am and walked down to the temple. After having ablutions there again, we entered the temple at 10.30 am. The invitees who were sitting on the temple premises waved at us as we walked in. All yajmanas were so overwhelmed that we all bowed down at the first step of the temple before entering inside it."

He recalled, "We watched the grandeur of the temple as we walked in and were taken aback at the architectural beauty. All arrangements for the pooja were made inside the sacred sanctum (Garbhagriha). We were taken over by the devotion as the sacred sanctum was filled with dhoop and notes of Ram Dhun. After Modiji came I had a few words with him. My wife's dream of watching Modiji



closely was fulfilled. Yogiji too walked in with his hands folded. We will treasure the moment when the curtain was removed and we had the first darshan of the idol for a lifetime. We were so spellbound by the beauty of the idol that we could not even blink. The actual rituals went on for about half an hour. All the time we were gazing at the idol."

He added, "The ceremony has indeed strengthened cohesiveness, integrity and love for the nation. Backward Classes and Other Backward Classes were left out for a long time. They were given a feeling that they had nothing to do with the culture of this country. However,



people of all castes are deeply connected with God and religion. Therefore, God and religion bind all of us together. This bond strengthens our unity. The feeling of devotion will unite us. It will bridge the gaps in society. I strongly believe that everything that we have been devoted to must be revived to unify society and to promote national unity. The opportunity given to the backward classes to express their beliefs would change their lives for the better. I would like to appeal to the people to ensure that they do not distance themselves from our ancient culture.”

Gaikwad said, “The atmosphere created due to the creation of Ram temple and the consecration ceremony strengthens the values emphasized by the Satyagraha’s that took place in Maharashtra for entry of all cross sections of society in temples. The decision to perform pooja at the hands of people belonging to the backward castes and other backward classes is a welcome move that has awakened all depressed people to their self-esteem. Though the issues still prevail, the process to resolve them will speed up because of it. This would change the way the Sanatanis think and reassure the backward classes, other backward classes, nomads and Vimukta Jamati’s.”

Another yajmana couple, Adalarasan and his wife, Lalitha Pankajavalli from Ramnad, Tamil Nadu are of Ramanathapuram king Baskara Sethupathi. The Sethupathi’s were the keepers of Ram Setu. The Sethupathi’s were the ones who built the Rameshwaram temple at the site where Lord Ram had performed the pooja of Lord Shiva after returning from Lanka. King Baskara himself was a great social reformer, who had sent Swami Vivekanand to Chicago, USA for the session of the Parliament of the World’s Religions. Adalarasan and Lalitha Pankajavalli said, “We have no words to describe our joy of getting the opportunity to participate in the monumental event. We will treasure the memories for a lifetime. It has fulfilled the purpose of our lives.”

Adalarasan said, “The Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Tirth Nyas Committee decided to invite one of the families from Tamil Nadu. They wanted people from every part of India – South, North, East and West. They decided to call me from Rameshwaram, which is an important pilgrim centre linked to Lord Ram to the South end of India.” He said, “Though I received the invitation to attend the ceremony some 20 days before the programme, more details were not given. I came to know that I and my wife were to be one of the Yajmanas two days before the ceremony after we reached Ayodhya.”

He recalled, “It was a very emotional

experience. Around 4000 Sadhus and 3000 very important people had gathered there. Everybody was craving to have the darshan of Lord Ram. But we were sitting in front of Ram three hours before them. We carried out the rituals of Sankalpa. We repeated the verses as dictated by the priests. After the rituals, aarti



started. We were overwhelmed. Innumerable people have laid down their lives, for the cause. The feeling that all these efforts have succeeded now is overwhelming.”

Lalitha Pankajavalli said, “Indeed, we were fortunate to get the opportunity. We have a deep emotional connection with Lord Shri Ram because our forefathers were associated with him. After so many generations, we could reconnect with Lord Shri Ram.” Adalarasan recalled, “When the Aarti took place, I felt the statue glowing. I am still wondering if it was my illusion or if it was real. It was a moment of bliss.”

He added, “The yajmanas with such diverse backgrounds made the function unique. The yajmanas were people belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Dalits, Yadavs, Brahmins, Lingayatas, Upper Class, Lower Class, Middle Class and royal families too. They united everybody equally. All were given equal importance. The main objective of the trust was to unite all cross sections of the society. It was an example of one country with one faith. It created a feeling of unity.”

Speaking about the response to the ceremony in Tamil Nadu, he said, “It was a very important thing for Tamil Nadu. The scenario that Tamil Nadu is against Hindi, Tamil Nadu is against the nation, and religious things are not suitable for Tamil Nadu is created with political motives. It is false propaganda. I experienced a very good response to the ceremony after returning from Ayodhya. I was invited to many celebrations. At Ramnathapuram, a one km long procession was taken out there to celebrate the consecration. When we landed at Tiruchirappalli, people were celebrating and chanting the slogan Jai Shri Ram there.”

*As told to Prasanna  
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# “Ayodhya temple will promote unity, integration & cohesiveness”



In this exclusive interview with the Unheard Voices after the historic Ram Lalla idol consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony at Ayodhya, Kameshwar Chaupal - trustee of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, Ayodhya \_ says, “I strongly believe that this temple will play a pivotal role in spreading values, promoting the culture and unify the nation by inculcating the feeling of harmony, integrity and cohesiveness in minds of people.” Read the full interview...

