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New policy New horizon



18 July
Annabhai Sathe birth anniversary
1 August death anniversary



6 August
Bhagat Namdev
death anniversary



9 August
Vishwa Adivasi Din



13 August
Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar
death anniversary

EDITORIAL

New policy - new horizon

Unheard Voices has published an article in the current issue on new education policy with a special focus on students from deprived classes. It is accompanied by another article on micro, small and medium scale industries, which plays a crucial role in building the economy. Education and entrepreneurship are two wheels of progress and the new education policy seems to have enough space for them.

In the context of students of deprived classes, education policy has been mainly restricted to reservation and scholarship. It is argued that it was mainly to attract students. But the new education policy has gone a step ahead by opening new avenues like special education zone and covering other aspects like upliftment of deprived classes, equality, social justice and human dignity.

Economic progress and value education are equally important in any education. The students from deprived classes mainly have a poor economic background. Undoubtedly, we have ample success stories of these students from all walks of life. Medium and small scale industries, we believe, is a growing field where deprived people may find new avenues because of their changing and growing canvas.

Urbanization has changed traditional social structures. It has delivered a new social system. Technology comes along with urbanization but it is away from the rural sector. We are witness to Dr Ambedkar's mantra – educate, organize and agitate – which has changed the lives of deprived classes. On another hand, we are also witnessing an encouraging change in the mindset of the people, who were

beneficiaries of the caste system. India has several encouraging examples where both sides have given up the traditional mindset. It has boosted our confidence that – “We, as a nation, can bring about intentional change in the society”. This is an elating experience, which keeps motivating the workers. The struggle against discrimination is a long journey and India needs a paradigm shift in social and economic order to accelerate the process.

Pushing behind the industrial age, we have entered into the internet age. The students from deprived classes have to respond to the demands of a new age. They need to adopt new skills and education so that they will not be at the receiving end. Three U - update, upgrade and upskill – is the password for the new age, for which everybody has to come out of the traditional mindset. Students from deprived classes are mainly found studying subjects related to humanities but the time has come to introspect whether these students need to go beyond humanities and learn skills, which may ensure more financial safety. Education without entrepreneurship leads to unemployment and education without a human face will deliver an unhealthy society. New ideas and new visions will pave the way for all-round progress and peace. We need to awaken with new senses instead of occupying ourselves with other hidden agenda. It is saying that money goes to money and poverty goes to poverty. We need to come out of this vicious circle and adopt a mindset which will meet the aspirations of the society, where the creation of wealth will take place along with equal opportunities.

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NEP 2020 : A Step Towards Inclusion

COVER STORY

National Education Policy-2020 accepts that education is a great leveller and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion and equality.



Edward Mendhe

Horace Mann, a pioneer of American public schools once famously said, "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery." Those who do not get access to education or for that matter quality education seldom end up on the wrong side of employment, earnings and in our context, especially, the social hierarchy. Similarly Prof Michael Sandel of the Harvard University writes in his latest book that the ability to rise depends less on the spur of poverty than on access to education, health care, and other resources that equip people to succeed in the world of work. It is in fact the universal truth that

education is one of the most important tools to provide equal opportunity, better life and dignity. Dr Ambedkar said, "Education is what makes a person fearless, teaches him the lesson of unity, makes him aware of his rights and inspires him to struggle for his rights." He believed that education is a movement. If it does not fulfil its objectives, it is useless.

The National Education Policy-2020 accepts that education is a great leveller and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion and equality. It also recognises the 'inherent obstacles' that students from deprived classes face in their bid to gain education. According to UDISE data quoted by NEP, share of Scheduled Castes students falls from primary to higher secondary level by about 2%. Lack of access to education does

violate article 8 (c) & (d) of the RTE Act which commands 'appropriate government' to prevent any kind of discrimination against students from disadvantaged groups. Increasing the access and preventing the drop outs has been the focus of all educational policies and reports on education in India.

