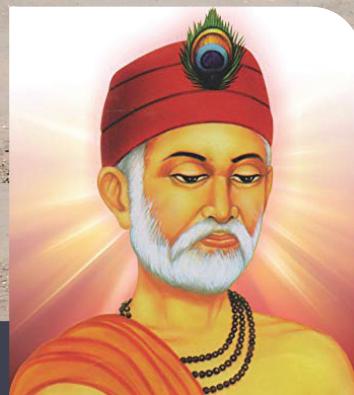


# UNHEARD VOICES

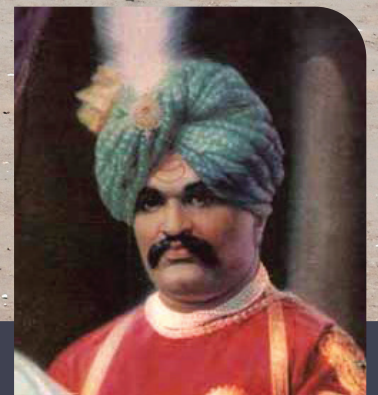
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Year long COVID lockdown has severely added to woes of underprivileged people across the country. Unheard Voices talked to people to understand their sufferings and hardships. The cover story throws light on the loss of job opportunities, migration and fights to live. COVID lockdown has made them further anxious and insecure.



24th June  
Sant Kabir  
birth anniversary



26th June  
Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj  
birth anniversary

## EDITORIAL

# Social Justice : A long journey

June 26 is observed as Samajik Nyaya Din, the birth anniversary of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, to remember his great contribution to the cause of social justice. He is credited with introducing reservation for socially and economically weaker people way back in 1902 in the princely state of Kolhapur. The first experiment was followed by other provinces like Mysore and Madras. Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj realised that the nation would never become strong if knowledge and power continued to be concentrated in the hands of a few people. His vision was reflected also in the fields like religion, economy, culture, education and sports. His bold decisions later became the great instrument for deprived people to take the path of progress.

The principle of social justice has been the driving force of the Indian constitution. Its architect Dr B R Ambedkar fought for it for his lifetime. Social justice is the foundation stone of a strong, prosperous and healthy India. The materialistic achievement of any society is meaningless if it does not respect values like equality and justice. We, as a society, have to prepare ourselves to accept these concepts at intellectual and emotional levels. Any concept which lacks emotion is bound to be dry and cannot sustain for a long period.

In India, the fight against caste discrimination and efforts for social justice are inseparable. We can trace the origin of such efforts in the Bhakti Movement which was spread all over India. This was really the democratization in the field of spirituality. It was followed by a period

of Renaissance. During this period, the scope of democratization was further widened and covered other aspects of human life like education, politics, culture and women rights.

India has experienced and witnessed a lot of transformation in the past few decades in this direction. The established norm that one has to be born in a particular caste or family, stands exposed. It is proved that caste and human qualities, intelligence and efficiency are not linked to each other. Privileges have no space in modern society.

Social justice covers all aspects of human life such as religion, economy, trade, education, culture, politics, media etc. Equal rights and opportunities, appropriate representation, participation and involvement in decision making and implementation, in each and every field of social life is embedded in a concept of social justice.

The principle of social justice is the foundation of modern society. The representation, inclusiveness and diversification standards are incorporated by the Academy of Motion Pictures for Oscar nomination and also by fortune 500 companies. But the question remains why the Academy felt it necessary to introduce such guidelines. The plain and simple answer is that there is still a need to work hard in this direction.

Social justice is not an idea to be demanded or granted. It has to be accepted by the heart as basic human and social value. We ought to evaluate society with respect to the concept of social justice from time to time to ensure quality human life.

## CONTENTS



**3**  
**COVID lockdown adds to woes of underprivileged people**

**5**  
**Remembering Shankarrao Kharat**

**7**  
**Withering away of casteism in Bihar**

**9**  
**Kerala Myth : The eye opener**

**10**  
**Sant Kabir : Converging streams of spirituality**

**11**  
**Mishri Devi : A Super Mom**

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A representative photo of lockdown impact in a village in Maharashtra. All the activities have come to a standstill due to COVID fear.