**UV: What feedback to the Ram Lalla idol consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony held at Shri Ram Jan Bhoomi Ayodhya from the point of view concerning unity, integrity and cohesiveness have you received?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** The feedback to the ceremony we have received is that the ceremony was a never before initiative from the point of view concerning integrity and cohesiveness. All schools of thought, sects, various types of worshippers from across the country, and all cross sections of the society including the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, and deprived class people were addressed. The rituals followed by each of them, and the ways adopted by them to attain the glory of God were observed. Priests and pontiffs of more than 125 Hindu sects from all over the country attended the ceremony. Besides Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim priests also attended it. Therefore, I feel this ceremony gave an extremely effective message of unity, integrity and cohesiveness. It promoted unity among the Indians and inspired them to eradicate all the evils that have found their way into our society. Most importantly, the spirit of cohesiveness was displayed through this ceremony.

**UV: How did the ceremony display the spirit of cohesiveness?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** I say the ceremony displayed the spirit of cohesiveness because when Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived for the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony, such was the atmosphere prevailing that everyone felt Lord Shri Ram is our forefather and the blemish of the humiliation of Lord Shri Ram that our society faced is being removed today. Therefore, everyone was overwhelmed. It was a moment when everyone could experience the feeling of Ramatva (spiritual oneness with Lord Shri Ram). Tears rolled down and everybody was overcome with emotions. Many bursts into tears and sobbed at that moment. Such was the effect of that feeling of Ramatva (spiritual oneness with Lord Shri Ram) that all hearts got cleansed. Such was the effectiveness of this feeling of Ramatva (spiritual oneness with Lord Shri Ram) that people overcame all differences of castes and language. Everybody was experiencing his spiritual oneness with Lord Shri Ram. Nobody noticed who belonged to which caste, sect, or school of thought. The entire society was charged with the devotion to Lord Shri Ram. That was the biggest inspiration for cohesiveness we have experienced. In the



charged atmosphere that prevailed, everybody loved everybody. All adored each other and found perfect harmony with each other. If such an atmosphere continues to prevail, nobody will pay any attention towards the caste differences.

**UV: You explained the atmosphere that prevailed in Ayodhya. However, Hindu organisations and people on their own too organised a variety of programmes to mark the occasion, not only all over the country but across the world. What feedback concerning this from the point of view concerning unity, integrity and cohesiveness have you received?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** The people from India and even abroad who found themselves unable to reach Ayodhya to attend the ceremony too were overwhelmed with the feeling that Lord Shri Ram was arriving and that would make our houses pious. It will make our lives worthwhile. The rich and the poor, the urban and the rural all people had the same feeling. Each person had cleaned and decorated his house with Torans (garlands) and Rangolis. The entire country appeared to have transformed in the hut of Mata Shabari decorated to welcome the arrival of Lord Shri Ram. I was at Prayagraj the day before the ceremony. People belonging to the backward classes had organised a rally to celebrate the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony. I was to flag it off. I noticed that the slum dwellers were so charged with enthusiasm that they had overcome all differences and attained spiritual oneness with Lord Shri Ram. The rally went on for four hours and I experienced the same atmosphere prevailing during the entire period. There was not a single chowk on the procession route that had not been cleaned spotlessly. All roads used as routes of the procession were decked with arches decorated with garlands. Caste and language differences carried no meaning in that atmosphere. Consequently, the entire nation found itself in perfect unison with Lord Shri Ram on January 22, the day of the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony. People had forgotten their castes. Everybody had the divine feeling of oneness with Lord Shri Ram.

**UV: Would it be appropriate to describe it as an extension of Bhakti movement? The Bhakti movement has made great efforts to eradicate social inequality in the past. Do you look at the Ayodhya movement as an extension of the Bhakti movement?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** It was a powerful agitation against social inequality. Let me tell you, Domb Raja (representative of the

Domb community) was also present for the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony in Ayodhya. The supreme pontiffs were also present there. But nobody noticed any difference. Everyone was immersed in the devotion to Lord Shri Ram. They could see Lord Shri Ram prevailing in each other. It all was a miracle of Lord Shri Ram. I feel we had not realised that such is the power in the name of Lord Shri Ram that it can end all sufferings and conflicts of people.

**UV: Do you think that the cause of Ram Janmabhoomi Ayodhya would help us eradicate casteism among Hindus?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** Lord's idol has been consecrated now. People worship Lord Shri Ram. Now we need to believe in Lord Shri Ram from the core of our hearts. We need to realise how Lord Shri Ram behaved in his life and follow in his footsteps. Lord Shri Ram unified the society with his conduct and the treatment he gave to others. Now we need to install Lord Shri Ram in our hearts follow his conduct and integrate society the way he did with his behaviour. We have already taken a giant step in this direction. If politicians do not pollute the atmosphere again, people will definitely unite in the name of Lord Shri Ram and usher in the Ram Rajya in India.

**UV: You have been associated with Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindu organisations. You wish that everyone must adopt the ideal of Lord Shri Ram from the core of his heart. Does Vishwa, Hindu Parishad, Ram Janmabhoomi Trust at Ayodhya or any other organisation have a plan to inculcate the values professed by Lord Shri Ram among people? Do you have a plan to organise programmes to steer people in that direction?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** The best solution to end the inequality in society is that we all stay together and think alike. There can be no other solution to the issue. Our organisation works only based on this belief to ensure that we all stay together, think alike and maintain harmonious relations with each other. No doubt, this will solve all issues. At the same time, some cross sections of our society were deserted by us. We have already launched various voluntary works, and initiatives to inculcate values to address this. Thousands of organisations are already working on it. We reach out to such cross sections of society through these organisations, awakening them to self-dignity. When we take initiative on our part, they too step ahead to meet our efforts. I strongly believe that society would be able to solve all issues faced by it merely by

learning to stay together and maintain cohesive relationships. We believe the differences arose in the middle age era because there was a lack of cohesiveness and we lost contact with each other. We have to re-establish the contact. If we manage to do it, a bond like the one between Lord Shri Ram and Mata Shabari will prevail in the present era too. Many Mata Shabari's are living in rural India even today. What is needed is someone adopting values professed by Lord Shri Ram reaching out to them. The character of our society is changing rapidly. Our sages (Sants) too have a pivotal role to play in this. The sages (Sants) too have begun reaching out to all cross sections of the society. Recently, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has decided that the sages, priests and pontiffs (Sants) associated with us will reach out not only to the urban areas and the areas dominated by well-off people but also to the rural areas, areas where



the poor live and the areas where values and culture are diminishing. They shall cleanse the minds of the people, enlighten them with knowledge and bring them all together at the same level. When more and more sages, priests and pontiffs (Sants) start reaching out to people in such a manner, the inequality and differences instilled in the minds of people will diminish. When people are free of such illusions, the entire society will stand strong together.