The previous education policies and most of the reports on education have focussed on providing scholarship or emphasised on the implementation of reservation policies as a measure to promote access to education among the deprived classes. The NEP-2020 seems a better placed document for upliftment of deprived classes as it recognises that till the teaching-learning process itself imbibes inclusiveness and constitutional values such as nondiscrimination, equal treatment for all and respect for every citizen,

fostering inclusion and social justice in education will not materialize. This policy makes it explicitly clear that such values will be promoted through curriculum and a change in school culture. Not just the students but also the teachers, principals and educational administrators will be sensitised towards inclusion and equity as well as respect and dignity of all students. It further says that full equity and inclusion will be the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.

In today's world where economy plays such important role, success of an individual depends on



education and skills one has. Therefore it becomes imperative that governments provide everyone with a chance to get quality education on which success depends. In the new economic order, what matters now are innovation, flexibility, entrepreneurialism, and a constant willingness to learn new skills. And the national education policy 2020 focusses on such skills. This policy makes provision to integrate skill development, technology learning and technology based learning, multilingualism, flexibility to choose subjects, incorporating global citizenship education along with focus on regional content in our education system. Currently such features can be seen only in private schools with high fees normally out of bound for the socially backward community. This type of exposure plays an important in how a student performs during various competitive examinations at different stages of education. Even the second Administrative Reforms Commission accepts that it is generally the affluent and the elite who by virtue of their resources have access to better educational institutions and better coaching and preparation for the competitive examinations. Measures of merit are hard to disentangle from economic advantage. Imparting these skills and providing this kind of exposure to students in government schools, when that becomes a reality, will truly take India forward in assuring equal opportunity for all.

NEP makes provision for providing education in regional medium. Generally speaking, children from socially and economically backward classes often attend government schools delivering education in regional language medium. This used to hamper the

transition of these children from school education to professional higher education in fields such as medical and engineering education. But post NEP-2020, there is a move towards enabling these students to opt for medical and engineering education in their regional language medium. Recently the AICTE approved engineering education in eight regional languages. Following this, IIT-BHU has initiated the process to introduce Hindi medium in their institution.

There are several other provisions in the policy like fee waivers, scholarships, increased number of hostels, conditional cash transfers and academic bridge courses to enhance the learning experience of students from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG). But where the NEP misses the point is, it has not spoken or made provisions towards addressing the infrastructural issues. It promises to build new schools in aspirational districts but fails to address the issue of upgrading the current ones. This is especially worrying when the successive government since 1964 has been promising to spend 6% of GDP on education and the best we achieved is around 3-3.5%.

Section 6.6 of the NEP talks about creating Special Education Zones (SEZs) in such aspirational districts.

One more particularly important aspect that has now cropped up and taken the front seat is online education. National Education Policy though prepared before Covid19 era, but released after the first wave, must be commended for making a few provisions relating to online education.

This could prove to be a double edged sword for the governments, on one hand it seems to be incredibly positive step in fast tracking the development of educational facilities in the areas that are deprived of it till now. On the other hand it could lead to ghettoization of students from backward communities further leading to segregation of these students from the main stream.

One more particularly important aspect that has now cropped up and taken the front seat is online education. National Education Policy though prepared before Covid19 era, but released after the first wave, must be commended for making a few provisions relating to online education. Nevertheless we must not overlook that online classes fail to provide individual attention to all students. This might lead to increasing the learning gap between students from poor families and those from the well-off families, as these students do have access to any additional coaching etc. Therefore, the guidelines for online education should also include a provision for remedial classes especially for SC/ ST students. According to UNESCO, Schools are the centre of Social Activity which is important for learning. Further it says that even parents are not yet ready for their wards to have online education. One year of Covid Induced online teaching **(Page 14)**



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.

Aditi Narayani

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 COVID19, 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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Valmiki and Dom : Silent Corona warriors

The members of Valmiki and Dom community had played a crucial role during COVID pandemic as both of them were involved in ensuring hygiene. However, the contribution of these silent CORONA WARRIORS during the pandemic remains largely neglected. Unheard Voices focuses on how they worked in adverse conditions.