# COVID lockdown adds to woes of underprivileged people

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shows how the pandemic has hit the economy both in urban and rural areas. All the economic activities have come to a standstill, posing serious difficulties for the people, who mainly rely on traditional skills to earn daily bread. Unheard Voices selected people of few castes like Musahar, Khatik, Shilpkar, Charmkar, Nat and Dhobi from the states including Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi, Harayana to understand the ground reality and to know how their lives have been affected. These people narrated not only their own hardships but also the problems being faced by their community.

## Satyajit

More than a year-long lockdown has added to the woes of underprivileged people across the country. When Unheard Voices talked to these people across the country, they revealed how they are facing a dire crisis due to loss of livelihoods, forced shuttling between cities to rural areas, lack of jobs all over and glitches in government assistance. Besides, they are burdened with health worries due to COVID-19 and uncertainty about the future.

GDP has gone down below

zero : -7.3 per cent, shows how the pandemic has hit the economy both in urban and rural areas. All the economic activities have come to a standstill, posing serious difficulties for the people, who mainly rely on traditional skills to earn daily bread.

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not only their own hardships but also the problems being faced by their community. Fear of COVID, accompanied by economic hardships and an uncertain future has gripped these people across the country.

Dularchand Sahay, a resident of Harbhagna village of Madhubani district in Bihar says that he used to get work as daily wage labourer every day in the pre-COVID period. " Situation is so bad that I get to work for only four or five days in a month now. We manage to live with free ration and bank loan". Dularchand belongs to Musahar community.

Dularchand has to look after his family of five with his current monthly earnings of hardly Rs 1000. Schools are closed for more than a year now and the nearest government dispensary is ten km away from their house. “We are just pulling on”, he said.

Pankaj Sada, from Bhada village in Sahrasa district of Bihar, has returned from Nashik in Maharashtra. He said, “I used to earn Rs 400-500 every day in Nashik. There is no work in Nashik due to lockdown. So, I was left with no option but to return here”.

Pankaj has a joint family of 15 members. One of his brothers is still learning, while three others work as daily wage labourers. “I have been jobless ever since I returned from Nashik. We depend on the ration and many times rice is not even edible. We are helpless and the future appears bleak”, he said.

Member of Musahar community are mainly known as daily wage workers. This is one of the most backward communities in the state. Musahar community does not have any traditional vocational skills. On the other hand, Khatik community, which traditionally deals in chicken and mutton, is also going through the same experience. Although chicken and mutton are in the category of the essential commodity, members of Khatik community are facing problems as all business-related activities have come to a halt due to lack of mobility and the absence of customers.



Shivank from Muzaffarpur in Uttar Pradesh says his mutton shop has been closed for more than a month now. “I used to sell around 100 kg of chicken and mutton every day. Now, if I open the shop, the daily sale is just 30 kg. Frequent lockdown and changing rules have destroyed our business”, he said, adding that how can one expect people to buy chicken or mutton when they have no money to purchase even rice. Shivank is the eldest child of his parents and a major source of income for the family. “I have no money now. I am borrowing it from my friends and relatives to run the show”, he said.

Santosh Tampta of Shilpkar community from Pithoragad in the Kumaun district of Uttarakhand has been in the traditional family business of making copper vessels. “We were already in trouble because of machine-made items. COVID has added to our

misery”, he said. Santosh used to send his vessels to Nainatal, which is a big tourist centre. Tourists have been his main customers. But, the flow of tourists has stopped due to COVID fear and travel restrictions. All the eight people who used to work in Santosh's small workshop have lost jobs. Santosh, who was earning an average of Rs 30,000 per month is not making any money currently.

Charmkar is another community relying mainly on traditional skills. Members of Charmkar community too have lost their jobs. Some have migrated to cities like Delhi with the hope to get some jobs there. Pappu, who is involved in shoemaking in Chandosi village of Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh is physically handicapped. He lost his one leg in an accident a few years back and did not get married. The only breadwinner in his family, Pappu says, “All my community members are unemployed currently. We have already been facing serious problems as people prefer branded shoes and footwear. COVID has worsened the condition. All of us are jobless. How will we survive?”, he asked.

Jugal Kishor, another member of Charmkar community, has closed down his workshop. Seven people working in his workshop have lost jobs. “I am helpless. What can I do? I am myself looking for daily wage work. How can I run a workshop if there are no customers?”, he asked.