**UV: There were reports that a different narrative is being propagated in South India. What is your experience concerning this?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** As far as South India is concerned, I believe Indian culture finds its base there. For example, Shrimat Bhagvat says the religion originated in Karnataka and subsequently spread all over. South India has been a culturally and spiritually rich region. However, invasions by foreign aggressors

in India over the last 1000-1200 years, be it military aggression or cultural invasion, put the entire country into distress. Even South India suffered because of its impact. Temples in South India might not be demolished but an extremely powerful invasion was made there through social work. Weaker sections of society were influenced because of that invasion. Some people who were well-off too joined hands with the invaders out of their greed. As a result, the cultural heritage of South India from where the religion originated and spread across the country has been distorted. We have realised that we need to connect with various cross sections of society there and pull up our socks to do social work in various fields such as healthcare, value education etc. Plans to do this are afoot. Even the sages, priests and pontiffs (Sants) have shown great inclination to work in South India. Till now, it was believed that only people belonging to a particular class were eligible to perform religious rituals (Poojas). Training courses for priests and pontiffs (Pandits and Purohits) were held in South India. They were provided with the material required for the religious services and engaged to perform rituals (Pooja-Path) in temples. They will not only bridge the gaps in various cross sections of society but also restore the honour of the deprived people by performing the rituals. Thus, the misconception instilled in the minds of the people that this religion is only for the rich, and only the well-offs can enter the temple and perform rituals will be eradicated.

**UV: Do you think the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony at Ayodhya will help change the conditions in South India? What has been your experience concerning this?**

**Kamleshwar Chaupal:** We have experienced that people came in large numbers for the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) ceremony from areas of South India where such misconceptions were spread. They have seen that there is no segregation on the basis of caste or religion in Ayodhya, which is an important cultural centre of the Hindu community. They have themselves experienced that here everybody stays together, eats together, lives cohesively and stands in the same line to offer worship. They have returned home with this takeaway. Therefore, I strongly believe that this temple will play a pivotal role in spreading values, promoting the culture and unifying the nation by inculcating the feeling of harmony, integrity and cohesiveness in the minds of people.

*As told to Vijendra  
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# Honouring deprived with 'Padma'

The Padma Awards, India's highest civilian honours, aim to recognize individuals across various fields for their exceptional contributions to society. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on inclusivity in the selection process for these awards. The awards might have recognized individuals who have made significant contributions from marginalized communities, including Dalits, Adivasis. The Padma Awards typically cover a wide range of fields, including art, literature, science, sports, social work, and public service. Ensuring representation across these diverse fields promotes inclusivity and recognizes excellence in various spheres of society.

**G**addam Sammaiah is a Chindu Yakshaganam artist who was born in a village in the Telangana district of Jangaon. This year, he received the Padma Shri in recognition of his efforts to preserve this antiquated art form. Telangana is home to the ancient art form known as Chindu Yakshaganam. This theatre art form has a distinct style



and form and blends dance, music, conversation, costumes, makeup, and stage techniques. Sammaiah described how it has successfully increased thousands of people's awareness. In addition to sharing his abundance of experience in giving presentations on subjects like family planning, HIV awareness, literacy, environmental protection, and cleanliness, Sammaiah reflected on his lifetime dedication to social causes, particularly the government's welfare initiative to outlaw alcohol since he was a young man.

Sangthankima, a committed social worker from Aizawl, Mizoram, was awarded the esteemed Padma Shri award in the Social Work (Children) category at the age of sixty-three. The inspiration behind "Thutak Nunpuitu Team," the biggest orphanage in Mizoram, has been Sangthankima, also called the "Saint

of Compassion". He has spent the last thirty years fighting for causes such as education, HIV/AIDS awareness, addiction treatment, children's welfare, and other civic concerns. The foundation of Sangthankima's extraordinary work is his unwavering commitment to helping the marginalised people in society to find refuge and rehabilitation. Under his direction, the orphanage has developed into a sanctuary for drug addicts, alcoholics, divyang kids, and orphans, providing them with not only a place to stay but also a shot at a new and respectable life.



Sangthankima has worked extensively for Burmese nationals and villages in the Northeast, therefore his compassion goes beyond the boundaries of Mizoram. His rehabilitation centres, which are located over four districts of Assam, have been instrumental in offering assistance to individuals in need, garnering him recognition as a great humanitarian.

Machihan Sasa, a master craftsman from Nungbi Kajui (Longpi Kajui) village in Manipur's Ukhru district, who has dedicated his life to conserving and developing the ancient skill of Longpi black pottery, will receive the Padma Shri award this year.

Machihan was born on April 10, 1950, in a region dominated by agriculture and traditional professions. He established himself as a pioneer



in the field of black stone pottery, considerably contributing to Manipur's cultural legacy. He learned pottery-making from his father, Kuishim Sasa, when he was just 20 years old. Since 1970, he has been actively involved in the production of one-of-a-

kind black stone pottery made from pulverised black serpentine stone and a distinctive brown clay found only in Longpi. Machihan's creative approach to pottery, notably the black stone kind, has garnered attention not just locally, but also regionally and globally. His pottery is noted for its rustic appearance, nonstick properties, and usefulness in the kitchen.

