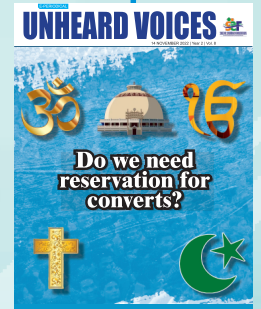
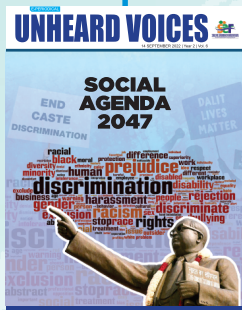
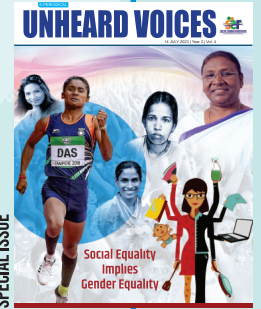
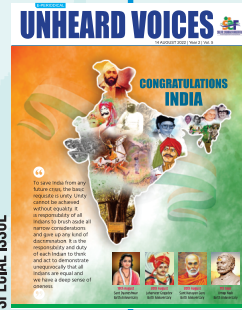
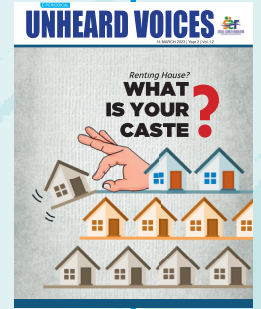
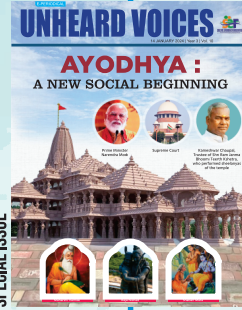
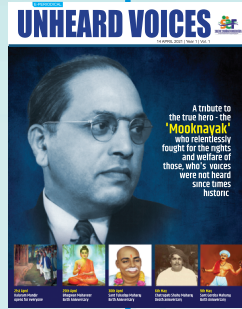
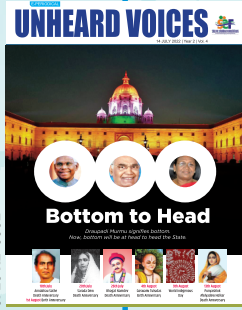
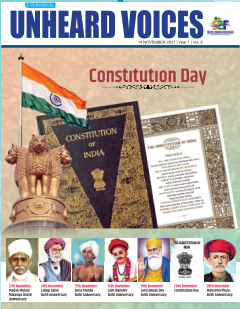


# UNHEARD VOICES

SPECIAL ISSUE

14 APRIL 2024 | Year 4 | Vol. 1



# COMPLETING THREE YEARS

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*Dear Readers,*

*We are happy to present a special issue of “UNHEARD VOICES” on the occasion of its third anniversary. The first issue of UNHEARD VOICES was published on April 14, 2021 on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. We are satisfied that the Social Studies Foundation was able to publish 34 issues without any interruption thanks to the blessings and support by all the well-wishers and supporters, who are spread all over the world and not merely in India. We take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for our well-wishers, supporters and contributors, who are spread across India.*

*On the occasion of our third anniversary, we have compiled a few selected articles, which were published in the past three years. We are confident that it would help all of us to refresh our memories. This exercise would also help all of us to introspect and move in the right direction. We hope that readers would welcome this experience.*

*UNHEARD VOICES provides a platform to those people, whose voice is not listened to. This is a serious attempt by the Social Studies Foundation to draw attention of the people towards problems and grievances of the people, who are mainly from socially and economically weaker sections of the society. However, we believe that merely raising problems and voicing grievances is not adequate for depressed class. We, as a nation, are passing through a significant phase and depressed people need to move with the pace of time. We need to come out with solutions for the problems. UNHEARD VOICES is an attempt in this direction. We believe that solutions to the problems have to be found out in this soil, instead of outsourcing them from foreign land. We are confident that we will continue to get support from our well-wishers.*



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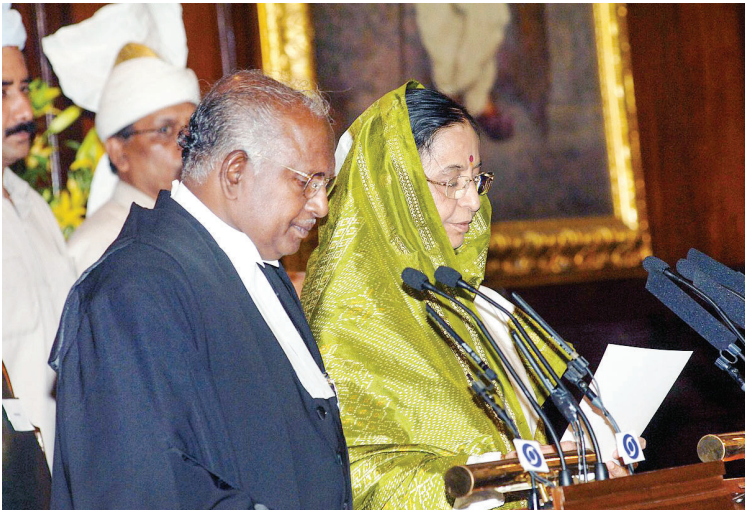
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# 'Right person must hear your voice at right time for right action'



In the democratic process, those who cry for their rights alone get what they want. You are supposed to raise your voice. A large number of people in this country cannot raise their voices. They are never in the mind of the administration. You have to agitate. This is the advice from the retired Chief Justice of India, K. G. Balakrishnan, for young Dalit professionals. In a detailed interview with Adv. Vinod Kumar, retired CJI spoke on hurdles faced by the deprived sections due to discrimination.

**UV :** What were your feelings when you became the 37th Chief Justice of India? What was your immediate reaction?

**KGB :** To be the Chief Justice of India, head of the judicial institution of this country, was a proud moment for a member of the Dalit community. Therefore, it was a moment of pride, not only for me but for the whole community. That's how I saw it. I realised that even a person of my origin, low-income family background like mine, can reach this position in independent India.

**UV :** Sir, though Article 17 abolishes untouchability and discrimination, caste-based prejudice still prevails. Although the Constitution provides adequate representation to Dalits, Adivasis and

deprives, they get little representation in Supreme Court and High Courts even after almost 74 years of independence. How do you see it? How can it be increased?

**KGB :** Indeed, representation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the judiciary is minimal. So far, it is not even in a five-digit number. I think Justice Ray from West Bengal was the first Judge of the Supreme Court belonging to a Scheduled Caste. Then Justice Ramaswamy became the Judge of the Supreme Court. There was another judge from Tamil Nadu to adorn the office of the Supreme Court, and I was the fourth Judge of the Supreme Court with a Scheduled Caste background. Even in the High Court, there has been minimal representation. However, courts





in this country have administered justice by determining rights of the people. It means the rights of all the people are decided in the absence of proper representation by the Scheduled Castes. This non-representation is not by a purposeful denial. There has been no adequate representation because there was a lack of appropriate candidates in the legal profession. Legal profession is dominated by people from the affluent sections of society. Since there were no good lawyers, it isn't easy to become a judge and reach the Supreme Court and High Court positions.

**UV : Will appointing more judges from deprived sections achieve the constitutional mandate of a casteless society in India? How can the existing caste system be abolished, and can its influence on society and good institutions be minimised?**

**KGB :** Article 17 of the Constitution abolishes untouchability. However, caste discrimination still prevails in various forms in various states. We read about several instances where the Scheduled Castes, even those holding offices, are being denigrated, insulted and subjected to ill-treatment. Members of Scheduled Castes face the question of how to escape from atrocity. Of course, we would be able to achieve democracy in its true sense only by establishing the constitutional mandate and giving judicial power, administrative power, and political power to the Scheduled Castes. Otherwise, there will be only political democracy and no social democracy, as Dr. Ambedkar pointed out. Representation of the Scheduled Castes in the administrative and bureaucratic setup, official positions, especially in the judiciary and the police, is essential to ensure social democracy.

**UV : What is the contribution of Scheduled Castes in the post-independence era in the justice delivery system, in your opinion?**

**KGB :** Scheduled Castes' contribution to the country's judiciary is minimal because they have no representation. They would be able to establish and enforce the rights of the people only if they are given proper representation due to them. Therefore, until there is an adequate representation of the Scheduled Castes, the contribution to the judiciary or the judicial administration will remain minimal. Of course, merely giving raises based on the castes is not the judiciary administration. Judicial administration means determining the rights of the people based

on the constitutional provision. But if there is a proper representation of Scheduled Castes in judicial service, the prejudicial mindset of the people will gradually change.

**UV : What is your opinion on the creation of All India Judicial Service provided under Article 312? Can it transform the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' lives, particularly those in the legal field?**

**KGB :** All India Judicial Service was thought of several years back. There are certain impediments to implementing it. All India Judicial Service would mean selecting lower judiciary judges starting from the Civil Judge Junior Division up to the District Judges at the national level. District Judges are the feeder category for the selection of High Court Judges for the concerned state. How can the appointment of High Court Judges be managed if there is an All India Judicial Service? Secondly, a judge from Tamil Nadu may not be a fine judge to conduct a trial in UP in Hindi. Besides, presently the High Courts have the powers to select their judicial officers and are under the High Court's administrative control. Therefore, most of the High Courts oppose All India Judicial Service. But I feel selecting a percentage of judicial officers based on All India Judicial Service will help get the best talent from all the categories and ensure effective implementation of the reservation principle. So, appointing at least some 70 or 80% of the officers on an All India basis can solve the problem of inadequate representation. That is why the Union Government should take suitable action to implement the All India Judicial Service.

**UV : A new Article, 124-A, was added to the Constitution to make a procedure for the appointments of the High Court and Supreme Court Judges by passing the National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, 2014. That was later struck down by the Supreme Court while expressing the opinion that it will interfere in the independence of the judiciary. How do you see it?**

**KGB :** It may not be proper for me to criticise the judgment of the Supreme Court as I had been holding a responsible post myself. Nevertheless, I can say that in all countries, people have a right to say what type of judges they should have. There is a committee for selection, and civil representatives suggest names for the appointment of judges. In America, the President suggests the names

and the candidates are severely questioned by the Senate before their appointment to the Superior Court. To my knowledge, appointments of judges are made by agencies other than the judges in most countries. And in all those countries, judiciary is independent. In South Africa, Brazil, Britain, America, Canada, Australia and many other countries, judges are not selected by judges. The independence of the judiciary will be lost if there are no judges in the selection process is a myth.



**UV : The civil society has been saying that the Collegium system works under a cloud of secrecy and sometimes ignores the merit. What is your opinion about the Collegium system?**

**KGB :** No system is perfect. Every system has its inherent defects. We cannot say outright that we cannot find good judges because we have a lousy selection system. Even under such a system, we can select the best candidates. The problem arises when the system is abused and misused. I cannot say that the Collegium system is bad. It is our bounded duty to see that such a system works perfectly well. Judges of the superior courts are duty-bound to discharge their functions without fear, favour or affection or ill-will or bizarre prejudice or bias. You cannot say Collegium is bad merely because some wrong candidates are selected at some point in time for various reasons. Anyway, if you feel that the system is not working well, you can change.

**UV : Women have also not been given**

**proper representation in the judiciary. Only eight women have made it to the Supreme Court so far. Is it high time that there should be a woman Chief Justice of India?**

**KGB :** Representation by women has been poor because women were not joining the legal profession. Sorabji, the first lady lawyer, could not even be enrolled as an advocate because people opposed her enrolment. Even during my college days, only four of the 60 candidates in my law class were women. So, women candidates were inadequate in the legal profession. Now, the scenario is changing. Many girls are joining the law and holding good positions in the academic field and legal field too. In all the High Courts, representation of women is fairly good, and it will increase. Justice Fathima Beevi was the first woman to come to the Supreme Court. She was a colleague with me. Sujata Manohar was my Chief Justice. Then there was Justice Anna Chandy from Kerala. She was the first lady who adorned a high court. She was a courageous woman and a fearless judge. So, the representation of women was in ratio with the number of women lawyers practising law in those days.

**UV : How good the judiciary has performed its duties to achieve the goal enshrined in Article 14?**

**KGB :** Without upholding the majesty of Article 14 of the Constitution, no judge can function. Article 14 and all the rights, justice and the equality before the law and equal protection of law remain the soul and spirit of the Constitution. Equality before law for all citizens and equal protection of law for all is the mandate of the Constitution and the judiciary. I don't think any Judge can afford to violate these principles. Some may say that some judgments show social bias. That is personal. Judiciary has upheld principles of the Constitution in true spirit. The Supreme Court has upheld the majesty of the law and upheld the constitutional principles, and protected the rights of media and people of this country. The Courts and Supreme Court have been the people's last resort seeking justice, equity, and good conscience.

**UV : Can you suggest some judgments pronounced by the Supreme Court that have worked better for the Scheduled Castes law students?**

**KGB :** There is a series of decisions touching the origin of reservation, right from the



Champakam Dorairajan vs The State of Madras, which resulted in the 1st constitutional amendment to protect the reservation in the state of Madras. After that, there has been a series of decisions on defining socially and educationally backwards and how the reservation is to be extended, including the Indra Sawhney case and Thakur's case. The case of Thomas is also essential. All these decisions upheld the constitutional principles and the reservations. We have upheld the constitutional right from the beginning. Whenever a Constitutional provision created any bar, we have amended the provision. When 16(4) was found inadequate to give representation, Constitution Amendment to insert 16(4)(a) was done. When it was said that seniority is not being given on the basis of the reservation, the Constitution was amended with the system for consequential seniority. The Constitution is a dynamic, living document. It requires day to day interpretation, and some of the interpretations

**Discrimination in the administration of justice or governmental action is not because of the absence of laws. We have adequate laws. The laws are sufficient for the proper implementation. No law can be enacted to cause perpetuated discrimination and to cause injustice. The laws are passed with the bonafide intention. But unfortunately, they are not adequately implemented. So, I don't think that there is any necessity for any other laws. There is affirmative action. Atrocity is punishable. I don't believe any laws need to be modified to establish these rights.**

have been given by very eminent judges. They saw the light, and they gave them for future guidance. Affirmative action is essential in India because large sections of the Scheduled Castes community still see no future. There is no good employment, business opportunity, land or other assets, adequate livelihood or life opportunities. Till such discrimination continues, affirmative action should continue. Otherwise, the social democracy envisaged in the Constitution will remain an enigma. We

have to achieve social democracy through the democratic process and constitutional interpretation.


**UV : We see a lot of cases of atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Do you think we have failed to implement the law against atrocities in its tooth and nail and in the right spirit?**

**KGB :** Majority of the cases filed under the SC/ST Atrocities Act end in acquittal because the witnesses who give evidence before the police authorities later withdraw their statements. Those who commit the atrocities exert influential power, money power, other power and seek a settlement. Many cases end in acquittal because the complainant or his witnesses are won over by the accused or his henchmen. There is a provision that such cases should be investigated by a superior police officer. This is mainly a judicial function and not a one-man action. It involves the police, court staff, the advocates, clerks, many other witnesses, the prosecutor etc. All these agencies need to pool in for right conclusion in the cases. If one of these agencies is susceptible to influence, the case ends in disarray. The policy needs to be very alert and careful while recording the evidence and ensuring the independence of witnesses. They should extend protection to the witnesses. But when many cases are pending in various courts, it is challenging to render such independence and enforce such independence of witnesses.

**UV : Most students belonging to deprived sections opt for government jobs. In view of the socio-economic changes, do you think the students should also opt for professional careers like lawyers, chartered accountants, doctors, journalists etc.? What is your advice to students?**

**KGB :** we cannot forget the complex realities in this society. It is effortless to say you should join the journalism course, business management course, chartered accountancy course etc. But who pays income tax in this country, and who will go to a Dalit accountant for Income Tax assessment? Which newspaper baron will employ the poor, and which company will provide jobs to a poor MBA degree holder? They are all controlled by wealthy persons coming from the upper echelons of society. They would like to engage a person who is with multiple talents. But, how a young pass out of college can show his talent to the employer? So, these students go





for the subjects which are likely to generate employment for them. We cannot give any definite advice on this subject.

**UV : Governments appoint lawyers in the High Court and Supreme Court to represent their cases, but Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes get negligible representation. What is your opinion?**

**KGB :** In Kerala, from where I come, and in Tamil Nadu too, there is adequate representation to Scheduled Castes in the posts of public prosecutors and government pleaders. State governments can implement reservations in it, and this can be a springboard for young lawyers. Why ministers are not taking action? Why don't you approach the Chief Minister? Why don't you approach the ministers? Why don't you approach the law minister? There are a large number of young Dalit lawyers in various states. Why don't they speak up? They should make representations to the ministers and Chief Ministers. In the democratic process, those who cry for their rights alone get what they want. Why are these voices unheard? Why don't you raise your voice? You are supposed to raise your voice. The right person must hear your voice at the right time to do the right action. Your voice shall never remain unheard. A large number of people in this country cannot raise their voices. They are never in the mind of the administration. You also have to agitate for them because you are the chosen few with an excellent opportunity to get an education.

**UV : That would be participative democracy. Is it not so?**

**KGB :** They don't raise their voice. So they don't get it. UP, Bihar and other states were at some point of time were administered by people who belong to this category. Why was it not done?

**UV : Are some more laws required to achieve goals enshrined in the preamble of our Constitution so that caste-based discrimination could be eliminated from society?**

**KGB :** Discrimination in the administration of justice or governmental action is not because of the absence of laws. We have adequate laws. The laws are sufficient for the proper implementation. No law can be enacted to cause perpetuated discrimination and to cause injustice. The laws are passed with the bonafide intention. But unfortunately, they are not adequately implemented. So, I don't

think that there is any necessity for any other laws. There is affirmative action. Atrocity is punishable. I don't believe any laws need to be modified to establish these rights.

**UV : Any message to the young lawyers, young professionals?**

**KGB :** There are a large number of lawyers in all the states. But they are not able to make both ends meet. Judicial Service Examinations are not conducted properly. And I must say our children are not preparing well to appear very spiritedly for the judicial service examination. A large number of people can get into the judicial service because the number of posts is going to be doubled or tripled over the next few years. You shall not miss and waste your time. You must make headway by joining the legal profession. But merely being a lawyer will not give anything to you. You may not have any case in hand, but you should work hard to appear for the judicial service exam. Nobody can discriminate when your answers are 100% right. So avail that opportunity and various other opportunities such as government pleaders, various bank service examinations etc. A large number of people with legal knowledge need to be recruited in the banks. You have to search for opportunities and seek them to be in the right place. Make use of the opportunities and lead a perfect life. This is my only advice to young lawyers from the lower strata of society who are suffering discrimination, which I also suffered at one time in my life.

**UV : What is your message to young girls belonging to the lower strata of society concerning the legal profession?**

**KGB :** Generally, young lawyers belonging to the marginalised sections of society face problems, and women face this disability more than young lawyers. It is difficult for them to get into the legal profession without help from somebody, and nobody extends the benefit of even sharing the office as a junior. But two or three young lawyers can come together and start an office. Help people, not only in the legal profession, in all societal problems such as welfare, insurance claims, motor accidents claims. A large number of people are looking for help regarding that. The profession of lawyers can be a standard in the field of social service also. By helping such people, then you will be recognised as a saviour of society. With it, you can do it.

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Nearly 1.3 Lakh cases were registered in different states between 2018 and 2020 on Dalits. NCRB indicates that more than 90% of the crimes against SCs' are pending in the court. If a Dalit victim is lucky enough to escape or overcome these hurdles, as is the case with a small percentage of cases that reach the court, the victim's feeling that all are not equal before the law is reinforced by the courts misinterpretation of the spirit of SC/ST (PoA) Act.

# Poor implementation of Atrocities Act

Ritik

Born as a Dalit in India, the first question arises in my mind is – whether I should have pride or feel shame. This is the question as a law student as well. Constitution of India ensures justice, liberty, equality, fraternity but why Dalit need some special provisions? Is it that the constitution or its arms like executive, legislature and judiciary fail to secure rights of Dalits?

The word Dalit stands for oppressed, broken or crushed people. It refers to those formerly known by the dehumanizing term “Untouchables”. Dalits, officially known as SC's and ST's, the meaning assigned to them respectively under clause (24) and clause (25) of Article 366 of the Constitution. There are 200 million Dalits in India out of 1.3 billion which constitute more than a fifth of India's population. Article 14-18 Fundamental Rights of Constitution contains the right to equality provision. These articles influence equality based on faith, opportunity in employment and demotion of untouchability. Article 17 aims to demolish untouchability in India.

In 1955 under Article 35(a)(2), the

untouchability act was passed. This amendment is under the Untouchability Amendment and Provision Bill, passed by the parliament and enforced from 1976, is known as Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. When it became clear that existing laws had not made a desired impact against the oppression of Dalits by upper caste and by the state apparatus even 40 years after independence, 'The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocity) Act, 1989' was passed by the Parliament.

The Object and Reason of 'The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989' was enacted with a view to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to establish Special Court for the trial of such offences and for providing relief and rehabilitation of the victims of such offences.

When we talk about enforcement mechanism it is universally accepted that the success of the special act which deals with social offences goes to the enforcement to which it is entrusted. First Information Report (FIR) is the necessary initial step to commence the legal process when an atrocity takes place or untouchability



is practiced. But the implementation is pathetic. Sakshi Human rights Watch in Andhra Pradesh monitored the action in 103 cases during 1999 to 2003. It found that FIRs were correctly filed under the relevant provisions of the law only in 18 cases while in remaining 85 cases, 29 were never even brought within the preview of the law due to police failure to register cases. It reflected negligence on the part of police officials and colluding with the dominant caste. Notably, where a lower-ranked police official refuses to register a FIR, Rule 5(3) SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) does provide Dalits with the avenue of filing a complaint with the Superintendent of Police. In other words, such negligence of the erring official is punishable under Section 4 SC/ST (PoA) Act. In reality rarely such actions are being taken against the erring police official for negligence of duties.

Lutheran George of Tadepudi village in Athreyapuram mandal of East Godavari district, a watchman guarding shrimp ponds, was murdered on 23 June 2001 on suspicion of his having misappropriate produce from the shrimp ponds. Despite pressure brought to bear by the shrimp pond owner and prime accused, the deceased's wife eventually filed a complaint with the support of people's organization. However, the police did not take any action and no FIR was registered (Case 7, 'Dalit Human Rights Monitor, 2000-2003, Andhra Pradesh')

Another factor is the increasing number of false counter cases being filed against Dalit victim of atrocities by the dominant-caste perpetrators. While Dalit in Pitchatoor filed a case against the dominant caste for attacking the Dalits and destroying three houses, police took no action on the Dalit's complaint. However, based on a false complaint against the Dalit by the dominant caste people, a counter case was filed against the Dalit victim. (Case 31, 'Dalit Human Rights Monitor, 2000-2003, Andhra Pradesh'). Nearly 1.3 Lakh cases were registered in different states between 2018 and 2020 on Dalits. NCRB indicates that more than 90% of the crimes against SCs' are pending in the court. If a Dalit victim is lucky enough to escape or overcome these hurdles, as is the case with a small percentage of cases that reach the court, the victim's feeling that all are not equal before the law is reinforced by the courts misinterpretation of the spirit of SC/ST (PoA) Act.

In "Ramaswamy and Ors. Vs. state by: Inspector of Police (1997 (2) Crimes 684), the

Madras High Court granted anticipatory bail on the grounds the crime was not committed on the basis of the victim's caste, hence ignoring the prevailing caste tension and discrimination by the dominant caste - Thevars and Dalit". It shows that judicial opinion as to the validity of section 18 SC/ST (PoA) Act seems to be split, with about half of the cases in favour and half against granting of bail. It shows that not only dominant caste perpetrators abuse the law but also the very official entrusted to uphold the law and main order throughout the country.

When we talk about the Indian Judiciary system, it can be inferred that due to the non-representation of SCs and STs in the top judiciary, there must be glaring holes in the deliverance of justice. In 24 High Courts in India, there is not a single Adivasi Chief Justice. No Dalit Judge has been elevated to the Supreme Court since K.G. Balakrishnan in 2010. According to an Indian Express report, the Supreme Court collegium responsible for the appointment of judges and promotion to the superior courts does not have clarity on the rules and criteria. There is indication of nepotism in judicial appointments. More than 70 percent of the judges are connected in one way or another to 132 families. The Supreme Court has put a ceiling of 50% reservation for 82% of the population, thereby providing an open field of 50% reservation to the already dominant 18%. A large percentage of this 18% have a grip over resources, jobs and ownership and use their caste network so that these continue to circulate among themselves generation after generation. It shows that the concept of reservation and good governance adopted while framing an Indian Constitution is completely myth without equal representation.

Dr. Ambedkar remind us that "Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic and without annihilation of caste and class we build a palace on a dung heap". When we used to talk about the rights of the Dalits, we always remember that the rights they want to acquire that is in the hand of the social dominant evils of the society. For acquiring that right, Dalit not fight for the existing law which were govern to them, they should fight for securing the dominant position. Only representation in the field of law and justice can save Dalits from the hands of injustice society.

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# Abrogation of Article 370 : A step towards social equality



**Ritika**



Abrogation of much debated Article 370, conferring special status to Jammu and Kashmir, has not merely changed India's long time fight for national integration but it has brought about some major changes at the ground level as well.

The change in the citizenship rules enforced by the abrogation of Article 370 of Indian Constitution has been a significant step towards gender equality. Earlier, citizenship rules were inequitable – the citizenship accorded to women did not hold the same power, compared to men. Women, both permanent residents of J & K and those belonging to the West Pakistan Refugee community - have suffered alike. If any woman married outside J & K, her citizenship was not transferable to spouse and children. It was more problematic for single girl child, widows, and divorcees, who claimed their ancestral property.

Unlike women, men retained their citizenship and it was also transferable to spouses and children. Likewise, many girls from the West Pakistan Refugee community were married off early to unsuitable matches who had state citizenship with the hope that they would continue education and gain state citizenship thereby making them eligible for government jobs. Any of the career aspiring women seldom materialized and remained largely backward. In the case of West Pakistan Refugee men, there were no roads to state citizenship as they existed in the case of women.

The citizenship of permanent resident women was not



A sense of fear and uncertainty is there, as not much has materialised yet. The system is taking its own time to adjust to the changes and people are at the receiving end of the things.

**KULDEEP KUMAR**



Reservation is crucial to ensure equality. The deserving and talented youth who otherwise doesn't get opportunities will get better opportunities.

**SANT KUMAR**



Reservation will benefit the local population who were denied benefits earlier. It will increase their representation in the politics, administration and government jobs, thereby lifting their living standards and morale.

**ARJUN ATRI**



Electoral rights matter a lot being a woman. They bring a sense of power and participation.

**SEEMA MOTTAN**

transferable to spouses and children, unlike men. The changes in citizenship rules have made citizenship of women not only equal and transferable as men and made West Pakistan refugees eligible for government jobs.

#### **Benefits of Centrally Sponsored Schemes**

West Pakistan Refugees and Valmikis constituting a significant portion of SCs in J and K were not eligible for various centrally sponsored schemes earlier, requiring state citizenship. With the new domicile rights, they are now eligible for various benefits provided by the central government both for the general public and the upliftment of the SC community. Many meritorious students belonging to these sections were not eligible to avail benefits of the Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Scheme for J and K, which provides scholarships to students for pursuing education outside J and K. With the change in the domicile rules, a significant number of such students availed the benefits in the academic year 2021-2022. Many other central government schemes coming under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) department, Social Welfare Department, and Agriculture Sector were made available to the poor and backward of the Community, ending their accessibility of seven long decades. Ladli Beti, the J and K Government-sponsored social assistance scheme meant for newborn girl children of UT of J and K, and Ladakh was unavailable to these sections which needed it the most. The new domicile has helped many of these people avail the benefits.

There has been a significant increase of applicants post the changes in the citizenship

rules. The extension of reservation benefits to these sections both within J and K and in the central government jobs and institutions is sure to uplift these sections of the SC community after seven decades of marginalization.

#### **Voting Rights**

With the newfound citizenship of J and K, West Pakistan Refugees and Valmikis also gained electoral rights in the state elections. They can not only vote but also contest elections, thereby increasing their representation in the government and increasing their socio-political relevance. As earlier, these sections could not vote for panchayat, municipal, and legislative Assembly elections; neither they nor their issues were relevant for the local leaders.

While abrogation of article 370 has made these people hopeful, the government is expected to address their some issues, which have surfaced now. People here have a little sense of insecurity because of the changing situation. As Indians from the rest of the country are now allowed to purchase land in Jammu and Kashmir, they fear that money would play a big role in changing the ownership of the land. They also have a sort of resentment that their local culture and identity would get affected in the new circumstances. Feedback also suggests that the administration is yet to make its mind to cope with the new situation because of which some reformations are moving at snail's pace. They hope that administration would be monitored once an elected government is installed there.

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# Myth of casteless politics in Kerala

CPI(M) derives its support base in Kerala from "Bahujan Samaj" but the current cabinet is dominated by the so-called upper castes. The Communists in Kerala remain dismissive about the question of caste and social exclusion. They conveniently evade accountability, stating that the bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only castes they believe to sustain their leadership status quo.

**Prakash Raj**

After the 2021 assembly election in Kerala, most of the people sought Health minister Sailaja Teacher as the first female Chief Minister candidate. But the CPI(M) politbureau rejected it.

Even in 1987, KR Gouriamma was projected as a CM candidate, but she was sidelined later. Shockingly she revealed that her lower caste identity became the hindrance to reach the echelon of power. Why did communists fail to resolve the caste and gender inequalities using state machinery? Without annihilation of caste and gender inequality, how come we consider the Left as progressive? Socialist-Feminist Clara Fraser articulates "Radical men too often expect

radical women to be not leaders but brides of the revolution, not comrades in arms but comrades in straitjackets." Eventually, politics should lead the chariot of social transformation and justice.

The Indian constitution prescribes a parliamentary form of government, where the real executive powers are vested in the Cabinet. The pertinent question here is "Which caste rules the Cabinet in Kerala?" Since 1957, Kerala cabinet is ruled by upper castes, irrespective of the party either CPI (M) or Congress. The statistics explicit 11.9 percent Nair caste is overrepresented by 147.53 percentage, but OBC Ezhava's are underrepresented by - 24.80 per cent to their population of 21.6 per cent. The 0.5 per cent of Brahmin population in the cabinet is overrepresented by 255.33 per cent but 1.45 per cent of the tribal population is underrepresented





by - 82.50 per cent. The 12.6 per cent of upper caste Christians are overrepresented by 55.10 per cent, but 9.1 per cent of Dalits are underrepresented by -49.80 per cent. Representation is severely disproportionate. But why does caste representation matter? Do upper-castes represent lower caste issues? Several scholars have accentuated that the lack of representation of marginalized people in politics can jeopardize the advancement of social justice. To create an egalitarian society,

**But why does caste representation matter? Do upper-castes represent lower caste issues? Several scholars have accentuated that the lack of representation of marginalized people in politics can jeopardize the advancement of social justice.**

we need to transform our unjust, unequal democratic institutions and power relations. It is plain injustice to monopolize caste-dominated power in a modern constitutional democracy. Historically, for centuries lower castes have been excluded from possessing power, decision making and governance. Marxist Philosopher Gramsci's idea of democracy is that it is a form of access of power to the subaltern class. But we experience that the unprivileged people are denied participation.

Let us examine the current cabinet of Left

in Kerala. Outrageously, more than 50 per cent of ministers belong to Nair Caste (+205 percentage overrepresented) but other castes are underrepresented by nearly -50.05 per cent. Notably, the support base of Left, especially CPI(M) in Kerala is from Bahujan Castes like Ezhava, Thiyya, Dalits, Tribals and lower caste Christians. Insidiously, the left in Kerala created a myth of casteless politics despite indulging in caste sectarian politics.

This regressive social order conspicuously reflects the Left's institutional hierarchy. In blithe disregard to social equity, the upper castes always held the most important and powerful portfolios in Left ruled states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Moreover, the Communists in Kerala remain dismissive about the question of caste and social exclusion. They conveniently evade accountability, stating that the bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only castes they believe to sustain their leadership status quo. The representation of the marginalized people in the cabinet is reduced to mere 'symbolic tokenism'. As Lenin proclaimed, "Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement". Will Indian communists stop trying to fit an economically deterministic theoretical framework into caste determined society? We must cultivate constitutional morality to make our political democracy a social democracy as well.