Satyajit

At Harishchandra Ghat in Kashi, where final rituals are performed, a group of few people used to stay for twenty hours. They did not go to their homes for days. Dozens of dead bodies were waiting for final rituals and they had no time to take care of themselves. It was a probably an unusual situation for them as they had never heard of the same.

Reason: COVID situation in the country was at its peak. Thousands of the people succumbed to

COVID and fear psychosis had gripped the masses. However, members of Dom community, which traditionally carries out the last rituals, were not moved. Many of them used to have their meal and tea, few feet away from the burning dead bodies. They were always surrounded by either suspected COVID patients or confirmed patients.

On many occasions, they had no enough material to protect themselves like PPE kits, masks or hand gloves. They had to organize for wood as the power supply was affected on several occasions.

They were getting meager income of Rs 300 every day at big risk. They continued work mainly because to get money and also teaching that – what they do is service to society.

The same is the case of Valmiki community, which is largely involved into day to day cleaning operations. Conservancy staff working in various parts of the country mainly comes from Valmiki community. During COVID period, the community took all the risks to ensure their area remains clean to reduce the threat from CORONA infection.



Rajesh Valmiki of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh said that his community members had to attend the calls to sanitize the house whenever COVID patient is found. “We have no fixed working hours as the patient was found at any time. We have to take a big risk at the time of sanitization as we were not provided masks and hand gloves several times. Our family members were also scared to get into contact with us”.

Conversation with members of Valmiki and Dom communities, spread across the country, reveals that they were under stress at the beginning of COVID in the last year. Local self-government of the respective areas were cautious to provide them with all the safety equipment. However, this did not continue. As the number of patients increased and the death toll rose, the fear factor subsided.

Conservancy staff was under pressure because of the increased workload. In most cases, the contract of cleaning a particular area is given to a private contractor. The private contractor engages the necessary staff, which is mainly from the Valmiki community. While the payment of labourers is given by the respective local self-body on the basis of attendance register, the staff has some serious complaints. Rajesh said that fake names are inserted in the attendance register to get the money and additional work is distributed to them, who are actually working on the field. “This naturally increases the workload,” said Rajesh.

Members of both the communities are upset today as their work is not recognized by the society like medical fraternity, police and administration. On many occasions, they had to face humiliating treatment. The main complaint raised by them is that they did not get any additional monetary benefit despite taking a big risk.

The workload was further increased during the COVID period as a large number of patients were found everywhere in the country. The members of Valmiki community carried out COVID related work in addition to their routine work. Rajesh said, “Imagine a situation in which adequate cleanliness was not ensured when COVID was at a peak. The situation was such horrible and serious that some other virus would have born”.

Sangram Chaudhari of Kashi, who has been working at Harishchandra ghat for the past 15 years said, “The situation was Ram Bharose. We had never seen such a large number of dead bodies at a single time. The family members of the deceased COVID patient used to wait for hours for their turn. We were working without having a meal or tea, We had no time to go to our homes”.

Sangram said Harishchandra ghat receives an average of 40 dead bodies in pre –COVID period. This number suddenly rose by five times. Harishchandra

ghat was witness to the last rites of an average of 200 bodies every day at the peak time of COVID. Harishchandra ghat had a team of eight, which used to carry out all the last rites. Sangram said, “One body takes a minimum of three hours to burn and we have to ensure that body is burnt properly. We were extra cautious because of COVID”, he said.

The family life of these people was badly affected during this period. Their family members used to keep a water bucket outside the house and were allowed to enter only after taking baths and washing clothes. Most of them live in shanty rooms and were not able to follow COVID protocol like social distancing. “Our families were living with death all the time but we did our duty”, said Rajesh and Sangram.



Members of both the communities are upset today as their work is not recognized by the society like medical fraternity, police and administration. On many occasions, they had to face humiliating treatment. The main complaint raised by them is that they did not get any additional monetary benefit despite taking a big risk. “We are already less paid and are unable to take care of our families. We feel that government should consider our role during the pandemic”.

Santar Ram of Bokaro district in Jharkhand said members of Dom community were taking a big risk as several dead bodies were of the suspected COVID patients but the reason for death was else.