Nat community, which is spread across Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, is also badly affected. Members of Nat community are nomadic folk artists reciting traditional bhajans. Many of them are presently struggling for two meals a day.

Mahesh Baaz of Gujarat has given up the traditional way of source of income as it does not give him sufficient money. He shares the problems of his community members. “All of them are sitting at home. What can they do? They do not have any other skills. We solely rely on support from people even during normal conditions. Now we depend totally on help from the government or NGOs”, he said.

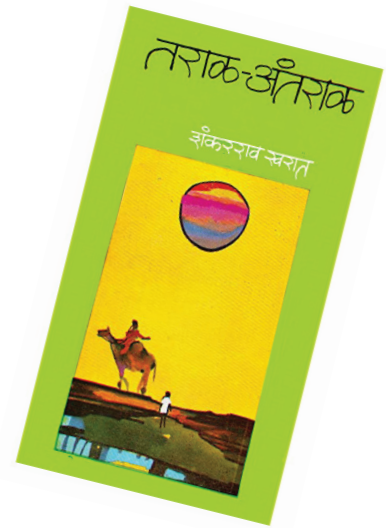
Ram Kumar Rai from Chitoud in Rajasthan, who works for the welfare of the community, said almost all members of his community have been forced to work as daily wage labourers. “We have no political leadership to speak for us. We used to earn Rs 100-150 per day in the pre-COVID period. Now we are not getting any money”, he said. Rai said many people of the community have migrated to big cities like Mumbai and Kolkata with the hope to perform there and get some money. “I do not know what is in store for them there”, he said.

The Shilpkar community of Uttarakhand, which is involved in the construction of temples, is also facing a severe crisis. The case of Kripal Lal Sagwad is representative. A resident of Garhwal district in Uttarakhand, Kripal said all construction sites are closed for more than a year. “We cannot move around due to restrictions. Earlier, we used to (Page 12)

Look for July issue of Unheard Voices to know contribution of Walmiki and Domb community in COVID crisis.



Dr Shankarrao Kharat is considered as one of the founders of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. His birth centenary is being observed currently. Unheard Voices recalls Shankarrao's contribution to Marathi literature on the occasion.



# Remembering Shankarrao Kharat

**Dr. Ishwar Nandapure**

Term "Sathotari" - post-sixties- has special significance in Marathi literature as it took a major deviation from the established norms. Barring few exceptions, Marathi literature was dominated by so-called upper-caste authors, who had accepted modern values in the personal life. But it was not strongly reflected in their writings. Their writing did not cross the framework, which was determined by the old and orthodox values.

Maharashtra witnessed the emergence of modern literature because of a new awakening among the Dalit youths. The new awakening was the result of Dr B R Ambedkar's decision to embrace Buddhism in 1956. Dr Ambedkar's decision shattered the social fabric, giving birth to new ideas like equality and humanity. Inspired by Bhagwan Buddha and Dr Ambedkar, the new authors rebelled against the established norms in Marathi literature, which later was recognized as Dalit literature.

This period saw new authors like Anabhau Sathe, N R Shende and Bandhumadhav. Dr Shankarrao Kharat belongs to the first batch of this trend. Dr Kharat, who wrote for more than four decades, highlighted the struggle of Dalits

in his books. Hunger, exploitation and inhuman living conditions were always at the centre of his writing.

As an author, Dr Kharat used all the forms of literature. He wrote a number of stories, novels, research papers, edited books and autobiography.

Dr Kharat, who had the privilege to work closely with Dr. Ambedkar, was truly recognized as an author because of his book "Bara Balutedari". Balutedari is the social system in Maharashtra, comprising various lower castes, which have been carrying specific works traditionally. Even as the lower caste people were playing a very crucial role in society, they were denied basic human rights.

'Bara Balutedari' is always considered as a mirror of the contemporary mindset of Dalits, who were showing signs of awakening but found themselves in a helpless situation. All of them had pains because of their plight but were unable to raise voice as they had no alternate source of income.

Rama, one of the characters in the book, stands as a representative of the then Dalit community. He is willing to stay in the village but cannot give up the traditional work. He is so burdened with the routine work as he could not take his sick son to the doctor.

His son dies due to the lack of medical treatment. Rama is forced to work when his son's dead body is lying in his hut. What could be a more painful and frustrating experience for an individual?

