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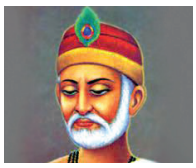
CASTE BASED CENSUS



14th June
Sant Kabir Das
Birth Anniversary

26th June
Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj
Birth Anniversary

4th July
Swami Vivekanand
Death Anniversary

6th July
Babu Jagjivan Ram Death
Anniversary

EDITORIAL

Caste Census – A Dilemma

The issue of caste census has once again come to the fore. Political parties and organizations have been demanding caste census for a long time while it is being opposed by another section as they have raised some genuine questions before the herculean task. The issue is expected to take priority as Bihar has decided to conduct a caste census. Significantly, this decision was taken at all party meetings, indicating political consensus.

Bihar development is noteworthy on two counts. Firstly, Bihar Assembly had passed a resolution in the past two occasions. But it was not implemented. Secondly, there were different views among political parties in Bihar because of which the issue was almost shelved. Following the Bihar decision, political parties have demanded similar exercise in neighbouring Jharkhand, which was once part of Bihar. One of the senior leaders from Maharashtra has also emphasised the demand. It is likely to gain momentum as that party Is one of the ruling partners in the State.

Census, by all counts, is important data collection. It is not merely a headcount but a collection of other information like housing, nutrition, employment, education etc. This data provides the specific information to formulate the policies and to ensure that benefits of development are taken to the needy groups.

The first census was conducted in 1872 by British rule. It continued in independent India. Independent India had seven census and work on the eighth census in progress. Despite having a history of more than a century, the first caste census was conducted in 1911. But after Independence India had chosen to cover only Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) while other castes were not included in the census.

Both sides are making strong arguments to support their views. The Government of India has submitted an affidavit in the Supreme Court, indicating its reluctance to go for caste census. However, BJP is in power in Bihar, which decided to conduct the exercise. This is suggestive as all party meeting was attended by BJP. Ruling party seems to have second thoughts on the issue because of possible adverse political fallout.

It is a reality that several types of information, which is collected during the census, is directly or indirectly related to the caste system. For example, education, nutrition, number of family members, employment or unemployment, housing and several other factors certainly are different in the so-called upper caste and deprived class. All these factors are important to the development of the country and their precise information will certainly emerge as crucial inputs. If we agree on proportionate representation, we do not have any strong reasons to shy away from collecting information in this regard as it will be inclusive, participative and comprehensive.

Those, who are in favour of caste census, fear that caste census data will be used only for political motivations. Their fear is also reasonable in view of our past experience. Caste is always seen as a vote bank and this vote bank is captured by few politicians. All of us are witness to the politics of identity now-a-days. They fear that such exercise would flare up caste sensibilities, which will ultimately harm social unity and integrity. The argument being forwarded by this group is that it plays a crucial role in shaping mindset, which is not in accordance with modern sensibilities.

Notwithstanding ideological differences, some practical difficulties cannot be brushed aside. For example, how the caste will be defined? In a country like India, a particular caste is known with different names even within the same state. We also have castes, which are SCs in one state and OBCs in other states. Also, there are sub-groups within every caste. This has also a religious angle, which needs to be attended with adequate seriousness without any other considerations. It is a sociological reality that the birth rate in the section of society, which has gained progress, is always lower. These people may not want to know their own numerical strength for obvious reasons.

Caste census has potential to bring about drastic changes on social and political front. But everybody must keep in mind our ultimate aim. The aim is to have an equal and cohesive society. We must aim for a society, where everybody will get equal opportunity. Our primary objective is to emancipate ourselves from the shackles of caste.

For feedback please click the below link : https://forms.gle/XWQ19k9xC1CyNr6e7

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Response

Many Congratulations on collaborating with Centre for study of Social exclusion and Inclusion policy , JNU and successfully organising a two days National Seminar on marginalized and neglected voices of our society. The periodical covered diverse topics pertaining to marginalization and gender issues. I wish the foundation success in all their future endeavours.

- **Dr. Sutapa Das,** Associate Professor
Department of History FSS BHU Varanasi.

Thanks and congratulations for this issue of unheard voices on a very pertinent topic. Regards.

-Dinbandhu Vats

Namaskar, Thank you for sharing. This magazine is informative.