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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



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

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 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?**

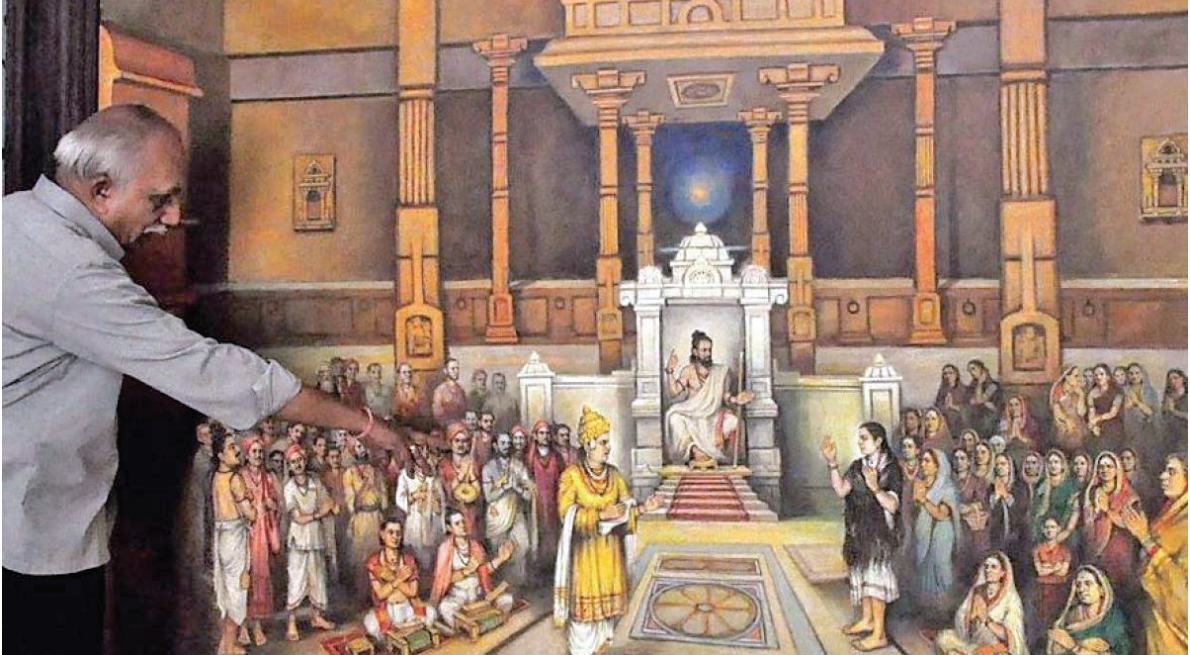
**KAMESHWAR CHAUPAL:** Recently Samarpan Abhiyan was held. I visited a couple of places in Bihar to launch the Samarpan Abhiyan. When we went there, we visited the colonies of the people at the lowest strata of the society like the conservancy staff. The people, when they came to know we were approaching 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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# Anubhav Mantapa : Unique experiment by Sri Basveshwara



**Mahadevayya  
Karadalli**

**Vijendra  
Sonawane**

Anubhav Mantapa was a unique experiment by Sri Basveshwara 900 years back. It sends a strong signal of social equality as anybody could participate, irrespective of caste, sex, education or on any other ground. The most significant feature of Anubhav Mantapa was that the participant could raise any issues or ask questions from materialistic to spiritual life.

**B**hakti, Social harmony, Morality and Equality are the ethos of teachings of Sri Basveshwara, who launched various experiments 900 years ago. Sri Basveshwara advocated for equality with samarasya, rejecting discrimination on any ground – be it sex or caste. Eradication of poverty, caste system and superstitions were the life mission of Sri Basveshwara. He started various activities for all-around development of common man lifestyle. Anubhava Mantapa stands as a novel experiment among them. ANUBHAVA MANATAPA launched by Sri Basveshwara, was ahead of his times, manifests his deep faith in equality and vision.

Anubhav Mantapa for moral and spiritual values in life

While we are pressing for participative and transparent democracy, Anubhava Mantapa can still guide the world not only to nourish democratic values but also to hope for a healthy social life, which is the ultimate goal of all the ideologies. The principles of Anubhav Mantapa have all the potential to lead a materialistic, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual





life. Anubhav Mantapa used to be a public assembly of Sharanas in which men and women, irrespective of their caste and economic status, were allowed to participate. All the men and women, with good conduct and devotion, could be part of Anubhav Mantapa. They were expected to follow the principles of Kayaka (working with sincerity), Dasoha (to feed the needy) and self-reliance. All three principles have great significance when the entire world is searching for moral and spiritual guidance to get free from the current problematic situations.

The most significant feature of Anubhav Mantapa was that the participant could raise any issues or ask questions from materialistic to spiritual life. Practical problems being faced by the participants were discussed freely to find suitable solutions. Discussions include various angles of knowledge, such as hearing the elders, by seeing the work of experts, self-study and practical experiences. It helped to cultivate an attitude to listen to others – what is now described – “tolerance”, which is even relevant in the current social and political hostility. The practice of healthy debate and discussion helped to inculcate democratic values and principles among the participants of the Anubhav Mantapa.

We need to understand that revolution with a positive attitude had happened in 12th century i.e. 900 years ago itself. It happened when society was not merely divided on basis of caste but the entire decision-making process was based on birth rather than worth. Sri Basveshwara, thus, tried to rejuvenate the society with a modified set of conducts that had equality as its guiding principle. Sri asveshwara,

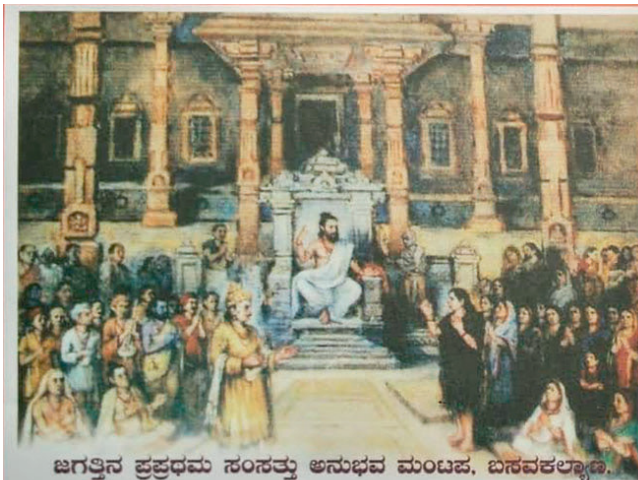
thus, asked the people through Jnana and Bhakti to free themselves from the clutches of all the indiscrimination and inequality.

Action first and Teaching next

Sri Basveshwara had deep faith in his teachings. His life had no gap between principles and action. Sharana Haralayya, who was a cobbler by profession, was considered equal to Sri Basveshwara because of his spiritual progress. He used to say that any sharana (An individual, who follows Veershaiv philosophy) was neither a Brahmin nor a cobbler. He had a strong belief that sharana, had given up all barriers of caste, creed and status etc at the moment he started wearing Linga, practice Kayaya and Dasoha. Sri Basveshwara started Sharana movement to establish a new model society with a positive attitude. He wants equality through samarsya by removing ignorance, birth-based discrimination & untouchability in the name of Varnsshrama. His movement was aimed at the protection and promotion of human values.

The million-dollar question is – whether we the people of the 21st century are ready to accept the principles of Sri Basveshwara. We need to understand the life and mission of Sri Basveshwara, the promoter of the welfare society in the right perspective. We, in the modern age, are well aware of problems of mankind, equality through Samarasya, and human values. Let us follow the actions with the principle of Sri Basveshwara much better than 900 years ago to achieve all-round development.

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ಜಗತ್ತಿನ ಪ್ರಪ್ರಥಮ ಸಂಸತ್ತು ಅನುಭವ ಮಂಟಪ, ಬಸವಕಲ್ಯಾಣ.  
 ಪ್ರಪ್ರಥಮ ಸಂಸದ - ಅನುಭವ ಮಂಟಪ, ಬಸವಕಲ್ಯಾಣ  
 World's First Parliament Anubhava Mantapa Basavakalyan



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# Savarkar fought against seven shackles

Savarkar strongly supported Dr. Ambedkar's Mahad Satyagraha. He said in an article on September 11, 1927 in the magazine 'Shraddhanand' that Hindus should accept and cooperate with the untouchables to take water from the Mahad Chavdar tank. He further says that if the upper caste Hindus oppose your just demand do not threaten to leave Hinduism. Hinduism is not just the inheritance of the upper class; it is as much your religion as it is their religion.

**Jai Kumar**

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is one such personality, who is presented with biased opinions in Indian political history. Veer Savarkar was born in Bhagur village of Nasik district of Maharashtra. Veer Savarkar poured his heart and soul into the Indian freedom struggle. He was also a great revolutionary

thinker, writer, poet, social reformer, and visionary leader. Veer Savarkar's revolutionary work is unparalleled and unforgettable. Politically biased historians have only painted the image of Savarkar as a Hindutva leader. But Savarkar spent most of the period of his life in social reforms.

Savarkar was always vocal against evils like caste-system since his childhood. He has written extensively on social reform and did



many works at ground level. In the series of Indian social reformers, we study the thinkers like Raja Rammohan Rai, Jyotiba Phule, Ranade, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr B.R.Ambedkar. Veer Savarkar deserves to be from this series.

### **Savarkar on caste system & social reform**

Research done on Savarkar in the last few years has helped in shedding a light on his multidimensional personality. Along with being a freedom fighter and an avid writer, he was also a social reformer, who was blatantly against social evils. He was released from jail in 1923. After being released from jail, he chose Ratnagiri for his further works. Savarkar was always committed to eradication of flaws in the social structure of India. He was more concerned about division of Indian society into castes, which has made this strong nation

completely hollow. Attacking the social evils like caste system, Savarkar says that today in Hindus, what we call innate casteism, which is actually codex caste. Savarkar believed that the caste system was not only a problem of Brahmins and Shudras. This is the problem of the entire Hindu society." Caste system is a stigma on Hindu society, it is a blot on humanity"; According to Savarkar, the caste system is not a single maze created by the Brahmins, nor by the Kshatriyas, but it is a social network created by all the castes of the society.

'Caste is different from class. It is not based on merit. In Savarkar's 'Samagra Vangmaya', details of an article are found in which he says that India's land force has become completely weak. The ships were India's strength in water and navigational means till the tenth century, we used to hoist the Hindu flag on the chest of the ocean. But all of them have not drowned in the ocean; they have drowned in the ego of the caste system. The caste system has made India very weak. Due to which India has fallen prey to the western invasions.

Savarkar while writing in 'Kesari' says that even if we get the freedom we want for the Hindu nation, we will lose it back to the caste-ridden nation. Savarkar wrote in Kesari on November 29, 1930 that even if we achieve the freedom we have to achieve for the Hindu nation, the nation, ruined by casteism will be destroyed. We will lose it again. In order to avoid this, we will have to eradicate the caste system from its very roots.

Savarkar gave a call to the entire Hindu

community, to break the shackles prevailing in the Hindu society. He wrote an article titled "Seven bonds of Hindu society". In which he advocated breaking the seven bonds. Savarkar called for breaking some shackles prevailing in the Hindu society. Savarkar wrote an article titled "Seven bonds of Hindu Society", in which he advocated breaking the seven bonds.

**Vedoktabandi (Prohibition of rites sanctioned by the Vedas):** The entire Hindu society should have equal rights on all religious scriptures like Vedas. Recitation of Vedas and Vedokta Sanskar should be done by all Hindu societies without caste



discrimination. If people from other religions can study our Vedas, then why can't our untouchable brothers.

**Vyavasaybandi (Prohibition of pursuing certain occupations):** In Hindu society, a person should have the right to choose his occupation according to his wish. We should not force a person to choose his profession on the basis of caste. Categorical business should be prohibited on the basis of caste. In order to increase the nation's power a person should be given the chance to choose his occupation.

**Sparshbandi (Prohibition of Touch):** Untouchability is a stigma on humanity, we should eliminate it. If untouchability ends in the society, then the Hindu brothers will merge with their nation as one soul. Untouchability has divided the Hindu society into pieces, due to which both the attack & conversion on the entire Hindu society by non-Hindu religion



community has increased.

**Samudrabandi (Prohibition of seafaring):**

Our Hindu society has been cut off from the world by the bondage of the sea. The huge Hindu nation which was spread from Mexico to Egypt, today nearly got cut off from the world due to this Samudrabandi. That is why our Hindu religious preachers, Hindu organizations, Hindu businessmen and brave students should settle abroad in large numbers.

**Shuddhibandi (Prohibition of reconversion):** By breaking this fifth bond, we should bring back the people of Hindu society who have gone to foreign religion to Hinduism. We should assimilate Hindu people who have gone to other religions with affection and equality and good behaviour. This will give strength to our Hindu nation. Due to obstacles like temple ban, roti ban, and beti ban, such a big Hindu society is not coming back to our Hindu religion.

**Rotibandi (Prohibition of Inter dining):**

The feeling of brotherhood has ended in our Hindu society due to rotibandi . It would be a kind of foolishness that by eating with another-caste, our caste and religion would be completely destroyed. Because of this ban on bread, untouchable Hindus shared food with Christians during times of famine. People

of Christian religion lured our people and got them converted. The whole world has eaten the food from Hindus, those religions had never been corrupted. So how will we get corrupted by eating the food of the people of our Hindu society. That's why we should organize this joint meal (Sahbhojan) in Hindu society.

**Betibandi (Prohibition of inter-caste marriages):** This is the seventh biggest bond that breaks the Hindu nation into pieces. We have to accept and promote inter-caste marriages in Hindu society. There are also inter-caste marriages among Muslims and Christians. Those people never oppose it. They identify themselves as a Muslim and a Christian. Similarly, there should be inter-caste marriages in Hindu society and they should not be identified only on the basis of caste but it should be known as only Hindu.

**Social Reform Workshop by Savarkar in Ratnagiri**

Savarkar did not advocate social reform only through his writings and speeches. He, in fact, stayed in Ratnagiri and led social reform. Savarkar believed that social reforms would not happen through writings and speeches alone. For this we have to work on the ground. Both touchable and untouchable sections



Distribution of the sacred thread (yagyopavita or janeu) and granting right to recite vedas to by the Purva ashpryushya (translated as ex-untouchables) Parishad, Malvan, 1929





of the society have to face the challenges. Savarkar was absolutely prepared to face the challenge arising out of social reforms.

He made his first debut on April 17, 1924 at Vitthal Mandir in Parshuram village. This temple is considered to be the most sacred place for Chitpavan Brahmins. Savarkar's first speech after his release was held at this place. Savarkar openly expressed his views on purification and untouchability here. Due to which Savarkar had to become a victim of bitter criticism from orthodox Hindus. But Savarkar faced it firmly.

#### **Ganapati For Untouchables**

The Ganapati for untouchables was installed by Savarkar in 1925 during the Ganesh Utsav in Ratnagiri. It was well received by the Brahmin community. A person named Shivu of an untouchable community worshipped the Ganesh idol. More than 5000 people were present in this Ganapati festival. This was a truly revolutionary initiative for the people stuck in social evils.

#### **School admission for untouchable children**

In 1925, Savarkar undertook the challenging task of enrolling untouchable children in schools. So that all the children in the school sit together without caste discrimination. Until then, untouchable children were not allowed to sit with other children. They used to stay outside the class. There was no such school in Ratnagiri and Malegaon where children were studying together. Actually in 1925 Savarkar decided to tackle this problem directly. During his speeches at Dapoli, Khed, Chiplun, Devrukh, Sangameshwar and Kharepatan, Savarkar appealed to the Hindu community to let children study together.

Savarkar said in the public meeting "Can you prevent Christian children from entering the school? No! You don't have enough courage. Because you know the consequences of it. The English government will reply to it with bullets. You despise the helpless and ignorant untouchable. You accept the unlawful demands of Muslims because they are fierce. When an untouchable Muslim becomes a Christian, you treat him as equal. But you do not treat him equally as an untouchable."

#### **Establishment of Patit Paavan Temple**

It was a very difficult task to allow the entry into the old temple to all Hindus together without caste discrimination. The Hindu Mahasabha decided to establish a new Akhil Hindu Devalaya (All Hindu Temple). In

this context, Savarkar planned to establish an ethnic Hindu temple. For this he invited the famous businessman Bhagoji Balaji Kir, who alone built Hindu temple. He was a big admirer of Savarkar. He donated a huge amount for the establishment of Patit Paavan Temple. On March 10, 1929, Shankaracharya Dr. Kurtakoti performed Bhoomi Pujan to lay the foundation of the proposed temple. On February 22, 1931, the Patit Paavan temple was established in Ratnagiri.

#### **Savarkar's support to the Mahad satyagraha**

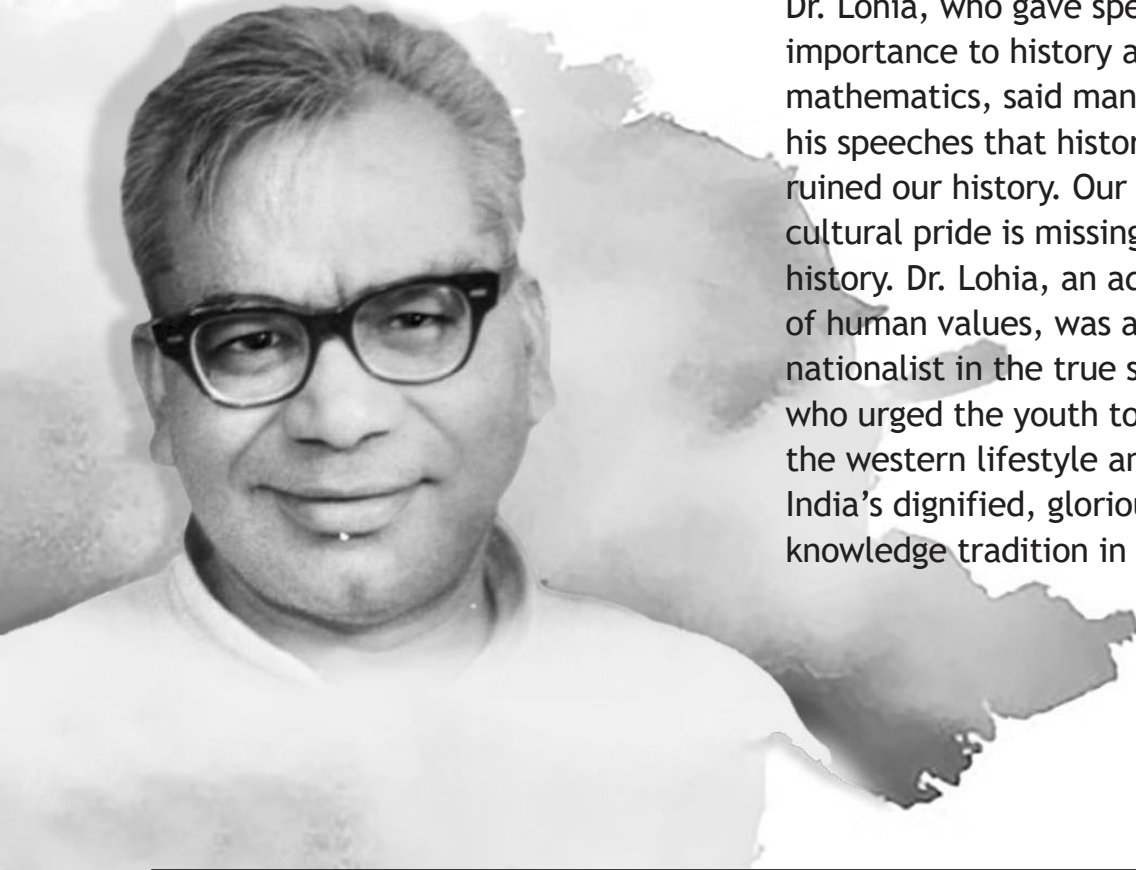
On March 20, 1927, Dr. Ambedkar and his companions took out a procession to Chavdar tank. It is famous in history books as Mahad Satyagraha. It proved to be a decisive step in the fight against untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar drank canal water to prove equal rights of untouchable castes in public places. Savarkar strongly supported Dr. Ambedkar's Mahad Satyagraha. He said in an article on September 11, 1927 in the magazine 'Shraddhanand' that Hindus should accept and cooperate with the untouchables to take water from the Mahad Chavdar tank. He further says that if the upper caste Hindus oppose your just demand do not threaten to leave Hinduism. Hinduism is not just the inheritance of the upper class; it is as much your religion as it is their religion.

Savarkar conveyed the details of the social reform work done in Ratnagiri to Dr. Ambedkar through a letter. Biographer of Savarkar and Dr. Ambedkar, Dhananjay Keer gives the details of correspondence between Savarkar and Dr. Ambedkar in Savarkar's Biography. Praising the social reforms carried out by Savarkar, Ambedkar writes "I congratulate you for the work you have done in the field of social reform. If you want to make untouchables an integral part of Hindu society, you need not just abolish untouchability but you also have to destroy the caste system. I am glad that you are among the few who understand this."

During his stay in Ratnagiri, Savarkar invited Ambedkar to show him a view of his social reforms. But Ambedkar could not meet Savarkar in Ratnagiri due to his busy schedule. However, Ambedkar was always an admirer of Savarkar's projects of social reform.

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# Dr. Lohia's idea of Inclusive Nationalism



Dr. Lohia, who gave special importance to history and mathematics, said many times in his speeches that historians have ruined our history. Our sense of cultural pride is missing from history. Dr. Lohia, an advocate of human values, was a true nationalist in the true sense, who urged the youth to abandon the western lifestyle and imbibe India's dignified, glorious knowledge tradition in life.

**Dr. Alok Kumar Chakrawal**

There have been very few persons in Indian politics regarding the epithets and the number of epithets put before whose names nobody has ever registered any protest. During the fourth to sixth decade of the 20th century, the glory of such a personality radiated to the whole world and the name of this person was Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.

The one who conceived the idea of resistance to all kinds of oppression with the slogan of 'Sangharsh hamara nara hai', and one who has with his name innumerable

epithets like 'freedom fighter', 'famous face of socialist fraternity', 'original intelligence', 'multidimensional', 'philosopher', 'ardent nationalist', 'spokesperson of Dalits and the oppressed', and 'eminent scholar'—such was Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia who engraved new paradigms while enriching the nation ideologically. Dr. Lohia considered the partition of India to be a reality that had to be accepted due to circumstances. The British have ruled India through guns and the English language, we must learn to take pride in the nation and its



language, Hindi, by coming out of Englishism, he believed. He held the belief that India is one entity by nature, so even after being fragmented, it will definitely become single again one day.

Away from the worldly hypocrisies of flattery, lust for authority, and self-glorification, Lohia believed that the ancient ideal of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram and the three-point ideal of socialism, freedom, and non-violence of the modern world would have to be synergized in such a way that they complement each other as well as prove to be better versions.

Dr. Lohia, who strongly supported the democratic system, believed that the control and guidance of the state power should be done by the people. He also motivated the youth to voluntarily do 'Shramdaan' in the reconstruction of the country. Efforts for the upliftment of the exploited, the downtrodden and that last person gave birth to new experiments, theories and ideas, which have always been the primary basis of inclusive nationality. Dr. Lohia presented such a model of social and economic development in which the aspirations of the common people along with those of the poor, farmers, landless agricultural labourers, youth, and women can be fulfilled in entirety.

Dr. Lohia, an advocate of human values, was a true nationalist in the true sense, who urged the youth to abandon the western lifestyle and imbibe India's dignified, glorious knowledge tradition in life.

As the Vice-Chancellor of the Central University and a teacher of commerce and management studies, when I see the principles, ideas and experiments of Dr. Lohia ji, I find that he thought fifty years ahead of his times. There is not even a trace of orthodox or narrow nationalistic mindset in his thoughts. He seems to identify with Gandhian and Marxist ideas to achieve the noble goal of liberty, equality, economic-social harmony, and global integration.

Dr. Lohia, who gave special importance to history and mathematics, said many times in his speeches that historians have ruined our history. Our sense of cultural pride is missing from history. He believed that there are two types of coordination in history in which one is the coordination of the slave and the other is that of the master. From the history of the last one thousand years, we have not learned the coordination of the

master but the coordination of the slave. Dr. Lohia believed that the future of India depends on two subjects, History and Mathematics. History is the understanding of the past. We have to know our history well for the sake of the coming generation and if we do not succeed in doing this then it will be unfortunate for the country. On the other hand, mathematics is the basis of science. The combination of both takes us to the sky. Developed countries are an example of this.

Dr. Lohia always preferred Hindi over English as the official language of India. He believed that English has created a gap between the educated and the uneducated masses. The use of Hindi will promote the spirit of unity and ideas related to the creation of a new nation. Attempting to attack the roots of ill-traditions in Chanakya style, Lohia started his famous movement which declared "Angreji Hatao" When English is removed, the ill influence of

**Dr. Lohia, who was a staunch opponent of caste discrimination, suggested to remove caste discrimination through roti and Beti. According to him, people of all castes should eat food together and if marriages take place between families of higher and lower caste, the gap can be removed.**

English too, will go away. This was the concept of Gandhiji too. The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi had said that go tell the world that Gandhi has forgotten English. We are not slaves to any other language or culture to develop our nation. We have our own rich history of knowledge and tradition which we have to preserve and promote.

Dr. Lohia was in favour of providing free and compulsory education up to primary and middle school levels and for free or inexpensive availability of facilities for education and research, especially to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other poor sections of the society so that they can be ready for the minimum level of competition. National Education Policy 2020 seems to be realizing all these ideas of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia in which education for all, inclusive education, value-based education, skill development,



training and mental preparation of students for employment and entrepreneurship.

Dr. Lohia, who was a staunch opponent of caste discrimination, suggested to remove caste discrimination through roti and Beti. According to him, people of all castes should eat food together and if marriages take place between families of higher and lower caste, the gap can be removed.

Dr. Lohia, who prepared a complete roadmap for the future by scouring the principles and ideas according to the apprehensions and opportunities, put forth his unrestrained views on epoch-making and serious issues emphasizing on the development of indigenous languages, opposing caste and gender discrimination, improving the reservation

ideas of centralization and decentralization, accepting the importance of villages, divisions, provinces and the centre all. Dr. Lohia, in favour of spending twenty-five percent of the entire expenditure of the government's schemes through various government and other means for the development of the rural areas, vocally supported the government to govern projects like agriculture and industry. He believed that the goals of Asian socialism can be achieved by democratizing administration, employing small machines with little capital, socialization of wealth, and economic and political socialization.

Dr. Lohia stressed on giving practical form to the universal seven principles of socialism, which include acceptance of gender equality, elimination of caste-related and birth-related inequality, elimination of inequality based on apartheid, the end of oppression by foreigners and the creation of world government, opposing economic inequalities based on personal property and planned increases in production, opposition to the encroachment of individual rights and weapons of war, and acceptance of the principle of civil disobedience. Present government is trying to implement his ideas, inspired by Antyodaya.

New National Education Policy for women equality, skill development, employment-oriented education, education in mother tongue, pride on traditions, heritage, and history, importance to Hindi, training to make youth entrepreneurs, Kisan Samman Nidhi for farmers' development, dynamic economy and the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of the self-respect of the nation carry the quintessence of Dr. Lohia's work and vision. It is quite an experience to see Dr. Lohia's three decades of theoretical and ideological struggle come to the ground in a meaningful form.

In true sense, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia had guessed the needs and expectations of the present period 70 years ago. According to Lohia's ideas and principles, active and dedicated efforts are being made to convert education, language, the image of the nation on the international stage, and economic and social change into ground realities, the positive results of which are express conspicuously the success, significance, and totality of Lohia's ideas.

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system, opposing women's inequality. Dr. Lohia, who gave priority to the development of language and its relevance, had prepared a concrete blueprint for shaping the future of India. To achieve this overarching objective, he tried to make better use of modern and traditional measures so that people are mobilized for social empowerment and economic development.

Dr. Lohia envisaged the concept of 'Chaukhamba' state and conflated the conflicting



# Manual scavenging workers : Lot more to be done

In reality, the manual scavengers need to enter inside sewers to make them free and clean. They enter the sewers filled with human waste without any safety gear and remove it from inside. These are the people, who do all this work with bare hands and carry it on their heads from one place to another. Continuation of this practice clearly shows the societal divide even today.

**Adv. Girender Nath**



It is very miserable that the practice of manual scavenging that started ages ago is still in practice. This problem of manual scavenging is getting worse with the advent of industrialization and urbanization. This work was always associated with a particular caste and was considered a hereditary profession. It used to be inherited from one generation to another. This millennial old practice has become a day-to-day life for this community.

The peculiar characteristic of the Indian caste system is that each of the castes is associated with a certain type of business. Upper caste people had a number of options for the businesses while the work associated with filth, cleanliness and garbage used to

be the responsibility of lower caste people. For example, cleaning of roads, cleaning of drainages and sewers, removing of human and animal waste, leather work, pig breeding, etc used to be associated with lower caste people. Because there were no flush toilets in many villages, cleaning workers would collect human waste with their hands and take it to dumping place on their heads. This also included picking up the dead bodies of stray animals and taking out leather from their bodies. All this was considered a dirty task. Not just these tasks were known as pollutants but it also involved remunerations in terms of leftover food from the kitchens of upper caste houses. Despite technological development, there is not much change in this scenario.

In a caste-based society, human waste carriers/cleaners have been put at the bottom



of the pyramid. All those born in this caste had to pursue this profession. This ensured that they remain at the farthest corner of the caste-based system in India. Most heart-wrenching fact is that those born in these families were put in the lowest layer of the social ladder and were considered as pollutants. These are the people, who were most hated, excluded by all the other castes and classes along with being the most harassed and exploited community. No community in history has ever faced such difficulty, insult and exploitation. We need to take arduous efforts to change our mentality on a social as well as on a national level.

After achieving independence in 1947, the government of India has taken a lot of legislative and strategic efforts to stop this practice of manual scavenging. Even in recent years, many such efforts were made by the government. The efforts are being made to make scavenging an advanced technology-based task. This is to ensure that no human should need to do this manually again and no human effort gets involved in this task.

On one hand technological developments in cleaning works is a very important step towards ensuring that lower caste people do not engage in manual scavenging. However, only the investments in this technology are not enough to end the social and financial exclusion faced by this community. The government's aim should be to reach out to the last person doing this job and helping him/her to get rid of it. Local officials need to be sensitive about this topic for better implementation. This should be done by local authorities as they are the ones who actually find out such cases of manual scavenging.

#### **Work of Sewers**

In reality, the manual scavengers need to enter inside sewers to make them free and clean. They enter the sewers filled with human waste without any safety gear and remove it from inside. These are the people, who do all this work with bare hands and carry it on their heads from one place to another. Continuation of this practice clearly shows the societal divide even today.

Following are the types of manual scavenging – Manual scavenging in dry toilets, manual scavenging in dry community toilets, manual scavenging in railways, cleaning of septic tanks, etc.

All types of manual scavenging led to health issues, caste discrimination and all the other

insulting values in the society. Any person, who is engaged in cleaning of lanes/drainages does the same job in any part of the city. Deployment of cleaning workers began since the inception of cleanliness as a priority of the cities. Later, a water hose came into use for the cleaning of lanes and drainages.

Since the state governments are not willing to put in more effort, the expected objectives are not being achieved despite consistent efforts by the central government. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs started a scheme for emancipation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers back in 1980. The scheme was aimed at converting dry toilets into clean toilets. Under the scheme, the government started building low-cost urban toilets. This was the first big step towards the change. In 1992, when the scheme deepened its roots and with the aim of rehabilitation of manual scavengers, the government converted the scheme “Low-cost

**When Indians were fighting their first war of independence in 1857, the French were building the networks of sewage systems. During the British era growth was restricted to only cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. That is why the networks of sewage systems can be seen in these cities even today. Frenchs were way ahead of their time in terms of safety of manual scavengers.**

urban toilets to get rid of scavengers” into two separate initiatives.

1. Conversion of dry toilets into flush toilets which was supposed to be funded by the then finance ministry
2. The ministry of social welfare started “National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers” (NSLRS)

Later, both the schemes were handed over to Urban Employment and Poverty Eradication ministries. However, the pace of implementation of the scheme was very slow. The scheme only could focus on getting rid of manual scavenging and the further motive of emancipation and rehabilitation somehow never happened.





## Legal Efforts

1. In 1993, under the Employment of Manual Scavengers Act, the practice of employing a person for manual scavenging was declared a crime.
2. On September 6, 2013 the Parliament passed the bill to form the "Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (prohibition) Act 2013" which is committed to end the practice of manual scavenging. In many parts of the country, a lot of people are still involved in the practice of manual scavenging. In the colonial times, with increasing urbanization the practice got more encouragement than restraint. There was hardly any change in this practice during colonial times. Though there was an invention of septic tank or sewer, the technology was available for the limited number of people in the society. It was found in a survey in 2013 from the official figures of the government that the number of manual scavengers was 14,505 in the year 2013. Later, National Safai Karamcharis Finance Development Corporation (NSKFDC) which is an undertaking of the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) undertook another such survey in between March and December 2018. It pointed out that a total of 42,303 people were still engaged with manual scavenging as of August 2019.