However, they had some pleasant experiences as well. In several localities in the city, the conservancy staff was greeted with warmth every day. People have suddenly realized the importance of their role during pandemic and also in routine times. At several places, the conservancy staff was publicly felicitated by the people. People voluntarily offered them food and drinks at several places. The ration was delivered to their house while some people also helped them by providing financial assistance.

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What does Indigenous Peoples' day mean to India?

India does recognize and support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples but strongly maintains that all Indians are indigenous. It's of the opinion that the very concept of Indigenous Peoples' does not apply to the Indian context.

Vivekanand Motiram Nartam

Every year, the World community observes August 9 as the 'International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples' to promote and protect the rights of the world's indigenous population. On this occasion, the original inhabitants or aboriginals in various parts of the world, gather together to remember the atrocities and subjugations, they suffered at the hands of domineering people coming from different lands.

Such solidarity among them has built up a good amount of pressure on the world community to recognize their rights, distinct culture and way of life into account. A subsidiary body within the structure of the United Nations called the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), established in 1982, met for the first time in Geneva in the same year. Following the deliberations and recommendations of this body, the UN General Assembly, on December 23, 1994, decided that 9 August be observed as the International Day of World's Indigenous People.

The UN General Assembly in its resolution proclaimed that the world community will observe the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples' from 1995-2004. The main objectives of this decade were to strengthen international cooperation for the solutions to the problems, being faced by indigenous people in areas like human rights, environment, development, education and health. Further, as per the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2004, a Second International Decade commenced on 1 January 2005 and concluded in December 2014. The focused areas of this decade were promoting non-discrimination and inclusion, full and effective participation, adopting culturally appropriate development policies etc.

India does recognize and support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' but strongly maintains that all Indians are indigenous. It's of the opinion that the very concept of Indigenous Peoples' does not apply to the Indian context.

India's position has to be understood against the backdrop of the description of Indigenous. The International Labour Organization's convention, in 1957, on Indigenous Peoples' in its Article 1(a)



characterizes them as less advanced in their socio-economic conditions in comparison to other sections of the national community. Further in Article 1(b) says that they are the descendants of the original inhabitants before the conquest or colonization of the country or a geographical region and that their social, economic and cultural institutions are distinct from people coming from outside.

From the above description of the concept of indigenosity, it is quite clear that in India prior to Islamic aggressions and the subsequent conquests in medieval times or British colonization in the modern era, there is no history, which suggests aggression or conquests. Moreover, there are innumerable examples of harmonious coexistence and cultural exchange between and among the people, living in towns, villages, forests and hills. The colonial ill-intentioned invention of Aryan Invasion theory stands exposed from many quarters of historians and archaeologists today.

The Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, Ramayana and Mahabharata are replete with anecdotes that portray the intermingling of these cultures. Acharya Vinoba Bhave held Rigveda as the text of the tribals. Many scholars believe that the 'panchjanas' mentioned in the Rigveda consisted of a person each from the

The tribal people in India have the same notions of common friends and foes like the other people. Many tribal communities that have been talked of in the ancient and medieval times don't exist today as a result of acculturation. Many Rajput kings in the Middle Ages migrated to inaccessible forest areas to evade the tyranny of Islamic rulers and became tribal.

Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and Nishads—a tribal community and enjoyed equal status. The references of the Sabaras or the Saoras could be traced to Aitareya Brahmin. Many romantic and friendly descriptions of the tribals can be found in the ancient Sanskrit literature like Panchatantra, Kathasarit Sagar, Vishnu Puran etc. Shabari, who offered fruits to Rama, has become in Verrier Elwin's words, "a symbol of the contributions that tribes can and will make to the life of India".

The tribal community had a very important and honourable place in the Ramayana. Vali and Sugriva have been mentioned as the most glorious kings of the tribal society in the Ramayana. Most of them, known tribals, have been described to have participated in the Mahabharata and its innumerable episodes. Mahabharata has ample descriptions of tribal kingdoms and warriors fighting both to the sides of Pandavas and Kauravas. Bhima's son Ghatotkacha, who performs prodigies of valour in the war is born of his tribal wife Hindimba, Arjuna marries Uloopi, a Naga princess.