- **Akanksha Singh,** Delhi

We must liberate ourselves from denial mode to accept reality. 'Khandan-Mandan' has been an Indian tradition. We are never scared of any debate as we are honest to accept errors and take corrective steps. Only consensus can pave the way in critical days today. Reading the editorial provided me a great relief. I felt, it has the potential to create a new ideology. An ideology of the 21st century. It is not a quantum ideology, but rather hybrid ideology, which sets aside all the negativities and moves forward towards counter-passing all the positives. It is equilibrium. In the age of genetic recoding it is high time to identify the current social narratives to recode social genes for better tomorrow. Thanks for sharing the issue of 14th May.

- **Prof. Ajit Mujalkar,**
Maharashtra Mahavidyalaya Nilanga, Latur

Caste Census in India

Pros & Cons

2021

The issue of caste-census has once again come on the agenda with political parties and social organizations pressing their stands. We are publishing both side of the issue.

Akanksha

In a country living with the reality of caste and striving constantly to offset disadvantages created on the basis of social hierarchy, the central government's decision to hold a caste census does have wide appeal. The enumeration of castes is to be undertaken along with a 'Below Poverty Line' census in such a way that there is a simultaneous mapping of the economic, caste, and religious backgrounds of the entire population. A mere caste census may have meant just a headcount of diverse communities, but with the plan to integrate socio-economic data with the caste count, there is a hope that the country might at last have a set of quantifiable data that would justify key administrative measures predicated on caste identity.

Over the years, the debate over the use of caste as the basis for ensuring social justice in education and public employment has been resolved in favour of caste-based reservation for 'socially and educationally backward classes.' Once caste was accepted as the main parameter on which social justice would be measured, it was only a matter of time before the country came around to the view that a restoration of the pre-Independence system of including caste in the decennial Census was necessary. The continuance of existing levels of caste-based reservation also hinges on collection of caste-wise data. For the judicially imposed limit of fifty per cent on the quantum of reservation — flowing from a constitutional scheme that says the extent of reservation, being the exception, cannot exceed equal treatment, the norm — can be overcome only by providing hard data to the court.

Census

The origin of the Census in India goes back to the colonial exercise of 1881. Census has evolved and been used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, delimitation exercise, etc. However, as early as the 1940s, W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941 Census, had pointed out that "the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument unsuited for specialized inquiry."

SECC

The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was conducted in 2011 for the first time since 1931. SECC is meant to canvass every Indian family, both in rural and urban India, and ask about their: Economic status, so as to allow Central and State authorities to come up with a range of indicators of deprivation, permutations, and combinations of which could be used by each authority to define a poor or deprived person. It is also meant to ask every person their specific caste name to allow the government to re-evaluate which caste groups were economically worse off and which were better off. SECC has the potential to allow for a mapping of inequalities at a broader level.

Pros

Helpful in Managing Social Equity Programmes, India's social equality programmes cannot be a success without the data and a caste census would help fix that. Due to the lack of data, there is no proper estimate for the population of OBCs, groups within the OBCs and more. The Mandal Commission estimated the OBC population at five percent while some others have pinned the OBC population from 36 to 65%. The census would 'besides resolving the needless mystery about the size of the OBC population, census enumeration would yield a wealth of demographic information (sex ratio, mortality rate, life expectancy), educational data (male and female literacy, ratio of school-going population, number of graduates) and policy relevant information about economic conditions (house-type, assets, occupation) of the OBCs'.

Bring a Measure of Objectivity on Reservation: A caste-based census could go a long way in bringing a measure of objectivity to the debate on reservations. According to the Rohini Commission, which was formed to look into equitable redistribution of the 27% quota for OBCs, noted that there are around

2,633 castes covered under the OBC reservation. However, the Centre's reservation policy from 1992 doesn't take into account that there exists within the OBCs, a separate category of Extremely Backward Castes, who are much more marginalized.

Cons

Repercussions of a Caste Census: Caste has an emotive element and thus there exist the political and social repercussions of a caste census. There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities. Due to these repercussions, nearly a decade after the SECC 2011, a sizable amount of its data remains unreleased or released only in parts.