The survey was done only in 18 states and all of them accepted that they still have the practice of manual scavenging. The country has a total of 780 districts; however, a survey was undertaken only in 170 districts. In the end, the ground situation can be assessed only after a nationwide survey.

Before taking any action towards eradication of deaths during sewage tanks cleaning, one must understand what exactly it is. It's a general process of transferring the accumulated waste through underground pipes. Through these pipelines, the accumulated waste in any form is taken to processing machines where it undergoes some chemical process. This accumulated waste includes the mud, human excreta, and industrial waste. Along with this, underground pipelines are the dwelling place of various viruses and bacteria. As bacteria and viruses are there the accumulated waste also produces the gasses like hydrogen sulphide, ammonia, methane, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide.

When these sewage holes get completely

filled with waste to their limit, they are supposed to be cleaned by the local municipal corporations. According to the Manual Scavenging act of 2013, these sewage holes should be cleaned with the help of machines or they can also be cleaned manually but with proper care and precaution. But the conditions are such that no one adheres to the rules. Workers are forced to clean the sewage holes without giving them any safety instruments which results in severe illness and deaths. According to the statistics given by government departments, 1032 sewage cleaners lost their lives during 1993 to 2023. Between January 2022 and January 2023 total 91 people lost their lives



during sewage cleaning. Before 2014, conditions were really difficult for these cleaners. They hardly got the compensation for the dead ones. But things started changing after 2014. The Supreme Court came as a saviour for these scavengers and ordered the governments to pay the compensation of 10 lakh rupees to the family of the dead one. It also ordered the job and accommodation facilities for the family members. But still there are many loopholes in this system which should be given attention. Let us say if there are three people working in



the sewage holes and two of them die and one survives, then there is no surety of his further life. Governments are not entitled to pay any compensation in this matter.

On 2 February 2020 two persons were working in the sewage hole of CBD ground in East Delhi. One person among them lost his life after coming in contact with the poisonous gas. His family was given a compensation of Rs.10 lakh. The other one who managed to survive, was not less than dead. He could not get any kind of compensation as he was alive. His life completely changed after that incident. When I happened to meet that man's old mother, she told us that her son also should have died as he has turned into a moving dead body. With the combined efforts of government bodies, social organizations and social workers, cases were filed against the concerned contractors under article 304 of IPC. Manual Scavenging act of 2013 and Prevention of Atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes act of 1989 are also there to help these classes, but still there is a lot of scope for improvement.

Our bureaucrats and governments are focusing on building the networks of cities according to the western model. But on the other hand, issues and complaints of manual scavengers still remain unaddressed. When Indians were fighting their first war of independence in 1857, the French were building the networks of sewage systems. During the British era growth was restricted to only cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. That is why the networks of sewage systems can be seen in these cities even today. Frenchs were way ahead of their time in terms of safety of manual scavengers. They were given all the safety instruments. There is one museum in Paris which is dedicated to the instruments used in manual scavenging which is built on a drainage canal. This museum has now become a tourist spot. Since the year 1867, they have been running a program where they make people aware about the contribution of sewage cleaners and manual scavengers in keeping the city clean.

In India manual scavengers used to use brooms made up of bamboo sticks which gave them spinal ailments. In order to carry the accumulated trash and waste in the sewage tank, they used to use the vessels made of bamboo, which we all know are not that strong. During the process of carrying it, their body also used to get littered with that trash. How

inhuman it was!

In 1962, a committee was formed by the labour ministry of India to suggest reforms for the betterment of manual scavengers. Late Kanhaiyalal Valmiki, who was also a member of Parliament, was the member of that committee. That committee suggested the use of a wheelbarrow to collect the trash and also suggested the use of brooms with the extended stick attached to it. These reforms were supposed to be followed by the local municipal corporations. but the manual scavengers kept working with their traditional equipment.

My grandma , who was also involved in this work of manual scavenging, used to work with the traditional equipment . She was a worker in the local municipal corporation. I can still recall those days when newly introduced brooms came on the horizon. This was not a very big move but still it felt like a big change. Still there are some pockets in our country where these manual scavengers are given inhuman treatment.

In 1995 -1996 National Human Rights Commission along with National Labour Commission came up with the suggestion of using advanced equipment which were supposed to be put into practice by municipal corporations. On October 2, 2014, our Prime Minister launched the Swachh Bharat Mission whose main purpose was to make people aware about building toilets, eradication of defecation in open areas and the use of machines instead of manual scavenging. In 2022, the government came up with the NAMASTE scheme whose aim was the eradication of unsafe sewer and septic tank cleaning practices. Total 100 crore rupees were allotted for this scheme. Most of the parties and social organisations welcomed and praised this move by the government. If the implementation of this scheme goes well, then we can see the drop in the deaths happening during manual scavenging . The laws made by the then governments in the years 1980, 1992, 1993, 2013, which we have already mentioned and the plan announced by the Prime Minister, will be fully implemented when the monitoring committees get power and the people related to the subject are appointed in the respective commissions. These institutions should become vibrant and strong so that the manual scavenging finally ends !

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# Things sanctified by the touch of a 'MAHAMANAV'



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Museum has completed 25 years. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's followers get emotional on seeing this invaluable treasure. We consider ourselves blessed to have got this opportunity to take care of this historical wealth. This is a place of inspiration. It will continue to inspire scholars and Ambedkarite followers for many years in the future.

- Sanjeevani Mujumdar,  
Director,  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar  
Museum, Pune



# Dr. Ambedkar favoured UCC

Ramesh Chaner

The issue of UCC is once again in the news because of government initiative and the Law Commission. With a view to make the things easy to understand for the common man, I thought of sharing a common man's take on the subject. The move is obviously supported by the ruling BJP and opposed by few oppositions, as expected, on the respective party lines. UCC repeatedly remained on the agenda of the ruling BJP and other right wing Hindu outfits right from independence in 1947, framing of the constitution and thereafter. As such it remained a controversial issue. BJP and other proponents quote Article 44 of the Constitution which reads, "Shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India" and underline that it was the will of the majority of the constitution makers to have UCC that is why it was stipulated in the constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy.

On the other side the Congress and other parties in the opposition argued that time was not ripe to have UCC as it would tend to fragment the social fabric of the country which was threat due to various factors. The opposition argued that the proposed legislation was against the principles enshrined in Article 26B and Article 29(1) of the Constitution, which allow people "to manage its own affairs in matters of religion" and the right to conserve distinct language, script or culture.

The Constituent Assembly discussed and debated the matter extensively and decided to insert the issue of UCC under the Directive Principles of State Policy. The chief architect of the constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was, prime facie, in favour of UCC as his personal motivation was to reform the society of graded inequality of which the socially depressed classes and the women folk were suffering for centuries. He was of the view that the UCC aimed to provide protection to vulnerable sections including women and religious minorities, while also promoting nationalistic fervour through unity.

BJP and proponents of UCC often tend to take shelter under Ambedkar while pursuing their agenda in this regard. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a visionary and pragmatic leader and

a nationalist to the core. India is a multi-cultural and multi-racial society. The Hindu conservatives were interested in maintaining the Hindu traditions with regard to civil matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance and share of women folk on one hand and the Muslim minority were keen to retain the personal laws like Shariat as India was a secular state which guaranteed religious freedom.

Dr. Ambedkar agreed to insert the UCC under the Directive Principles of State Policy, I think, against his own liking. The objective



of Article 44 of the Directive Principles in the Indian Constitution was to address the discrimination against vulnerable groups and harmonize diverse cultural groups across the country. Dr. B R Ambedkar, while formulating the Constitution had said that a UCC is desirable but for the moment it should remain voluntary, and thus the Article 35 of the draft constitution was added as a part of the Directive Principles of the State Policy in part IV of the Constitution of India as Article 44. It was incorporated in the constitution as an aspect that would be fulfilled when the nation would be ready to accept it and the social acceptance to the UCC could be made.

Babasaheb Ambedkar warned in the





Constituent Assembly, "No one need be apprehensive that if the State has the power, the State will immediately proceed to execute... that power in a manner may be found to be objectionable by the Muslims or by the Christians or by any other community. I think it would be a mad government if it did so." It was a far-sighted and pragmatic approach. We need to build consensus on the issue. The minority communities should also not adopt a hard attitude just for the heck of it as many of the Islamic states have opted for 'Common Law System and Civil Law Systems.

The legal systems of countries all over the world are divided into two categories: common law systems and civil law systems. There are around 150 nations with predominantly civil law systems, compared to approximately 80 countries with common law systems. A Uniform Civil Code means that all sections of the society irrespective of their religion shall be treated equally according to a national civil code, which shall be applicable to all uniformly. They cover areas like- Marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption and succession of the property.

In the post-independence struggle, we are trying our best to make it a modern nation as a 'Union of States' with its diversity and individual freedoms. We are to maintain this under its 'secular' identity as many democratic and federal countries like the USA have done. In the United States of America, States are independent legal entities with their own Supreme Courts, which follow their own practices and legal conventions. Even though there are common principles that govern these civil laws in the States in a manner that is universal across the nation.

Ambedkar was not only a constitutional expert but also a great social reformer to make India a cohesive country. In the face of stiff opposition, he was interested in safeguarding the interest of women and depressed classes and proposed changes which later came as Hindu Code Bills - The Hindu code bill was passed in the 1950s that aimed to codify and reform Hindu personal law in India, abolishing religious law in favour of a common law code.

Dr Ambedkar resigned in 1951 from his coveted position as the Law Minister when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru could not carry forward the reform agenda of Ambedkar. Nehru could not convince President Rajendra Prasad, who openly opposed the proposed Hindu Code

Bills. He said, "My right to examine it (the bill) on its merits, when it is passed by the Parliament, before giving assent to it is there. But if any action of mine at a later stage is likely to cause embarrassment to the Government, I may take such appropriate actions as I may be called upon to avoid such embarrassment consistently with the dictates of my own conscience".

In this background, we need to be balanced and practical in addressing this complex issue as advised by Babasaheb Ambedkar. It is a matter of satisfaction that our judiciary has acted pragmatically to reconcile the differences owing to Uniform Criminal Code as against Diversified Civil Code - While the criminal laws in India are uniform and applicable equally on all, no matter what their religious beliefs are, the civil laws are influenced by faith.

Swayed by religious texts, the personal laws which come into effect in civil cases have always been implemented according to constitutional norms. All said and done, I think Uniform Civil Code would be beneficial to the health of the society at large. I quote from an article on the subject which explains the matter further and puts the issue in its perspective, "Since India is an emerging and progressive country, and it is a bit disappointing to hear that we are not bolting our attention to achieve the core purpose of equality and secularism that we have committed to providing to our citizens. India can be a great nation only if the same laws relating to inheritance, marriage, family, land, etc. apply to all citizens, irrespective of caste, creed or community. All Indians will be treated equally in this way. The age-old religious customs and personal laws of our country are usually gender-based. The Uniform Civil Code is an indication of a progressive modern nation. It is an indication that the nation has moved away from caste politics and religious politics. We as a nation are regularly striving towards the best possible economic growth, it might also be right to say that socially and culturally we have degraded to a new low. A uniform civil code will help to improve the conditions of women in India. It will help to bring about changes in the age-old traditions that have no relevance in today's modern society, where women should be accorded equal rights and treated fairly. The uniform civil code in India will ensure not division on the basis of religion but unity by creating a sense of nationality."

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# Maharshi Valmiki : More than a poet

Ms. Deepali

**M**aharshi Valmiki is considered as the Adi Kavi. He was the first person to compose poetry. He was the inventor of the meter called 'Shloka'. He was the writer of the first ever epic – Ramayana. The Sanskrit word Kavi is generally translated to English as 'Poet'. But 'Kavi' is a non-translatable word. It means many things including - wise, enlightened, gifted, skilful, knowing, thinker, bard, seer, prophet, and a man of knowledge, understanding and intelligence.

Valmiki is also called a Maha-Rishi. Rishi is generally translated as 'Seer', he who sees, he who is a visionary. Again, Rishi is a non-translatable word. It means not only seer, but also an ascetic, a composer of Vedic hymns, a ray of light, a sage, an inspired poet and an enlightened being.

Valmiki is described as Maha-Rishi, a Great Rishi! It is such an enlightened one who writes about the journey of Rama. In his work, Valmiki suggests three names for the epic –

काव्यं रामायणं कृत्स्नं सीतायाश्चरितं महत् ।

पौलस्त्यवधमित्येवं चकार चरितग्रतः ॥ १-४-७ ॥

He says this work can be titled as – Ramayana

(The Journey of Rama), SeetaCharita (The Life and Deeds of Seeta) or Paulatsya-Vadh (The assassination of Ravana, a descendant of Pulatsya Rishi). This only highlight that for the writer Valmiki, Seeta was as important as Rama. In Valmiki's Ramayana, Seeta did not play a supporting role, but she played the lead role along with Rama. It is thus the birth place of the slogan "जय सियाराम", Victory to Sita-Rama! When one reads Valmiki Ramayana, he is amazed not only by the subjects it covers, but also by the micro details that are provided. Ramayana speaks of the geography of Bharata, of the rivers and mountains, of the seasons, of the flora, of the history of Ikshavakus, of the Social Institutions, of war strategies, of Dharma, of spiritual practices, of human behaviour, psychology and even about mathematics. Do note that this is not an all-inclusive list of the subjects covered by Valmiki's Ramayana.

Valmiki describes the geography of Bharata from the kingdom of Kekay (today's Northern Pakistan), kingdom of Videha (today's Nepal) and Hastinapur (on the banks of Ganga) in



the North to Dandakaranya, Kishkindha and Lanka in the South. Through Sugreeva, Valmiki describes the geography of areas that are further off and beyond those mentioned above. He describes the mountain ranges like the Himalayas, the Vindhya, the Malaya Parvat, Rishyamukh Parvat, Mandadri and others. He also describes the Indian rivers. He speaks of their depth, their waters and their speed. He describes the birds on the banks. He also describes the plants and trees that the trio, Rama-Lakshmana-Seeta encounter in their journey.

He is an excellent reader of human character and behaviour. While reading the feelings of his characters tears well up in the eyes of the reader. The brotherly love of the four brothers, father's love of Dasharatha, Dasharatha's pining for Rama, the guilt that Bharata feels due to his mother's deed, Rama's heart of lion, Rama's pangs of separation from Seeta, Seeta's composition of steel, the shades of jealousy Kausalya feels towards Kaikayi, the anger Bibhishana feels when insulted by Ravana, the loyalty of Hanuman ... the list is simply unending.

When a messenger of Ravana describes the army of Sugreeva, he tells - "This Sugreeva, the king of monkeys, having great strength and valour, always surrounded by a colossal army, is approaching you to make war. He is accompanied by the valiant Vibhishana and the ministers, as also a hundred thousand crores of Shankas, a thousand Mahashankus, a hundred Vrindas, a thousand mahavrindas, a hundred padmas, a thousand Mahapadmas, a hundred kharves, samudras and Mahaughas of the same number, and a crore of Mahaughas whole army as such is identical of an ocean."

Valmiki speaks extensively of the Dharma, that is the duties and responsibilities, of a King, of a warrior, of a minister, of mother, father, brother and son etc. Here is one example where Valmiki speaks about the duties of a King. When Bharata goes to see Rama at Chitrakoot, Rama inquires upon him if he was following the duties of a king. He asks - "Dear Bharata, are you taking care of the subjects of Ayodhya? Are those who live by farming and cattle rearing taken care of by you? Are you ensuring protection to the women folk of Ayodhya? I hope you are also taking care of the animals and the trees that stand at the cross roads in our kingdom. I hope you are holding in high esteem the teachers, elders

and the doctors. Pray, tell me you are treating our mothers and teachers and ministers with respect. I hope you are honouring the Brahmins, but not those who are materialistic. I hope you have appointed valiant, incorruptible and learned ministers because for a king, the source of victory comes from a counsel by ministers, who are well-versed in political sciences. I hope you do not take excess of sleep and do wake up early. I do hope that you use the night hours to contemplate on your actions. Do make sure that you take up welfare projects that have minimum cost but maximum benefit, and do not delay them in anyway. I hope you are giving salaries to the army and your employees without delay. I hope you are keeping a watch on the happenings within the state and beyond through a good network of spies. O mighty Prince! A wise and a learned king, who rules the Earth with righteousness ascends to heaven after discarding the body.

Such detailed are the instructions about Dharma in Ramayana, that the reader will be influenced by it. India has seen a great many kings who were influenced by Ramayana and had Rama as their ideal king. Not just in India, but wherever Ramayana was read, the kings there wanted to be like Rama. The shining example being the old capital of Thailand that was named Ayutthya (Ayodhya) and her kings who still call themselves 'Rama'. An inscription of King Yashovarma of Cambodia reads, "My capital is like that of Rama's Ayodhya." While another 10th century inscription of Rajendravarma reads "... like Sriram this king took care of his subjects like a father." As a poet Valmiki is the king of similes. He gives not one but many similes to describe one thing. Example - when Sage Vishvamitra comes to visit King Dasharatha, the King says he is delighted to receive the Sage. He says, "Your arrival brings me delight that can be likened to the delight of a mortal attaining ambrosia, or the coming of rains in dry land, or a barren father begetting a son, or regaining of long-lost treasures, and the gladness at a great happening! Oh, great saint, welcome to you."

Valmiki generously uses elements of nature as similes. Example to say, "Rama and Lakshmana are arriving." he writes, "Rama whose complexion is like that of a blue lotus, and Lakshmana whose complexion is like that of the moonlight, came together." His description creates a live picture for the eyes of the mind, and gives goosebumps to the



skin. Valmiki describes himself as – the 10th son of Prachetas. Further he says, in my life I have never hurt anyone through my deeds, my words or even in my thoughts!

प्रचेतसोऽहं दशमः पुत्रो राघवनन्दन।

मनसा कर्मणा वाचा भूतपूर्वं न किलविशम ॥ ७.१३.१७

॥

It is this tender-hearted, pure souled Valmiki, who we see throughout the pages of Ramayana. Once the sage was at the banks of river Tamsa, happily watching a pair of krounch birds (Curlews), who were flying about together merrily. Suddenly a hunter shot the male bird with his arrow. The bird fell to the ground in agony. The female bird wailed at his plight. Her piteous utterances moved the Sage to utter a curse in form of a Shloka -

मां निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः।

यत्क्रौंचमिथुनादेकम् अवधीः काममोहितम् ॥ १.२.१५ ॥

Oh violent hunter (निषाद), for killing one bird, when it was infatuated by passion, you shall not (मां) achieve fame for everlasting years to come!

This verse when read in a different way means – Oh Vishnu (at whose feet Lakshmi seats herself मां निषाद), for killing one bird (Ravana) who was infatuated by lust, you shall achieve fame for everlasting years to come!

For a long time, Valmiki was unable to forget the sad mourning of the female bird. In that state of melancholy, Brahma advised

him to write the Ramayana. Valmiki wrote the Ramayana in 24,000 verses. It is divided in 7 sections called Kanda. Each Kanda having many chapters called Sarga. Brahma said -

यावत् स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितः च महीतले ।

तावत् रामायण कथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥ १.२.३६ ॥

As long as the rivers flow on this Earth, as long as the mountains remain immovable, until then O Sage, your Ramayana will remain popular amongst the people!

It is this Ramayana of Valmiki that has inspired many a kings and rulers to be righteous. It has inspired many brothers to be like Rama, Lakshmana and Bharata. It has taught one to be a friend like Sugreeva and Vibhishana. It has taught not only how the family relations should be, but also how an ideal society should be. Valmiki's Ramayana is considered as a Upajivya Kavya, a work that has provided livelihood to many for generations together. Story tellers, writers, actors, artists, singers, dancers, poets and so many have made a living by retelling Ramayana through various mediums. Not just India, the world owes its humanness to Valmiki, had he not written the Itihas of Rama, we would have never known about it.

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Harichand's doctrine is based on three basic principles-truth, love, and sanctity. The doctrine treats all people as equal; people are not seen according to castes or sects. This is why most of his followers believe Harichand to be an 'avatar' (incarnation) of Vishnu. Majority of them are from the lower strata of society.

## Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and regeneration of Namshudras

Raktim Das

The Matua religion was founded by Lord Sri Sri Harichand Thakur of Orakandi, in Gopalganj district of present-day Bangladesh. Lord Sri Sri Harichand Thakur was born in 1812. He became active during the period when the untouchables of Bengal were accepting Islam and Christianity due to ill treatment by upper caste Hindus. Lord Harichand saved the untouchables from conversion by floating Matua religion that maintained vocabulary and motifs of the Hinduism

Harichand Thakur received little formal education. After completing his initial schooling in a pathshala, he attended school for only a few months. He then started spending his time

with shepherds and cowboys and roamed with them from one place to another. Signs of some transformation within him were seen during this period. He was loved by all of his friends for his physical beauty, naivete, love for music and philanthropic attitude. He could also sing kirtan.

Harichand's doctrine is based on three basic principles-truth, love, and sanctity. The doctrine treats all people as equal; people are not seen according to castes or sects. This is why most of his followers believe Harichand to be an 'avatar' (incarnation) of Vishnu. Majority of them are from the lower strata of society. They used to affirm: *Rama hari krisna*



*hari hari gorachand. Sarba hari mile ei purna harichand* (Rama is lord, Krishna is lord, lord is Chaitanyadev. But all of them make our Harichand, who is our lord.) Harichand did not believe in asceticism. He was more of a family man and it is from within the family that he preached the word of God. He believed that *Grhete thakiya yar hay bhaboday. Sei ye param sadhu janio nishchay*; (the best ascetic is he who can express his devotion to God remaining a family man).

He mobilised all the neglected sects and castes and inspired them to remain true to the openness of Hinduism. Harichand left 12 instructions for the matuas, known as Dvadash Ajnya (Twelve Commands): 1. Always speak the truth, 2. Respect your parents like Gods, 3. Treat women as your mother, 4. Love the world, 5. Remain liberal to all the religions, 6. Never discriminate on racial counts, 7. Try to establish Harimandir (temple of the Lord), 8. Sit in prayer every day, 9. Sacrifice yourself for God, 10. Do not practice asceticism in a garb, 11. Hold the six cardinal passions in check, and 12. Chant the name of your Lord while working with your hand.

Harichand died on 23 Falgun, the year 1284 of the Bangla calendar. Matua Sangit spiritual songs of the Matua sect, containing praises of the god Hari and their gurus, Harichand Thakur and Guruchand. Composers of Matua songs include Aswani Gosai, Tarak Chandra Sarker, Manohar Sarker, Mahananda Sarker, Rasik Sarker, Prafulla Gonsai, Surendranath Sarker, and Swarup Sarker. Matua religious literature in Bengali has been growing since the end of the 19th Century. The first, scriptural works of Matua literature are the Mahasankirtan, a book of Matua songs and Sri Sri Hariliamrita, a multi volume poetical epic style life history of Lord Harichand Thakur. These two books were both penned by Tarak Chandra Sarker, a famous folk poet and untouchable sant. Composed in the manner of baul songs, these songs are predominantly about love (prem) and devotion (bhakti). The closing lines of the songs mention the name of the composer. Musical instruments such as the drum, shinga, and kansa are used as accompaniments. The devotees dance while they sing. Matua songs describe the longing of the soul for the divine.

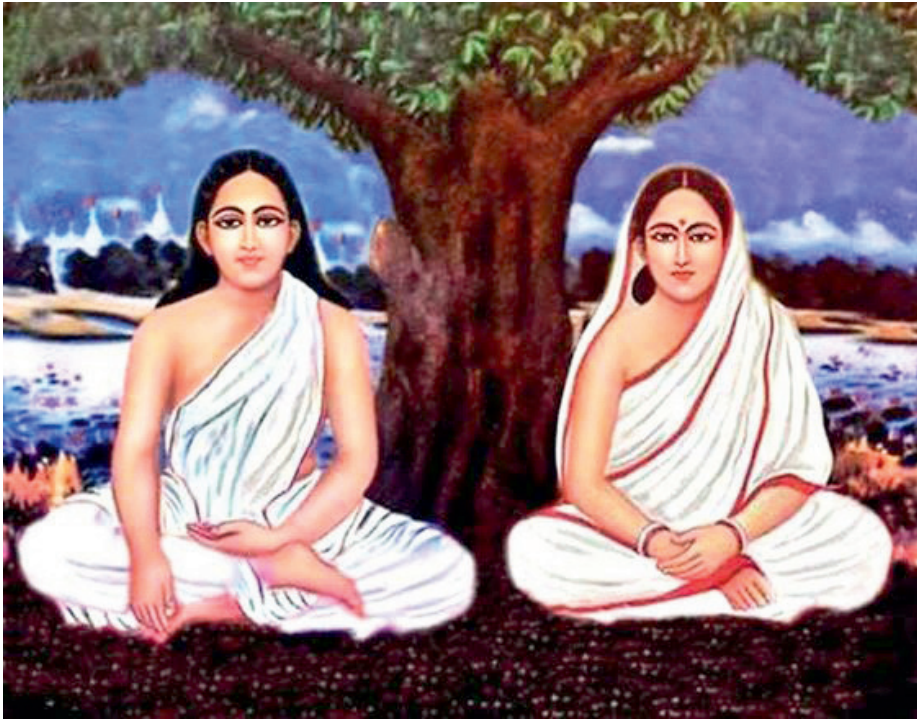
As in other religious poetry, the desire of the human soul is imaged in terms of human love as in the following songs: *Hari tomar namer madhu pan korla na man-bhramara* (The

honey-bee mind has not drunk the honey from your name, oh Hari), *Kabe tanre pab re, paran kande Harichand bali* (When shall I meet Him, my soul cries for Harichand), *Amar ei akinchan, he Guruchand tomay ami bhalabasi* (Listen to me, O Guruchand, I love you).

Shri Harichand Thakur and his son were great social reformers. Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur brought reformations in the chandal (charal) section of the society. In 1873, Chandals held a general strike and decided not to serve any higher caste people unless they got a dignified position in Hindu society. This is the first general strike (Dalit uprisings) officially recorded and recognized in the Indian subcontinent. He started an English high school at Orakandhi (Bangladesh) for the people of lower communities, most of them called Namshudra (untouchable community). He united people of lower communities and protected them from conversion. He also took help from an Australian missionary Dr. C. S. Mead for the social and educational development of these downtrodden societies. With the help of Dr. C.S. Mead, he also tried to increase the awareness regarding basic needs like health check-ups, environmental awareness, etc. In 1907, he established a higher English medium school, named Dr. C. S. Mead School, in his native village. He also understood the importance of women's education. In the Vedic period of India, men and women had equal opportunities for education. However, this flow was stopped during the medieval period by the name of Purdah System. Purdah System basically means women cannot go in front of other men except their husbands without covering their faces. This system was most prevalent in upper-class society. Most of the women of the lower-class society had to go outside for daily earning; thus, Purdah System did not exist in that society. However, education was like a dream for most of the girls during that time. Women also had to suffer much in their family life due to lack of any education. He understood these problems of women and tried to find a solution through women's education.

He realized that only educated women can balance their married life in a rational way and provide a healthy educational atmosphere to their children at home. He understood that only educated women can engage themselves in various avenues of social and economic development. He established many





girls' schools for the spreading of women's education. Under his guidance, the Widow Remarriage system was also introduced in the Namshudra community in 1909. He also instructed his followers to stand against the dowry system. In 1907, he submitted a memorandum to the Bengal government demanding upper caste status for the lower class of Hindu Chandal society. Starting from 1901, many Hindu caste sections sent representations to the Bengal government demanding a name change and a higher status. In 1911, the government turned down all these demands except two. One of these were of Chandals, who were renamed as Namshudra. People from the Chandal community started calling themselves Namshudra and professed to be Vaishnav. He realized that political, economic, and moral standards had to be raised for the upliftment of the poor Namshudra community. He understood the necessity of government help for the upliftment of the Namshudra community. He requested the Bengal government for reservation for the Namshudras in the field of government jobs. By his serious effort, Reservation was introduced for Namshudras in the field of education, government employment and representation in politics. In 1909, A list of 31 disadvantaged classes was prepared in the Bengal province

and Reservation was extended to them for their economic and social upliftment.

These disadvantaged classes are renamed together as a Scheduled Caste. However, only Bengal province had this Reservation system. No other state in India had such a system. Later in 1919, Reservation was introduced in all other provinces of India under the Montague-Chemsford Act of 1919. Guruchand thakur preached this religion amongst the Dalits and promoted their upward mobility by launching his famous education movement in 1881, ten years before the birth of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Due to Guruchand Thakurs education movement, Dalits of East Bengal literate and politically conscious and therefore elected Dr. Ambedkar from

Bengal constituency in the Constituent Assembly election in 1946. It was the time when Congress leaders had marginalized him in Maharashtra and the Hindi belt. Considered another avatar in his own right, Guruchand Thakur integrated Bengal's great Namshudra community into one unit from its divisions and skillfully organized their ongoing mass conversion to Matuaism in protest against Brahmanism.

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# Srimanta Sankardev, the Luminous Beacon of Assam's culture and spirituality



## Prajvalant

To understand Assam and its rich heritage, one needs to understand the life and legacy of Srimanta Sankardev. He was not just a spiritual personality, scholar, or reformer but was the beacon that guided Assam for centuries of change, ensuring its unique identity remained intact. His teachings, both spiritual and social, are still relevant even though they were of the 15th century.

In Sankardev, Assam found its truest reflection, and in his legacy, it continues to find its path forward. In the tapestry of India's spiritual and cultural heritage, few figures shine as brightly as Srimanta Sankardev. Born in 1449 in Alipukhuri, Sankardev remains not just Assam's most celebrated son but also the keystone in the edifice of its socio-cultural and religious identity.

Early life and spiritual evolution:

Srimanta Sankardev was born in the Shiromani (chief) Baro-Bhuyans family at Alipukhuri near Bordowa in Nagaon district. His early years were fraught with personal losses. He lost his parents by the age of 12. However, these adversities took young Sankardev towards spiritual introspection. A pilgrimage across

Srimanta Sankardev was not merely a spiritual personality. He was a social reformer, poet, dramatist, artiste, dancer and music composer from Assam in 15th and 16th century. He introduced several experiments, which enriched life of Assam. We recall his contribution on the occasion of his birth anniversary, which falls on September 26.

India, spanning almost 12 years, deepened his spiritual insights and exposed him to various philosophical tenets.

Contribution to Literature and Culture:

Sankardev's vast literary creations have left an indelible mark on Assamese culture. He introduced the written script in Assam and wrote extensively in the Assamese language. His translation of the Bhagavata Purana and the composition of plays like 'Cihna Yatra' are groundbreaking works of Assamese literature. He also pioneered the Neo-Vaishnavism movement in Assam. Sankardev's version of Vaishnavism, rooted in devotion to Lord Krishna, was characterized by its inclusiveness and accessibility. He advocated for a casteless society, where devotion was the only pathway to the divine. Furthermore, Sankardev was a maestro in the field of cultural art forms. He introduced the Sattriya dance form, a classical dance that narrates stories from ancient scriptures, particularly the life and deeds of Lord Krishna. The art form, now recognized nationally, is an intrinsic part of Assamese culture.

Institution of Satras:

Sankardev established Satras, or monastic centres, as a focal point of spiritual, cultural, and social activities. These Satras became hubs for



the propagation of Neo-Vaishnavism and acted as cultural centres where art, music, and dance flourished under the patronage of Sankardev and his disciples. The influence of Satras can still be seen in Assam, with many continuing to be pivotal in the cultural and spiritual lives of the people.

#### Social Reforms and Legacy:

Sankardev's vision was not just limited to spiritual salvation. He envisioned a society free from caste discrimination and superstitions. He propagated the philosophy of personal devotion (Bhakti) to God without the need for elaborate rituals or mediators. This democratization of spirituality made Neo-Vaishnavism immensely popular among the masses, transcending caste and class barriers.