Pandu Lohar and Damu Parit are the other characters, who faced similar hardships in some different form. Pandu is forced to commit theft as he was never paid for his work. Damu Parit runs away to Mumbai to work in a mill as he could not tolerate injustice.

Dr Kharat's characters in the short stories are more forceful. A character in one of his story says that it was better for him to go to jail where two meals every day are ensured. Ganu, a collie, gets relieved when one of his sons dies. Reason – he would be less burdened now. Can we imagine this happens in post-independent India?

While focusing misery of the lower caste people, Dr Kharat also wrote on social issues like the entry of Dalits in the temple and superstitions. He writes in a story about a man, who is taken to a temple of a local deity because of his illness. The priest told his family that it was because of the anger of the deity. The priest further adds that the deity was now further angry as the man had entered the temple. Imagine how caste and superstitions had become social

ills for society. Dr Kharat shows how the administration was in hand in gloves with the upper caste people when police conducted a fake panchnama. The Dalit man dies of hunger and thirst but the real reason is not mentioned in the panchnama.

Marathi literature was shaken because of his story – Pani in which a Dalit was denied water in a temple. Ironically, The same priest cleaned the entire temple with water because of the entry of a Dalit. The story tells how basic human right was denied to the Dalit community.

Dr Kharat also wrote on the people from nomadic tribes, who were in the complete dark about the modern age. Dr Kharat indicates nomadic tribes were



completely alienated from the rest of the people. Dhanya, the hero of one of the stories, goes to a house, seeking work. The landlord asked about his caste and denied giving him any work. Can we imagine that a person, willing to work for his livelihood, is refused the work because of his caste?

Wasna is another story, which depicts the horrifying experiences of Dalit women. Anju, a Dalit woman used to clean the temple premises every day. She was given leftover food but was never allowed inside the temple. The priest, one day, however, took her to the temple and raped Anju. Dr Kharat underlines the pretentious nature of the upper caste as well male dominating attitude in the story.

All the characters in Dr Kharat's stories are representative of Dalits in the country as many of them had undergone similar experiences. Dr Kharat depicts their sorrows and sufferings, agony and anger, frustration and fruitlessness in their lives.

While showing the miserable lives of Dalits, Dr. Kharat also wrote on some signs of new awakening among them. A youth in Bahishkar, refuses to say Johar Maybap and shouts Jay Bhim. Another youth in Watsaru, takes a knife out of his pocket when people attacks him for having tea in a cup and saucer, which is reserved for upper caste people.

Dr Kharat wrote a few novels as well. While his stories had mainly rural orientation, novels had an urban background. He wrote novels, including "Hatbhatti", "Me Mukta Me Mukta", "Gaoncha Tinopal Guruji", "Masaledar Guest House" and

"Manuskichi Hak".

Dr Kharat is one of the first Marathi writers, who have described the lives of the people living in the slums in the cities. He is a little more vocal when he writes on the life in the slums, which is full of hunger, poverty, goons, criminal elements, addiction, prostitution, gambling, police and superstitions.

In Me Mukta Me Mukta, Dr Kharat says about the life of a boy, who grew in an orphanage while in "Gaoncha Tinopal Guruji", he describes corruption in education department. as it shows the psyche of Dalit community

"Manuskichi Hak" chose to adopt a different path when it embraced Buddhism. Published in 1958, the novel describes the horrifying conditions of Dalits and their new awakening. It tells us about the new aspirations among them because of awakening and urges to have a new system where all human beings have dignity.

Dr Kharat is never aggressive. He never speaks of Vidroh. He is in favour of consensus instead of rebellion. His soft personality is reflected in his writings. His autobiography – Taral Antral - speaks more in this direction. An indifferent attitude, which is said to be a basic pre-requisite for an author, is seen in his writings.