Somanna, from Mothahaadi, which is around



10 kilometres from HD Kote town, has received the Padma Shri award. Somanna, who grew up in bonded labour, has since become a determined campaigner for the Jenu Kuruba group, which has been designated as a Particularly Vulnerable

Tribal Group (PVTG). At 66 years old, he is still committed to fighting poverty.

Somanna has worked tirelessly for the growth of the Jenu Kuruba tribe over the past four decades. Notably, his initiatives have permitted the acquisition of title deeds, providing legal legitimacy and protection to over 500 native tribes living in forested areas. His services have not gone unnoticed; he has already received the Valmiki award from the state government.

Sano Vamuzo, the founder of the Naga



Mothers' Association (NMA), received the coveted Padma Shri award during the Republic Day festivities for her outstanding accomplishments. Born on March 27, 1940, Sano overcame educational hurdles but excelled

academically at several schools throughout Nagaland. She studied at Guwahati University, Bombay University, and NEHU, creating a solid educational foundation.

Her career journey included serving as the State Organising Commissioner (G) of Bharat Scouts & Guides Nagaland in 1972, and later becoming its Vice President for numerous years. In the field of education, she achieved tremendous progress, managing schools in Kohima and lecturing at Baptist College. Sano was also given the Navjyoti Award for Social Services by the Delhi Police Foundation, which recognised her excellent contributions to young social services and her involvement in creating the NMA.

In addition to her teaching and advocacy work, she was the first chairman of the Nagaland State Commission for Women, actively supporting her late husband, Vamuzo, in his political endeavours. Sano is still highly concerned about the difficulties confronting Naga society and emphasises the significance of finding solutions through divine wisdom and successful leadership initiatives.

Jageshwar Yadav, a Jashpur district resident, has received the coveted Padma Shri award



for his tireless efforts to improve the lives of Birhor tribals, particularly in Jashpur's rural parts. Yadav, originally from the peaceful village of Bhitghara in the Bagicha district, has served as a beacon of hope for the Birhor tribe since 1989. He

founded an ashram in Jashpur with the goals of combating illiteracy, providing healthcare, and advocating for the rights of tribal populations.

He resolved to become a change agent after witnessing the Birhor tribals' struggles with access to education, healthcare, and work prospects. By immersing himself in their language and culture, he helped to develop an educational culture among them, encouraging youngsters to attend school. Yadav's altruistic efforts have been recognised, including the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh Award in 2015. Despite several challenges, his enthusiasm for social improvement has remained unwavering.

Yanung Jamoh Lego of Arunachal



Pradesh, who has revived the traditional healing practices of the Adi community has received Padma Shri award this year. Hailing from East Siang district, the 58-year-old woman is a former deputy director in the state agriculture department.



Despite financial constraints and personal challenges, she dedicated her life for revival of the lost traditional healing system of Adi Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh.

Chandrashekhar Mahadeorao Meshram who belongs to Scheduled Castes is an eminent neurologist from Nagpur Maharashtra, has been awarded Padma Shri for his extensive contributions to neurological education and research, as well as for championing brain health awareness in the field of medicine.



Chami Murmu, an environmental activist from Saraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand belongs to Scheduled Tribes. She has mobilised hundreds of women in her area, against the wishes of the male residents, to plant trees in more than 500 villages. Among the trees that she has planted are Eucalyptus, Sal, Acacia, which are good sources of



firewood, and Neem, Sheesham trees, which are used for making furniture. After 36 years of hard work and planting more than 28 lakh trees, she has been awarded by Padma Shri this year.

Dukhu Majhi is an environmental activist from a tribal community in West Bengal's Purulia who has been honoured with Padma Shri this year. At the age of 12, he began his green crusade and since then, he has gone to a new barren place on his bicycle and planted trees, turning those lands into green zones. The man from Purulia never thought that



he would be honoured with one of the highest civilian awards in India and it has only promoted him to up the ante of planting trees.

Vaidraj Hemchand Manjhi, awarded by the Padma Shri award is a traditional medical practitioner from Narayanpur. He belongs to Scheduled Tribes. Hailing from remote terrain of Chotedongarpur, Manjhi has been serving the people of the surrounding area since the age of 15. Now in his seventies, Hemchand



has been serving the people for more than five decades and provides treatment of various life-threatening diseases such as cancer of many forms, blood sugar, and asthma. In his pursuit to provide suitable and effective medicine in meagre amount, Manjhi also visits the remote terrain of Abujhmaad Forest to get precious herbs on a regular interval. He has also been repeatedly threatened by the Maoists, though despite the threats and personal attacks, Manjhi continues to work for the needy and sick.

Shri Narayanan E P who belongs to Scheduled Castes from Kerala has dedicated 6 decades to promoting the traditional art form of Theyyam. He has been awarded Padma Shri for his contributions to the field of Art. Theyyam is customarily performed by men from the lower strata of Kerala's caste structure. Although the caste system is conventionally followed in North Kerala,



the theyyam dancers, in their divine form, are worshiped by all classes of people. This can be a big incentive for men from these castes to be a theyyam.

Prominent folk musician Silbi Passah who belongs to Scheduled Tribes from Meghalaya was conferred the prestigious Padma Shri



Award. Passah, a resident of Riatsamthiah, Shillong, was awarded for her distinguished service in the field of 'Art'. The noted Khasi folk musician has been known for her work in traditional folk Khasi music in the state. Passah is a renowned Khasi-Jaintia artist, composed, poet, playwright. She is also a school teacher by profession.