#### Legacy in Contemporary Times:

In contemporary Assam, the influence of Sankardev permeates every sphere of life. His teachings continue to guide the socio-cultural practices of Assam, fostering a sense of unity and shared heritage. Festivals like Raas Leela, which celebrates the life of Lord Krishna, are a testament to Sankardev's enduring legacy. Additionally, his literary works serve as a backbone for Assamese literature, influencing generations of writers and poets. The Sattriya dance, with its graceful movements and spiritual themes, is a proud representation of Assam in the national cultural scene. In the realm of spirituality, Neo-Vaishnavism continues to be the dominant force in Assam, guiding millions in their spiritual pursuits. Srimanta Sankardev, often referred to as Shankardeva in some texts, was a towering figure in the cultural and religious landscape of Assam. His contributions spanned across literature, music, dance, and philosophy. Most importantly, he is remembered for spearheading the Neo-Vaishnavism movement in Assam, a socio-religious reform that played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural and spiritual ethos of the region.

#### Neo-Vaishnavism Movement:

**Focus on Devotion to Lord Krishna:** At the heart of Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavism is the unwavering devotion to Lord Krishna. Drawing inspiration from the Bhakti movement that was sweeping across India during the medieval period, Sankardev emphasized personal devotion to Krishna as the supreme path to salvation. He propagated the message of the Bhagavata Purana, translating and adapting its teachings to cater to the Assamese populace. One of the most transformative aspects of

Sankardev's movement was its egalitarian approach. Rejecting the rigid caste hierarchies and discriminations prevalent in society, Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam under Sankardev's leadership preached that everyone, irrespective of caste or social standing, had equal access to God. This had a profound social impact, promoting inclusivity and social cohesion.

To propagate the teachings of Neo-Vaishnavism and to act as centres of cultural and religious activities, Sankardev established Satras or monastic institutions. These Satras played a dual role. They were not only religious centres but also hubs of cultural activities, fostering music, dance, and literature that echoed the principles of Neo-Vaishnavism. Along with his religious teachings, Sankardev introduced the Sattriya dance, a classical dance form that became a medium to narrate tales from the scriptures, especially the life and acts of Lord Krishna. This dance, recognized as one of the eight classical dances of India, is deeply embedded in the Neo-Vaishnavism ethos.

Sankardev enriched Assamese literature with his extensive writings. He penned plays, poetry, and prose that not only propagated Vaishnavite philosophy but also became foundational texts for Assamese literature. His literary and artistic creations were tools for spiritual and moral teachings, emphasizing virtuous living, devotion, and social equality. Sankardev introduced the concept of 'Namghar' or the House of Chants. These were community prayer halls, where people gathered to sing devotional songs and hymns. These congregations played a significant role in community bonding and the propagation of Neo-Vaishnavite teachings.

Srimanta Sankardev's socio-religious movement was not just a spiritual endeavour but a comprehensive cultural revolution. His Neo-Vaishnavism movement left an indelible mark on Assam's societal fabric, promoting unity, equality, and an enriched cultural tradition that remains influential to this day. Through his teachings and institutions, Sankardev ensured that the principles of devotion, social justice, and artistry became deeply embedded in Assamese society. Today, Sankardev is not just remembered as a sant or scholar but as a reformer who moulded Assam's socio-cultural fabric. He laid the foundation for an inclusive society in which unity and harmony prevailed over divisive forces.

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# Mithila Paintings : A Dalit perception



In the region of Mithila, there were particularly women from two sub-castes among the Dalit community who had mastered the art of Mithila painting, which was different from paintings by upper caste women. These women, belonging to Dusadh and Chamar community, had developed their own distinct style of paintings and various new themes were included.

Dr. Aditi

Dalit art evolved as a mode of resistance and protest. It tries to historically trace the origin and the seriousness of caste discrimination from the past till present. Dalit artists across India have picked up themes, which invoke a deep sense of contemplation in the minds of the onlooker. Dalit art is a representation of critical issues of domination, discrimination and oppression encompassing along the triple oppression faced by Dalit woman. Dalit women's problems encompass not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with religion, caste and untouchability, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural and political rights.

One such artist from Maharashtra "Savindra Savi" has successfully done so, through his art. He has created a mode of protest and also tries to track the interplay between meaning and power within hierarchical structures of religion, caste, gender and politics. As Y. S. alone puts it, Dalit art needs to create a social space for itself, which is associated with hegemony and monopoly. Adherence to social reality in the pictorial space was a major shift affected by Indian painters. They succeeded in legitimizing their own culture and social environment through their art practice. As Gopal Guru aptly explains that the evolution of Dalit art varying from folklore to paintings to folk poetry has provided Dalits with an intellectual platform for creation as well as articulation for laboring Dalit women self perception





of emancipation. He very well states that Dalit emancipation is not only possible through government policies as they are temporal in nature but through cultural and intellectual stimulation which will create a language of resistance and fully loaded with meanings and have a story of their subordination and suppression.

In the region of Mithila, there were particularly women from two sub-castes among the Dalit community had mastered the art of Mithila painting, which was different from paintings by an upper castes women. These women, belonging to Dusadh and Chamar community, had developed their own distinct style of paintings and various new themes were included. Dusadhs captured their oral history (such as the adventures of Raja Salhesh, and depictions of their primary deity -Rahu) — typified by bold compositions and figures based on traditional tattoo patterns called Godna locally. This added another distinctive new style to the region's flourishing art scene.

Dusadh women were very receptive to her ideas of starting a profession in Mithila Paintings but at the same time were apprehensive of their awareness and strength against the much-established Brahmin women leading the art. These apprehensions were born around the lack of their knowledge for elaborated painting styles like Kohbhar and Aripana, Hindu customs, deities, Gods and goddesses over which the Brahmins have created a dominance and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata making them doubt their ability to translate the same on paper in form of beautiful paintings with meaningful message.

#### Geru Paintings

Geru (brown) included big figures of Gods and Goddess, animals and fields largely painted in light brown along with few more bright color objects on the paper. Resembling low relief figures on the walls of homes of Mithila inhabitants, these paintings did not take off too well and couldn't attract many buyers. The fact to ponder upon here is that none of these Dusadh paintings or High caste paintings from Brahmins and Kayastha women has remained stagnant from the times of their inception to today.

Mithila Art is under a state of constant evolution and also intermixing of styles among its sub categories. That is to say not only the theme of Bharni paintings or Kachni paintings has changed slightly over time but also elements

of Dusadh paintings have penetrated in the same. This could be studied by taking examples of Brahmin painters, who now abundantly use cow dung wash papers to add sully beauty to their Bharni paintings and the Dalit painters, who use a lot of colors and broad figures in their paintings resembling to Bharni style and often depicting Kohbhar images also in their creations.

The art of Mithila Painting has facilitated an exchange of quality styles among the artists of all castes and aesthetic signs of one could be well appreciated in the other. This being said the overall ambit of Mithila Painting includes paintings with some distinct broad identifiers like repeated image of the subject of the painting, single plain, no use of perspective or shading, full face representation of Gods and Goddesses. The skills of Dusadh painters increased manifolds in around last four decades. Now they are not only drawing images of Shiva and Krishna but also expanding their content base. They are depicting the adventures of Raja Salhesh, Rahu (Dusadh community Sun God), besides current social and rural life issues to give a contemporary appeal to their work. One major element of their paintings is the life tree, a huge tree with images of animals, flowers, regular day-to-day household items, Gods and human forms in various stages of human life. These tress of life have been thoughtfully used by Dusadh painters to depict intellectually, stimulating concepts of cosmological inference such as Raas to a more regular depiction of nomadic journey of migrant workers assembling in Jitwarpur and nearby areas during the harvest time in order to find work.

Though upper caste painters have used small trees, leaves and other related images repetitively as fillers in their paintings, they have not been very explicit and thought applying with tree of life which is popular in India and Europe.

Gobar style paintings were started by Jamuna Devi by giving the paper a light Gobar (Cow dung slurry) wash to give it a beautiful sully look and feel on which bright colors often come out very beautifully. From the caste perspective it's important to note that unlike other scheduled castes of Jitwarpur village like the Malis, the Pasis, Doms, and Dhobiwho all stuck to their traditional professions, the Chamars and the Dusadhs have forayed into full time profession of Mithila Painting. At this point it's helpful to probe the socio-economic background and status of these two castes before studying the evolution of their art and



its modern significance. Even today these castes - Chamars and Dusadhs are considered inferiors and untouchables and discriminated openly in social transactions and exchanges. There are various sources and studies done on history and background of these castes at the bottom of pyramid and they unanimously bring forth the plight of being a low born by birth.

Dusadhs and Chamars are among the most devoid of castes and denied the basic human rights. These included restriction on them from using the village well, expected to not cross high borns day time during their walks in fields and villages, couldn't eat or participate in village social affair, feasts and gatherings and most primitively above all "cast of impurity on a higher caste person if a Dalit's shadow falls on him or her.

The scheduled castes had the tradition of decorating their houses, kothis, storage other broad surfaces with figures of animals like horses and elephants but these were simple images devoid of any aesthetic or ornamental qualities. Making mud wall frescoes was very popular with them. However the growing popularity of Brahmanical and Kayastha Paintings more precisely known as Bharni and Kachni, started to inspire lower caste Dusadhs and Chamar women as well and they wanted to learn the art behind these paintings. This was, however, not easy as Dalit Painters devoid of any knowledge of rich and ornamental Brahmanical or high caste rituals, deities and Gods, found themselves clueless about imitating Bharni and kachni painting styles.

Godana art

Evolution of Tattoo Paintings can be traced back by studying the ritual and habits of Nat community. Natins, the women folks of this community have been master tattooers since long time. Dalit women from Bihar have used

Godna as an idiom to make an elevated sense of Dalit emancipation, which they explain in terms of annihilation of caste and the restoration of manuski [dignity to themselves].

Godna originally meaning, the art of tattooing was adopted particularly in the provinces in Bihar and Bengal, to imprint the prisoners as well as demonstrate an upper caste distinction. However the history Godna lies in the discrimination suffered by the Dalit women, when they were forced to wear ornaments of iron and inferior materials as prescribed by the Manu code. Tattooing, was thus seen as an inversion of that prescription, which marked distinction from the lower caste in the public. Godna, was not only seen as the inversion of markers of identification for the Dalit women but was also viewed as an attractive alternative to forms of subaltern expression for these women.

Evolution of Dalit art came as mode of resistance as it is evident, it marks the creation of social space for themselves in the cultural hierarchy of the society. Dulari devi, Rajesh Paswan, Shivan Pawan, Channu Devi and Roudi Paswans are some of the individuals, who despite belonging to the low caste, did work for their cultural upliftment and are successful to a greater extent. In the contemporary era, Godana paintings are very famous and popular in the market but due to consumer demand and the paintings, they have become highly commercialized. We also notice combination of mixture of Godana art with other styles of Mithila paintings, which is deviation from their original art. Among the Dalits in Bihar, Dusadhs and Chamar have led the way for evolving their own style of painting and asserting their identity by creating their social space.

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# "Jay Bhim"

## Sending a loud message silently



Jay Bhim, a movie produced in Tamil Nadu, was recently released on OTT platform. Inspired by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, movie has become a big hit. At no stage viewer sees and hears the slogan - Jay Bhim but it is experienced throughout the movie. Jay Bhim not merely shows conviction in laws but also deep faith in the ideology of Dr. Ambedkar.

### Viraj & Vijendra



Senggeni a tribal woman, also the protagonist turning her back to power, refused to bow down to the exploiting system. The film speaks about her lonely fight for self-respect and justice for her husband's custodial torture and death.

Senggeni had filed a suit in the Supreme Court about torture and death of her husband. She is brought to the police station when a police officer is attempting to force her to withdraw the suit. In the midst of this situation, top police cop calls the police station and asks the concerned police officer to drop Senggeni

at her home by a police vehicle. But she turns down the police offer and decides to walk down to her home. Police find themselves in a helpless situation and start chasing her by their jeep, requesting Senggeni to get into the jeep.

She walks down from her village, where her husband was humiliated by upper caste people. These were the people, who had refused to help her. These were the people who had abused her.

'Jay Bhim' starts with a shot wherein prisoners are allowed to leave. The catch, however, is – prisoners are asked about their caste. If the



A scene from Jay Bhim

prisoner is from an upper caste, he is allowed to leave. But the prisoners from scheduled castes and tribes are asked to stand in a corner. This is done so that police could pick them up again as 'suspect' in other cases.

The film throws light on the plight of the citizens, who are still facing humiliation and all other methods of torture. People from some tribes do not have any documentary evidence to show that they are Indian citizens. They do not owe a small piece of land. An incident in the film is self-explanatory. A local teacher, who is involved in an adult education drive, tries to get a voter id card for the tribe. The reaction from local political bigwigs was, "It's enough that we have to request lower caste people to vote for us. Should we also go to their houses for this purpose?"

Chandru in the film is not merely a lawyer of Senggeni but also a social activist. He fights for human rights. Suriya plays the role of Chandru very effectively. But Chandru stands for Senggeni, who was also pregnant when the incident took place. The film is based on an actual incident in 1995 in Tamilnadu, which highlighted caste biases and police torture against the deprived people. The community, shown in the movie,

is forced to catch the snakes as they have no other source of livelihood. A shot in the movie is moving. Rajkannu says, "I don't know how many bricks I have made but could not give my family a pucca house". The shot reminds Dr Ambedkar's famous speech in constituent assembly when he warned, "We are going to enter the life of contradictions. Politics will have equality, but social and economic life will have inequality. We will recognize the principle of one person, one vote, and one vote one value in politics. But in our social and economic life, we will continue to deny one person one value principle because of our social and economic structure".

Another shot in the movie takes the people in self-introspection mode. On seeing the school children, dressed like Gandhi and Nehru, Chandru asks, "Why Ambedkar is not here?". But Chandru never gets demoralized. As a staunch follower of Dr Ambedkar, he continues his fight with the help of law, in which he has deep faith.

The most significant part of the film is that at no point did we see or listen the slogan – "Jay Bhim". But it is experienced throughout the movie. It once again underlines "Jay Bhim" is the slogan for the fight against injustice.

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# Jhund message - Cool down please

Jhund is a different attempt mainly for two counts. Firstly, it gives up the violence and secondly it opts the different track, giving up traditional ways for change. It does not speak of revolution but bats for fundamental and sustainable change in the society, which can take place only on the basis of mutual trust, empathy, sense of brotherhood and oneness.



## Satyajit



Jhund is a timely released movie. It is not merely a movie, starring Amitabh Bachchan and directed by celebrity Nagraj Manjule. It is not merely a movie, depicting realistic slum life in urban centres. Nor it is a movie which poses disturbing unanswered questions before the viewers.

Jhund needs to be seen with a different mind-set. It has to be interpreted with a contemporary social backdrop. Jhund needs to be viewed on the bigger canvas of history of social movements, the questions they posed, answers they tried to provide and their current status. Jhund gives a ray of hope for any sensible and socially aware person.

It can be a matter of debate whether Jhund is an art or parallel movie. Indian art film, which was once part of Bollywood, is almost vanished. Some attempts are being made by producing such movies with social focus but they are very weak now. Indian movies have a glorious history of taking up social issues since its inception. (Savkari Pash of Baburao Painter). But it flourished in the post-independence era and was strengthened in the seventies and eighties. This trend became synonymous with the people like Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihlani as they spoke of contemporary issues in very strong words.

However, barring a few exceptions, the trend could not sustain for a long time. Expert's attribute this to reasons like commercialization of Bollywood and lack of popular support to





art films. This is the truth. But there can be some other reasons as well. Firstly, intensity of social issues, which were focused by the art films, was reduced because of various factors. Secondly, ideology, which used to inspire and motivate art film, became irrelevant after the fall of Communist Russia. Serious questions were raised in the nineties before the relevance of Communist ideology. The attraction for Communist ideology and political support gradually vanished. This was not seen only in India but it was a global phenomenon.

One can list a number of movies which advocate particular political ideology. The terminology of this ideology was liberally used in these movies to propagate the political message. This can also be seen as a part of larger political design. Attempts were made to portray Karl Marx's theory of 'class struggle' in the Indian context. Implicit violence was an inevitable part of these movies but the intention was sure to influence people with Marxist ideology.

Jhund is a different attempt mainly for two counts. Firstly, it gives up the violence and secondly it opts the different track, giving up traditional ways for change. It does not speak of revolution but bats for fundamental and sustainable change in the society, which can take place only on the basis of mutual trust, empathy, sense of brotherhood and oneness.

Jhund's story revolves around children and youths from a Nagpur slum and Vijay, a football coach. Jhund depicts the real slum life and Nagraj Manjule has effectively shown realistic life of slum dwellers. The youths are directionless. They do not know the world beyond the slums. A boy is being shown, asking Vijay – "Bharat? What is Bharat?" He is innocent. He can never be blamed. Vijay noticed a tremendous amount of energy among them and decided to channelize it. The movie begins here. Vijay trains them football after a series of hurdles and the slum youths and children enter in an international football match. The journey between the two ends is Jhund.

The entire movie has a lot of social significance. One is tempted to draw parallels between contemporary social movements and Jhund. Several scenes in the movie send very strong social messages. The last scene in the movie tells us all. Ankush, who was earlier denied passport because of his criminal background, is granted passport at the eleventh hour. He rushes to the airport to catch

the plane. He is stopped there for a security check up. He is needed to undergo all security formalities. Ankush is carrying with him a small cutter, which he had procured to murder a police officer, who had denied him passport. Ankush is asked by security personnel to throw the cutter. He is so strongly inspired to join the football team that he drops the cutter.

Cutter is a symbol. It stands for violence. Throwing a cutter in the dustbin tells us that Ankush had given up violence. Ankush is a little pained while throwing the cutter in the dustbin but he finally drops it. The question arises why Ankush dropped the cutter? Does he realize the futility of violence and ideas, he was possessing? Was high level motivation of joining football team proved decisive? Has he found some new ways and methods?



Now let us interpret the scene in some social context. We have witnessed a series of social movements against all types of discrimination. The large-scale intensified manifestation of unrest against social and economic discrimination was seen after seventies. While it was much louder for some, we ought to understand that it was natural. It was natural as the sentiments of newly awakened people were bound to be more intense and stronger. A strong sense of resentment or revenge was seen in the social movements because of injustice for centuries. The movements might have spoken some illegitimate means as legitimate methods were a time-consuming process. The newly awakened people were excited, hyper and angry as it was their initial response to the new awakening.

What this process achieved was very significant. This achievement could play a decisive role even today. The new awakening



was not restricted to deprived classes. Awakening of the “privileged class” was also a natural fall out of this process. The agonies, pains, cries and sufferings of the deprived Indians moved the sensible people, which made them realize and understand the real picture in the society. They began to respond positively to the social reality, which was painful and undesirable for them. This, of course, happened because of a strong sense of oneness and deep concern for a healthy India.

Ankush has now thrown the cutter in the dustbin. Ankush is hoping that he has found some other way. What is this new way? Ankush has set some different goals. Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) is instrumental for this process. Ankush has responded positively while Vijay has come forward to set a different positive goal for him. What does this signify? Vijay noticed the potential and qualities of the youths and children living in a Nagpur slum. He understood the need to divert their energy for some positive and constructive mission, which would change their lives. And it happens. Jhund shows that the lives of children and youths change once they start loving football. They began to follow the rules of football while they used to enjoy football in an unruly manner in the past.

It is very simple to draw the inference. Youths and children of the slum respond positively when they come into contact with positive thoughts, positive ideas and positive direction. This happened because they had never come into contact with any positive thoughts in the past. Bachchan is merely a carrier of this positivity. Jhund emerges as a team when both – Amitabh and slum children - communicate with each other and realize common interests and work as a team.

What does this mean on the larger canvas of social movements? For various reasons, both the sides – oppressed and privileged maintained distance from each other because of reasons like disbelief and lack of trust. But we must remember that disbelief and lack of trust was the fallout of baggage of the past. 'Here and Now' is considered as a major psychological therapy to have a simple and healthy life. It is possible, of course, with great efforts, to apply this theory in the current context. We must learn from the mistakes in the past, correct the mistakes in the present and walk jointly towards the future. A scene in the Jhund is significant. Vijay (Amitabh), who represents the

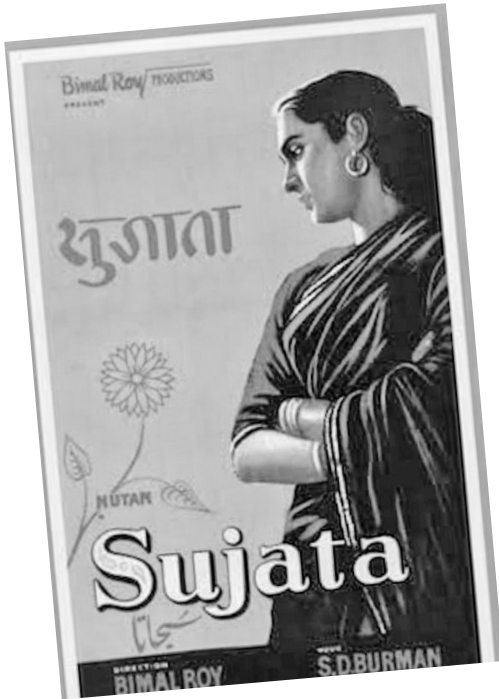
privileged class, bows down before the huge portrait of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar during the procession, which is being taken out on account of Ambedkar Jayanti. He is probably unhappy with the manner in which Ambedkar Jayanti is celebrated. Still, he bows down. We must learn from this. Bhagirath (or Herculean?) efforts are needed to establish a meaningful, serious and consistent dialogue for these kinds of efforts. Social leadership has to take initiative in this direction. It would ensure a healthy and cohesive India. Jhund is not a story for cinema. It is a real story and we can certainly hope for such efforts.

Another major part of Jhund is largely neglected. In fact, it is not discussed. It takes the story to the logical extension of awareness. The awareness is a process, which is expected to be percolated to the last layer of the society. The movie shows a Muslim couple, living in the slum. Relationship between husband and wife is strained. Jhund shows quarrel between the Muslim couple. Angered and annoyed by continuous male dominance and quarrels, the wife asks her husband, “What can you do? You can give me talaq”. She does not stop here. She says talaq for thrice and leaves her husband along with her kids. The woman later becomes part of the football team. Is it not a rebel? It is. The Muslim woman, who gives triple talaq to her husband, emerges as the representative of all the oppressed people. She becomes the representative of all those, who are yet to be awakened.

In a court scene, Vijay (Amitabh) says, “Ye samaj ke Bahishkrut log hai”, ‘aap kahte hai ye Jhund hai, mai kahata hu ye hamari National football team hai’ (You say that this is wild horde, I say this is our National Football Team). Again, in that same shot, he tells a judge, ‘No matter how much talent they have, they can’t reach you. There is just too large a wall.’

Jhund shows a college - symbol of privileged class, and the slum - representing deprived people. Both are divided by a huge brick wall. This wall is strong and is guarded by security all the time. It is an unwritten rule that nobody would cross the wall. College people are initially reluctant to allow slum dwellers to enter on the premises. But as the movie unfolds, the wall's existence becomes meaningless. The need of the hour is to remove the wall and make India a strong and healthy team.

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# SC woman, portrayed in Bollywood

Cinema is a mirror of society and dominant caste filmmakers have depicted deprived classes real issues through the Savarna perspectives. Primarily, they were never interested in producing movies on caste and gender issues. However, popular cinema lacks deprived women-centric movies.

Dr. Chandrakant Kamble

Scheduled Castes belong to the lowest category in the hierarchy of the Indian caste system. Due to Manu's law and other Hindu scriptures, they have been unconditionally excluded from society. Deprived classes were segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. They were even prohibited from using natural resources and women were denied fundamental human rights.

However, the constitution of India postulates human rights and fundamental rights for women through the Hindu code bill. These women are equal before the law and nobody denies such human rights. However, as an outcome of people practicing caste-based hierarchy, their assertions are still constantly happening in the Indian subcontinent and

are a question of concern. The experiences of these women are unique in many ways because they suffer from the triple burden of economic deprivation, patriarchy, and caste-untouchability-based discrimination. According to the 2011 National Crime Reports Bureau (NCRB), Deprived class women in India are raped every four hours. They face many issues simultaneously, like Caste exploitation and gender discrimination, and social dignity.

Violence is also the core outcome of gender-based inequalities, shaped, compounded, and intensified by caste discrimination. Mainstream Indian feminists have been exploiting these women's vulnerability to add to their privileges, and such risks are indispensable in developing a theory of gender. Stereotypically, women have





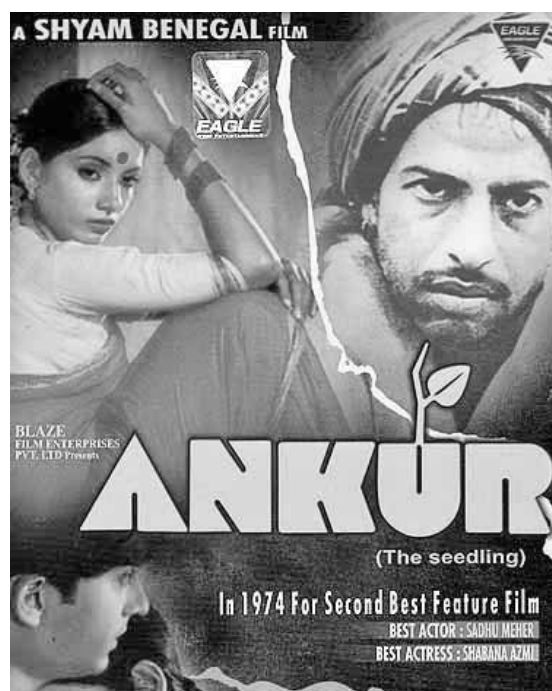
been depicted as secondary, like household mothers, helpful sisters, and beautiful wives in Bollywood cinema.

The Bollywood industry runs under the control of males and is massively influenced by nepotism. The Indian cinema industry has been driven by quite prejudicated, biased upper-caste male dominance and filmmakers. Excluding some, Bollywood has not adequately depicted the agency of women and nor an unprejudiced portrayal of women. Dominant caste filmmaker's have assumption such as the their stories do not increase the entertainment business, Deprived class itself is an issue, it does not seem appropriate for Bollywood filmmakers to make movies on social issues. And they are never warmly received in the industry. However contemporary regional filmmakers are successful making movies on their issues and receiving mass appreciation and financial success such as Nagraj Manjule, Pa. Ranjith, Mari Selvaraj and Vetrimaaran.

Their issues are adequately represented in the literature, politics, and education. What about the arts and especially in modern art cinema? Is there sufficient representation of deprived classes and, in particular deprived class women? How has Bollywood cinema portrayed deprived class women? Exploring through lenses of third-world feminism, the paper examines the representation of these women in Bollywood cinema. Especially, SC women-centric movies are especially selected for the inquiry. Achhut Kanya (The Untouchable Girl, Hindi, 1936) By Franz Osten, Sujata (Sujata, Hindi, 1959) by Bimal Roy, Ankur (The Seedling, Hindi, 1972) by Shyam Benegal, Bandit Queen (Bandit Queen, Hindi, 1994) by Shekhar Kapoor, Rudaali (The Mourner, Hindi, 1996) by Kalpana Lajmi.

The agency of deprived class women elaborates through Gayatri Spivak's question, can the subaltern speak? Who is speaking on behalf of deprived classes? As Spivak argues that the western intelligentsia are talking about the others. They utilize third-world countries as raw materials to make products and sell worldwide (Spivak, 1988). Coherently, are the Savarna filmmakers telling the their stories? Are they using deprived class as data or resources for filmmaking? Have they presented deprived class agency unbiased on the screen? Intersectional third world through the subaltern perspective will elaborate on the agency of SC women. India's

first deprived class women-centric movie is Achhut Kanya (The Untouchable Girl, Hindi, 1936), directed by Indo-German filmmaker Franz Osten. The story of Achhut Kanya (The Untouchable Girl, Hindi, 1936) has prepositional and imagery of upper caste filmmakers. That happened in British India, where people strictly practiced caste and untouchability in the public or private domain. Frenz Osten depicts a liberal, progressive, Brahmin protagonist in Achhut Kanya. The untouchable girl has been portrayed as a victim through a Savarna male



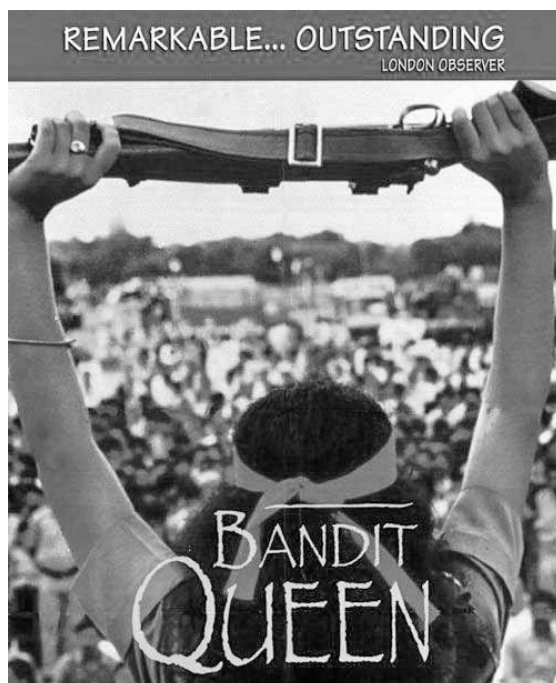
from Savarna's standpoint, and it has explicitly become a doubly prejudiced movie. The Savarna perspectives depict that untouchables sacrifice everything for upper-castes and are victims of society. As per the caste system and patriarchy, these women will sacrifice/die or live for their male and Savarna male.

Mahatma Gandhi unsuccessfully attempted a movement to abolish untouchability from Hindu society. Gandhi called them Harijan instead of deprived classes. The movie Sujata (Sujata, Hindi, 1959) is a product of Gandhian philosophy. Again, the Savarna filmmakers have created an imaginary story about the untouchable girls. The constitution of India annihilated inhuman practices, gender, and caste-based discriminations. Moreover, Hindu society strictly practiced untouchability in



their daily lives. For the untouchable girl (Sujata) even her shadow is impure and pollutes the Brahmin if touched. Savarna liberal and leftist filmmakers in their fictional story depict the Brahmin family accidentally parenting the untouchable girl. It is never possible for the Brahmin family to parent an untouchable girl as their girl child. Sujata is portrayed as an untouchable girl who is never special and she faces caste discrimination and all kinds of trauma like any other deprived class woman. Sujata is a romantic drama cum a semi-legal thriller genre movie made for Savarna spectators by dominant castes producers. The filmmaker's perspective is quite clear: they have portrayed these girls as merely workers or sufferers.

Ankur (The Seedling, Hindi 1974) is a socially realistic movie that shows upper-caste males sexually assaulting more inferior caste women. In Ankur, director Sham Benegal depicts rape prevalent in India, societal acknowledgments, and feudal landlords of hegemonic dominance.



Ankur is a story about a voiceless, vulnerable, and subaltern deprived class family. India is a (caste prime farming country) agricultural country, and deprived classes, who otherwise are scavengers, are primarily agrarian laborers. Ankur is a saga about the daily life struggles of the Indian deprived community. It mainly

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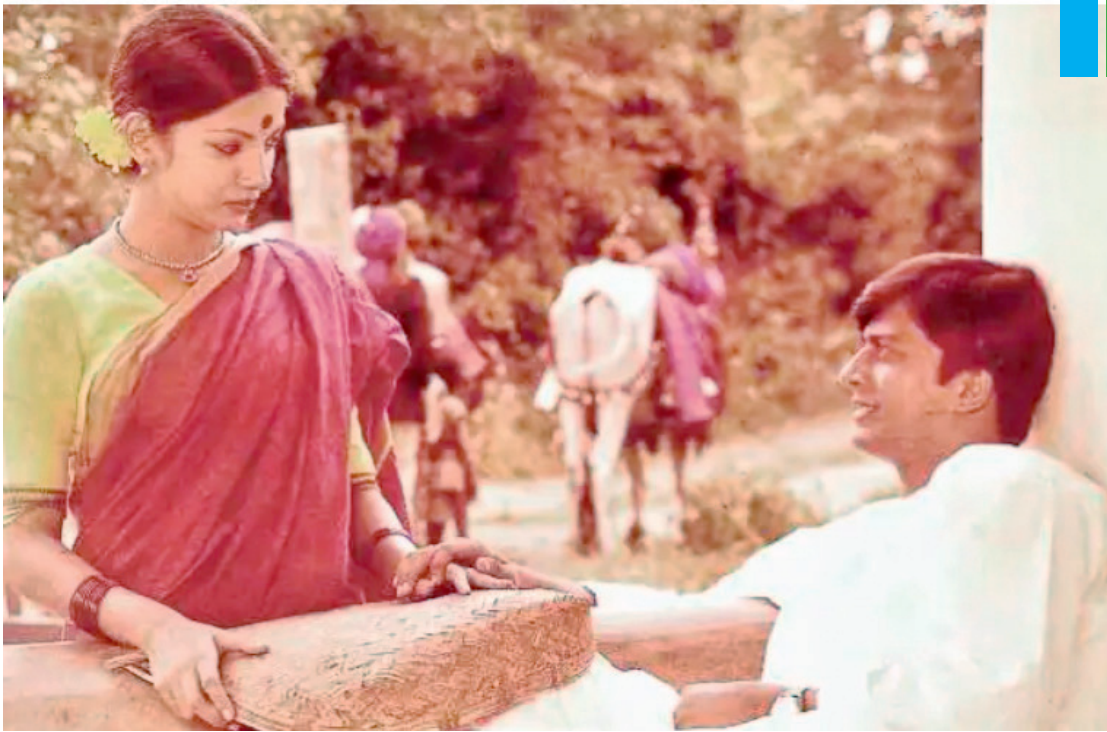
represents the behaviour of the Indian feudal system and landlords against voiceless deprived class servants.