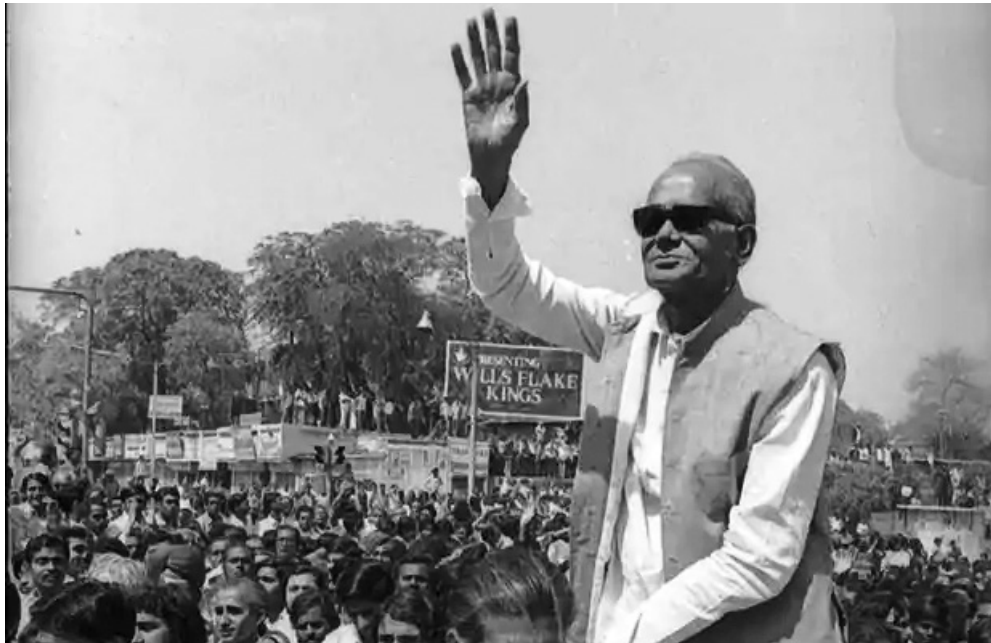
**Born on July 11 at Atpadi in now Sangli district, Dr Shankarrao Kharat moved to Pune for college education. He became follower of Dr Ambedkar and became lawyer. He was editor of Prabuddha Bharat for three years. He began his career as author in late fifties and is considered as one of the founders of Dalit literature. Dr Kharat was also vice-chancellor of Dr Ambedkar Marathwada University. He was also president of Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, held in Jalgaon in 1989. He died in April 2001.**

Marathi Dalit literature had seen a number of autobiographies in the past five decades. Dr Kharat is one of the pioneers of this trend. He paved a way for Dalit authors to write about their sufferings instead of living in an imaginary world. Dr Kharat can also be attributed for giving a new perception to Dalit authors through his novels and stories. We need to remember Dr Kharat for laying the foundation of Dalit literature. Dr Kharat's stories and novels forced the established people in Marathi literature, who used to describe their literature as 'classic', to re-examine their values and ideas. His perception is much larger as his literature is not restricted to a particular caste, but covers other castes among Dalit community. Dr Kharat's greatest contribution is that he created a background for Dalit literature, which later emerged as a strong stream in Marathi literature.

**Author is retired professor of Marathi from Nagpur (unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)**



# Withering away of casteism in Bihar



## Aditi Narayani

On the occasion of birth anniversary of Ram Vilas Paswan, which falls on July 5, Aditi Narayani reviews social change in Bihar. Ramvilas Paswan, considered as the product of JP's Sampurna Kranti, was always against 'vidroha' or social devide. Bihar has rich tradition of such leaders who contributed to social reforms.

Since independence because of the constitutional rights and rule of law, the battle for social equality has shifted from the tangibility of untouchability and caste-based discrimination to a more subdued fight for acceptance of marginalized in the social fabric of India. Now the fight from the right to passage has shifted to the right to dignified livelihood, education, land and jobs. In this fight for equality and equity, social justice and reforms have taken a rather scattered trajectory across India, wherein several states have shown a significant increase in the inclusivity of their social fabric.

One such state, which has shown significant improvement in its social justice reform, is Bihar. Despite losing the perception battle it has done exceptionally good on several parameters and the society has responded well to the

reforms initiated by their reformers. It is said that Bihar is plagued with caste-based discrimination; I would rather rephrase it, as the people of Bihar are conscious of their caste identity, which doesn't necessarily imply they practice casteism or untouchability. The political consciousness of caste and its discussion thereto, in day-to-day lives, do not necessarily mean that it is used as a tool for discrimination. However, it is sadly a truth that Bihar, like any other state, inter-caste marriages and union is still an exception than a norm.