There are ample evidences in the medieval and modern history of Bharat, when people of the tribal communities fought shoulder to shoulder with Maharana Pratap, Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Tatyasaheb Tope in defence of Dharama and Rashtra. Furthermore, in many parts of India they rose up against the British and joined India's struggle for independence. To name some of the heroes of uprisings against British are Bhagwan Birsa Munda from Jharkhand, Umaji Naik from Maharashtra, Tantya Bheel from Madhya Pradesh, Alluri Sitaram Raju from Andhra Pradesh and Rani Gaidinliu from Nagaland, Matmur Jamoh from Arunachal Pradesh, Pa Togan Sangma from Garo Hills, Meghalaya.



The above examples suggest that the tribal people in India have the same notions of common friends and foes like the other people. Many tribal communities that have been talked of in the ancient and medieval times don't exist today as a result of acculturation. Many Rajput kings in the Middle Ages migrated to inaccessible forest areas to evade the tyranny of Islamic rulers and became tribal. For example, Rani Durgavati a Chandela Rajput princess married a Gond King Dalpat Shah of Gadha Mandla and fought against Moghals. Therefore, Dr. G. S. Ghurye, a renowned sociologist's observer, "Though for the sake of convenience they may be designated as the tribal classes of Hindu society, suggesting thereby the social fact that they have retained much more of the tribal creeds and organizations than many of the other castes of the society yet, in reality, they are backward Hindus".

Therefore, while we recognize the atrocities, subjugations and in some cases ethnic cleansing, suffered by indigenous populations in the America, Australia and many other parts of the world, we don't share anything in common with such history on our land. The practice of borrowing from other cultures and imposing the same in our social milieu is counterproductive. Such artificially created sense of fissure and discord between communities needs to be rejected lock, stock and barrel.

Nartam Vivekanand Motiram, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Shaym Lal College, University of Delhi.



Bhagat Namdev and Bhakti movement

Paramjit Singh Kaith



Bhagat Namdev became an icon of India's famous Bhakti movement. He penned 125 Abhangas in Hindi and 60 of them are part of Guru Granthsahiba.

Bhagat Namdev, a prominent spiritual personality of Bhakti period in India was born on October 26, 1270. He used to stay with his family Narsi Bamni village in Maharashtra. Namdev had some spiritual characteristics since childhood and his parents were little concerned about it. He was married to Rajbai when he was eight years old. His father persuaded him to continue the family's traditional business of tailoring. However, Namdev was more eager to serve spiritual persons instead of getting engaged with routine family life.

Family responsibilities could not stop Namdev from his spiritual love. As a result, Namdev was attracted to various ways of spirituality. Devotees strongly believe in two stories related to Bhagat Namdev. In one such story, God consumed milk offered by Namdev. Another story describes how Bhagat Namdev accepted Sant Visoba Khechar as his Guru.

One ought to understand the contemporary situation in Maharashtra when people were greatly attracted towards Warkari sect, which teaches them Vitthal Bhakti. Warkari sect strongly opposes the caste system, rituals and superstitions. Bhagat Namdev got attached to the Warkari sect. He undertook pilgrimage and visited various places in India including Rameshwar, Hyderabad, Devgiri, Junagadh, Marwad,

Dwarka, Gokul, Ayodhya Prayag, Kanshi, Gaya, Hastinapur and Bikaner. After completing the pilgrimage, he settled in Ghuman in Gurudaspur district of Punjab. He breathed his last in Ghuman.

Bhagat Namdev became an icon of India's famous Bhakti movement. He penned 125 Abhangas in Hindi and 60 of them are part of Guru Granthsahiba.