Bandit Queen (Bandit Queen, Hindi, 1994) is the first biopic on a deprived class dacoit woman, Phoolan Devi. It is a story of caste atrocities and barbaric patriarchal practices practiced by dominant castes. Today, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are the top two states that witness an increased number of deprived class women rape cases and harassment. Gender-specific and social inequalities are responsible for sexual violence in India. Unfortunately, Shekhar Kapoor never took her permission to make the movie. They made the movie merely based on their perspectives and never considered her about her genuine experiences of the traumatic events.

Producers lack the scope to depict empathy or imagination in order to expand the story in a cinematic way. Because it was a living person's biopic, filmmaker Shekhar Kapoor used the subaltern as an object/material for cinematic representation. According to Phoolan, he has depicted her real-life inaccurately on the silver screen. However, the movie's motif is calmly in favour of the propagated western scholar's perspective.

They occupy several traditional and mandatory jobs in the country's particular regions due to the Hindu cultural dominance. Weeper/Mourner is a conventional work for the community in north India. It is a barbaric practice for subaltern deprived classes, especially women. They were highly discriminated against for thousands of years and still retain the same speechless position. They cannot speak and save their history, culture, and life.

However, Rudaali focuses on the tragic memories of these women. Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi wrote a story on the trauma of the deprived classe women about the



barbaric praxis of Rudaali. A narrative came in the market of literature from an upper-caste empathic perspective. Rudaali (The Mourner, Hindi, 1996) moviemaker found the object/material to make a movie on the concept of the Rudaali. Director Kalpana Lajmi never highlighted the essential elements of the caste exploitations in her narration. She dealt with the film romantically and emotionally, which is never a topic to express romanticism or poetics. The movie has romantic cum tragic songs as spectators enjoy the trauma with a romantic flavour. Kalpana Lajmi has misrepresented these women and has failed to portray them accurately on the silver screen. She uses the language of tears to mock back at her oppressors and to depict romanticism. The movie expresses empathy to the deprived class women, and the narrative style is interlaced with the trauma. Dominant castes and female filmmakers are never exceptional to narrate without Savarna's perspectives.

Cinema is a mirror of society and dominant caste filmmakers have depicted deprived classes real issues through the Savarna perspectives. Primarily, they are never interested in producing movies on caste and gender issues. However, popular cinema lacks deprived women-centric movies.

They have produced movies only on deprived class victims, stories; they are merely rape victims, like Bandit Queen and Bawandar, who are the biopics of rape victims; Ankur, Rudaali, and Chauranga are based on the actual incidents. They have produced

realistic movies through their imagination and expressed empathy/sympathy to these women in their movies. Achhut Kanya and Sujata are realistic fictional movies. The deprived class women rape ratio is high in India and the same is reflected in the silver screen through the cinema. The three movies mentioned above represent deprived class women's caste, class, gender, and social victimization. In addition, they produce movies with their creative imagination for targeted spectators. The portrayal of these women protagonists is metonymically represented and over-emarginated by makers. They have misrepresented or under-represented deprived class women's agency in their cinema. The movies are realistic and based on their life experiences, but there is an unsuccessful attempt to fictionalize it for cinematic liberty. However, the motive of producing movies had never been anti-caste or anti-sex but entirely professional and used as an object/material for the upper caste spectators.

Primarily, dominant castes producers' have used or abused deprived class (Rape Victims) experiences as objects/materials to produce professional movies for targeted spectators through their perspectives. Savarna filmmakers produce self-authorized movies and have economic and cultural-political interests without scientific representation of deprived classes.

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# Understanding Strengths

The population of Scheduled Castes needs to be considered as a strength.

The Scheduled Castes constitute a significant portion of the population of India; regarding the Census 2011, the Scheduled Castes make up approximately 16% of the country's total population. This large and diverse population represents a significant strength for the Scheduled Castes. Here are a few ways in which the size and diversity of the Scheduled Castes population can be seen as a strength.

## Vijendra

Scheduled Castes are a group of historically disadvantaged castes in India. They are listed in the constitution of India and are eligible for affirmative action measures, such as reservation in education and government jobs. The Scheduled Castes are one of the several categories of backward classes that the Government of India recognizes. The term 'Scheduled Castes' refers to those castes listed in the Scheduled Castes order, 1950, which is a legal document that specifies these castes.

It is essential to recognize that Scheduled Castes, also known as Dalits, are a diverse group of people with a wide range of strengths and abilities. Like any other group, they have unique talents, skills, and strengths. We can say

that there are a few strengths which are often associated with Scheduled Castes in India:

**Resilience** : Many members of the Scheduled Castes have faced significant challenges and adversity in their lives and have had to learn to be resilient in the face of these challenges. This resilience is a strength that has helped them overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity.

**Adaptability** : Due to many challenges they have faced, members of Scheduled Castes have often had to be adaptable and resourceful in order to survive and thrive. This adaptability can be a great strength in the face of change and uncertainty.

**Strong Community ties** : The Scheduled Castes have often faced discrimination and social exclusion, and as a result, they have



developed strong bonds of solidarity within their communities. These strong community ties are a source of strength and support for other members of the Scheduled Castes.

**Determination and perseverance :** Despite facing significant challenges and obstacles, many members of the Scheduled Castes are determined and persevering. They are committed to working hard and to overcome any challenges that come their way. This determination and perseverance are a strength that has helped them to achieve success in their personal and professional lives.

**Strong work ethic :** Many members of Scheduled Castes have a strong work ethic and are willing to work hard in order to improve their situations and those of their families.

**The population of Scheduled Castes looks at it as a strength.**

The scheduled Castes constitute a significant portion of the population of India; regarding the Census 2011, the Scheduled Castes make up approximately 16% of the country's total population. This large and diverse population represents a significant strength for the Scheduled Castes. Here are a few ways in which the size and diversity of the Scheduled Castes population can be seen as a strength:

**Political power :** The Scheduled Castes constitute a significant voting block, and as such, they have the potential to wield substantial political power. This can be seen that political parties often target the Scheduled Castes during elections and that the government is usually responsive to the needs and concerns of the Scheduled Castes.

**Cultural diversity :** The Scheduled Castes are a diverse group of people with a rich cultural heritage. This diversity is a source of strength for the Scheduled Castes, as it allows them to draw on a wide range of cultural traditions and practices and contribute to India's cultural richness.

**Economic potential :** With a large and diverse population, the Scheduled Castes have the potential to be a significant economic force in India. As more and more members of the Scheduled Castes gain access to education and employment opportunities, they are likely to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country.

**Social and cultural influence :** The Scheduled Castes have a long and rich history in India, and they have played a significant role in shaping the culture and society of the country. This social and

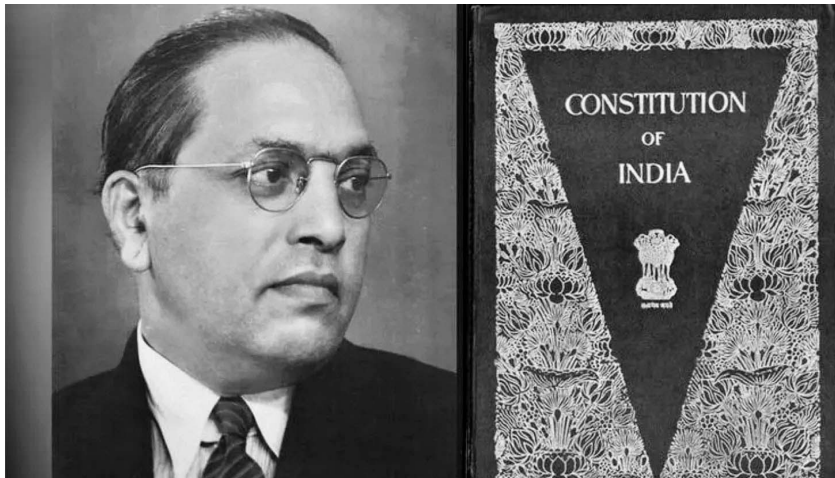
cultural influence is a source of strength for the Scheduled Castes and allows them to contribute to the broader discourse on issues of national importance.

**Dr. Ambedkar - Source of inspiration**

Dr. Ambedkar was a leading figure in the movement for the rights and emancipation of the Scheduled Castes in India. He was born into a Dalit family and faced discrimination and social exclusion throughout his life. Despite these challenges, he became one of the foremost leaders of Scheduled Castes and a driving force behind the drafting of the Constitution of India. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar played a crucial role in shaping the provisions of the Constitutions that relate to the Scheduled Castes. He was a strong advocate for the inclusion of provisions that would protect and promote the rights of the Scheduled Castes. He worked tirelessly to ensure that these provisions were included in the Constitution's final draft. In addition to his work on the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar was also a leading social reformer and educationist. He played a vital role in the development of a system of higher education that was more accessible to the Scheduled Castes and marginalized communities. Dr. Ambedkar's contributions to the cause of the Scheduled Castes have had a lasting impact on Indian society. He is remembered as a hero and a strength of the marginalized. His ideas and writings continue to inspire social and political movements worldwide, and his legacy lives on as a source of inspiration and hope for those who struggle for justice and equality. Dr. Ambedkar is one of the strengths of communities in fighting against injustice.

**Education :** Education is a strength for members of Scheduled Castes communities, as it provides opportunities for personal and professional development and advancement. Education can also help break the cycle of poverty and social discrimination many Scheduled Castes individuals and families have faced. There are many examples of individuals from the community who have achieved success through education despite facing challenges and discrimination. These individuals can serve as role models and inspire others in their communities to pursue education and achieve their goals.

However, it is essential to note that access to education is different for all members of communities, and there are still significant barriers that prevent some individuals from obtaining a quality education. However, this



education remains a vital strength and source of empowerment for many members of communities.

The Constitution of India provided several measures to protect and promote the interests of Scheduled Castes, also known as Dalits, who have historically faced discrimination and social exclusion. These measures are outlined in Part XVII of the Constitution, which deals with the “Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes.

Article 341 defines the term “Scheduled Castes” for the Constitution and empowers the President of India to notify the Scheduled Castes for each state or union territory. The President can also modify the list of the Scheduled Castes in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state.

Article 341(2) empowers the President to specify the areas inhabited by the Scheduled Castes in any state or union territory and to specify the castes, races, or tribes or parts of or groups with castes, races, or tribes that shall be deemed to be Scheduled Castes to the state or union territory.

Article 15(4) allows the state to make special provisions for advancing any socially and educationally backward class of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Article 16(4) allows the state to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens, which, in the opinion of the state, needs to be adequately represented in the services under the state.

Article 46 directs the state to promote the special care of the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled

Tribes, and to protect them from social justice and all forms of exploitation.

Articles 330 and 334 provide for the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the house of the people (Lok Sabha) and the Legislative Assemblies of the states.

Article 338(1) establishes the National Commission for Scheduled Castes to monitor and evaluate the measures taken by the Government for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and to report on the working of those measures. This helps to ensure that the Government is accountable for its actions and policies affecting the Scheduled Castes and that their needs and concerns are considered.

Holding high offices by members of Scheduled Castes in India, it is a strength in several ways. First, it can be a sign of progress in terms of reducing discrimination and promoting equality. In the past, members of Scheduled Castes were often denied opportunities and faced significant barriers to advancement. They can now hold high offices, which is a positive step towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Second, it can also be seen as a sign of the strength and resilience of members of Scheduled Castes. Despite facing discrimination and adversity, they have overcome these challenges and succeeded in their fields. This is a testament to their determination and hard work. Finally, having members of Scheduled Castes in high offices can also be a source of inspiration and role models for other members of these communities. It can show that they can achieve success and positively impact in the face of barriers and discrimination.

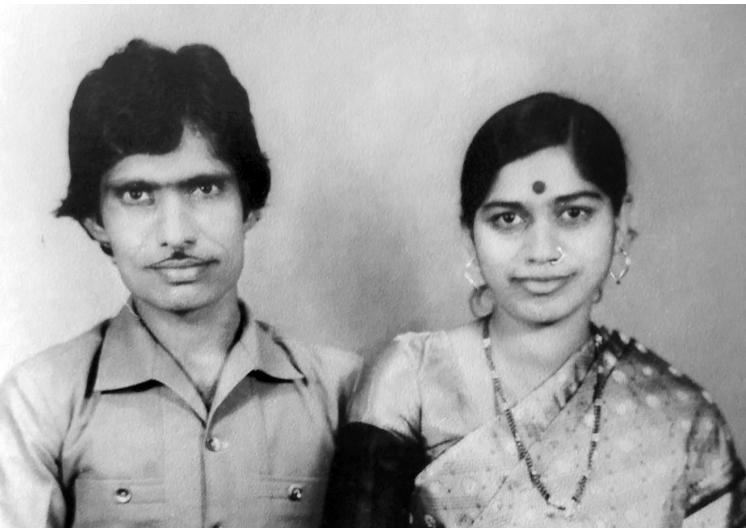
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# A story of inter-caste marriage : Three decades back

Both of us have told families about our love and our plan to get married. My family has no issue. Rajani used to come to my home. It was acceptable to my family. Rajani's family was not in opposition to marriage but certainly had some concerns and anxiety because of inter-caste marriage. They love me but not my caste. They were also under some social pressure, which made them rigid. But we were clear.



Mr. Pralhad Kachare & Mrs. Rajani Kachare

I am Pralhad Vishwanath Kachare. I belong to Hindu Kolhati (NT B) community and my spouse Mrs. Rajani Gopinath Vipradas belongs to Hindu Brahmin (Deshasth Rugvedi). Both of us come from poor family backgrounds. Both of us have big families. I have seven sisters and three brothers (including me we are 11), my spouse had four sisters and two brothers and parents. When we completed HSC in 1977 it was time for us to take over responsibilities. We were in search of job-oriented courses. I opted for English stenography after completing 12th standard in ITI Ahmednagar. My spouse who had completed 12th in Arts also got admission there.

Thus, we were in ITI Ahmednagar in the class of English stenography in the academic year 1978-79. We had a very formal relationship during this period and were in touch with each other even after completing the course. I used to visit her home also. Her family was very lovely. Somehow our friendship turned into love by the end of 1979 and it took seven years for us to marry. We got married in April 1986. Our marriage was registered under the Special Marriage Act.

I used to work as an office assistant in a private factory in Kedgaon Ahmednagar. Also, I worked in the office of superintendent of police in Ahmednagar and zilla parishad in Ahmednagar and district court in Sangamner. During the same period I completed M. Com and LLB and worked as a lecturer. Then I prepared for competitive examinations. I was selected as Tehsildar,



Mr. & Mrs. Kachare with their family.



got promotion as Deputy Collector and so on. I retired as Additional District collector in 2017.

Rajani – my wife took a private job after completing her graduation in arts. Then she joined as a civilian in defence MIRC, Ahmednagar and then in Military Engineering Service as lower division clerk and retired as Office Superintendent. She served in Ahmednagar, Nagpur, Deolali Nashik, Colaba (Mumbai) and Pune. She retired in January 2020. We do not repent having inter-caste marriage, on the contrary we are a very happy couple and we promoted many successful inter-caste marriages.

**Q) How would you recall your first meeting with the spouse? Was it an accident or arranged?**

**A :** We were in the same class for about one year and our friendship and company continued thereafter. Maybe at the end of 1979, we started meeting and feeling attracted to each other. Though I used to visit her house, we hardly got time to talk to each other. It was then difficult to meet outside also. So, colleges, offices and sometimes temple areas were our meeting places. Our meetings and coming together was not an accident, it was through our companionship.

**Q) What was your self-talk when you decided to marry, given the current social conditions?**

**A :** I found it almost impossible but love was strong and my spouse was strongly committed to what was decided. Initially self-talk was full of uncertainty but slowly we could gather courage.

**Q) How was the actual marriage ceremony?**

**A :** I approached her family with my friends but they were not in the mood to listen. I tried to convince them but in vain. Then we sent a served notice under the Special Marriage Act. Our marriage was registered in presence of six-seven well-wishers. This happened in Ahmednagar.

**Q) What was the response from both families when you decided to get married?**

**A :** Both of us have told families about our love and our plan to get married. My family has no issue. Rajani used to come to my home. It was acceptable to my family. Rajani's family was not in opposition to marriage but certainly had some concerns and anxiety because of inter-caste marriage. They love me but not my caste. They were also under some social pressure, which made them rigid. But we were

clear. We had told them categorically that we would be getting married lawfully even if they do not accept it. Fortunately, our marriage was accepted very early. Within two days after marriage, I got a message from her family that they had arranged reception for our marriage. Both of us invited friends and relatives and it's been going smoothly since then.

**Q) Who were the people who supported your decision?**

**A :** Our friends Manvendra Birulkar, Sanjay Landage, Sudhir Kher, Ranganath Wadekar, Gokul Rasal, Ambadas Unde, my brother Ramchandra Kachare, Chandrakant Kachare and Rajendra Kachare were closely supporting while there were many others. Her brother's friend late Satish Gharu was our staunch supporter and unbreakable link between both of us.

**Q) Do you have any problems in post-marriage life? How did you solve them?**

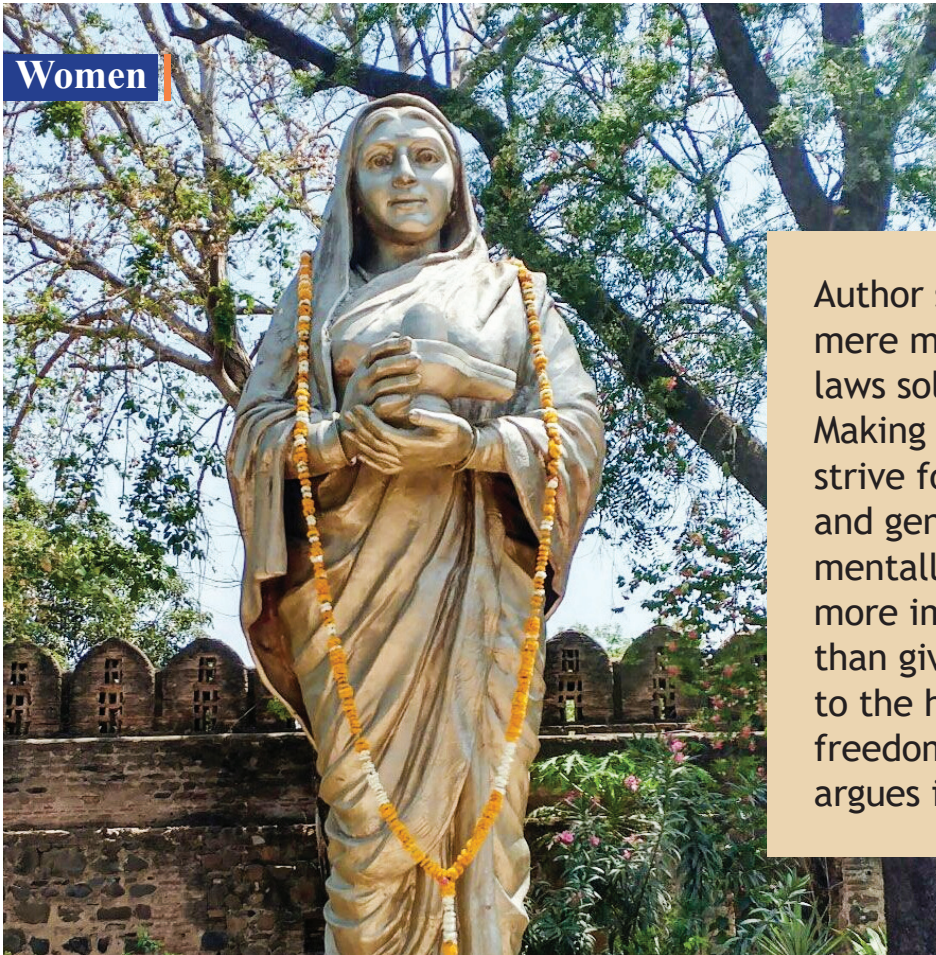
**A :** Fortunately, we did not face any problem. Maybe because Brahmins are by nature liberals, none of her relatives including her close family members have asked me what my caste is yet.

**Q) What are your views on inter-caste marriage? Do you think it will be a significant step to achieve social cohesiveness?**

**A :** I feel inter-caste marriages create a new space of gradual liberal acceptance of residing in social diversity in terms of cultural issues, traditions, ideologies, opinions, skills and thereby two different ends come together unconditionally and live together peacefully and without tensions. This may not be exact cohesion but not less than cohesion. My community i.e., Hindu Kolhati stands for social interaction. My father happens to be Kasar while my mother is from a Maratha background. My grandmother – father's mother – was a Kolhati and we are known as Kolhati. But this did not cause any problems for us. My marriage also did not cause any problem. My son – Abhay married to a Koli girl while my daughter – Pooja – married to Koknastha boy. My personal experience with inter-caste marriage has been very encouraging. Problems are always there, maybe it is an arranged marriage or inter-caste marriage. For problems it is not just to blame such a system. Both sides have now understood the need to cross the boundaries.

*As told to Ankita  
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Author stresses that mere making of laws solves no issue. Making women who strive for liberation and gender equality mentally strong is more important than giving strength to the hands giving freedom to her, she argues in this article.

# Ahilyadevi Holkar : Indian woman ruler

## Pradnya

Pious and competent queen Ahilyabai Holkar's name is inked in golden letters in the Indian history. Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar's work and her qualities are relevant in the wake of the issues faced and developments in post-independence India. Her life and work provide guidance to solve several issues.

The process of liberation or change begins in one's mind. Liberated actions become possible only when the thoughts are liberal.

For the last century, issues of women have been in focus. There have been several attempts to empower women while blaming patriarchy for the gender bias. Women in many countries have struggled for a long time to secure their rights. Even in the so-called liberated, modern,

democratic nations in Europe and USA were granted franchises after 1928, following a 100 to 150 year-long struggle.

The feminist movement had its impact on Indian society too. Social reformers including Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, Mahatma Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Lokhitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Nyaymurti Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, Karmaveer Vitthal Ramji Shinde and many others started movements to curb the evils like sati, child marriage, and remarriages of widows. Participation of women in the independence movement underlined the importance of the woman power and that it is essential for creating a liberated society too.

The year 1975 was observed as the International Women's Year and the decade





from 1975 to 1985 was observed as the Women's Decade. Concepts of Women's Liberation, Women's Freedom, and Feminism became popular during this period. However, women's empowerment and the expression of woman power had begun 250 years before that. Incidentally, the year 1975 marked the 250th birth anniversary of Ahilyabai Holkar.

Ahilyabai was born on May 31, 1725 in a backward caste family. There was little possibility of her getting an opportunity to pursue education. She spent her childhood living life of a sheep keeper. However, Bajirao Peshva and Malharrao Holkar, the King of Indore noticed the potential and qualities in the eight-year-old and married Malharrao's son Khanderao to Ahilya.

Malharrao treated his daughter-in-law like a son. He trained her in diplomatic manoeuvres. He ensured her participation in politics and social work. Resultant, Ahilyabai could govern skillfully for 27 years. Her character was so strong and her achievements were so towering that she got the status of Revered Queen Mother.

People bestowed the title "Punyashlok" to Ahilyabai due to her political, social and religious work. She was an ideal daughter, wife and homemaker, a loving mother and a ruler alert to protect the interests of her subjects. She was personification of strong character, purity of thoughts and action and due diligence.

Her husband Khanderao was a sensualist addict. Notwithstanding his flaws, Ahilyabai would treat him affectionately. She was particular in discharging her duties.

Though women of royal families observed 'Purdah' in those days, Ahilyabai did not follow the regressive practice. She prevented her daughters-in-law, rival wives and daughter from following the practice of Sati. She had the courage to oppose such regressive practices and stand up in arms against the fundamentalists whenever the need arose.

Though she embraced the modern outlook, she displayed no undue rebellious combativeness. Instead, she worked to bring about the change with courage and patience while maintaining her decency and could make tall achievements.

Various structures of temples, stairs along the riverbanks and caravan sarais built by Ahilyabai dot the entire map of the country. This is standing proof of her financial freedom and mastery of economic planning. It would

be relevant to understand how she could raise funds to finance so many public works. Her fund reserve amounted to Rs 16 crore and it all was accumulated 'Stree Dhan'. As per the practice followed by the Dhargar community in those days, if the master of the house handed over Re 1 earned by him to his wife, she would have her right to keep 4 Annas, i.e. 25 Paisas, of the total amount for herself as 'Stree Dhan'. She had the sole right to spend the wealth amassed as 'Stree Dhan'. Malharrao Holkar was a potent man who had earned the position of Subedar of Malva, established his dominance over the Rajputs and would collect revenue for Peshvas from the North India. The fund reserves of women in the Holkar family were amassed since the time of his head-wife Gautamibai. When Bajirao granted the charter of Malharrao's post in 1733, he suggested that earnings from some provinces in the Jagir of Holkars be given to the women of the family perpetually. After Gautamibai's demise, Ahilyabai became recipient of these privy rights and also Gautamibai's Stree Dhan. Thus, Ahilyabai had annual privy earnings of Rs 1,13,800. This shows how the Dhargar community practiced gender equality by adopting such practices. Instead of spending this fund to carry out public works only in her state, Ahilyabai used it to provide amenities all over the country. This shows how she was concerned about the welfare of people across Hindustan.

Ahilyabai was well aware that scientific developments can be achieved only in the nations which are protected by the weapon. Though she had appointed Tukojirao as her general, she would keep a keen eye on her army. When Raghoba Dada headed a campaign against the Holkars in 1761, she successfully deescalated by using her diplomatic skills with him. However, she had also kept her army battle-ready and sent the message to Raghoba Dada through Tukojirao that if he crossed the Kshipra River, a war would break out. Consequently, Raghoba Dada had to withdraw. Besides, Ahilyabai sternly dealt with the rebel of Rampur and awarded the death sentence to the rebel leader Sobhag Singh. This impressed Nana Phadnavis to such an extent that he awarded a gun salute to her and praised her saying, "Ahilyabai is the only woman I have seen who is capable to destroy the enemy either with a curse or an arrow."

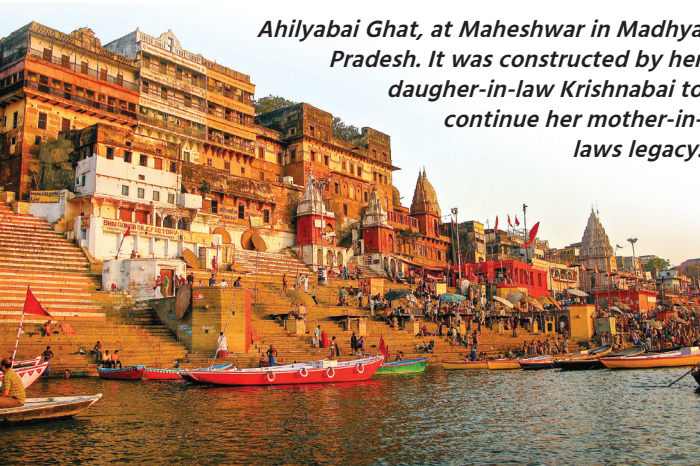
She implemented Kautilya's maxim that the interest of the king lies in the interest of





the public while acting as a ruler. She never discriminated on basis of caste and religion. Her politics and religious work were both aimed at public welfare.

Her several decisions as a ruler were amazingly far-sighted and her policies are still relevant. She believed that the king is the protector of his subjects and he rots in hell if his subjects are dissatisfied. Accordingly, she made several systemic changes. She changed



*Ahilyabai Ghat, at Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh. It was constructed by her daughter-in-law Krishnabai to continue her mother-in-laws legacy.*

the revenue system. She held the charge of state's treasury herself. She would pay surprise visits to her subordinates so that they would work diligently. She was well aware that agriculture and trade make a state wealthy and prosperous and treated matters relating to agriculture and trade with due importance. She encouraged the trade and adopted measures to promote business. She abolished the practice of confiscating the wealth of widows. She was the first ruler in the country to grant the right to adopt a child to the widows. Ahilyabai had faith in woman power and provided opportunities for women by raising a platoon of women warriors.

Lokhitwadi mentions an incident where she adopted a compassionate approach while adjudicating a case. After Khemdas, a moneylender from Sironch died, his wife sought permission to adopt a son. The administrators recommended that since the estate was huge, permission to adopt be granted to her while charging duty. Ahilyabai took a firm stand that charging such a duty when the widow has the right to adopt would be an act of plunder.

On another occasion, Ahilyabai had fearlessly questioned the then gallant ruler Mahadaji Scindia, "Mahadaba, you take out campaigns

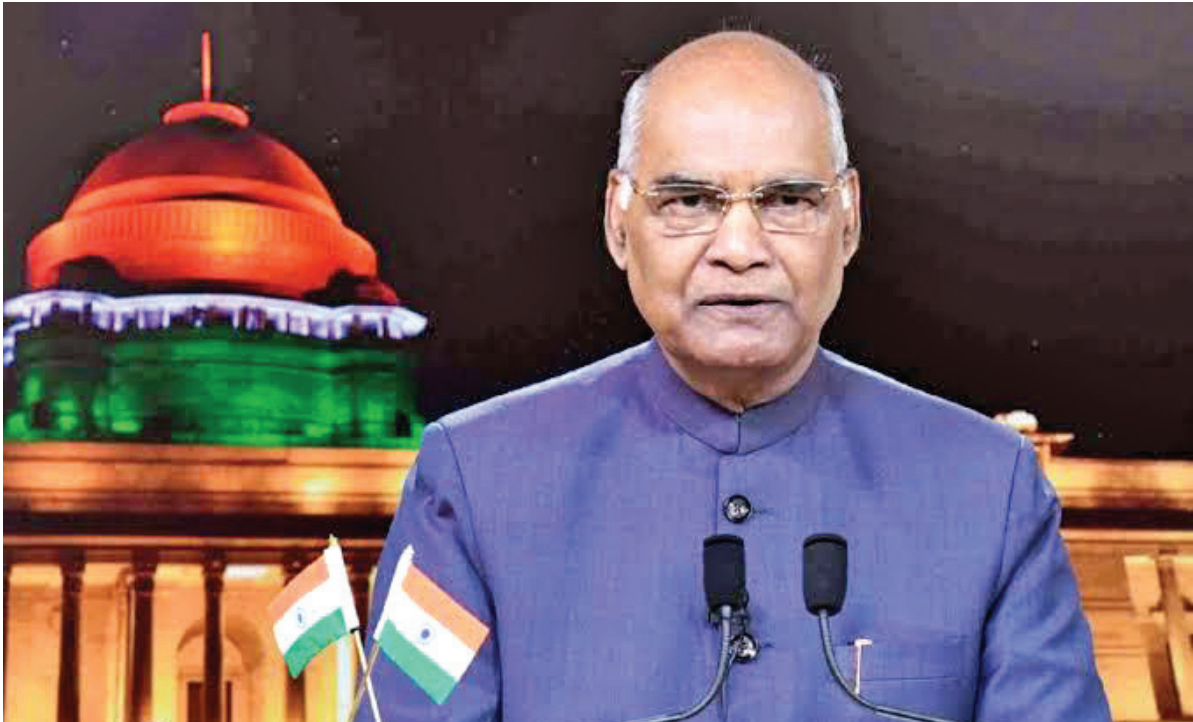
across the country. But are you aware that the British have sneaked into our country and are making the country hollow by scooping?"

Members of the Bhil community used to rob travellers passing through forests in the regions of Vindhya Mountain. Besides, they used to collect a tax called Bhil Cowrie. Ahilyabai summoned their chief. When he failed to appear before her, she arrested him and his accomplices. She awarded a death sentence to some of them. But when the community surrendered, she granted pardon and provided concessions for them to start farming and business activities to earn a livelihood. In return, she obtained surety of travellers passing through the forest from them.