Arguments for demanding a caste census

Political parties batting for the caste census cites the need for caste-wise data to justify the extension of reservations to various communities. On the other hand, there is also a large body of scholarly work, done by sociologists, political scientists and historians, which bypass the welfare argument to assert that India's fundamental mistake in its battle to overcome caste was not doing a caste census. According to these scholars, formal blindness to caste in a casteist society results in a denial of the web of caste-based privileges that continue to funnel opportunities to those at the top of the caste hierarchy. They point out that while the very term 'caste' has come to be associated with 'lower castes', the SCs or the OBCs, the upper castes tend to appear "casteless". They argue that in order to abolish caste, it is essential to first abolish caste-derived privileges, and in order to do that, the state must first map castes and their socio-economic status privileges/deprivations, which is what a caste census seeks to do.

The government has cited numerous administrative, operational and logistical reasons to argue that collecting caste data during the 2021 census — postponed to next year due to COVID-19 — is unfeasible and attempting it could endanger the census exercise itself. It begins by pointing to the difference in caste categories according to different lists. While the Central list contained 2,479 OBC castes, there were 3,150 OBC castes as per the lists of all the States and Union Territories taken together. Unlike in the case of the SCs and the STs, there is no constitutional mandate for the Registrar-General and Census Commissioner, India, to provide the census figures of the OBCs and the BCCs. And lastly, it has cited the 2014 Supreme Court judgment setting aside two orders of the Madras High Court directing the Centre to conduct a caste census. As per this Supreme Court judgment, what information to collect in a census is a policy decision of the government, and while the court may find a certain policy untenable, it was "legally impermissible" for the court to dictate to the government what policy it ought to follow.

Way Forward

A caste census may not sit well with the goal of a casteless society, but it may serve as a means of addressing inequities in society. Caste data will enable independent research not only into the question of who does and does not need affirmative action but also into the effectiveness of this measure. Impartial data and subsequent research might save the bona fide attempts of the uplift of the most backward classes from the shadow of caste and class politics and be informative to people on both sides of the spectrum – for and against reservation. It is not reservation that creates the current divide in our society but the misuse or the perceived misuse of reservation.

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Caste Census and Bharatiya value system

Dr. Ayush

Bharat is a diverse country. It is a nation adorned by diverse religions, cultures, faiths, opinions and sects. Therefore, she is often referred to as 'The Land of Diversity'. The Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. "The Entire World Is One Family" aptly summarises the essence of Bharatiya culture. Conversion of the Varna system into Caste system and continuous increase in the number of castes due to hybrid marriages may be seen as a positive sign for Bharatiya diversity. However, it is also plagued with several negative aspects such as the castes getting prominence over humanity and suppression of human values on the basis of castes. Bharat has witnessed several incidents highlighting the negative aspect of her diversity wherein support was extended to criminals on the basis of caste or benefits were given to people on the basis of caste while ignoring the criteria of merit. Formation of communities on the basis of caste is not necessarily evil. However, suppression of humanity in the interest of caste is evil.

Indeed, a diverse country must make appropriate

arrangements to fulfil all necessities and to provide for protecting the interests of all cross sections of the society. Government policies provide for all necessities and protect all interests. Therefore, statistical data of such target groups become a vitally important factor to chalk out policies while keeping diversity in mind. If this rationale is applied, caste census proves to be a necessity in view of the caste diversity. However, consideration of various other factors too is important. These factors include what are the technical preparations needed for the caste census; whether the term 'caste' has been defined officially; is any model for classification of castes available; whether the procedure of preparing for conducting the census provides adequate time to impart training to the census officers; whether the target group is informed about the basis of castes; what will be the impact of a caste census on the society in general and what would be its effect on the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam that is the essence of Bharatiya culture, humanity, national integrity and Bharatiya value system. In several states of Bharat, casteism and caste discrimination has reached its peak. Consider this, if an influential person belonging to X caste murders a member of Y caste, people belonging to the X caste, who have not been witness to the incident, do attach sympathies and extend their support to the killer without having complete knowledge of the facts of the case. Under such circumstances, their rational thinking fails to enable them to take a stand in favour of a fair and unbiased investigation and ostracise the killer who has maligned their entire caste. Indeed, castes would have proved to be positive social institutions had such rationality prevailed. Every organisation, be it formal or informal, which takes the toll of reasonability is a threat to progressive society.