Guru Nanak strengthened Bhakti movement in India, which covers several aspects like sagun and nirgun Bhakti and even Sufi school of thought. This model of Bhakti movement opposed the caste system and all outdated traditions and rituals by professing love and affection to all human beings. Several spiritual personalities like Kabir, Shaikh Farid, Tarlochan, Namdev, Sadhana, Beni, Ramanand, Ravidas, Pipa, Bhikan, Parmanand and Surdas were part of this Bhakti movement. Islam was ruling India during the period of Sant Kabir, who did not hesitate to criticize some practices in Islam.

Many of these spiritual persons were socially and economically weaker sections of society. All the concepts during that period were centralized at religion. Bhakti movement gave a new dimension of social and economic aspect to this view. It is because of Bhakti movement contribution that Indians realised about their slavery in all aspects of life.

Bhagat Namdev opposed the caste system and untouchability and advocated love and affection for all human beings. He strongly supported unity among the people. **(Page 14)**

'We know, why we want to be together'

As I was highly educated, with spiritual background and had well-mannered behaviour, Dr. Bhanu's parents used to like me. But when we decided to get married and the discussions regarding caste came up, it was not accepted at all, especially by the elders of her house. She being a part of hardcore Brahmin family, it was not accepted by the elders from her side that she would marry a person from other caste.

Chinmayee



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

My wife Dr. Mrs. Bhanu Shrinath who is a naturopathy and yoga therapist was studying at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, where I was teaching naturopathy and yoga. She was my student and knew about me and my educational background. We met there and as we started to know each other, we knew that we wanted to spend our lives together.

What was your self talk when you decided to marry in view of the current social conditions?

We both believe that if we are emotionally connected, all other things are secondary. We knew for sure that there will be a lot of struggle while convincing our parents for this marriage, but we were ready to do that, as it was not just about marriage, but also we wanted to grow together while working for the society. Our views were similar and also we knew what we wanted to do for our society and so we were ready to convince everyone that, what we wanted to do was a right thing.

How was the actual marriage ceremony?

It was a typical Hindu wedding ceremony with all the rituals

and traditions. Though it was an intercaste marriage, we didn't want it to be a simple or a hidden thing. It was a symbol of acceptance from both the sides and so we had a proper wedding ceremony with relatives from both the sides.



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

As I was highly educated, with spiritual background and had well-mannered behaviour, Dr. Bhanu's parents used to like me. But when we decided to get married and the discussions regarding caste came up, it was not accepted at all, especially by the elders of her house. She being a part of hardcore Brahmin family, it was not accepted by the elders from her side that she would marry a person from other caste. Similar type of response was given by my family.

My parents, my brothers were strictly against this. At the same time I had many well educated girls approaching me for marriage from my community, so obviously my parents were inclined towards them. But eventually we

convinced our parents that nothing bad would come out of this and with the help of a few relatives and family friends our parents were convinced.

Did you have any problems getting married? If so, how did you address them?

The biggest problem was to get an approval from both the families. Her family being a typical Brahmin family, it was very difficult to get acceptance from her side. With Dr. Bhanu's decision of marrying me, her grandfather even left the house.

My father being a socially active person in our community, wanted me to marry a girl who belongs to our caste. Just like my elder brothers he wanted me to marry someone who knows our culture and belongs in it. But me and my wife knew the exact reason of being together and so we stayed firm on our decision, and convinced our respective parents for the marriage.

Who were the people who supported your decision?

It was year 2000. Not many people around us were (Page 14)

Tribute to Prof. Simhadri



Prof Yedla C Simhadri, who had the rare honour of being vice-chancellor of four universities, died in May this year. He was such a highly respected personality that President Ramnath Kovind described him as a “moving library”.

Vijendra

A boy born in a downtrodden family in a small village in the East Godavari district, Yedela had never imagined that he would be once vice-chancellor of Banaras Hindu University. In his lifetime, Yedla had the unusual honour of becoming vice-chancellor of four universities.

Professor Yedla.C.Simhadri served as Social work department Head of Andhra University (Andhra Pradesh) and served as vice-chancellor of four Universities. At the age of 80, Simhadri breathed his last on

May 22, 2021. President Ramnath Kovind aptly said in his condolence message, “Simhadri was a moving library”. Vice-president Venkayya Naidu, recalling his long time association with Simhadri said, “We had discussed the problems of higher education in India and worldwide”.