John Malcolm, a British officer and historian, writes about Ahilyabai, "Such, at least is the account which the natives of Malwa give of Ahilyabai; with them her name is sainted, and she is styled an Avatar, or incarnation of the divinity. In the soberest view that can be taken of her character, she certainly appears, within her limited sphere, to have been one of the purest and most exemplary rulers that ever existed; and she affords a striking example of the practical benefit a mind may receive from performing worldly duties under a deep sense of responsibility to its Creator."

Today, we speak passionately about gender equality. Many movements have been launched across the country and the world to liberate women suppressed by the patriarchy while blaming culture, traditions and customs for it. This weakens women firmly rooted in their cultures and makes them redundant. Women are awakening to these calls to rebel and become aware of their rights. Laws are also being made to help women. Still, the solution to the issue is not in sight because mere making of laws solves no issue. Making women who strive for liberation and gender equality mentally strong is more important. Besides being resolute, a woman needs to observe self-restraint because the longing for gender equality can be expressed by adopting a natural manner and not by adopting rebellious aggression. It cannot be achieved by superficial change. It can be accomplished only by nurturing minds. The life and work of Punyashlok Ahilyabai inspire us to achieve gender equality through the rich culture.

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# A moment of pride

## Bringing deprived in mainstream

Election to the post of President of India will be held this month. Ruling BJP has nominated Draupadi Murmu, belonging to Santhal tribal community, opposition parties have fielded Yashvant Sinha. Murmu's victory is considered certain in view of the electoral strength of BJP and its friends. The most outstanding feature of the election for the highest constitutional post is - that the ruling party has fielded a woman candidate from a backward region and from a backward community. This signals a major qualitative change in the socio-political scenario of the country. Earlier, PA Sangma also fought the Presidential election but could not win. But this is not for the first time that a citizen from a backward community will be holding the post of President.

Earlier, K R Narayanan and Ramnath Kovind also occupied the post of President. Let's have a look at three personalities.

**Vijendra**







## Draupadi Murmu

The choice of Draupadi Murmu was not unexpected as her name was being discussed in BJP circles seriously. Considering BJP strategy for the past few years, it was presumed that the ruling party would choose her considering her background and also push its accommodative agenda. Notwithstanding political calculations and equations of the ruling party, Indians have to admit that it is for the second consecutive time that an individual from depressed class is occupying the highest constitutional post. Draupadi Murmu's victory is a formality considering the electoral strength of BJP and its partners.

Draupadi Murmu stands as a symbol of changing aspirations of the deprived class. Her choice for the highest constitutional post, followed by Ramnath Kovind, who



belongs to Dalit community, can be described as a well thought mindful move to bring deprived class in the mainstream. Draupadi Murmu belongs to Santhal tribe. Santhal is the third largest tribe

in India after Gond and Bhill. They have a strong presence in eastern states like Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam and West Bengal.

In Odisha, Santhal tribe is mainly situated in the districts of Balasore, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. Draupadi Murmu belongs to Mayurbhanj district. She was born in Uparbeda village of Mayurbhanj district. Santhal community is mainly engaged with agriculture, industrial labour, mining and quarrying.

The Santals are known for building beautiful multi-roomed houses of definite artistic design having spacious compounds and courtyards. They paint the walls with different colours, mainly red and black. They observe all the traditional festivals like other parts of India. Of course, their festivals are mainly concentrated around nature.

Santhal literally means "calm". Draupadi Murmu not only looks calm but she has demonstrated her calmness with determination in her personal and social life as well. She began her political career in 1997 when she was elected as counselor of Rairangpur district

in Odisha. She rose to the top of the political ladder in politics. But her personal life was full of struggle. She swallowed the tragic deaths of her three family members in a short period. She lost her two sons – one in 2009 and another in 2013. This was followed by her husband's death in 2014. But she continued her social and political work. She had once said, "I have witnessed many ups and downs in life. I have lost my two sons and husband. I was completely devastated. But God has given me the strength to continue to serve the people".


Draupadi Murmu resigned her government job to continue politics. She later became MLA and was also minister in Navin Patnaik's government when BJP was part of the government. Later she was appointed as Governor of Jharkhand. Draupadi Murmu looks modest. One of her photographs became viral after she was nominated as Presidential candidate. The photo shows how she was cleaning a temple. However, she never forgets her commitment to deprived people and shows her determination for them.

This was seen when she took some courageous decisions when she was governor of Jharkhand. In 2017, she had refused to give assent to a bill, approved by Jharkhand Assembly, seeking amendments to the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Act. The bill has sought to give rights to tribals to make commercial use of their land, while ensuring that the ownership of the land does not change. Being Governor and constitutional head of the state, she sought all the explanations on the bill.

Draupadi Murmu will not be the first woman President of India. Previously Pratibha Patil occupied this highest constitutional post. The major difference is that Murmu belongs to the tribal community. Second significant part is that Murmu is from tribal dominated and backward state Odisha unlike Maharashtra, from where Patil hails. Murmu, thus, will be the first woman president from a backward state and also deprived community. Her nomination is expected to bring tribals in the mainstream as they feel alienated because of their deprived lives.

## Dr. K. R. Narayanan

President Dr. Kocheril Raman Narayanan was born in a Dalit family, on the October 27, 1920, in Perumthanum, Uzhavoor in the Kottayam district of Kerala. Narayanan's early



education was completed at the Government Lower Primary School, Kurichithanam (1927), Our Lady of the Lorde's Upper Primary School, Uzhavoor (1931-35), St. John's High School, Koothattukulam (1935-36) and St. Mary's High School, Kuravilangad (1936-37) from where he matriculated.

A brilliant scholar, Narayanan was awarded the Travancore State Scholarship to complete



his intermediate from C.M.S. College, Kottayam (1938-40). He then went on to complete his B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. in English Literature from the University of Travancore (1940-43), standing first in the University.

From 1944-45, he started working as a journalist associated with The Hindu and The Times of India. In 1944, President Narayanan was awarded the prestigious Tata Scholarship to study at the London School of Economics, where he was awarded Bachelor of Science (Hons.) in Economics with specialization in Political Science. At the London School of Economics, he was taught by renowned scholars like Harold Laski and Karl Popper. While studying in London, President Narayanan was involved with the Indian League and was also the London correspondent for the Social Welfare Weekly published by K. M. Munshi.

Narayanan returned to India in 1948 and upon the insistence of Harold Laski met Jawaharlal Nehru who requested him to join the Indian Foreign Service. From 1949 onwards, Narayanan served in various diplomatic positions culminating in his superannuation, in 1978, as the Indian Ambassador to the People's Republic of China.

Simultaneous to his diplomatic career, President Narayanan also taught for a year, in 1954, at the Delhi School of Economics and was also the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow from 1970-72. From 1979-80, President Narayanan served as the Vice-Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, an experience he later described as laying the foundation of his public life. In 1984, Narayanan was recalled from retirement and appointed as the Indian Ambassador to the United States of America. In 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inducted Narayanan into

active politics. He was a Member of Parliament from the Ottapalam constituency for three successive tenures (1984, 1989 and 1991). In 1985, President Narayanan was appointed as the Minister for State (Planning, External Affairs and Science and Technology) in the Rajiv Gandhi government. In 1992, President Narayanan was elected as the Vice-President of India and subsequently in 1997, he was elected to the highest office of the President of India. Narayanan was the first Dalit to hold the high office of the President of India.

Upon his demise on November 9, 2005. The Centre seeks its inspiration and direction from the following lines of a speech delivered by the late President on January 25, 2000, on the eve of the Republic Day: 'Fifty years into our life in the Republic we find that justice – social, economic and political – remains an unrealized dream for millions of our fellow citizens... The growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many social upheavals can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society. Dalits and tribals are the worst affected by all this.'

### **Ram Nath Kovind**

Shri Ram Nath Kovind was sworn in as the 14th President of India on July 25, 2017. A lawyer by profession, he had been the Governor of the State of Bihar before he took over the highest constitutional office. Shri Kovind brings to the office a rich experience of working across the spectrum of the republic, from the grassroots to the apex court and parliament. He has been an ardent champion of equality in society and integrity in public life.

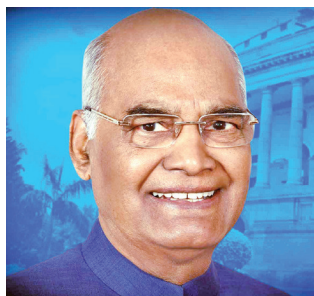
Shri Kovind was born on October 1, 1945 at village Paraunkh in Kanpur district of the State of Uttar Pradesh. Coming from a family of modest means, his beginning was humble. He attended school and college in Kanpur. He first studied commerce for Bachelors and then attained his Law degree from Kanpur University.

Shri Kovind enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Delhi in 1971. He served as Counsel of the Union Government in the Delhi High Court from 1977 to 1979. In 1978, he rose to become an Advocate-on-Record with the Supreme Court of India. From 1980 to 1993, he was Standing Counsel for the Union Government in the Supreme Court. Under the Free Legal Aid Society of New Delhi, he also



provided pro-bono aid to weaker sections of society, especially women and the poor.

Shri Kovind was elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of Parliament, from Uttar Pradesh effective from April 1994. He served two consecutive terms of six years each till March 2006. Serving on numerous Parliamentary Committees, he gathered in-depth experience in governance. He addressed the United Nations General Assembly on October 22, 2003 as a member of the Indian delegation.



Shri Kovind is an ardent advocate of education as a tool for social empowerment.

He actively supports greater participation of women in nation-building and has been consistently

calling for the society to create more opportunities for the deprived sections, especially the disabled and the orphans. He served as a Member on the Board of Management of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Lucknow, and also as a Member on the Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata. President Kovind's vision is to contribute towards creating that optimal partnership between citizens and their representatives in the Government.

Shri Kovind was appointed Governor of the State of Bihar on

August 8, 2015. His term as Governor received all-round appreciation for upholding the values of the Constitution. He, in his capacity as Chancellor, introduced several reforms and modern technology in the working of State Universities and brought transparency in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors. He earned respect from leaders of all political parties for his statesmanship, sagacity and adhering to democratic ethos.

Shri Kovind's achievements as a Governor burnished his credentials as a candidate for the Presidency in 2017. After his election to the highest constitutional office, he has discharged his duties as the first citizen of India with foresight and humility. He has paid State Visits to 33 countries till June 2022 enhancing India's global outreach and footprint. On these State Visits, President Kovind conveyed India's timeless message of peace, progress and harmony. As the President of India, he has received the highest State honours from six countries, namely Madagascar, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Croatia, Bolivia and Republic of Guinea.

As the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of India, in May 2018 President Kovind made a historic visit to the troops deployed at 'Kumar Post' in Siachen, the highest battlefield in the world. He is an avid reader and has keen interest in books on politics and social change, law, history and spirituality. Shri Kovind married Shrimati Savita Kovind in May 1974. They have a son and a daughter.

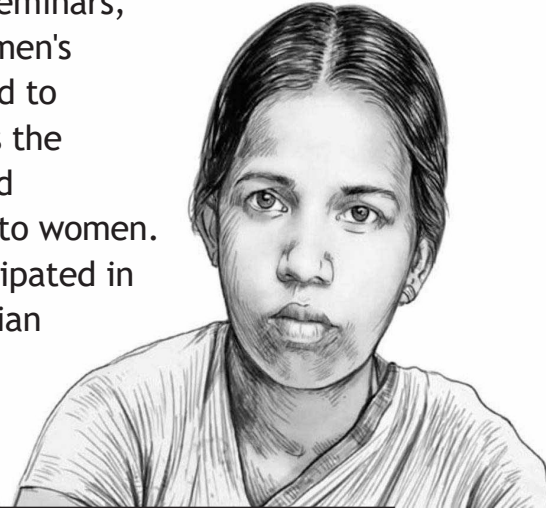
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# Dakshayani Velayudhan: Only SC woman, member of constituent assembly

Through AIWC, Dakshayani organized conferences, seminars, and workshops to discuss pressing issues such as women's health, employment, and legal rights. Her efforts led to tangible changes in the lives of countless women, as the conference played a vital role in shaping policies and legislation that were more inclusive and favourable to women. Furthermore, Dakshayani Velayudhan actively participated in the Indian independence movement, joining the Indian National Congress. She firmly believed that political freedom was incomplete without the liberation of women from social and economic oppression.



Dr. Neha Singh

India stands together as one of the largest democracies in the world. In the celebration of 75 year of independence one needs to acknowledge the contributions of the constituent assembly members as they moulded the country into a democratic model. The world today looks at India as a rapid developing fast-growing economy and the country might not have achieved this status sans the strength of our constitution.

We had 15 women members in our Constituent Assembly. And one of them was Dakshayani Velayudhan, a woman who belonged to the oppressed and deprived section of the society and had reached there. She had made important interventions on various topics related to deprived classes and labourers.

Thus, this Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav it becomes important to discuss the contributions of strong women such as Dakshayani Velayudhan in our Constituent Assembly. Dakshayani Velayudhan was a name that echoed throughout the realms of social reform and women empowerment

in India. The anti-caste movements in India have a long history that were radicalized in varied ways. Different regions at different times observed varied social reformers such as Jyotirao Phule, Sree Narayana Guru, Periyar emphasized on self-respect movement and Adi Dravida Movement while Dr. Ambedkar created a highly contested political phenomena during the colonial and post-colonial times. The commonality in all these movements were the cultural heritage that became the locus of political contestation amongst the marginalized communities in order to assert on their identities and rights.

Born in 1912, the time that she lived in itself is testimony to her struggle as a woman and as a Scheduled Caste, since the oppression of both was considered natural at that time. She created history by covering the upper part of her body at a time when women from oppressed castes were not allowed to cover their breasts. Later (from 1813 to 1859) the state witnessed the Maru Marakkal Samaram or Channar revolt for women's right to wear clothes to cover their



upper body. Dakshayani had other unique achievements to her credit, too. She was the first woman to pass ESLC (Education equivalent to that of present time's tenth standard) and the first Indian Scheduled Caste woman to become a graduate. "One such fascinating personality in the Constituent Assembly was Dakshayani Velayudhan, a Scheduled Caste woman, coming from an untouchable family, much admired by the 14 other upper caste, privileged and Western-educated women with her in the Assembly for her intellectual interventions against social injustices and towards inclusive governance in the assembly debates.

Thus, through the discussion on the life and intervention in Constituent Assembly Debates, the chapter intends to emphasize on the radical traditions within the Scheduled caste women movement to address issues like separate electorate, social reforms, the state within a conceptual framework of liberty, equality and non-discrimination.

#### **Her Social and Political Journey:**


Dakshayani Velayudhan was born in 1912 in the Mulavukad village of Ernakulam district and belonged to the Pulaya community in Cochin. The Pulayas were mostly agricultural labourers. Women from the Pulaya community were prohibited by dominant caste persons from covering their torsos (they were only permitted to cover themselves with bead necklaces), having an access to education, cutting their hair or even coming in close proximity to people from dominant castes. She defied these norms since she was a little child.

She dedicated her life to challenging societal norms and advocating for the rights and upliftment of women in the country. With her unwavering determination, relentless efforts, and remarkable achievements, Dakshayani Velayudhan became a symbol of change and progress for generations to come. "I can't say that I was born in a poor Pulaya family as the family was not poor at the time of my birth. Unlike other Pulaya families in Cochin state, we had a house of our own and the compound of more than one acre with coconut and other fruit trees. The family could live with income from the coconuts. My father was a village school teacher ... the school being the house itself. He used to go for contract work of bunds, with the other male members of the family. My two elder brothers were the first in the community in the state to crop their long-knotted hair and wear shirts. When they went through the

road, other community people used to hoot at them and when going by country boat, the people threw stones at them because they were wearing clothes like upper castes, who were mostly Latin Christians and Ezhavas in my island native place.

Dakshayani's narration of the 1913 formation of the Pulaya Mahajana Sabha, one of the earliest counter publics, involving her maternal uncle and elder brothers, conveys the process of exploration and interpretation of self and society as well as the private experiences and public practices of anti-caste struggles: The meeting was held with country boats tied together in the sea in Bolghatty—the sea did not have a caste. In Kochi, the untouchables were not allowed to hold a meeting 'in my land' by the Maharaja. The raft was made by joining together a large number of catamarans with the help and support of the fisherfolk. The historic Kayal Sammelanam (Meeting on the Backwaters) of 1913 sent out a message of solidarity and protest that led to a meeting of over a thousand men and women in the grounds of St Albert School, Ernakulam and the formation of the Cochin Pulaya Mahajana Sabha.

Her journey as an advocate for women education began with her involvement in the Kerala Mahila Mandal, an organization dedicated to promoting women rights. Dakshayani played a pivotal role in establishing and expanding the organization, ensuring that it reached the grassroots level and reached women across Kerala. Under her leadership, the Kerala Mahila Mandal opened schools, vocational training centres, and provided scholarships to deserving young women. One of Dakshayani's significant achievements was the establishment of the All-India Women Conference (AIWC) in Kerala. She recognized the need for a platform that could bring together women from different backgrounds and provide them with a collective voice. Through AIWC, Dakshayani organized conferences, seminars, and workshops to discuss pressing issues such as women's health, employment, and legal rights. Her efforts led to tangible changes in the lives of countless women, as the conference played a vital role in shaping policies and legislation that were more inclusive and favourable to women. Furthermore, Dakshayani Velayudhan actively participated in the Indian independence movement, joining the Indian National Congress and working alongside notable figures such



as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. She firmly believed that political freedom was incomplete without the liberation of women from social and economic oppression. Her involvement in the independence movement allowed her to amplify her message and push for women rights on a larger scale.

#### **Her Intervention in the Constituent Assembly Debates:**

It is no doubt that the social and political journey of Dakshayani Velayudhan has been very difficult yet path breaking as it had to fight the overlapping identity of a Scheduled Caste woman to get integrated into the mainstream society. There is a very dearth of literature available on her which itself reflects how little the society has taken interest in the journey of a Scheduled Caste woman leader. This discourse needs to be altered. Not many may be aware that she was also the first SC woman graduate in BSc Chemistry from Maharajas College. But due to the caste system she was stopped from performing experiments. This was at the receiving end of the caste system. And hence in her first speech in the Constituent Assembly, she paid homage to Gandhi's Harijans of the new India. She had been a staunch supporter of Gandhi but on the basis of her own life experiences she opined that the term Harijan itself is insufficient to provide the deprived classes a status of acceptance in the society. According to her, "The Independent Socialist Indian Republic can give freedom and equality of status to the Harijans."

She believed that in independent India the progress of the Harijans can be only brought about by emancipating their economic status. The Harijans were not only oppressed by the caste hierarchical structure but were also exploited by the communists. "She held that the Constituent Assembly should go beyond framing a constitution and give 'people a new framework of life', use the opportunity to make untouchability illegal and ensure a 'moral safeguard that gives real protection to the underdogs in India.'"

Her idea of moral safeguards rested on the idea that only an independent socialist republic could help uplift deprived classes, remove social disabilities and give them the liberties exercised by every citizen. She added, 'the working of the Constitution will depend upon how the people will conduct themselves in the future, not just the actual execution of the law. So, I hope that in the course of time there will be no such

community known as Untouchables.' Therefore, new India required the atmosphere of socialism to even out the oppression and hierarchies.

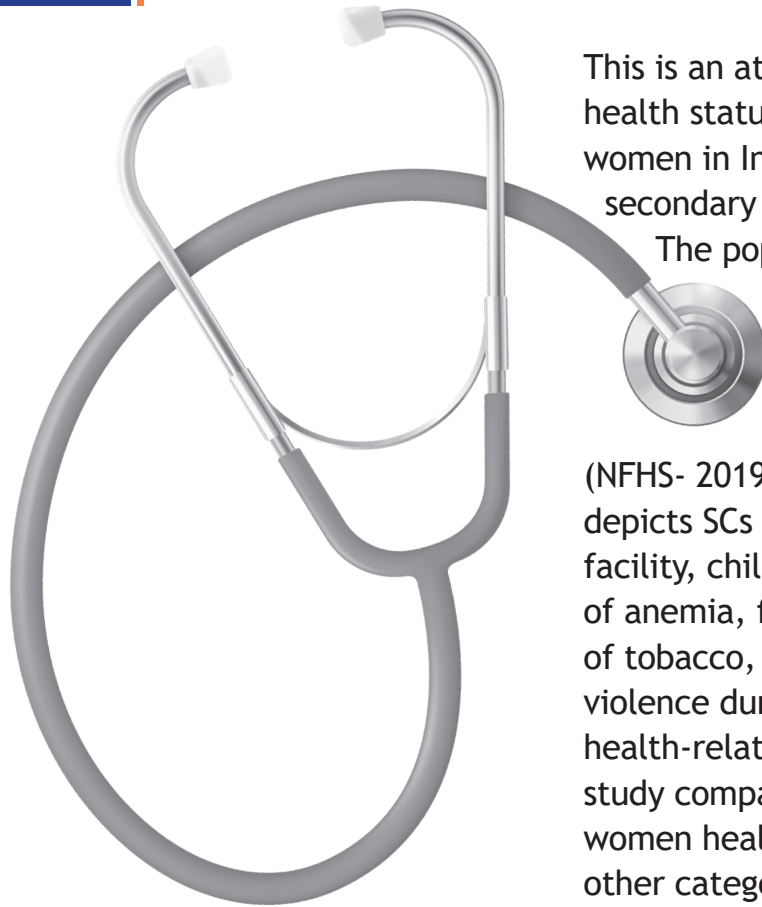
#### **On the question of Decentralization:**

On November 8, 1948 when the Vice president allowed the minority speakers to express themselves in the house, Dakshayani contended that the new constitution was merely a replica of the Government of India Act, 1935. She believed that it had the similar nature of centralized power in its hands. Instead, the country must look for the democratic means to decentralize its powers. She opposed Dr Ambedkar's insistence on the continuation of the Government of India Act, 1935 and said, "The Committee feels that if the Governor and the Chief Minister who is responsible to the Legislature are elected by the people then there will be friction between the two. But the remedy they have suggested is worse than the disease. There is a panel and the President is to select from the four one person as a Governor. If the Centre happens to have a Congress President and if a province is having a Socialist majority, suppose the Socialist party recommends three from their party and one from the Congress, certainly the President at the Centre will select the Congressman to be the Governor. Certainly, this will lead to friction. We find that this direct recruitment to Governorship is taken from the Government of India Act and it shows that we have not left out even a comma from it."

The work of Dakshayani needs to be celebrated as it is significant even in today's times. Whether it is her stand on the process of decentralization which is reflected via the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act or call for the protection of rights. The Scheduled Caste women's influence redefined the feminist discourse on issues such as caste violence, access to education etc. When the awareness was created amongst the SC women, the SC activists discussed varied topics such as their diverse topics such as environment, social issues, economic issues etc. It has been only possible with the efforts of women such as Dakshayani who laid a firm foundation for the protection and empowerment of the SC rights. It is only owing to her efforts that we have women such as Shrimati Draupadi Murmu as a President of our country.

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This is an attempt to assess the health status of the Scheduled Caste women in India. For this purpose, secondary data has been collected.

The population- and literacy-related information has been collected from the National Family Health Survey-2019-2020 (NFHS- 2019-2020). This study depicts SCs women's access to toilet facility, child mortality, prevalence of anemia, food consumption, use of tobacco, accessing health care, violence during pregnancy and other health-related aspects. Also, the study compares the Scheduled Caste women health status with that of other categories of women.

# SC women's health : Core area to be attended

Dr. Raghavendra R. H. & Anil Kumar R.

As Babasaheb Ambedkar said "I measure the progress of the community by the degree of progress, which women have achieved in that community". Scheduled Caste women, approximately three fourths live in rural areas where they face systematic oppression, social exclusion, and direct and structural violence from within their own community as well as from 'upper' castes, and these problems have been reflected in poor maternal health outcomes. Scheduled caste women generally have limited access to education. It is due to the lack of education that the deprived class women are not able to come out of their poverty and marginalized situations. Being

illiterate, they are not aware of their own rights and thus upper caste people can easily exploit and oppress them. Lack of education also keeps them ignorant about health knowledge and they become easy prey to pandemic diseases. Contemporarily women in India are empowering due to the availability of education, but Scheduled caste women are not like that. Very few come out of the obstacles and empowered.

The present study reports the National Family Health Survey-2019-20, health measures to compare the Scheduled Caste women status with others. Indeed, many of India's health indicators fare poorly in



### Comparison of Scheduled caste population with overall population

Indicator	Absolute				Percentage	
	2001		2011		2001	2011
	SCs	Overall	SCs	Overall		
Total	16,66,35,700	1,02,86,10,328	20,13,78,086	1,21,05,69,573	16.2/100	16.6/100
Rural	13,30,10,878	74,23,02,537	15,38,50,562	83,34,63,448	17.9/100	18.5/100
Urban	3,36,24,822	28,63,07,791	4,75,27,524	37,71,06,125	11.7/100	12.6/100

comparison with its neighbouring countries and economic peers. To improve the nation's health, the message is that politicians need to address the caste system. They must work towards creating equality, opportunity, and investment in health and education. Caste can no longer be ignored in Indian society. Health interventions, which target SC/ST may also have to address both perceived and actual stigma and discrimination, in addition to providing needed services.

Strategies for overcoming these barriers may include sensitization of healthcare workers, targeted health education and outreach, and culturally appropriate community-level interventions. In this context, Scheduled Castes women's health status has been discussed with certain health related factors. In the light of above observations, the paper critically sets the objective to study the health status of scheduled caste women in India.

The above table shows the Scheduled Caste total population comparison with percentage. As per the 2011 census, the Scheduled Caste total population is 16.6 percent. Out of the total rural population, 18.5 percent of SCs are living in rural areas and in the case of total urban population 12.6 percent of SCs are living in urban areas. Four states account for nearly half of the country's Scheduled Caste population, reveals the 2011 census. Uttar Pradesh stands first with 20.5% of the total scheduled caste (SC) population, followed by West Bengal with 10.7%, Bihar with 8.2% and Tamil Nadu with 7.2 % come third and fourth.

Scheduled Caste women in rural settings face a number of serious challenges, including lack of access to resources, health, land, basic services and justice. Scheduled castes form a large proportion of India's agricultural workers but they generally do not own land and they

### Percentage of households having access to a toilet

Household	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled caste	71.2	91.4	76.9
Scheduled tribes	65.1	88.8	68.5
OBCs	75.7	95.6	82.3
Others	87.8	98.6	92.5

are forced to do low-paying and undesirable occupations such as street sweeping and removing human waste and dead animals. They are often not allowed to use the same wells or attend the same temples as higher castes. The landlords' socio-economic and political power in rural, agricultural areas and status as employers of deprived class women allows for continual caste and gender violence.

### Early childhood mortality rates

Household	Rural				
	Neo-natal	Post-neonatal	Infant	Child	Under five
Scheduled caste	31.4	11.8	43.2	9.1	51.9
Scheduled tribes	29.7	13.2	42.9	9.8	52.2
OBCs	26.8	10.5	37.3	7.4	44.4
Others	22.4	9.1	31.5	5.2	36.6
Urban					
Scheduled caste	22.0	10.2	32.2	7.1	39.0
Scheduled tribes	21.8	10.3	32.1	3.5	35.5
OBCs	17.4	8.0	25.5	4.5	29.9
Others	14.5	7.5	21.9	4.4	26.3



Deprived class women are met with physical, verbal and sexual violence from the landlords when they try to assert their economic right to wages or land and their right to sexual integrity.

#### Access to a toilet facility

Having a household toilet improves the quality of life for all members of the household, more so women and girls. While the inconvenience of travelling to and from an open defecation site and the risk of contracting diseases is faced by women alike; these problems are exacerbated in the case of women and girls. The material reality of not having a toilet at home results in poor menstrual hygiene management and the withholding of food and water, leading to undernourishment, reproductive and bladder infections.

Such health problems are heightened for pregnant women. Critically, open defecation

Household	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Scheduled caste	25.5	30.5	3.2
Scheduled tribes	26.4	35.2	3.0
OBCs	25.3	26.8	2.5
Others	26.1	27.9	2.3

places women and girls in danger, as they often face harassment and assault from men, or are attacked by animals. A lack of toilets, therefore, leads to stigma, stress, and anxiety.

The data clearly shows that the open defecation among Scheduled Tribes is very high, compared to other households, the next highest is Scheduled Caste, around 24% not

having access to toilet facilities at home. OBCs and others have less open defecation rates. The govt should adopt behavioural changes through the Swachh Bharat Schemes and need to adopt targeted beneficiary approach to eradicate open defecation.

#### Early childhood mortality rates

The mortality indicators are still being used as important parameters for indirectly assessing the health of the population and the nutritional status. Children belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are more likely to die before their fifth birthday than those born in non-SC/ST families.

The above table clearly shows the desperate situation of lack of facilities to SC women in India. The Neonatal mortality, post neonatal mortality, infant mortality, child mortality and under five mortalities are high in scheduled caste (Both Rural and Urban areas) compared to OBCs and other communities, this shows SC women are facing severe problems more during and after pregnancy. The whole data vividly shows the desperate scenario of SC women health status after the pregnancy. Government should improve access to health facilities for mothers and children belonging to deprived caste groups in India. Continuous efforts to raise the level of maternal education and the economic status of people belonging to deprived caste groups should be pursued simultaneously.

#### Prevalence of anemia in women (Percentage of women age 15-49 with anemia)

The common cause of anemia in the general population is iron deficiency. Anemia is adversely affecting women of reproductive age and child health, which in turn results in increased morbidity and maternal death, and also hamper social-economic growth.

TABLE 5	Type of foods									
	Milk or curd	Pulses or beans	Dark green, leafy vegetables	Fruits	Eggs	Fish	Chicken or Meat	Fish or Meat	Fried foods	Aerated drink
Scheduled caste	68.7	92.2	90.6	44.4	48.4	37.4	37.7	47.7	42.9	15.0
Scheduled tribes	54.9	90.3	91.0	37.4	46.4	36.0	37.1	46.0	38.0	12.5
OBCs	76.5	93.6	90.2	50.3	42.7	32.4	33.7	42.0	41.9	15.2
Others	74.9	93.5	91.9	57.9	45.7	39.6	37.5	47.7	47.0	18.1





Household	% who use any kind of tobacco	% who smoke cigarettes	% who smoke bidis
Scheduled caste	4.6	0.1	0.2
Scheduled tribes	11.1	0.2	0.2
OBCs	2.9	0.1	0.1
Others	3.2	0.1	0.1

Reproductive women are more prone to anemia due to inadequate dietary intake and iron loss during menstruation and pregnancy.

The above data clearly depicts the rate of severe anemia among SCs women is very high compared to STs, OBCs and others. Severe anemia is very prevalent among SC women - 3.2 %, whereas other categories have less severe cases - STs women is 3.0%, OBCs is 2.5% and others is 2.3%. The SC and ST women are more prone to any anemia than OBC and other women. Economic status dominantly controls the anemia in all social groups. Different potential factors among SC women including rural residency, lower education, lower empowerment, poor economic condition, lower nutrition status, higher childbearing increases the chances to be anemic.

**Women’s food consumption (Percentage of women age 15-49 consuming specific foods)**

Food consumption patterns and dietary diversity are vital sources for the nutrition status of pregnant women (PW) and lactating women (LW), children, and adolescent girls. SC and ST women in India have been reported to suffer from a lack of proper food intake, which can negatively affect their health and well-being. **(Please refer table 5)**

The quality of food we consume determines our health status; the table shows various food items consumed by different communities’ women (15-49 age group). Consumption of fruits is very less among SCs and STs women i.e., 44.4% and 37.4%. Consumption of milk and curd is also relatively low among SC women and ST women compared to OBCs and others. Poor health conditions among SC and ST women are caused by insufficient consumption of nutritious food, leading to

undernutrition and related health issues. Women play a central role in the nutritional status

of children, therefore the urgent need to address the public health problem of under nutrition in women.

**Prevalent tobacco consumption**

Tobacco consumption has become pandemic, and is estimated to have killed 100

S. No	Caste/tribe	Percentage who experienced violence during pregnancy
1	Scheduled caste	3.7
2	Scheduled tribes	3.6
3	OBCs	3.1
4	Others	2.5

million people in the 20th century worldwide. Some 700,000 out of 5.4 million deaths due to tobacco consumption were from India. Tobacco consumption by females is known to have grave consequences.

Lack of illiteracy also affects the health of women; the table shows that the usage of tobacco among SC and ST women is very high. OBCs and Others have less percentage compared to SCs and STs women. Frequent consumption of tobacco also reduces the life expectancy and also causes lung related diseases. Increased tobacco consumption by SC-ST women poses very severe hazards to their health, maternal and child health, and their family health and economic well-being. Due to the remarkably complex Indian picture of SC women tobacco consumption, an immediate and compulsory implementation of tobacco control policies laid down by the WHO FCTC is the need of the hour.