Couple Shivam Paswan and Shanti Paswan of Madhubani district belong to Bihar have been honoured with Padma Shri Award for folk painting. Paintings of Padma Shri awarded couple Shivam and Shanti have been exhibited



in countries like America, Japan and Hong Kong. These couple belong to Scheduled Castes they have so far trained more than 20 thousand



people to make these paintings.

Jordan Lepcha, a craftsman of Sikkim who makes bamboo hats with stories of historical events and family values inscribed



on them, was one of those selected for the Padma Shri award this year. Lepcha belongs to Scheduled Tribes and is a 50-year-old craftsman hailing from Lower Lingdong in Mangan district has been nurturing the cultural heritage of the Lepcha tribe for the past 25 years. He has preserved the ancient craft of weaving traditional Lepcha hats, called 'Sumok Thyaktuk', and bamboo crafts. He is one of a handful of skilled artisans involved with it. Only natural materials sourced locally are used in making of the hats.

Shri Togdan Rinpoche, a revered Buddhist leader hailing from Leh, was honoured posthumously with the Padma award in the Spiritualism category.



Throughout his life, Rinpoche made profound contributions to both spiritual and cultural spheres, leaving an indelible mark on his community and beyond. As a spiritual leader, Rinpoche dedicated his life to the teachings of Buddhism, guiding and inspiring countless individuals on their spiritual journeys. His profound wisdom, compassion, and dedication to the principles of Buddhism endeared him to many, earning him respect and admiration far and wide.

In addition to his spiritual pursuits, Rinpoche played a pivotal role in the preservation and promotion of the Bhoti language. Recognizing the importance of language in preserving cultural heritage, he worked tirelessly to ensure that the rich linguistic traditions of his community were safeguarded for future generations. His efforts in this regard not only helped preserve a vital aspect of the cultural identity of the region but also promoted greater understanding and appreciation of its unique heritage.

Although Rinpoche is no longer with us, his legacy continues to inspire and guide those who follow in his footsteps. The posthumous recognition of his contributions with the prestigious Padma award serves as a testament to the enduring impact of his work in the realms of spirituality and cultural preservation. Rinpoche's life serves as a shining example of

selfless service, wisdom, and devotion, leaving behind a legacy that will continue to resonate for generations to come.

Sarbeswar Basuramatary, hails from the remote Panbari village situated in the Chirang district of Assam. Despite the challenges



posed by the geographical isolation of his village, He has risen as a beacon of inspiration through his exemplary practice of mixed integrated farming, earning him recognition with the prestigious Padma award. Integrated farming, as demonstrated by him, embodies a holistic approach to agriculture that harmoniously combines various agricultural activities on a single farm. His ideas of farm serve as a model of diversity, where he seamlessly integrates fruit and vegetable farming, poultry rearing, rice-fish cultivation, and mixed farming practices.

In his endeavour to achieve a sustainable and self-sufficient farming system, Sarb Eswar Sacramentary has embraced innovation and traditional wisdom. His farm not only yields a diverse range of crops and livestock but also promotes ecological balance and resilience. Through meticulous planning and management, maximizes the synergies between different components of his farm, thereby optimizing resource utilization and minimizing environmental impact. His dedication to integrated farming extends beyond mere agricultural practices. He serves as a catalyst for change in his community, sharing his knowledge and expertise with fellow farmers and inspiring them to adopt similar approaches. His farm stands as a living testament to the potential of integrated farming to enhance livelihoods, promote food security, and conserve natural resources.

The Padma award bestowed upon him is a recognition of his exceptional contribution to agriculture and rural development. His success not only underscores the importance of integrated farming as a sustainable agricultural model but also highlights the invaluable role of grassroots innovators like Sarb Eswar Sacramentary in transforming rural landscapes and empowering communities. Through his unwavering commitment and visionary leadership, he has truly emerged as a model for sustainable agriculture, inspiring others to follow in his footsteps towards for prosperous future.

*Compiled by Team UV  
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# Not mentioning Caste: Move towards a casteless society?

**Pramod**



Something different happened on 10th January 2024! The Supreme court, while allowing the transfer petition in a marital dispute pending before a family court in Rajasthan, passed an order that the practice of mentioning the caste or religion of litigants must be done away with! The top court further issued a circular (F.No. 3/Judl. /2024 dated 7th February 2024) in which it expressed its surprise at the practice of mentioning the caste of both the parties in the memo of parties and directed the Registry to do away with the practice with immediate effect. (Memo of parties is a document which is essentially taken to record the address of the parties).

We are all aware that the caste system in Bharat is deep rooted in the society and is considered and practiced in various traditions, customs and practices. However, an element of discrimination crept in the system whereby some of the castes were started being considered as low and backward and the others as high and forward. It also brought in the practice of 'untouchability' wherein people belonging to certain castes were started being considered as 'untouchables.' Untouchability led to many inhuman practices through which the so-to-say untouchables were deprived of education, respect and dignity in the society.

Caste has been associated, for generations, with the names of the people. Many times, one can know the caste of a person by his or her name. The interpersonal relation and behaviour, many times, changes when one knows the caste by the other person's name. Caste is also required to be mentioned mandatorily either for the purpose of having a caste-wise count or to fulfil some or the other statutory requirement. However, there are many instances where caste is mentioned without any reason. Leading newspapers, who espouse the cause of an equal and discrimination-free society, mention the castes of the persons against their names in their news items and stories. Similarly, the electronic media, which apparently talk against discrimination, use caste references indiscriminately in their programmes. One is used to read in leading newspapers / see on the television, the names of the newly appointed cabinet ministers of the government along with

the castes mentioned there against!