When we see the other states the picture get murkier, despite states faring much better on several other economic parameters. In Bihar, the lower castes worship at the village temples, unlike Punjab. People of all castes attend the same social and religious functions, celebrate births and marriages together. And yet the boundaries remain when it comes to the matrimonial alliance

and people will still vote according to their caste and community.

Bihar is the land of enlightenment, the land for J.P Andolan , Bhoodhan movement and Total Revolution or Sampoorna Kranti and to trace the social trajectory or social revolution of Bihar, it's important to understand the forms and means of Total Revolution. Talking about a total revolution that completely redefined the social and political sphere of Bihar, it is imperative to mention the work done by Jay Prakash Narayan, affectionately called JP. The concept of Total Revolution is based on the basis Marxist and Gandhian concepts of social revolution and also on the principles of western democracy of liberalism, Equality and Fraternity. The concept of the Total Revolution covers several dimensions like social, economic, political, cultural, educational, and spiritual. Bihar had experienced a social transformation, spiritual and educational transformation back in 1974.

To understand why Bihar is fairly doing better than other states when it comes to the practice of untouchability, we need to know the tenets of Total Revolution which was brewing in Bihar in 1970s. A brief description of each form of the Total Revolution is discussed below:



he carried Gandhi's view on economic life and economic relationships. In his Prison Diary, JP writes that economic development should include "technological, industrial, and agricultural revolutions, accompanied by a radical change in the pattern of ownership and management." On the question of Land and its related issues, he followed both the Marxist and the Gandhian approach. He emphasized the

land reform movements too but with a plea for a non-violent means and in the latter part of his life he advocated for Sarvodaya movement to address the land question. JP agitated for "land to the tillers". The primary emphasis in regard to land reform, therefore, is on the ownership of land by those who cultivate it, adequate wages for the landless, poor, and effective implementation of existing laws relating to ceiling, eviction, share-cropping, and homestead land.

**Cultural Revolution:**

By cultural revolution, it meant a change in the individual and group behaviour for social transformation at the individual level, changes meant as bringing changes in the moral values or if in a group then the guiding principles should be based on moral politics. A change in the ideological commitment would lead to what he referred to as an intellectual revolution, whereby the intellectual revolution of the individual and the groups would lead to such a transformation where the role of morality and commitment to the social transformations would lead to Cultural Revolution. The most important variable in cultural change is education. The education should reach all the sections of the society and there should be no social exclusion in achieving an education. And it should be able to create awareness amongst the masses so that they can participate in the development processes.

Political revolution: For Political revolution, the focus was on development at the grass-root level and focused on the dismantling of the hierarchical structure and strengthening of the village democracies. In other words, if power was shared among different echelons of the social structure starting from, say, the village upward, the danger of centralization could very well be avoided. Centralization, either of political or of economic power, was that which needs to be destroyed at all levels. Thus the total revolution not only gave moral courage to the masses to come on the streets but it also gave voice to the unheard. The people who were on the periphery of the social structure also became part of the struggle for social inclusion.

Total Revolution is a sum total of social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual revolution which paved the for Inclusivity in Bihar.

*Author is Assistant Professor, Maitreyi college, University of Delhi and Phd Scholar, JNU. (unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)*



**The dimension of caste and class needs to be addressed together in the total revolution. Therefore, he carried Gandhi's view on economic life and economic relationships. In his Prison Diary, JP writes that economic development should include "technological, industrial, and agricultural revolutions, accompanied by a radical change in the pattern of ownership and management." On the question of Land and its related issues, he followed both the Marxist and the Gandhian approach. He emphasized the land reform movements too but with a plea for a non-violent means and in the latter part of his life he advocated for Sarvodaya movement to address the land question**

**Socio-economic revolution :**

Bihar was experiencing social revolution under J.P, who had such a vision of social revolution where caste and class inequalities cease to exist. And in Marxist terms, he also understood the importance of economic revolution for social revolution. He was fully aware of the caste-based discrimination and social exclusion in Indian society and he also understood the importance of addressing it, first. And he considered integrating the social and the economic transformations as one aim under the socio-economic revolution.