**Problems in accessing health care**

Deprived class women face the double burden of being lower caste and female. These women have the lowest healthcare utilization and outcome percentage. Living conditions and occupations put them at high risk for disease exposure. This clubbed with discrimination from healthcare workers and lack of awareness makes them the most disadvantaged groups in society. Most of the SC population resides in rural areas and face challenges in travelling to healthcare centres.



In urban areas, SC families can be found in urban slums. Most do not avail healthcare subsidies due to a lack of identification documents.

Problems in accessing health care have a major impact on women's health status, there are various problems to access health care facilities. For SC women, major problems are lack of availability of drugs (40.8%), concern that no provider available (39.5), distance to health facility (24.3%), getting money for treatment (24.1%), transport (23.1%), seeking permission to go for treatment also another vital problem of SCs women problems for accessing medical advice or treatment for themselves when they are sick. According to data from the National Family Health Survey, life expectancy at birth for the general caste is 68.0 years. The life expectancy of SC and ST is significantly lower at 63.0 and 64.0 years respectively- this is likely due to the uncertain and unsafe conditions they are exposed to.

#### **Experience of violence during pregnancy**

Domestic violence in pregnancy is a serious public health problem that can put the life of the pregnant woman and the foetus at risk. There are many dangerous effects that violence during pregnancy can cause for both the mother and child. A violent pregnancy is considered high risk because verbal, emotional, and physical abuse all lead to adverse health consequences for both the mother and foetus. Violence during pregnancy has been associated with miscarriage, late prenatal care, stillbirth, preterm birth, fatal injury (including bruising, broken and fractured bones, stab wounds and low birth weight. Violence during pregnancy also leads to additional risks for the mother such as increased mental health problems, suicide attempts, worsening of chronic illness, injury, substance abuse, anxiety, stress, chronic pain, and gynaecological problems. A study conducted in hospitals in India found that 16% of all deaths during pregnancy were a result of partner violence.

Another major factor which affects the health status of women is domestic violence, the table shows that the percentage who experienced violence during pregnancy is very high among SCs women - 3.7%. violence leads to long term health imbalance and it will also affect their next pregnancy.

#### **Conclusion:**

The Scheduled Castes women in India

represent the most backward and deprived section in the society. The present article has discussed how the SCs women lag behind in terms of the various human development indicators of health and access to health schemes provided to them. They are at the bottom of social indicators, such as health and education, and they are exploited economically, socially and psychologically in every sphere. The government of India,



knowing this, has adopted various affirmative action and constitutional safeguards for their uplift. The various policies and actions adopted have seen a positive outcome in various spheres and have led to the improvement of the conditions of this deprived group. But the various provisions sometimes become a myth such that they face difficulty in accessing these provisions due to ignorance and sometimes due to social boundaries such as caste or race. However, in order for significant progress to be made in increasing the human development status of SC women, development organizations must continue to explore varying levels of incentives and pursue national social equality in India.

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# Ramji Gond :

## An unsung tribal warrior

The wounded Ramji Gond could not run far away. After scorched earth military strategy, the Nizam British army eventually caught him along with his men. Ramji Gond was hanged along with a thousand Gond revolutionaries during the mid-September 1860 to the branches of a banyan tree on the outskirts of Nirmal which came to be known as ‘Banyan of Thousand Nooses’.

**T. Dheeraj**

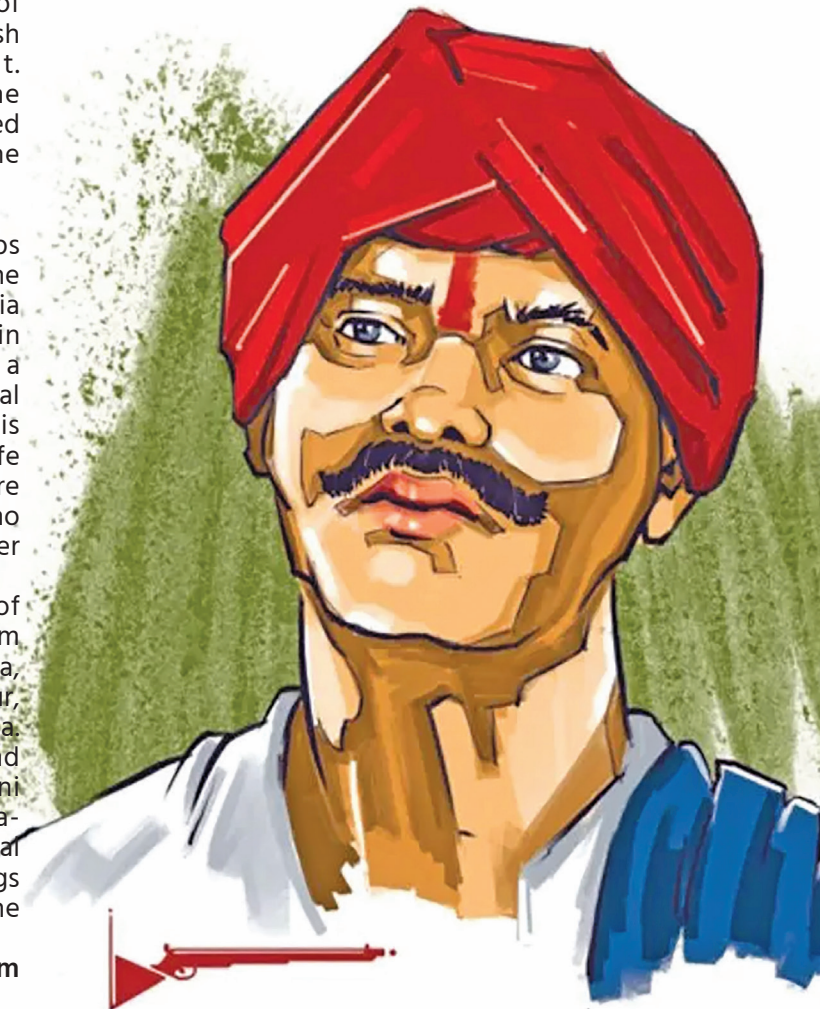
As early as the first war of Independence in 1857, the tribal tracts in the north of Godavari saw an uprising to fight the British residency and the Nizam’s government. Marsukola Ramji Gond, hailing from the Gond community, had successfully organized Gonds, Rohillas and Deccanis against the rulers.

**The Gonds and their Origins**

Gonds are one of the largest tribal groups in the Indian subcontinent, and perhaps the world. They are spread across central India and the Deccan plateau, mostly living in the hilly and forests areas. The Gonds as a community have a much more varied social profile. While a significant section of this community still lives a close-to-nature life involving hunting, some forms of agriculture and pastoral activity, some sections are no strangers to political and economic power since as early as the 15th century.

The Gonds formed many kingdoms of historical significance. The Chanda Kingdom at the present Chandrapur in Maharashtra, founded in 1400 CE, traces its origin to Sirpur, a region now part of northern Telangana. The most illustrious rulers from the Gond Community were the iconic queen, Rani Durgavati, from the Kingdom of Garha-Mandla. She is known for fighting the Mughal emperor, Akbar. The clout of the Gond kings came to an end in the 18th century after the rise of Marathas.

**The Gonds, The British and the Nizam**







## rule

After winning over the Maratha Kingdom in the Third Anglo-Maratha War, The British annexed most of the remaining Gond Zamindaris and took over the revenue collection. The Gondwana Kingdom in Hyderabad region came under the Nizam rule and the region was known as Berar Subah. The British Government signed a treaty with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1853, under which the territory came under the administration of the British, although the Nizam retained formal sovereignty over the province.

### Leading up to the 1857 Revolts

The Mughals, long lost in the wars against the Marathas were restricted only to the outer walls of Delhi and the defeat of Marathas in the Third-Anglo-Maratha war resulted in the British seizing control of most of the Indian subcontinent. The imperial policies of the British, like the Subsidiary Alliance, Doctrine of Lapse, harsh land taxes and other factors caused seething discontent among the people. It led to the rise in the number of rebellions, insurrections, and movements against them.

By June 1857, the whole of North India was ablaze with the fever of independence. It spread like wildfire from one station to another. The Peshwa Nana Saheb had risen against the British at Kanpur, Tatya Tope and Rani of Jhansi became accredited leaders of the mutinous soldiers and captured the fort of Gwalior.

Rumours about the reverses suffered by the British troops in the northern part of India were lapped up in great pleasure by the people of Hyderabad. Gradually, the mutiny spread to the south. Ranga Rao, an emissary of Nana Saheb, was sent to influence the Muslims of Hyderabad in his favour but failed in his objective as they had been estranged by the Marathas by bitter memories of the past.

The Rohillas, considered adherents of Nana Saheb, infiltrated the Deccan and carried out insurrections. Rohilla concentrations took place at Ajanta, Basmati, Latur, Makthal and Nirmal. However, the people of Hyderabad always had a strong current of anti-British feelings from 1800 onwards. All sections of Hyderabad also felt the loss of Berar. The disaffection among the people in Deccan came to the fore when the contingent troops of Hyderabad rebelled in Aurangabad in June 1857.

As the news of the outbreak in North India reached Hyderabad, The Moulwis and Arabs in

the city exhorted the Muslims to start a holy war against the British infidels and re-establish the Delhi throne. The circumstances later led to the attack on the British Residency by the Rohillas led by Moulvi Allaudin and Rohilla leader Turebaz Khan, but it was soon repelled with the help of Nizam and British troops. Other parts of Deccan too saw insurrections by princes and zamindars in the likes of Raja Venkatappa Naik of Shorapur, Bhim Rao Desai at Kopbal and Bhaskar Rao, Zamindar of Nargund.

To suppress the revolt, all possible measures, including the marching of contingent troops, the 47th Regiment NI (North India) forming part of the Bellary column and the posting of a detachment under subsidiary force under colonel Roberts at Hingolee were taken. For aiding the British in suppressing these revolts,

**The Banyan Tree, a symbol of atrocities and an oppressive regime at Nirmal, fell down around a decade ago, erasing along with it the memory of Ramji Gond and his army from collective memory, making him an unsung hero. Remembered for his extraordinary courage and heroism, Ramji Gond stood as an inspiration to the rise of another Gond leader, Kumaram Bheem.**

the British government amply rewarded the Nizam with the principality of Shorapur, and the Knighthood was conferred upon him in recognition of his faithful services.

### The Revolt in Nirmal

The British allied with the Nizam of Hyderabad heavily bore down on the Gonds by restricting their access to the forests and plundered the wealth of the forests. The Gonds were marginalized by the colonial forest policies and prohibitive taxes were imposed on the forest products used. They had to face many hardships and misery, which created havoc in their lives but never gave up. The spark of revolution began with Marsukola Ramji Gond.

By 1858, the Rohillas and Bhils spread themselves over the Deccan and caused



widespread disturbances against the British. At Nirmal, the Gonds, under the leadership of Ramji Gond, joined hands with the

Rohillas under the leadership of Haji Ali Nusrat. They trained the young fighters in guerrilla warfare and intensified the fight against the British. The guerrilla warfare and familiarity with the rugged terrain and forest in the Nirmal Ghats gave them an upper hand over the British. Ramji Gond was initially successful with his guerrilla warfare techniques for over two years in the large forest tracts spanning from Nirmal to Narayankhed in the west, Chennur in the east and the Godavari in the south.

On April 1, 1860, the collector of Nirmal received information that Ramji Gond and his band were sheltering at a mountain at a distance of 15 km from Nirmal. The place they camped was not easily accessible. The situation was that two people could hardly pass side by side and even daily necessities were not available there. Irrespective of the hostile terrain, the collector proceeded with the available force.

By noon they came face to face with

Ramji's army comprising about 200 Rohillas and 300 Gonds and Deccanis. At first, firing was exchanged between them and was soon followed by sword fighting. The offensive warfare by the Nizam and British forces was designed to strike a quick and focused blow. Many of the rebels were wounded, and a few others were killed. The invading army found 30 dead bodies of the rebel Rohillas and others. Some Jamedars of the rebel forces identified the dead body of Miyasahb Kurd, a chief of the Rohillas who came from Narayankhed.

Though the Collector's army was successful in rounding up the rebels, their chieftains Ramji Gond and Haji Ali managed to escape. The British Resident at Hyderabad was apprised of the details of this ambush and he appreciated the services of the collector, urging the arrest of Ramji Gond as soon as possible.

Fateh Ali Khan, Thanedar of Chennur, was deputed to assist the Thanedar of Adilabad. In his capacity as an administrator, he appears to have taken action against the rebels of that region by certainly chasing them, rounding them up and bringing them to book as promised to the British resident at Hyderabad, according to his letter number 155, dated April 9, 1860. The wounded Ramji Gond could not run far away. After scorched earth military strategy, the Nizam British army eventually caught him along with his men. Ramji Gond is said to have been hanged along with a thousand Gond revolutionaries during the mid-September 1860 from the branches of the banyan tree on the outskirts of Nirmal which came to be known as 'Banyan of Thousand Nooses'.

Till the end, Ramji Gond demonstrated valour in his fight against the Nizam and the British. After all these years, the punishment meted out to the captured men can send a shudder down one's spine. The Banyan Tree, a symbol of atrocities and an oppressive regime at Nirmal, fell down around a decade ago, erasing along with it the memory of Ramji Gond and his army from collective memory, making him an unsung hero. Remembered for his extraordinary courage and heroism, Ramji Gond stood as an inspiration to the rise of another Gond leader, Kumaram Bheem, who fought against the Nizam-British forces and attained martyrdom in 1940.

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Baji Rout, resident of Dhenkanal district of Odisha, is an inspiration as he became martyr when he was only 12-years-old. Baji Rout refused to ferry British soldiers, despite being threatened. Angry British soldiers mercilessly killed Baji Rout. The incident took place in 1938.



# 12-year-old boy refused to obey and got killed

Dr. Nirmal

October 11 is an unforgettable day in the history of India as it was on this date Baji Rout, a 12-year-old ferry boy from Odisha, was brutally killed by the British soldiers for refusing the British soldiers to ferry in his boat. The death that shook the nation and added fuel to the ongoing freedom struggle made Baji Rout the youngest martyr of the freedom struggle in India. Baji Rout is quite unknown outside Odisha. But he is the youngest freedom fighter/martyr of our country. Nilakanthapur, a river-side village of Brahmani River in Bhuban of Dhenkanal district, where the teenage hero of freedom movement Baji Rout was born in 1926. His childhood days were not so happy

and joyful.

Unfortunately he lost his father Hari Rout very early in his childhood. He was brought up by his mother who used to do a rice-husking job in the neighborhood village. This 12-year-old boat boy was shot dead by British police when he courageously denied ferrying them across the River Brahman on the night of 11th October 1938 at Nilakanthpur Ghats (Bhuban, Dhenkanal district). The cruelty of the then king of Dhenkanal Shankar Pratap Singhdeo was at the peak. Taxes had levied on the poor villagers and the soldiers of the king used to snatch the incomes of poor villagers. The people under his rule were looking for the end of this merciless





12 वर्षीय अमर शहीद बाजी राउत के बारे में,  
उड़िया कवि कालिंदी चरण पाणिग्रही ने  
अपनी एक कविता में लिखा है—  
“आओ लछन, आओ नट, रघु, हुस्सी प्रधान  
बजाओ तुरी, बजाओ बिगुल,  
मरा नहीं है, मरा नहीं है  
बारह साल का बाजिया मरा नहीं है”

ruling. It led to the Prajamandal Agitation under the leadership of Baishnav Charan Pattanayak. Baji Rout joined this revolt despite his tender age. British Police and the armed forces of the King were in search of Baishnav Charan Pattanayak. They had attacked the Bhuban village several times in search of him. It was around 8 pm on October 10, 1938, they attacked the village once again. They used all the means of torture and brutality on the public to reveal the information regarding Baishnav but all went in vain. They arrested some persons and took them to jail. But Prajamandal woke up and protested against this arrest. The soldiers opened fire at the agitators immediately to disperse them and killed two people named Raghu Naik and Quri Naik. The British forces arbitrarily arrested some people of Bhuban village and took them to the Bhuban Police station. Protesting against this injustice, leaders of the Prajamandal gheraoed the police station, demanding immediate release of the arrested people.

However, after this incident the forces thought their life was in danger and tried to flee away. They wanted to go to Dhenkanal via Nilakanthpur Ghats, which was the shortest route. On the wee hours of the raining night of 11th October 1938, they reached Nilakanthpur Ghats of Brahamani River. They ordered Baji Rout, who was on guard of a country boat at that time. He was ordered by the troops to ferry them across the River Brahamani immediately. Bajji, who had already heard details of the brutality of the troops, understood that if the British troops were to be obstructed, then they needed to be stopped from going across to the other bank. Instead of ferrying them, he started

shouting and tried to warn the villagers about the presence of the troops. Despite their threat, the boy strongly refused to obey their order. The troop threatened to kill him if he did not ferry them across immediately. Bajji however rejected their orders again.

One of the British soldiers hit Bajji Rout's head with his gun but that fractured his skull severely. He collapsed, but he rose again gathering whatever little strength and courage was left with him, and raising his voice to the highest pitch beyond even his strength, refused to ferry the British troops till he was alive. A soldier pierced his bayonet into the soft skull of the brave boy even as another started firing ruthlessly. While one of the bullets hit Bajji and he lay dead, his other friends Laxman Malik, Fagu Sahoo, Hrushi Pradhan and Nata Malik were also killed. The incident shocked the entire nation. People from within and outside the state lauded the supreme sacrifice of the brave martyr. The funeral procession of Shaheed Bajji Rout started from his native village of Nilakanthpur to Khan Nagar in Cuttack. At the very teen age of playing, Bajji Rout has sacrificed his life for the nation. History doesn't tell much about him. But his patriotism and love for his country has made him a martyr at the age of 12 years in the freedom struggle of India. He is mentioned in the who's who of Indian martyrs being published by the Government of India. However the young martyr definitely deserves more.

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Rooplo Kolhi, the Tiger of Sindh, who fought against the British keeping the flame of Independence burning, needs to be remembered by us along with other national heroes who did the supreme sacrifice for the freedom of the Country because we owe our future to them...



# Rooplo Kolhi's supreme sacrifice for independence

Dr. Manoj Kumar

Rooplo Kolhi, a warrior from the erstwhile Sindh province, is a national hero for the people of Sindh. Rooplo Kolhi displayed unmatched courage by refusing to accept the domination of the British and waging incessant struggle against the foreign rule. His struggle for independence dates back to the year 1848 when Sindh was a part of India. At a time when the freedom fighters from all over the country were struggling to oppose the foreign rule, Rooplo Kolhi stood shoulder to shoulder with them and waged his battle for independence in Sindh. That was the time when the Rajputs too had rebelled against the British in their adjoining region.

### Early Life

Rooplo Kolhi was born in 1818 in a family of Kolhi agriculturists at Kundhari village, about 18 km from Nagarparkar town in Sindh province. His mother was Kesarbai. Although his real name was Rupaji Kolhi, people affectionately called him Rooplo. Rooplo Kolhi was brought up according to the traditions of the martial Kshatriya community. In accordance with the traditions of his Kolhi clan, he was imparted training in using weapons in a strict and disciplined manner during his childhood. He was meticulously trained in using various lethal weapons including bow and arrow, spear, and javelin. Rooplo Kolhi, who had courage, bravery and nimbleness personified, soon mastered


the fighting techniques. In his adolescent years, Rooplo Kolhi earned fame for himself by slaying several brutes infesting the hilly areas and the deserts in the Sindh region. This not only brought fame to him but people also started loving the handsome and invigorating young man. Thanks to his virtues, people started treating Rooplo Kolhi with respect. This affection of the people he had won became Rooplo Kolhi's major strength when he started his struggle for independence.

### Rooplo Kolhi's Conflict with British

Under the leadership of the British Army General Charles Napier, the British brought down the flag of independent Sindh and unfurled the Union Jack to subjugate the province. Thus, Sindh, which took pride in its independence was forced into slavery under the British rules. Infuriated, Rajputs belonging to Kolhis and Sodha clans in the Tharparkar area came together and rebelled against the British in the ridges of Kurunjer. Alarmed with the rebel in Sindh, the British government appointed Lord Dalhousie, the father of the Doctrine of Lapse Policy as the Governor of Sindh.

### Raising of Kolhi Army

Master of war strategies, Rooplo Kolhi raised a fearsome Army of 8,000 Kolhi warriors. Many chieftains such as Karna Singh Sodha, Thakur Ladhu Singh, Sodo Kasmi too joined forces, giving strength to him. All these Kolhi warriors were renowned for their bravery, courage, and mastery of warfare. The Kolhi Army waged a fierce fight against the British.



The army of 8,000 Kolhi warriors led by Rooplo Kolhi, brought them under their control British-controlled police stations, revenue offices, and telegraph offices. This virtually left the then British government crippled. Vengeful, the British government let loose the reins of its officials and gave them a free hand to strike back most brutally – by attacking and looting the people.

### **War With The British**

In retaliation to the rebel, a column under the leadership of General Tyrwhitt launched a counterattack against Rooplo Kolhi's strong army of 8,000 men on the night of April 15, 1859. This resulted in an all-out war in Sindh. Charged with patriotism, Rooplo Kolhi's army badly defeated the British army. Many British officers and soldiers were killed. General Tyrwhitt himself managed to escape. He fled to Hyderabad. Once he landed there, he met Col. Avenes and prepared a platoon of guerrilla fighters to avenge his defeat.

### **Treachery And Backstabbing**

Taken by the lure of land, wealth and high positions, the Rajputs of Bhodesar turned treacherous against Rooplo Kolhi, the furious tiger of Sindh and joined hands with the British to sell off their motherland Sindh. On May 3, 1859, the joint forces of British and Rajput armies surrounded Nagarparkar where Rooplo Kolhi and Ladhu Singh were camping with their army. Ladhu Singh was captured, but Rooplo Kolhi was too smart to fall into the hands of the enemy. He made good his escape and sought refuge in the hills of Kurunjer. Emboldened, the British lured some Rajputs of Nagarparkar with promises of wealth. Some local Brahmins of Nagarparkar were promised attractive charity and assigned to spy on Rooplo Kolhi. The greedy traitors tipped off the British about Rooplo Kolhi's base. The folklore goes that Rooplo Kolhi was drawing water from a well to quench his thirst when the British surprised and captured him.

In a bid to compel Rooplo Kolhi to accept their dominance, the British subjected him to brutal torture. However, a patriot to the core, Rooplo Kolhi remained brazen. When he was produced before General Tyrwhitt, the British tried to buy him off with offers of wealth and the position of a Jagirdar if he sold out on other Kolhi warriors and Thakur Karna Singh Sodha and spied on their future activities. The British General also insisted that he tenders a public apology for launching the rebellion and

refrains himself from getting involved in any anti-British activity in future. When Rooplo Kolhi stuck to his pride, his fingers were doused in oil and set on fire. However, such was the patriotism of Rooplo Kolhi and his love for the motherland that he did not waver. Instead, he roared, "Leave my pious land. I will never sell off my motherland."

### **Patriot Wife Meenavati**

Rooplo Kolhi's wife Meenavati too was no less courageous. When she went to meet him at the jail, the British asked her to convince Rooplo Kolhi to give up on his rebellion and accept their rule. However, she did not budge. Keeping her head high, she walked inside the jail, embraced Rooplo Kolhi and told him, "I am not at all worried about you. Whatever the price, do not ever betray your alleys and associates. If you die as a traitor, no other motherland. But if you will die the death of a patriot, I shall beget you a son who will keep your flag high." No doubt such patriotic and encouraging words of his confident wife kept the flame of freedom burning in Rooplo Kolhi.

### **The Martyrdom**

Rooplo Kolhi was hanged to death along the Sardharo River in the ridges of Kurunjer near Nagarparlar on August 22, 1958. Thus, he attained his place as a foremost freedom fighter in the glorious history of the struggle for independence.

### **The Revered Hero Of Sindh**

People of Sindh sing folklores of Rooplo Kolhi's bravery, courage and patriotism till this date and take inspiration from him. Several functions and rallies are organised in Sindh province of present-day Pakistan, the land where Rooplo Kolhi ruled on his birth and death anniversaries. Thousands throng the place where Rooplo Kolhi was hanged to pay homage to him. Sindh Tourism Development Corporation built a resort at Nagarparkar on August 26, 2017 to commemorate Rooplo Kolhi and named it Rooplo Kolhi Resort.

At a time when we are celebrating the Platinum Jubilee of our independence, we need to remember all brave fighters like Rooplo Kolhi who did the supreme sacrifice during the freedom struggle. It is our national duty to remember all these heroes because they were the founding fathers of our great nation. We owe our future to them!

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# Gangadin valmiki : martyred giant hero of 1857 revolt

Adv. Brujesh



Gangadin also known as Gangu Pahalwan was a giant, not only figuratively but also literally! He was six feet tall, barrel chested man with fair complexion and long arms. He was born in a family from Jewar village which was known for producing courageous, honest, loyal and dutiful men and sending them to serve the Peshavas as warriors. Following the military tradition of his ancestors, Gangadin and his brother Matadin mastered skills as wrestlers and grew up to become fearless young men before they joined the service of Peshava Bajirao II and were assigned the duty of guarding the members of the royal family. Besides, they would play musical instruments during various festivities and military exercises.

Impressed by the bravery and loyalty of the sibling duo, Peshava Nana Saheb re-designated them as sepoy in the Royal Army and assigned the duty of working as a spy for him. Impressed by their mastery of wrestling, Peshava Nana Saheb, who aspired to build an army of strong men started Akharas to encouraged them to train young soldiers. Thus, Gangadin, who trained the Peshava soldiers of various castes not only in wrestling but also in other martial skills such as using weapons like spear, sword, bludgeon and sticks, came to be known as Gangu Pahalwan. Pleased with their dedication and skills, the Peshava had also gifted them several Bighas of agricultural land in Bithoor. Besides, Gangadin was also appointed as Kotwal and assigned to ensure law and order in Bithoor. He would wear his smart uniform consisting of a Pagri, Lungi, Kurta and patrol the town.

An unfortunate incident wherein Gangadin's brother Matadin was shot down by a Bithoor in full public view at a square to the north of Valmiki Ashram angered Gangadin. He could not retaliate due to the adverse situation prevailing at that time. When Peshava Nana Saheb came to know about the assassination of his military man, his blood boiled. Seething with anger against the brazen murder of their

colleague, the ranks and files of the Royal Army decided to revolt against the British. This prompted generals of the Royal Army as well as the citizens including Tika Singh, Awadhanush Dhari, Dal Bhajan Singh, Gangu, Azizan Bai and others revolt against the British. On 4th June 1857, they proclaimed Peshava Nana Saheb as their leader and an independent king and waged war against the British. Subedar Gangadin was appointed Colonel-in-Command



of the 374th Platoon of the Peshava Army and Dal Bhajan was given the rank of Colonel of the 53rd Platoon of the Royal Army.

In a short time, the Peshava won Kanpur, the seat of his kingdom. Womenfolk and children of British camp were captured and kept in the Bibi House complex. Still seething with anger, Azizan Bai hatched a secret plan to kill the British prisoners without knowledge of Peshava Nana Saheb and reached Kanpur where she took over Bibi House with the help of Tika Singh and Dal Bhajan and slayed the British captives. Conspirators of the slaying dispersed to various cities after the incident. However, the British managed to ascertain their identities and declared reward of Rs 1 Lakh for bringing them in, alive or dead. Gangadin was returning to Bithoor after the massacre at Kanpur when he was apprehended by the British at Channiganj and hanged against a Neem tree. Later on, his memorial was constructed there and the local resident's worship Gangadin as Pir Gangu Baba.

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# Punjab, where partition changed demography

Punjab had seen Congress, Akali Dal and BJP-Akali Dal governments for the past three decades. But Dalits continued to be marginalized. This mainly happened because Dalits continued to be divided. Dalit leaders from all the parties, failed to prove themselves. Dalit Deras are not aware of political reality and lack any intellectual inputs. They also have strong traditional caste bias. Parties like BSP, led by Mayawati failed to perform despite having favourable conditions because of clear and restricted political aims. The educated class among Dalits, is also confused.

**Ramesh Chander**

Dalits of Punjab, under the leadership of Gadri Baba Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, founding father of AD-dharam Mandal, launched in 1926, fought for independence but were equally concerned about the social status of depressed classes. Dalits of Punjab, in cooperation with Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Gopal Singh Khalsa, Seth Kishan Dass extended support to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his relentless struggle to get a due and rightful space for the depressed classes. Punjab Dalits stood by Dr. Ambedkar pleading the case of Dalits in the Round Table Conferences in London which resulted in PM Ramsey MacDonald's 'Communal Award' accepting Dalits as a separate entity and not as Hindus. The rest is history as to how Dr. Ambedkar was made to sign the 'Poona Pact' in 1932 to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi and retain the depressed classes in the Hindu fold with special provisions of reservation.

Dalits in Punjab not merely fought for social space but also political space along with Dr. Ambedkar. This was certainly aimed at equal partnership. Dalits contested elections of 1937 under the banner of the Unionist Party of Punjab and also All India Scheduled Castes Federation, floated by Babasaheb Ambedkar and left their mark on the political map of the

country. This is significant to note that Punjabi leather businessmen Seth Kishan Dass, Baba Budh Singh played a major role to ensure entry of Dr. Ambedkar in constituent Assembly in 1946 when Congress and other parties closed the doors for him. It is because of their efforts that Dr. Ambedkar entered the Bengal constituent Assembly. The role of Joginder Nath Mandal is also noteworthy in this direction. Joginder Nath later became the first law minister of Pakistan and later came back to India. But that is a different story. This indicates that Punjab Dalits were at the forefront with other fellows in the country with great amount of confidence.

It is noteworthy that socio-political and socio-spiritual considerations were equally crucial in shaping the role of Punjab Dalits. Caste sentiments were not intensified in Punjab, compared to other parts of India. Muslim influence was equally important factor as undivided Punjab was a Muslim dominated province. Sufi tradition and Sikh approach of equality were also important to determine the mindset of Dalits. Arya Samaj had a major contribution in bringing Dalits in the main fold also with Jatpaat Todak Mandal, founded by Sant Ram B A.

Despite this background, Punjab Dalits were marginalized in pre and post-independence periods. Harish Puri, political analyst, had observed that Jinnah had proposed to divide the Kamins population equally between India



and Pakistan. He had argued that Kamins was considered neither Hindu nor Muslim and community was engaged in conservancy work. It was proposed that both India and Pakistan need their services. Dr. Ambedkar and Nehru intervened when Dalits in Pakistan were prohibited from leaving Pakistan. In India, on another hand, Dalits were not allowed to live in refugee camps by caste Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar intervened in the situation, talked to Nehru, sent his emissary to ensure that Dalits are rehabilitated properly. Partition resulted into major demographic change in Punjab, which also awakened Dalits in Punjab at political level. Several Dalit leaders decided to side with Congress to counter influence of All India Scheduled Caste Federation, Shiromani Akali Dal and Adi Dharma. Some of them found ministerial berths. All these incidents were shaping Dalit mindset in Punjab, resulting several under currents. Dr. Ambedkar visited Punjab in 1951 and toured the entire state. To counter possible fall out of Dr. Ambedkar's visit, Akali Dal projected Master Tara Singh while Congress propped up Prithvi Singh Azad (Ravidassia), Yashwant Rai (Balmiki), Chaudhary Sunder Singh (Ravidassia), Master Gurbanta Singh and Master Sadhu Ram. Jan Sangh took steps in this direction but could not do much. All these leaders tried to create their influence in their respective sects.

Language was another factor. A large number of Punjab Dalits opted to record their language as Hindi when Punjabi was equally dominant language. Dalits started moving to foreign countries in the sixties, particularly to England and later to the Middle east. This was, of course, for economic uplifting. This process further accelerated political awakening among Dalits. Their political aspirations arose. The Republican Party was a dominant political entity during this period. However, the party was divided. One faction even joined hands with Akali Dal. The faction also joined the Akali Dal government in 1966. But Dalits got divided in the process as all the political parties were trying to bring them under influence.

Dalits in Punjab got a boost when they embraced various Deras like Satsang Beas, Nirankaris and outfits of Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh. Dalit Deras also came up during the same period. They mainly included Sachkhand Ballan in Jalandhar and Swami Gurdip Giri Dera in Pathankot. Kanshi Ram appeared on the scene in mid-seventies with BAMCEF, DS4 and

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and successfully shaped the Dalit psyche and converted into a force. With 34 reserved seats in Assembly and four in Lok Sabha, Dalit vote bank became much stronger.