Despite this background, the society has been vibrant and dynamic in fighting against such practices which brought disgrace to the social structure in the country. The governments, both central and state, have also been proactive in taking measures to build a discrimination-free society. However, one can easily understand that the fight against discrimination cannot be limited to the efforts of the governments. These are required to be supplemented by measures which would bring in a psychological – intellectual and emotional - change in the minds of the public at large. Such a social change can only be brought about by following such small practices as the one advocated and directed by the Supreme court.

Caste discrimination has already taken its toll. It has created a feeling of low-high, backward-forward feeling in the society. This can only be changed by changing the practices, which apparently appear to be small but may have contributed a lot towards promoting undesirable discrimination. Using caste as surnames (last name), mentioning caste as a piece of information even when it does not serve any purpose are practices which can be done away with.

The new generation has already made a beginning as it does not seem to be carrying the baggage of caste system. We find that college-going students (mainly in metros and urban areas) of the present day do not make use of their last names. They only mention their name thereby avoiding any unwanted feelings being generated. This idea can surely be extended to some other areas like writers/authors not mentioning their last names, avoiding the use of last names in the introduction of the panellists / speakers on the electronic media and the like.

The Prime Minister of Bharat has also given a different dimension to the caste system by declaring that he considers only four castes – the poor, the youth, the women and the farmers. Each of this would have people from different castes of the traditional caste system but without malice. The Supreme Court's move may therefore turn out to be a baby step in moving towards a casteless, discrimination-free and a healthy society! Let's therefore cherish the move!

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# The Fallacy of "Not Found Suitable"

In government institutions, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates continue to encounter systemic discrimination during faculty appointments. Many are unfairly labelled as "not suitable" due to biased assessments, a practice reminiscent of caste-based discrimination. This troubling trend, perpetuated by a small fraction of bureaucrats, deliberately obstructs the entry of reserved category candidates into the system.

A recent report by a parliamentary panel sheds light on the prevalence of discrimination against SC and ST candidates in educational institutions. Despite the government's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusivity, selection panels often misuse the term "not found suitable" to justify the exclusion of candidates from marginalized communities.

The repeated use of the "not found suitable" remark advances the agenda of anti-reservation bureaucrats, aiming to prevent reserved category candidates from entering the system. This deliberate obstructionism contributes to high vacancy rates, with prestigious institutions like IIMs and IITs seeing around 50 to 60 percent of



posts remaining unfilled. By perpetuating the narrative that suitable candidates are scarce in the reserved category, these bureaucrats effectively deny deserving candidates entry, further entrenching caste-based discrimination.

The situation is particularly alarming when considering the success of many individuals from reserved categories in the private sector, especially in metropolitan areas like Pune's Hinjewadi IT hub. Here, numerous youngsters from reserved categories seamlessly work at entry or mid-level positions, showcasing their capabilities and potential. This stark contrast highlights the disparity in opportunities between the public and private sectors and underscores the fallacy of the "NFS" argument.

It's crucial to recognize that the issue at hand is not about the availability of suitable candidates but rather the biased attitudes and discriminatory practices within the bureaucracy. Meritocracy should guide recruitment processes, ensuring candidates are evaluated based on qualifications and abilities rather than caste or social background.

Addressing this systemic discrimination requires a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, greater accountability and oversight are needed to prevent the misuse of selection criteria and ensure fair representation of reserved categories in government institutions. This can be achieved through stringent monitoring mechanisms.

Awareness and sensitization programs are essential to challenge stereotypes and biases perpetuating caste-based discrimination. Educational institutions and government bodies must actively promote diversity and inclusivity, fostering an environment where all individuals are valued and respected regardless of background.

Furthermore, policy reforms are needed to strengthen affirmative action measures and enhance opportunities for marginalized communities. This includes targeted interventions such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and skill development initiatives to empower SC and ST candidates and enable their upward mobility.

In addition to the concept of the glass ceiling in feminist and anti-race discourse, Maitreyi Bordia Das and Puja Vasudeva Dutta propose the notion of "glass walls" in their paper "Does Caste Matter for Wages in the Indian Labor Market?" These "glass walls" reflect horizontal segregation, where lower castes are constrained to menial, low-paying, and stigmatized occupations while upper-caste groups dominate preferred occupations.

Labelling SC and ST candidates as "not found suitable" is a grave injustice that undermines equality and social justice principles. Confronting this systemic discrimination head-on is imperative to create a more inclusive society where every individual can realize their full potential, irrespective of caste or social status. Additionally, a study by Sukhdeo Thorat and Paul Attewell reveals entrenched biases in recruitment processes, further perpetuating caste-based discrimination.

I recall a personal experience from 2007 during the entrance test for the Department of Communication and Journalism at SSUP University. A female SC candidate ranked first in all categories, making her eligible for the open category. Unfortunately, some upper-class students opposed her entry into the open category. However, the Head of the Department, also from an upper caste, clarified that the SC girl had ranked first in all categories. This situation reflects a pervasive issue across various contexts.

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## SC reserves judgment on caste sub-classification

The Supreme Court of India has reserved its verdict on the legality of sub-classifying reserved category groups, namely the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, under Article 16(4) of the Constitution. The case, *State of Punjab and ors vs Davinder Singh and others*, was heard by a constitution bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud with Justices BR Gavai, Vikram Nath, Bela M Trivedi, Pankaj Mithal, Manoj Misra, and Satish Chandra Sharma. During the hearing, the CJ made a distinction between the 'sub-classification' and 'sub-categorization' of communities, stating that States may have to sub-categorize reserved category communities to ensure that reservation benefits reach more backward groups. The matter was referred to a seven-judge bench of the top court in 2020 after a five-judge bench disagreed with the decision rendered in the *EV Chinniah* case, which had deemed sub-categorization of castes as unconstitutional.