Progress in the 21st Century cannot be harmful to rationality. If castes are capable of being predominant over humanity and deviating us from human values, we must strive to uphold its positive aspect and battle out the negative factors. Statistics of caste census (larger number of castes than expected categories) are slated to widen the gaps.

While discussing the caste census, technical issues that have been listed earlier in this article must also be discussed. The main reasons for which the statistics of caste census conducted in the year 2011 has not been made public because it revealed a larger number of castes than the number of classified castes (No clear basis has been provided for that classification too). Besides, there are other reasons for not publishing the census data. These reasons include misunderstanding of majority of the people belonging to the target group that their caste is linked to their occupation, basis for determining caste of women married to a person of other castes, confusion as to in which category the newly emerging castes should be included and existence of several castes which do not have even 100 members. This clearly shows that caste census is not adequately effective for protecting the interests of the target groups.

Besides addressing these technical issues, making an attempt to find answers to a few social issues too is important. The most important social issue relating to the caste census is what would be the effect of caste census on the society in general. We have already mentioned the issues of suppression of human values and loss of reasonability due to the caste systems. If caste discrimination finds its way into implementation of development schemes, the needy target groups would suffer. Immediate attempts for abolition of such strongly divisive and negative factors are essential in the present era, when concept like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam are focal points of cultural discussions. As already stated in this article, diversity need not be negative. However, if the diversity is harmful to unity, integrity and dedication to the nation, if it is adversely affecting the bond of integrity, attempts to bring an end to such diversity must be made.

Progress in the 21st Century cannot be harmful to rationality. If castes are capable of being predominant over humanity and deviating us from human values, we must strive to uphold its positive aspect and battle out the negative factors. Statistics of caste census (larger number of castes than expected categories) are slated to widen the gaps. Besides, if the target groups comprise of even 50-60 castes with less than 100 members, would it be advisable to activate the schemes for such communities differently? Chalking out the policies in such a manner would be like drafting a different policy for every individual. The State must focus itself on issues such as uplifting the physically challenged, empowerment of women, national security, curbing bribery, policy for transgender, laws to curb corruption. Deviating from these issues and parroting demand for caste census appears to be proving a better option for some. The aim of development for all human beings is far more comprehensive and real. Focussing on development for castes results in concentrating on political gains instead of achieving comprehensive progress. This has been happening for the last several years. Therefore, an all-out attempt to end the discrimination and tread on the path of development and progress using the philosophy of Integral Humanism propagated by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya as a guiding light is essential for us.

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Devendra is a highly qualified youth, who had completed his education against heavy odds. His father was a conservancy staff at tehsil place in Maharashtra. His parents toiled hard to ensure that their children get a good education and land themselves in a new world. As a result all his brothers worked hard and completed their education. All of them are well placed after having good academic achievements. Devendra is a public health professional and primarily works in health management. He had worked at national and international levels. Currently, he is working in the West Africa region and overseeing an extensive health program, associated with an international organization of repute. He has authored a couple of research articles related to health. In addition, he has vast experience of the Indian caste system, has travelled across India, and worked extensively at the community level.

Caste Discrimination : Still long way to go

Dr. Devendra

Today, India is celebrating 75 years of Independence and embarking on the journey of becoming a developed country, aiming to achieve 5+ trillion economy, and dreaming of becoming a superpower. However, the distribution of resources has never been equal and simultaneously a section of the community was denied access to the essential resources quintessential for the living.

At the very advent of Indian republicationization, the constitution-makers prescribed equitable rights to individuals irrespective of their caste, religion, gender, and socio-economic status. The tool made available to achieve equity and equality was affirmative action, by giving the reservation to traditional untouchable caste groups. The life struggle of Dr. Ambedkar has inspired many of us. It has paved the way for millions of youths nationally/ internationally to uplift from their status where they have been denied the status of a human being.