The dimension of caste and class needs to be addressed together in the total revolution. Therefore,



# 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 Gouramma 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

**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.**

have accentuated that the lack of representation of marginalized people in politics can jeopardize the advancement of social justice. To create an egalitarian society, 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 (Page 12)



# Sant Kabir : Converging streams of spirituality

On the occasion of Kabir Jayanti, we recall how Sant Kabir's thoughts were based on spirituality. Sant Kabir always spoke about the social and cultural life of human being. He tried to bridge concepts of 'Sagun' and 'Nirgun'.

## Dr. Rajeshwar Kumar

Sant Kabir is one of the prominent representatives of the Bhakti movement in India. His work has been analyzed widely in academia. The social, religious and spiritual dimensions of Kabir's ideas are celebrated in literature, humanities and social sciences. Recently, some scholars have studied the themes of love and environmental awareness as embedded in Kabir's ideas. Some scholars with limited understanding of Kabir try to prove him as a biased intellectual towards women. Some of them also attempt to see Kabir as Dalit thinker and representative.

While as Sant Kabir is a spiritual thinker who spoke about all the essential dimensions of the social-cultural life of human being. Spirituality is the essence of his thoughts. Kabir emerged as a social reformer when the Indian society was facing socio-cultural turbulence. The Muslim invaders and rulers were ruining the cultural heritage of Indian society. There was an environment of hopelessness. At that time, Kabir emerged as a saviour of humanity. His views go beyond the social-cultural-religious boundaries. He was a true representative of Indian Knowledge Tradition with the inclination towards brotherhood, co-existence and welfare of all.

As a Nirgun sage, he epitomized Ram as a God of all who led towards emancipation from worldly constraints. He said 'निर्गुण राम निर्गुण राम जफ़ रे भाई' and



emphasized a non-ritualistic way of spirituality. If one observes he will find that Kabir bridged Nirgun and Sagun through knowledge. For him knowing the reality enables one to live life freely. Instead of paving any new tradition or religion, he accommodated all the good things from all the existing traditions and religions. For example, he took Adwait, maya and metaphysical reality from Vedanta, Yog from Nath and Siddhi, Ahimsa from Vaishnav tradition, mysticism from Sufism.

His encompassing vision found Ram in each and every component of the universe. Ram exists in everybody we need to introspect and enlighten ourselves. It is the only way of being and becoming. It is one's highest achievement in life. He avoids extremism and accepts the existence of Brahm as an overarching concept and phenomenon. His presence is matter of realization therefore he affirms- ना मैं गिरिजा ना मैं मंदिर, ना काबे कैलाश में, मौको कहाँ दूढे बंदे में तो तेरे पास में. The literacy or knowledge of the physical world will not enable

us to know the way of Brahm . It is love that opens the way to spirituality. He supports intense love for humanity and criticizes all forms of discrimination. According to him, love helps to realize unity among all. Love is eternal but is not like any material that can be defined with all the dimensions and components it can be only felt and realized. His philosophy is unique in defining a relationship between the self and the other. He attacked the rituals of all the religion. His sarcasm was unique. One of the well-known examples of the same is- कांकर पाथर जोड़ी के मस्जिद ली चिनाया। ता चढ़ मुल्ला बांग दे बहया हुआ खदाय।।

He never left his job of spinning and at the very same time, he was engaged in the process of knowing reality through spirituality. He philosophizes in Adwait tradition and established the ideal of; यत् ब्रह्मंडे तत् पिंडे. He appreciated the pervasiveness of Jeev and Brahm unity. He opined that the soul is part of supra-soul that is known as Parmatma. In the end soul sinks in supra-soul. There is only an outer difference between soul and supra-soul.

Kabir was a social reformer, who enlightens common people in their language. He was critical of social evils and supported social cohesion. He opened the door of spirituality for all.

**Author is Assistant Professor & HoD, Department of Mass Communication, L.S college, Muzaffarpur (unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)**



# Mishri Devi: A Super Mom



This is the story of a woman, who made a big struggle to educate her children decades back. Meet Mishri Devi of Reliwas village in Rajasthan. Her son was the first graduate in the village. She ensured that her sons and daughters get proper education. Her resolve was seen when the family was not allowed to fetch water from public water source, while there was no electricity.

## Chinmayee

The Super-Mom...

This is the story of an illiterate woman, who is the mother of five sons and five daughters, who ensured that all her children and well educated and well established. The journey began with her family and still continues with efforts to get an education to the children in the village.