Punjab had seen Congress, Akali Dal and BJP-Akali Dal governments for the past three decades. But Dalits continued to be marginalized. This mainly happened because Dalits continued to be divided. Dalit leaders from all the parties, failed to prove themselves. Dalit Deras are not aware of political reality and lack any intellectual inputs. They also have strong traditional caste bias. Parties like BSP, led by Mayawati failed to perform despite having favourable conditions because of clear and restricted political aims. The educated class among Dalits, is also confused.

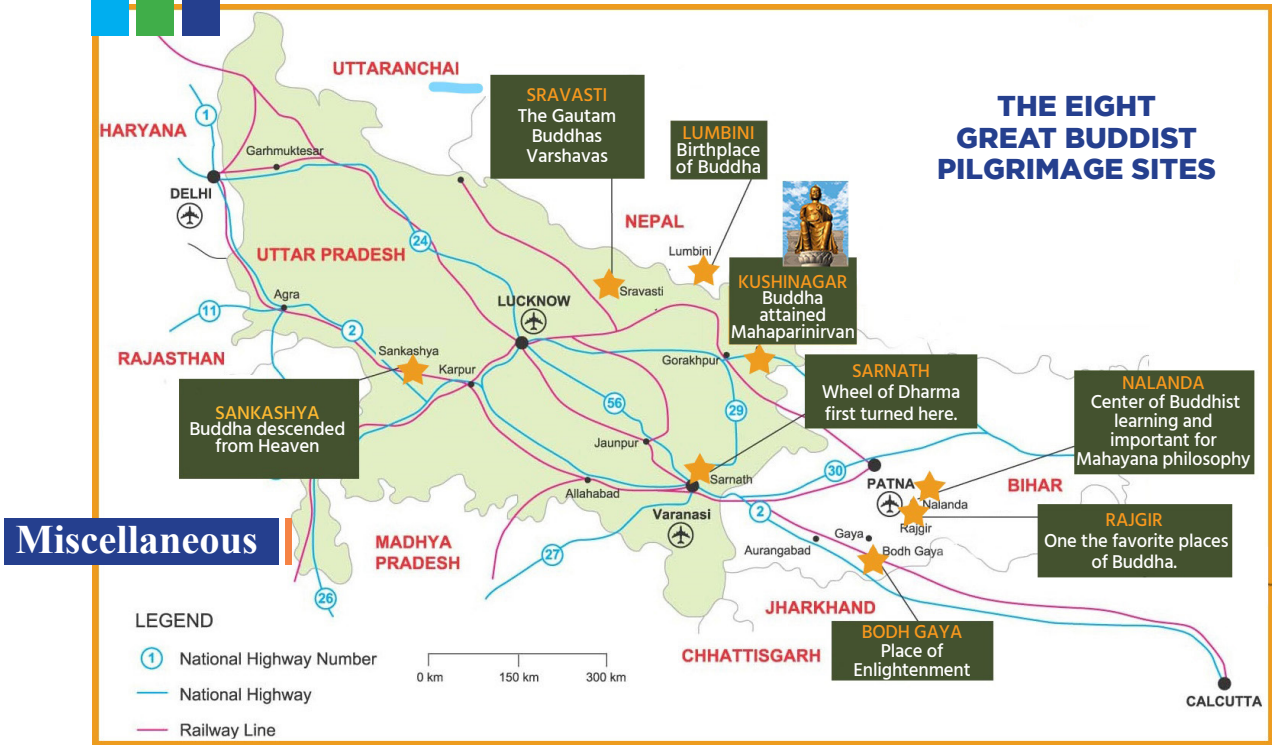
The solution to this deadlock can be found none other than by Dalits. They need to get their space in politics, society, economics and all spheres of life as they constitute 35%. Some signs are seen among youths. For example, Congress picked up Charanjit Singh Channi for the post of chief minister. It was not successful only because of infighting in Congress but also due to strong under current caste factors. BJP made Vijay Sampla minister of state. Akali Dal also tried to woo Dalits because of increasing political awareness among Dalits. Akali Dal even joined hands with BSP. Another significant factor, all political parties have managed to win Dalit votes. This included even new entrants like AAP. But fragmentation of Dalit votes was seen at every level.

AAP won Punjab Assembly election and came to power. Out of 92 seats bagged by AAP, 28 are reserved. Unfortunately, AAP did not choose a single Dalit leader for a single Rajya Sabha seat when elections were held for seven seats.

Punjab stands as a case for the well-established fact that democracy should never be restricted to the political arena. It has to accommodate all walks of life. Dalits are politically aware and awakened on one hand, but their situation has not improved on another hand. This is the time for deep introspection. Why Dalits did not support Charanjit Singh Channi? Dalits did not support the Akali Dal-BSP alliance, Congress or BJP either. Is it because of caste considerations? This is the political scenario when Dalit population is 35% in Punjab.

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# Buddhist Circuit : A pilgrim within

Generally speaking, a Buddhist person would strive to undertake a pilgrimage tour to the important places which were associated with the Buddha's life. The entire journey is called as the 'Ashtamahasthanayatra' (a pilgrimage of Eight Great Places). The places included in this pilgrimage include those four places where very important events took place in the life of Gautama Buddha. They are Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Saranath and Kushinagara. The other four places are those where he performed great miracles. They are Rajagriha, Sankissa, Vaishali and Shravasti.

**Dr. Manjiri Bhalerao**

Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism, which became a popular religion over the period of time. The religion, though born in India, crossed its boundaries and spread across the Asian continent and established itself. It, in many parts, developed into a new local variant of the original local religion. This religion manifested in different manner in several parts of the world but its

original concepts, philosophies, mythological episodes never dissociated themselves from India. Hence it has always been a dream of a pious Buddhist to visit the land of the Buddha. Generally speaking, a Buddhist person would strive to undertake a pilgrimage tour to the important places which were associated with the Buddha's life. The entire journey is called as the 'Ashtamahasthanayatra' (a pilgrimage



of Eight Great Places). The places included in this pilgrimage include those four places where very important events took place in the life of Gautama Buddha. They are Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Saranath and Kushinagara. The other four places are those where he performed great miracles. They are Rajagriha, Sankissa, Vaishali and Shravasti. Let us begin our journey of understanding the Ashtamahasthanas and their significance for a pious devotee of the Gautama Buddha.

Before starting this journey, we should know the various names by which Gautama Buddha is known to us through the Buddhist tradition. We address him generally as Gautama Buddha. However, his birth name was Siddharth, his father's name was Shuddhodhana, and mother's name was Mahamaya (as she was the elder daughter of the family). He was born in the Shakya clan. His father was living in Kapilavastu. His mother had seen a dream of an elephant entering her womb before she realized that she was pregnant. For the delivery of the baby, she started for her parents' place. However, on her way, in the small park called as Lumbini (modern Rummindei near Nepalese Terrain), she gave birth to a child. It was a miraculous birth as the child took birth from the side of his mother from where the elephant had entered her womb. Immediately after the birth, the child could stand on his feet. He declared that it was his last birth and that he would be liberated. It is told to us that his mother expired after his birth. He was brought up by his maternal aunt Prajapita Gautami, who was also his step mother. Hence, he was also called as Gautama.

Later on, when the astrologers predicted that this child will either become a sovereign emperor or the founder of a religion, Siddhartha's father took all the care and provided him all the material pleasures of life. Eventually, he got married with Yashodhara. Both of them had a child called Rahul. At the age of twenty-five, one day, he saw a death procession along with the crying relatives. He then noticed an ascetic. Then he realized of the miseries of the world especially when one has relatives, family and social bonds. He realized that the ascetic seemed happy as he did not have any bondage and could live his life freely. Hence, he also decided to cut all the bondage of his life by becoming an ascetic and become free. He joined various other groups and tried their ways to find the ultimate truth. However, he was not comfortable with those

methods and decided to find his own way. He started his own meditation at Gaya near the river Niranjara. When he was on the verge of getting the enlightenment, he was attacked by the Mara, the God of evil. He wanted to disturb the meditation of Gautama and prevent him for getting the enlightenment. He sent his fierce army, sent his beautiful daughters to lure him but Gautama did not budge. Instead, he touched the ground and appealed the mother earth that she was the witness to his meditation, dedication and he deserved to get the enlightenment. With this appeal, all attacks were cleared and he got the enlightenment. This place became the most important place for any follower of Buddhism as it was at Gaya



that Siddharth became the Buddha -- the Enlightened one. This is the most popular place for the pilgrims. Ashoka had erected a pillar at this place in third century BCE and even a stupa. Later on, in 7th century CE a huge temple was erected during the time of Harshavardhan. Today's temple at Bodh Gaya is the same with a few renovations in some parts.

The Vajrasana stone slab in the campus of the temple is supposed to have been placed there during the time of Ashoka. The Bodhi tree that we see there today was replanted in eighth century CE as it was burnt by King Shashank. In third, century BCE Ashoka's daughter had taken a branch of that tree to Sri Lanka and it was planted there. Hence a branch of the same tree was back to India and was planted at Gaya at the same place. Hence the tree as well as the other monuments, are extremely sacred for a pious Buddhist follower.

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Five eminent persons from Dalit community have emerged as prominent economists and philosopher in post-independence era. They have been guiding not only Dalits but steering Indian economy, which is expected to remove social barriers and discrimination.

## Dalit's contribution in shaping Indian economy

**Sheetal Bhangre**

**Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**

He is not merely known for his struggle against the caste system but also for contribution to the field of economics. Known as the tallest intellectual of his time, Dr. Ambedkar had completed formal education in economics, motivating other Indian leaders.

The man is called one of the greatest intellectuals of his time, who underwent formal higher two reputed institutions - Columbia University in the United States and London School of Economics in England. His career had a very vast canvas and economics was one of its aspects.

"The problem of the Rupee : Its origin and solution" was the title of the dissertation, which he presented for his D.Sc. Dr. Ambedkar used academic opportunity to study the Indian social and economic scenario and came up with his extraordinary research based books. Problem of the Rupee was probably the first well-written book regarding the Indian economy. As the title says, the thesis stated India's economic problems, currency exchange standards and impact on the economy for over a century.

Dr. Ambedkar opposed the theory of the then prominent economist John Keynes on the Gold Exchange Standard. In his preface, he says, "Nothing will stabilize the rupee unless we stabilize its general purchasing power. That the

exchange standard does not do. .... I think a far better way would be to have an inconvertible rupee with a fixed limit of issue".

Dadabhai Nauroji was a strong critic of British economic policy earlier. He felt that Indian economy was being exploited because of British policies. But Dr. Ambedkar gave this criticism a solid research foundation and showed people how British policies were making the Indians poorer. With the review of the currency value between 1800 to 1893, he argued how the whole British system of the currency exchange rate (Rupee and Pound) exploited the Indian economy for over a century.

His book – "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India" is also considered as a pioneer work. It focused the financial relationship between provinces and the center. Babasaheb argued that the dependency of provinces on the center for their expenditure had created fiscal stress and provinces should be allowed to raise their revenue. His views influenced our federal structure. In his maiden speech in the Assemblt, Dr. Ambedkar said, "The gross budget of our province is fifteen and half crores rupees, out of which nine and a half crores are only government expenditure. People representatives are not allowed to speak on this part and don't use it for another part. We rarely see a government so expensive as such and still very indifferent for social welfare".

His contribution does not end with these studies. He insisted on action. He played an important role with his recommendations to the





Royal commission (Hilton Young Commission). Dr. Ambedkar strongly favored urbanization but he also advocated for critical industries and agriculture to be under government control. He also criticized the caste system as a hindrance to the economic development of the country.

#### **Dr. Narendra Jadhav**

An expert on economics and a faithful follower of Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Narendra Jadhav also shares a remarkable contribution to the Indian economy. With a Ph.D. in economics from Indiana University, he built an excellent career. He is recognized now as the forefront economist in India. He has served many high posts such as advisor of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), principal advisor and chief economist of Reserve Bank of India, member of Planning Commission of India and member of Rajya Sabha.

Dr. Jadhav worked with RBI for many years. He majorly contributed to the research. His economic writings include Monetary Economics for India (1994), Financial stability and central Banking in India (2006), and Re-emerging India – A Global Perspective (2005). As a planning commission member, Dr. Jadhav played an essential role in formulating the 12th five-year plan. As a member of both the National Advisory Council and Planning Commission of India. He is also recognized as a major contributor to formulating the National Food Security Bill. He was one of those who pushed the implementation of the Right to Education Act- 2009. His contribution to the formulation of the ambitious scheme titled Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and developing the eco-system for Skill Development in India has been appreciated. He is the author of various official reports, one of which was Guidelines for Scheduled Castes sub-plan and Tribal sub-plan. This was his noteworthy contribution to social-economic issues.

#### **Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar**

Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar is another economist, who comes from a deprived family. He is professor of economics and social activist. Due to his expertise, he was appointed as a planning commission member. Manmohan Singh's government made him in-charge of crucial subjects like education, labor and employment, social justice, and tribal affairs. He suggested several new policies and programs in these areas during his tenure, which were subsequently incorporated in the 11th five-year plan. He says, "I studied economics to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment. And this is something that has not changed all

these years. Even today, I am in the Planning Commission with the primary concern of alleviating unemployment and ending poverty, and both of which are linked to annihilating caste: Dr. Mungekar completed his doctorate with a specialization in agricultural economics. His study was reflected while working as a planning commission member. He was also appointed as a member of the National Commission of Agricultural Costs and Prices.

#### **Milind Kamble**

"Economic power is necessary to overcome social discrimination", says Milind Kamble, who caused a strong drive of entrepreneurship among the Dalit youths through his organization – Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DICCI). He stands as a testimony to prove what Dalits contribute to Indian economy. Set up in 2005, DICCI has now crossed Indian boundaries in a short span of 15 years. DICCI provides a platform and showcase to platform to young Dalit entrepreneurship. It has brought Dalit industrialists under one umbrella and acts as a resource center for new entrepreneurs. We can read under the title Mission of DICCI – To encourage Dalit youth to contribute nation's economy through wealth creation. Milind Kamble addresses Dalit youth from various platforms, saying, "Be job givers, not job seekers". He spread a strong impetus and showed a direction to Dalit youths to solve their socio-economic problems. This endeavor is so admirable that it is recognized nationally, even by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and famous industrialists like Ratan Tata.

#### **Chandra Bhan Prasad**

While we mentioned DICCI, we cannot evade one of its key advisors and most important Dalit thinker in today's India - Chandra Bhan Prasad.

He is a strong endorser of Dalit capitalism - the term, he coined and sees it as a way to ensure the liberation of Dalits. He is also actively trying to find ways for Dalits to explore through this concept. He also has advocated the English language movement for Dalits as a sign of upliftment. Through his thoughts, writings, and activism, he has deeply influenced the aspiring Dalit generation. With DICCI, he is proposing Dalit capitalism for the vast community of oppressed castes. He is the writer of the Bhopal Document and impacted the policies of the state of Madhya Pradesh. He has also launched a website - [www.dalitfoods.com](http://www.dalitfoods.com).

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## Dalits and MSME : Understanding Inclusivity and social mobility

Over the next decade, India will become one of the world's most strong economies. By 2025, India's GDP is projected to be 8.5 percent, and the country's economy will be worth USD 5 trillion. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has the ability to become the economy's backbone and a growth driver.

**Dr. Aditi**



In the current scenario, democracy can be said to have any real value only when the enduring political proclamations of Dalit rights are reinforced by their economic empowerment. This means the state must encourage the Dalits and helps them maintain their economic endeavours in the 'free' market. Dalits view the state as a necessary institution to weaken the confines of formal Democracy while at the same time endorsing their socio-economic emancipation and enabling them to own capital. All perspectives have one common fact at their core, that the institution of state can be shaped to realize socio-political and economic objectives. Hence this malleable institution of the state is the most important element of their egalitarian socio-cultural, political, and economic plans.

Over the next decade, India will become one of the world's most strong economies. By 2025, India's GDP growth rate is projected to be 8.5 percent, and the country's economy will be worth USD 5 trillion. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has the ability to become the economy's backbone

and a growth driver. This segment's growth is extremely critical to meet the national imperatives of financial inclusion and generation of significant levels of employment across urban and rural areas of the country. Further, it can nurture and support development of new age entrepreneurs who have the potential to create globally competitive businesses from India. This industry accounts for roughly 30% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). They are an essential component of the supply chain, accounting for roughly 40% of total exports. MSMEs also play a significant role in job creation, employing approximately 110 million people across the country. Furthermore, MSMEs and the rural economy are inextricably linked, as more than half of MSMEs are located in rural areas.

The Government of India has announced various schemes to help the production of MSMEs from time to time in order to ensure that they continue to lead the country toward economic growth. In light of the economic distress caused by COVID-19, the government recently announced a number of schemes under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, which stands for Self-Reliant India. According to a new classification criterion, to decide whether a company should be listed as a micro, small,



or medium enterprise, the combined factors of “investment in plant and machinery” and “turnover” must be weighed. Previously, an MSME unit’s classification was focused solely on its investment in plant and equipment, as well as whether the business was in the manufacturing or service sectors.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 2015 Independence Day speech emphasised on the necessity of rapid industrialisation and the culmination of social justice to endure economic entitlement to dalit communities. The BJP government has worked out concrete plans to incorporate backward caste and provide them with better opportunities. It has launched Stand Up India Initiative- a scheme for encouraging greenfield enterprise by SC/ST and female entrepreneurs by facilitating bank loans between 10 Lakh and 1 crore along with supplementary measures. It was the first scheme of its kind bringing the financial system close to the dalits and providing them with a genuine sense of power of taking control of their own lives.

MSMEs are seen as an important opportunity in the times when policies like Make in India and Startup India are promoting manufacturing and young entrepreneurship in India. It is critical to focus on medium and small enterprises, especially rural social enterprises, as an agent for local economic development. MSMEs play significant role in promotion of Dalit entrepreneurship. It is commendable that nearly 2.5 lakh SC/ST entrepreneurs would be created under the Stand Up India initiative launched by the Prime Minister. MSMEs contribute to the economy and development at the local level, especially through providing employment and livelihood opportunities to those in the lower socioeconomic strata. As a result, they play a critical role in integrating the disadvantaged and marginalised into conventional development models. MSMEs often add value at the local level, in contrast to large corporations, which add value at the end of the value chain, thus enhancing the value of mutual wealth in practise and resolving inequities. MSMEs contribute directly to various socioeconomic SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Jobs and Growth), and SDG 10 (Climate Change) (Reduce inequalities). For example, Dharani Farmers Producer Company and Sittilingi Organic Farmers Association are able to provide direct income benefits to small holder farmers and marginalised communities in southern India through local value addition

of organic agriculture produce. The crafts and handicraft industry has suffered economic losses as a result of industrialisation. Traditional crafts have been increasingly replaced by mass-produced machine-made consumer goods, which are generally less expensive due to economies of scale associated with mechanisation. Entrepreneurial initiatives such as Dastkar, Saathi Samaj Sevi Sanstha, and Mithan Handicraft Development Private Limited are crucial in sustaining the handicrafts sector and the livelihoods of people who work in it. Furthermore, MSMEs are usually reliant on locally available natural resources, making them environmentally conscious. In order to ensure a stable, vibrant, and competitive MSME market, India’s MSME policy is increasingly focusing on covering the entire lifecycle of MSMEs. The Reserve Bank of India has proposed several steps to help businesses weather the storm, including a moratorium on term loans and easier working capital financing. Some public sector banks have also provided companies with emergency credit lines.

During the tough times of COVID 19, the government is working on a package to meet the needs of Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) are the backbone of the Indian economy. By leveraging exports, creating a large number of jobs for the unskilled, fresh graduates, and underemployed, and allowing banks to lend more credit to companies in this sector, this sector has contributed significantly to the country’s growth. For the sector’s long-term sustainability, the government should prioritise providing more and more MSME Registration benefits through better regulation, government transparency, and allowing financial institutions to lend more credit at lower interest rates. It is concluded that MSMEs are achieving their goal of socioeconomic development by developing and promoting small businesses across the region. It also succeeds in overcoming problems such as regional industrial imbalances, job creation by self-employment, improved efficiency. The aspiration of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar of a casteless society can very well be realised through the culmination of both social and economic justice for the Dalits and their initiation to work towards attaining economic entitlement can very wisely be viewed as a tangible step forward.

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When it comes to Bengal, literature holds a huge place in our culture. The people in the land of Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhutibhusan Bandhopadhyay and Satyajit Ray surely have a penchant for books and plays- but is the underlying fact visible yet? All the three literary geniuses I named belonged to wealthy or upper caste families.

# Bangaali Bhodrolok : Gaalii Hain Kya?

Debarati



Do you ever think about whether one lazy summer afternoon can alter your perspective about the dynamics of a place where you've lived all your life? At least that was the case with me when I stumbled upon an Anurag Verma podcast on Spotify where Dilip Mondal, an author at The Print, made me question my state's behaviour towards her lower caste sons and daughters.

Never really being a history-lover, I seldom dwelled on the details of post partition conditions of the people who had to relocate from East Pakistan to West Bengal after the midnight of 15th August, 1947. The podcast introduced me to the world of Namashudras- the lower caste people, who had to leave their all in the "Opaar Bangla" or the other side of Bengal, which was by then a Muslim dominated region.

Anticipating a warm welcome from their Hindu brethren, the Dalits of East Bengal were severely disappointed when they realised, that even in this new homeland, they would constantly be reminded of their "lower status" by upper caste Bengalis, popularly referred to as the 'Bhodrolok'. Not just the upper-class elites, but also the then ruling Congress government betrayed them with their controversial rehabilitation policy. The Namashudra peasants were shipped off en-masse to Dandakaranya and the Andamans, under the farce of a resource crunch of the State for proper refugee

rehabilitation. Interestingly, upper caste refugees successfully established squatter colonies in the heart of Kolkata, by deploying their political connections and leveraging their networks. In a couple of decades, the colonies developed into thriving neighbourhoods in South Kolkata.

The caste problem in Bengal had been very much present even when eminent personalities like Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought for social justice. Ishaan Mukherjee, a PhD scholar from Trinity College, wrote in his article for the Caravan about their biased approach towards the Hindu bhodrolok. Raja Ram Mohan's work in his later years often mentioned "Muslim tyranny" and how colonialization helped in curbing the problem. Ironically, it was Akbar Shah II who had given Ram Mohan the title of "Raja". Vidyasagar, one of the most revered figures in the history of Indian Academia, founded the Sanskrit College for Brahmin, Kayastha and Vaidya students but never encouraged lower castes to get admission in fear of disturbing the orthodox Bhodrolok of the college.

"Bhodrolok", the Bengali term, roughly translates to "polite men". Dwaipayana Sen also calls them the "gentle-folk" of Bengal. In Baangla, when we say a person is "Bhodro", we mean they are considerate, polite and empathetic men who are also morally upright. My 19-year-old, Rabinrasangeet and sweetmeat loving, fiercely Baangali soul was crushed when I got to know about the not-so-glorious truth about the Bhodrolok. I realized that the truth I



believed in for so many years of Bengal being a casteless state and working towards the class equality of people under the left regime was, in reality, a blanketed lie which hid the well-oiled machinery encouraging caste-based segregation and biased empowerment of the Upper castes.

When it comes to Bengal, literature holds a huge place in our culture. The people in the land of Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyay and Satyajit Ray surely have a penchant for books and plays- but is the underlying fact visible yet? All the three literary geniuses I named belonged to wealthy or upper caste families. Even if they were able to highlight the perils of the minorities, we never really came across Dalit or Muslim writers and received first-hand information about these communities even though Muslims make up to 25% of the states' population.

The yesteryears bore testimony to the act of the CPI(M) using the Namashudras to win against Congress by promising them homes, and once the elections were done, showering police brutality and sexual harassment on the people who opposed the State's Government's plan of action (of sending them to the nearby states) concerning their own selves. In 2019-20, these were the same people who were asked for proof of not being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants by today's government. In the wake of the Bengal elections of this year, coming across the well-hidden caste-based atrocities of the ever-glorified and world's longest democratically elected left-rule government was surely a shock for me. Being an upper caste woman in the metropolitan and belonging to an educated middle-class family, I was spared from facing the gory truths of life that the lower castes still have to face. Yes, still. Naveen Bharti's study for Harvard, using 2011 census data of 800 people brought into limelight the segregation carried out among people under the banner of development and urbanisation. The study was carried out in Kolkata and it was found that there are several colonies in the metropolitan city where only upper caste Bengali Hindus live and no Dalits are allowed.

My bubble of privilege with a calculated pinch of ignorance cooked up a perfect recipe for the shock. I watched a podcast that posed two very simple questions: who makes the intelligentsia of Bengal and the higher echelons of the state administration? How many Muslim or Dalit chief ministers has the state elected

since 1947? It is discussed as to how the Bhodrolok have usurped the administration, the media houses and even the cultural industry that Bengalis hold so close to their heart. The great Indian Coffee House is home to Bengal's intellectuals who make and break the opinions of the people around them. Surprisingly (not so much at this point), they are all upper caste men, they are our beloved Bhodrolok. The veil of intellectuality is a mere prop to hide the spine-chilling facts. The mother to numerous patriots and literati of the nation never allowed the voices of the minorities rise, thus maintaining the "Sujalang-Sufalang" picture to the world.

To explain this phenomenon of Bengal being called a casteless state, I feel that the voice of the Dalits and the minorities were never allowed to rise. Their faulty representation in the popular media subjugated their will to come together and stand as a collective against the cause. In fact, it is so deeply entrenched among the people of Bengal that even the lower castes have spent their lives believing that there is no hierarchy at play. We are often all states like Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu or Uttar Pradesh casteist. What we don't realise is that we were able to vigil the wrongs against the lower castes because we heard their voice and saw their assertion. Media till date provides a top-bottom approach and provides material allowing us to say that the Dalits have no education or proper health or even proper sanitation at their disposal. What is really required is the Bottom-top approach which was adopted by Joan P. Mencher. Unlike Dalit Studies, the upper castes have seldom been brought under the microscope. We need to study the upper castes and find the roots of the problems and not just the solutions.

Living in Kolkata I have been hearing the term "bhodro-lok" and "bhodro-mohila" all my life. Four months back if someone had said to me that the word is almost equivalent to a slur, I would have laughed it off. But today, after the discovery and realisation of the hidden facts, I will surely be offended if someone calls me this in my city from now on. I, in my own small way, have tried to call them out. If you still have difficulty in believing me, I would urge you to look up the names of any five Bengalis who have excelled in their field and view it through the caste spectrum.

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# The Enduring Relevance of "The Problem of Rupee"

In academia, some works are more than just scholarly pursuits; they transcend their time and context to become a beacon of knowledge and inspiration for future generations. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's master's thesis, "The Problem of Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution," is one such remarkable work. As we celebrate the centenary of this pivotal academic endeavour in 2023, we are presented with an opportunity to explore its historical significance and, more broadly, to reflect on the enduring importance of academic scholarship in driving social change.

Born in 1891 into a society deeply entrenched in inequalities and discrimination, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar defied the odds to become a symbol of knowledge, education, and social justice. His journey from the fringes of society to the pinnacle of the academic world serves as an enduring testament to the transformative power of education. His master's thesis, submitted in 1923 at the London School of Economics, marked the beginning of his illustrious career as a scholar and social reformer. An academic thesis on the monetary system might seem disconnected from Dr. Ambedkar's later activism and his struggle to combat caste-based discrimination in India. However, "The Problem of Rupee" is more than just an academic exercise; it is a testament to Dr. Ambedkar's unrelenting pursuit of knowledge and ability to engage with multifaceted issues.

The thesis is divided into four parts, delving deep into the intricacies of the Indian currency system, its historical evolution, the influence of British colonial policies, and the monetary fluctuations affecting the Indian economy. Dr. Ambedkar's meticulous analysis and well-researched arguments revealed India's monetary exploitation and economic subjugation under British rule. His thesis, at its core, was an early critique of the financial exploitation of a colonized nation.

Dr. Ambedkar's thesis holds significant historical relevance for several reasons: His work underscored the critical importance of economic independence for a society's overall progress. He argued that India's economic subjugation was intrinsically tied to its political and social subjugation. His thesis revealed that rigorous academic work transcended his personal circumstances. "The Problem of Rupee"

remains relevant today as it offers insights into the long-term consequences of economic policies. Understanding the historical context of monetary decisions can inform contemporary financial strategies.

Dr. Ambedkar's transition from academic scholarship to social reform underscores the relationship between education and social change. His scholarly work laid the foundation for his later activism, as he leveraged the knowledge, he acquired to challenge the oppressive systems perpetuating social injustices.

Academic scholarship, with its potential to foster critical thinking, research, and analysis, often acts as the crucible for ideas that drive social change. It equips individuals with the tools to question the status quo, challenge prevailing beliefs, and formulate solutions to pressing societal issues. In today's digital age, where information is readily accessible, Dr. Ambedkar's commitment to lifelong learning and the pursuit of knowledge serves as a poignant reminder. The internet, online courses, e-books, and vast resources make learning more accessible.

Moreover, the digital age calls us to consume information and contribute to the pool of knowledge. Writing, researching, and sharing insights can have a transformative impact on our society. Dr. Ambedkar's journey from a student submitting his master's thesis to becoming the chief architect of India's Constitution stands as a testament to the power of continual. As we commemorate the centenary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's master's thesis, "The Problem of Rupee," we honor his intellectual legacy and the enduring importance of academic scholarship in social movements. Dr. Ambedkar's work emphasizes that education is not just a personal pursuit but a potent tool for societal transformation.

His journey from a young scholar in London to the champion of social justice in India exemplifies the transformative potential of education. Dr. Ambedkar's life and work remind us that, in the digital age, the pursuit of knowledge remains as vital as ever, and the ability to contribute to academia is a path toward individual growth and societal progress.

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**UNHEARD VOICES**

**OCTOBER 2022**

Abrogation of article 370 : What it means for SCs and STs?

**UNHEARD VOICES**

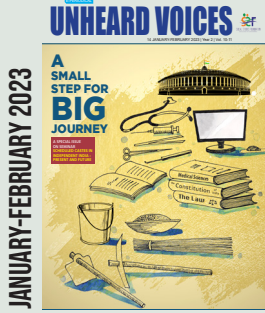
**NOVEMBER 2022**

Do we need reservation for converts?

**UNHEARD VOICES**

**DECEMBER 2022**

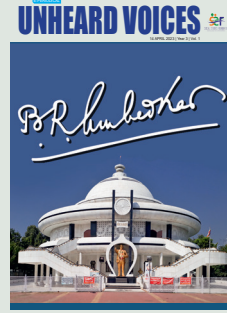
Buddhist Circuit



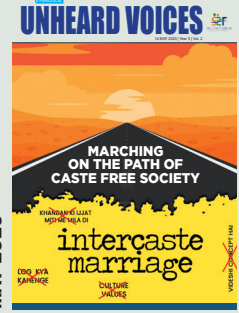
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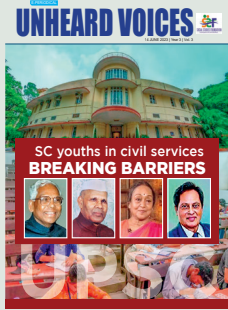
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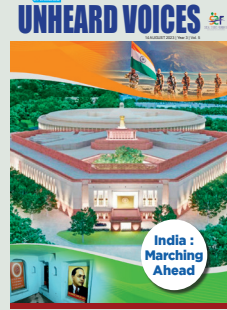
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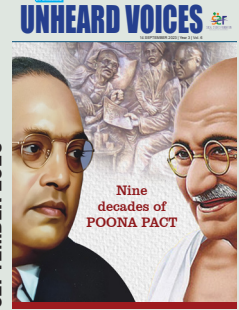
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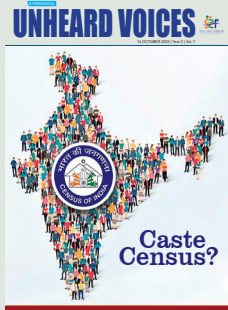
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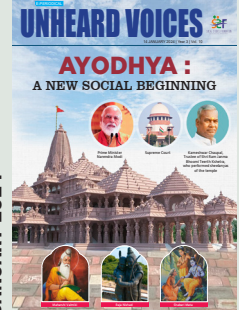
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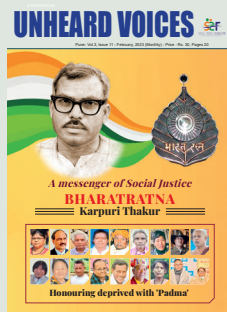
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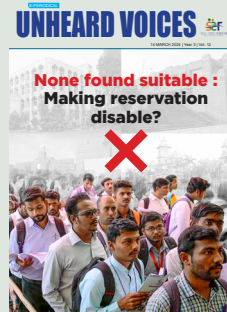
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