Inspired by Dr B R Ambedkar, Simhadri’s journey would not have succeeded without education. He was a doctorate in criminology. He was a great administrator and was known for his disciplinary attitude in educational institutes. He maintains the dignity of educational institutes by restraining political interference.

In personal life, Simhadri was practising Buddhism. Being Buddhist, he respects all the Hindu traditions. He attended Pooja at the BHU campus with traditional wear. Post-retirement, he founded a small school for poor students from Scheduled Castes and named it after Babasaheb Ambedkar.

After Simhadri, his wife, a Japanese national, Novaka worked in the school without any salary. Simhadri’s house in Vishakhapattanam is like an extensive library. Professor Simhadri was fearless. He never believed in ideological untouchability.
(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)

Appeal for financial assistance



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

“UNHEARD VOICES” is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly.

Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

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Bhagat Namdev and Bhakti movement

(From page 11) He was of the view that all human beings are children of the same God and everybody has the same spiritual element.

Indian civilization never accepted any kind of discrimination on any ground but it got perverted because of invasion and also due to some practices, which were accepted in course of time. The entire system got further perverted in the course of time and society was gripped with evils like untouchability. All the ways of social transactions and exchange were

determined by caste and people were not allowed to enter the temple and fetch water from the public well. Bhagat Namdev was a prominent spiritual personality who undertook a long pilgrimage to spread equality and humanity.

We need to remember Bhagat Namdev as he represents rich Indian tradition, which stands for equality and not any kind of discrimination.

President, National Scheduled Castes Alliance.
(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)



NEP 2020 : A Step Towards Inclusion

(From page 4) and learning has brought out the marked difference between the haves and the have nots. There is a huge gap in educational outcome among urban / rural as well as private and government school, moving to online education without a well thought path and addressing the concerns. This might just increase the gap much more.

Dr Ambedkar said about the Constitution of India, "...however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot..." Similarly, however the good the National Education Policy might be, its implementation in letter and spirit is pivotal in achieving desired outcome.

It is said that the difference between a life of promise and a life in peril hinges not on a student's potential but on the quality of the school one attends. Therefore an education policy holds much importance in displaying our resolve towards social justice and whether we allow our education system to be barrier that hinders equality or whether it evolves as a tool to bridge the gaps.

Researcher, Human Resource Development & Power Centre, New Delhi.
(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)

'We know, why we want to be together'

(From page 12) in support of our decision. Me and my wife were each other's biggest supports. She stood rock-solid by me through all the thick and thins.

Also there were a few friends of mine, one of my aunts and my father's colleagues and friends who helped us to convince my parents for this marriage.

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

The marriage is not just a union of two individuals but it is a bond between two families. If all the family members of both the families accept each other, then it forms perfect ecosystem with all the factors supporting each other. So the key element here is acceptance.

In our case, acceptance was the biggest issue. Even after 21 years of marriage, till date, our families have not completely accepted us. I appreciate my wife for adjusting in my family and being compliant with everything around, and I hope someday our respective families will accept us completely.

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

I believe that, caste is not something that defines who you are, but your deeds, your education, your approach of doing things decide that. Though I am from a non-brahmin background, I am a doctor, I have studied Vedas, I have mastered Jyotishvidya (Astrology), I am a five times winner of award given for Yoga, even got the Yogaratan, an international award for Yoga in 1985, also I have persued my PhD in yoga background. My caste was never a limiting factor for my growth. Me and my wife are connected to each other way beyond the limitation of castism. We were united by one dream and one direction of work and we are still going strong. As long as two people are connected to each other, on mental and emotional level, and have truly accepted each other for who they are, their caste doesn't matter.

(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)



UNHEARD VOICES

We will publish a special issue to commemorate 75th Independence Day. Theme of the issue is "Silent Contributors of Modern India". It will cover various aspects of nation building. Academicians and activists will write for UNHEARD VOICES. The issue will be published on August 15, 2021.