## Karnataka CM pledges action against manual scavenging

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has pledged to take strict measures against manual scavenging in the state. He has vowed to take stern action against those who engage in this practice, which is considered a violation of human rights. Manual scavenging is the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit. The government has also announced compensation for the families of the deceased.

According to ANI, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah said, "It is our party's and Government's commitment that civic workers should live with dignity. Therefore, I raised the salary of Safai Karmacharis from 7 thousand to 17 thousand immediately after becoming the Chief Minister for the first time." "Manual scavenging is not allowed in the state for any reason. Legal action will be taken if anyone practices that" he said.

## Government forms panel to protect SC interests

The Indian government has taken a significant step to address the welfare of Scheduled Caste (SC) communities by establishing a high-level panel. The panel's primary objective is to examine and implement measures that will safeguard the interests of SCs across the country. This initiative comes in the wake of increasing concerns about the well-being and rights of SCs, and it reflects the government's commitment to ensuring their protection and advancement. The panel's focus on standardizing the assessment and response to acute illness among SCs is a crucial development in promoting their healthcare and overall quality of life. This proactive approach is expected to have far-reaching implications for the empowerment and support of SC communities in India.

The formation of this panel underscores the government's recognition of the need for targeted strategies to address the challenges faced by SCs and to ensure their equitable participation in the country's development. By prioritizing the standardization of healthcare assessment and response systems for SCs, the government is signalling its intent to bridge existing gaps and enhance the well-being of these communities.

## SC: Scheduled Castes not a homogenous group

A seven-judge Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, stated that Scheduled Castes cannot be considered a homogenous group for the purpose of granting reservations. The court's observation stemmed from the recognition that while some individuals from the Scheduled Castes have made progress in society, others continue to face significant underprivilege. The Central Government affirmed its dedication to the reservation policy, while the Tamil Nadu government emphasized the need for the policy to adapt to the evolving societal landscape, cautioning against it becoming 'fossilized'. The Constitution Bench is deliberating on whether individual states have the authority to identify and sub-classify backward classes within the Scheduled Caste category to afford them greater preference in reservation. The court emphasized that the various castes listed under Article 341 of the Constitution as 'Scheduled Castes' have distinct experiences of suffering, humiliation, and dehumanization, and thus cannot be treated uniformly.

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# Inspirational life of Ahilyadevi

With this article we are concluding the series on Ahilyadevi, let us reflect on the enduring legacy of Her. Her life serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration, reminding us of the transformative power of leadership driven by compassion and empathy. Ahilyadevi's example stands as a testament to the enduring values of kindness, justice and solidarity.



**Rambhau Lande**

In Indian history, the golden era of the Holkar dynasty is glorified by the praise-worthy acts of Ahilyadevi Holkar. Ahilyadevi's period in Indian history is one that changed the direction of India. She, within the span of twenty-eight years of her reign, transformed the old rigid traditions, making numerous socially beneficial decisions, freeing society from the shackles of tradition. Ahilyadevi, known as an ideal woman, taking the responsibilities of the kingdom on her shoulders, transformed into a warrior. Without showing any hesitation to face the situations that came her way, she took the form of a fortress and stood tall on the battlefield of Gohad, Ramnagar, and Ahmedabad, sitting on elephants, leading her army. She elevated the status of women by standing them side by side with men on the battlefield, thus ending gender discrimination.

The notion that women can fight against the enemy alongside men became a new concept embedded in society. On December 10, 1767, Ahilyadevi officially accepted the reins of the Holkar dynasty, but she had been making decisions regarding the governance of the Holkar state since 1754. After the death of her son Khanderao, her father-in-law Malharrao Holkar reinstated her authority to make decisions. With the help of ministers responsible for finance and administration, she managed the affairs of the state meticulously, ensuring

economic prosperity and development while handling daily administrative tasks with great care. She softened the royal court's customs and traditions and treated her servants with trust, making difficult tasks easier for them.

The throne of the Holkar dynasty is considered the seat of the divine. Shrimant Malharrao Holkar, in his guise as the protector of this throne, not only maintained it but also stood firmly in the position of the ruler. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, the maternal uncle, entrusted Bhojrao Baragale, Thorle Bajirao, with the responsibility, and they are praiseworthy for their decision-making, which is akin to the direction of the sun. This sentiment was expressed by his wife Gautamabai and his daughter-in-law Ahilyadevi. Those who came from the south to serve as commanders were honoured according to their capabilities and given positions to exhibit their valour, adorning their shields with gold and silver.

The belief in maintaining sovereignty as the king of the subjects was safeguarded by Malharrao Holkar, and this trust was expressed multiple times in his court, creating a significant impact on his courtiers as well as his army. Ahilyadevi strengthened this thread of rulership, and hence, there was a distinctiveness in her governance that was evident in her ministers. After taking action against the Kumbheri campaign, led by Surajmal Jat, hostilities



began against Malharrao. His son Khanderao was involved in the Jaipur campaign. After putting an end to the Kumbheri campaign, Malharrao called Khanderao back from there. However, this battle proved to be Khanderao's final battle. In the case of Madhosingh and Ishwarsingh, Khanderao has defeated Surajmal, which deeply wounded Surajmal Jat's ego. Using deceit, he turned against Khanderao, avenging his own defeat. In the battle of Kumbheri, when Khanderao died, Malharrao was deeply saddened, and he choked with emotion regarding Ahilyadevi's potential sati, or self-immolation, upon her husband's funeral pyre. He pleaded with her to not follow the tradition of sati, reminding her of her responsibility towards the kingdom. He said, "Ahilya, you are my strength and support". With these words, he saw Ahilya as a capable young girl. Ahilyadevi abandoned the idea of sati after considering the situation and circumstances. She broke the tradition of sati. However, she went along with other rituals concerning Khanderao.