After completing seven years overseas and securing a satisfactory position financially, when I thought of buying a piece of land in the town where I was born, I realized that I am yet to achieve more money muscles to overpower the facts and practices of society. I will tell why I am saying so; while searching for a piece of residential land in my birth town, I came across several potential land pieces. Out of which, I liked one and showed interest to the middle man. He was a young man full of chewable

stuff in his pocket; I thought he impressed me and showed me good options, made some calls to the owner of the land. I thought, 'wow!, it's going to be a successful deal'; however, my thought was shaken when the young gentleman, after spitting on the ground his 'paan'; like stuff asked me

Q. Sir! Please don't mind but can I ask you something?

My reply : Yes, boss, no worries, if you want, I can pay you the token amount by today evening. (I presumed that he was going to ask for token money). To my seriousness, I attempted to answer this.

Q. No, sir, it's not about the token amount, but please don't mind, since the land piece belongs to my Mothe Baba (Uncle), they are enquiring

My reply – It's ok, please tell me

Q. Please don't mind, but what is your caste?

His question shook me; I had forgotten I was born in Shudra varna (untouchable) for several years. After taking a pause, I answered. I am Jaibheem, and I can't change it. But I don't think this will be a problem for your relatives.

Q. No, sir, it is not like that; sometimes they don't sell land to certain communities; I hope you understand. But don't worry, Sir, there are other land pieces I have shown you there are no such restrictions, those you can buy easily.

Devendra had a long-time desire to purchase a small plot of land in the town, where he spent childhood along with his parents and siblings. This was a natural feeling because of his emotional bonding with the town and establishing self-esteem. However, there was a rude shock in the store for him. He was denied a plot of land because of caste. Devendra shares his anguish.

Wow! What a situation, being an NRI, a physician turned public health professional, visiting the land with a chauffeur-driven vehicle and ready to pay a little extra for the land piece came to the ground immediately. I asked the gentleman to check with his relatives and tell me if they were ready to charge a little extra premium and would allow me to buy?

Alright! So, what Indian two-tier cities in India? May not be across India, and I am optimistic that what experience I came across should be just like the rarest disease that occurs per million. I was disappointed with the experience and travelled back to my childhood. It started as a ghetto-like slum area of Bhusawal, surrounded by darkness and poverty, and people were living like animals. My grandparents traditionally did scavenging work, which they thought was their destiny. Parents and the neighbourhood were full of superstition, and there was no feeling of discrimination despite its existence, nor any anger against their status. Almost all families were large in size, and under-five infant deaths were common. Most of the deliveries were conducted at home. Educational attainment was too low, and the funny part of it was that my father was the highest educated person in the area; he was educated up to contemporary 11th grade. Well, everywhere it was, not only poverty existed, but also substance abuse was the story of each household, which has ruined the childhood of many like me.

Somehow my siblings and I managed to study and came across good people, and we were fortunate to use the reservation to get admission to good educational institutions. It's a long struggle to get your own house and sleep in it without fearing rain. One can imagine a home with damaged/rusted zinc as a rooftop with rain. Life was painful and full of sorrows. It has impacted the overall health of all my siblings physically and emotionally, giving lifelong scars without any hope for healing. The struggle lasted for 30 good years. Yes! What made the change is Education and the capacity to speak English. These two tools have empowered us to earn money, which helped raise the overall status of all the siblings and me. I can remember when I enrolled myself for graduation and looking for a hostel residence, my friend and I went to one of the places, where the land owner asked me what is your caste. I replied, "I am Buddhist, Sir", the person clearly mentioned that he was not interested in giving space to a Buddhist person. I am thankful he did not beat me or harassed me the way they were doing 50 years back—what an incredible change.

Caste structure is the core of Indian society. What I am feeling these days is no untouchability in practice. However, silent discrimination is still there in the big cities, and clear discrimination would be in rural settings. Some of my seniors and employers mocked me because of my caste directly/indirectly; I feel pity for them for having such narrow-mindedness.

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Inter-caste marriage sixty years back

It was simply unimaginable to dare for an inter-caste marriage sixty years back in a state like Bihar, where caste sensibilities were sharp. A teacher by profession and born in upper caste family, Pushpa Srivastava, chose to marry with a Dalit youth - Rajeshwar Prasad, who was working with Fertilizer Corporation of India. The couple was so scared that they had to flee to a safer place after marriage. Aditi Narayani recalls her grandmother's experience.