This is the story of Mishri Devi from Raliawas, Rewari, a small village in Haryana. A large family, with limited resources and many mouths to feed, had to struggle every day for basic necessities. The one woman, who led the entire family towards a brighter future, was Mishri Devi. It was the time when there was no electricity, no clean water to drink or not enough money to feed everyone in the house.

What made Mishri Devi to make more struggle was the fact that one of her sons was physically handicapped because of polio. But her priorities were

very categorical. Unlike others, where children are asked to earn money instead of schooling because of poverty, Mishri Devi ensured that her children get proper education.

Mishri Devi's eldest son was the first graduate in the village. The second son is currently an army officer while two others are officers in nationalized banks. One of them retired as chief manager of the bank. Her handicapped son is an officer with a bank. Her two daughters are housewives.

Mishri Devi's son Dhanpat Singh is an IAS officer of 1984 Haryana batch. He recalls, "My grandfather and father used to work on a farm as labourers. They used to get 1/8th a portion of whatever is harvested, so obviously, our father wanted us to work in the field so that the family could have some financial support. But our mother stood against this and emphasized on our education." To avoid putting any extra financial pressure on the family, Mishri Devi used to cut and chaff whatever mustard

is left in the field after everything is harvested and sell it. The money earned from that was used for the education of the kids. Thanks to her efforts, her elder son Chandrabhan Singh was the first graduate of the village. It was a glorious moment for the family which was not even allowed to fetch water from the public well, because of their so-called lower caste.

The insistence of Mishri Devi on the education of her children did not merely change the life of the family but inspired other villagers. The villagers realized the importance of education in human life and Mishri Devi's family emerged as the symbol of a new change.

Around 1970, Mishri Devi decided to educate her daughters. It was the time when the term – women empowerment – was not born. Women education, particularly in rural areas, was a dream for many parents. She ensured that her daughters get an equally good education like her sons. Supported by her husband



**Mishri Devi with her family**

– Makhanlal Ji, Mishri Devi encouraged people in the vicinity to stand against the Dowery system.

For all the incredible work, she was honoured with the “Best Mother Award” under the Vayoshrestha Samman 2010 by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Senior Citizen’s Day. Mishri Devi had realized the importance of education but did not understand the significance when her son Dhanpat Singh passed IAS examination. She merely understood that her son had achieved something very big and distributed ladoos in the village.

Mishri Devi currently stays with Dhanpat Singh at the government house and is satisfied that her son had done something incredible. Inspired by her mother, Dhanpat Singh had started a school in Raliawas where all the children can get an education without any hindrance. Mishri Devi is a satisfied mother as her well-wishers call her Super Mom.

*(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)*



## COVID lockdown adds to woes of underprivileged people

(From page 4) work throughout the year. Now there is no work for us. People have stopped paying money for temples generously like in the past”, he said.

Members of the Shilpkar community are also looking for daily wage jobs. Kripal, who has closed his small workshop, said he has used all his savings and is forced to borrow money from friends or relatives.

Members of Dhobi community too have become jobless as people stranded at their houses do not need formal ironed clothes as in the pre-COVID times. Sukhpal Singh, a member of Dhobi community from Kurukshetra in Haryana, says he is totally dependent on help from the government, well-wishers and NGOs. Sukhpal says “I was earning Rs 300-350 every day in pre-COVID era. All shops are closed now. People do not need pressed clothes. It’s a very very tough time. We do not have any money. I have not paid rent and power bills for several months.”

Surendra Kumar of Yamunagar in Haryana runs laundry for the past 25 years with the help of his brothers. He pays a monthly rent of Rs 2,400 for the shop and used to make Rs 350-400 every day. Now his shop is closed and he is anxious about his son and daughter. Surendra Kumar and his family are also dependent on help from well-wishers.

In absence of formal education and dependency on traditional and hereditary skills, many castes in the country are undergoing financial distress due to the COVID pandemic. Job losses or lack of enough job opportunities has destroyed several lives. Helping hands of fellow countrymen and assistance from the government is the only ray of hope for these people.

*(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)*



## Myth of casteless politics in Kerala

(From page 9) 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.

*Author is a Doctoral Researcher  
at the Department of Political Science,  
University of Hyderabad.  
(unheardvoices2021@gmail.com)*