In Ahilyadevi's reign, a practice began of collecting the wealth of widows and childless women in government treasuries. Ahilyadevi put an end to this practice and granted widows permission to adopt children. Additionally, she initiated the tradition of providing widows with clothes, ornaments, and allowing them to play and enjoy festivities, as well as granting them the autonomy to choose adoption. This decision had positive outcomes in society. With the opportunity to live with dignity and respect, many families flourished. Ahilyadevi accepted everything that was good. She nurtured literature, art, and culture by providing royal patronage and promoting social awakening. Along with devotion to God, she encouraged the creation of various compositions such as hymns, bhajans, and songs praising the virtues of God, which empowered people. She also took special care to prepare handwritten copies of various scriptures, especially the Dnyaneshwari. More than three hundred manuscripts were meticulously preserved, and copies of scriptures were prepared.

Due to Ahilyadevi's firm commitment, the people in the northern region experienced a resurgence of their culture. Additionally, Ahilyadevi's contributions to infrastructure development led to the stability of the region. She established social justice and democratic values. Ahilyadevi was transparent in economic discipline. In the current postal system initiated by Ahilyadevi, not only government letters were included, but changes were made to exclude them and bring in other letters. Also,

the practice of delivering notices of general interest to women through government posts was started, resulting in increased revenue and privatization of government machinery. As a result, complaints from people reached Ahilyadevi directly. Strict measures were taken against village workers who were conducting business arbitrarily.

The desire to learn mathematics, astrology, pulse diagnosis, Vedas, and Puranas led to the establishment of independent institutions for providing education through experts. Among them, Ahilyadevi initiated the Bramhapuri Veda Gurukul in Kashi, provided assistance to Gurukuls already established near Pune, started Gurukuls in Maheshwar, and initiated recruitment of soldiers in Lasalgaon, Sultanpur, Sendhwa, Jamghat, Chandwad, and Wafgaon to create a trained military force. A new measure was introduced by providing them with a seal bearing the institution's emblem. Additionally, service providers were given a salary every fifteen days. Recognizing the farmer as the provider of food, efforts were made to protect and ensure their support, symbolized by the necessity to fill up the black mother's bowl with grains. With this belief, confidence was built among the farmers, leading to the initiation of systematic buying and selling of grains, along with the implementation of grain procurement measures.

To make the people more prosperous and joyful, responsibility was taken to provide royal patronage to pilgrimage sites and religious festivals for their protection, encouraging their participation in these festivals, thus making those festivals significant and building trust among the farmers. Additionally, strict measures were taken to prevent any harassment or extortion from upper castes at religious sites. Those who troubled people in the name of religion had their credentials verified, and a method was initiated to expose them publicly. Ahilyadevi Holkar consistently served for twenty-eight years as an exemplary ruler, diligently fulfilling the role of an ideal stateswoman. Ahilyadevi had created an atmosphere which helped people to feel safe and at ease. To participate in warfare Ahilyadevi taught people the warfare tactics to protect themselves from constant threats of invasion, thereby instilling fearlessness.

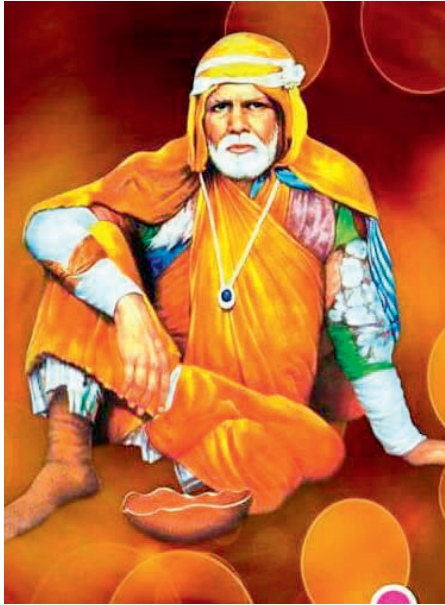
During Ahilyadevi's twenty-eight years of reign, a new identity of the nation was created on the world map. Even after three hundred years, people from all over the world come to Maheshwar to pay their respects to her.

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# DIN VISHESH

## Remembering Sant Gadgebaba



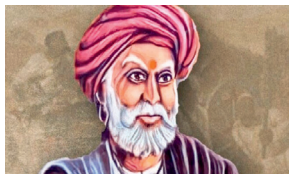
**23rd February**  
Sant Gadgebaba Birth Anniversary

Born in 1876 in the village of Shenggaon in Maharashtra, India, as Debuji Zhingraji Janorkar, Gadge Baba's journey towards spiritual enlightenment and social transformation began early in life. He was deeply influenced by the teachings of Sant Namdev, Sant Kabir, and Sant Tukaram, embodying their principles of love, humility, and devotion to God.

From a young age, Gadge Baba showed a remarkable inclination towards simplicity and austerity. He renounced material comforts and chose to live a life of extreme simplicity, wearing minimal clothing and surviving on meagre meals. His austere lifestyle was not a mere personal choice but a powerful statement against the extravagance and excesses prevalent in society.

Gadge Baba was deeply troubled by the plight of the poor and marginalized communities, who suffered from poverty, ignorance, and social discrimination. Determined to alleviate their suffering, he embarked on a lifelong journey of social reform and service to humanity.

One of his most significant contributions was in the realm of sanitation and environmental conservation. Gadge Baba emphasized the importance of cleanliness in both physical and spiritual realms, declaring, "Cleanliness is Godliness."



**17th February**  
Lahuji Salve  
Death Anniversary



**19th February**  
Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj  
Birth Anniversary



**24th February**  
Sant Ravidas  
Birth Anniversary



**26th February**  
V. D. Savarkar  
Death Anniversary



**10th March**  
Savitribai Phule  
Death Anniversary



**11th March**  
Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad  
III Birth Anniversary

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