Early days

Unimaginable it was to think of a marriage between a Dalit man and a woman from upper caste in the sixties of Bihar that was supremely infested with caste-based feudalism. It was indeed a marriage of ideas and confluence of commitment which shall eternally flourish and inspire the generations ahead. We used to stay in the same area. He used to stay across the lane leaving four houses. We always used to exchange glances with each other. It was the time when inter-caste marriage was very unusual and considered to have a negative social stigma. I recall the story told by my grandmother of her marriage where they often got threats of being outcast by society and sometimes even of getting killed. Every aspect of that marriage was full of heroic tale and also had significantly changed social mentality related to inter-caste marriage as they have prevailed the barrier set by society. This bond didn't only bring two souls together but also had a constructive impact in developing mutual understanding between different castes.

Self-talk when deciding to marry.

There were a lot of dilemmas and doubts , there was a lot of confusion whether it's a right decision, and Grandmother started doubting the decision since this marriage would mean complete abandonment from her family. It was not an easy decision at all because it was not only society who impeded and resented this decision but their own family too. When grandmother told her family about her decision to marry a Dalit man it was vehemently opposed .The major reason behind that was Dalit was considered as untouchable and also believed

Inter-caste marriage is a step towards integration of the society. I won't say it's coming of family together since my mother never saw me after I got married but the child born out of inter-caste couples or the next generation will definitely be more inclusive . I promote and endorse inter-caste marriages for social harmony and it helps in mitigating the evils of the caste system.

to hold negative omen.

Actual marriage ceremony

My grandmother had a court marriage as they didn't get any family support. They did not have any proper function or social gathering to celebrate their bond. Despite all that social stumbling block, their love was strong enough to carry their bond till eternity. It didn't seem like a happy ending was anywhere near as even after their marriage, they were not spared of threats. After their marriage, grandfather's life became vulnerable as he received death threats from society and even grandmother's family. The most difficult part was complications from grandmothers' family over their influential background. In order to live a peaceful married life, it was imperative to carve a solution over the threats they received so they fled to different states.

Response from both families when decided to get married

The groom's side was indifferent and grandmother's side totally despised their decision. While grandfather's family were totally ignorant, grandmother's family left no stones unturned to abhor their decision and totally discarded her. Grandmother's mother even called her disgrace to the family and severed all her bonds with her.

Problems in getting married

Marriage is a beautiful journey of two hearts rather than two families but in a highly stratified country like ours, it's about caste , class , skin colour . The idea of marriage gets diluted. Having the audacity to marry a guy outside my caste was something I never imagined. We both went through really big struggles and obstacles. Our families were not supporting us, emotionally and financially, so in the first year of our marriage, we had to even live in a very small house in Ranchi, present day Jharkhand. Now when I remember, it was very tearful and full of struggles but worth it . We had our lows but then what kept us going was we were there for each other.

People who supported her decision?

Her sisters and my grandfather's brothers were supportive.

Problems in post-marriage life and solutions

Marriage is a pure and divine bond that gives mighty strength that you can prevail through any obstruction imposed by society. It gives you the persisted strength that makes every complication a child's play as you have got each other's back till eternity. Problems are an inevitable part of life whether it's social or personal but if you adhere to your promise and trust each other nothing in the world can adversely affect you. Yes, society kept instigating complications upon my grandparents but their love for each other and bond they share was far stronger.

Views on inter-caste marriage and social cohesiveness

Absolutely, inter-caste marriage is a step towards integration of the society. I won't say it's coming of family together since my mother never saw me after I got married but the child born out of inter-caste couples or the next generation will definitely be more inclusive . I promote and endorse inter-caste marriages for social harmony and it helps in mitigating the evils of the caste system.

Wrote by Aditi Narayani
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Sant Kabir- The man on ground

Dr. Bhavna

Kabir is one of the most celebrated social reformers of the Bhakti movement. He was a prominent figure of the contemporary period. He continues to have a strong influence, especially in certain parts of India, primarily, the northern region. His teachings were so deep and profound that it had influenced various other spiritual leaders, who went on to disseminate his teachings through laying foundations of different sects and religious groups.

Out of the various individuals who had benefited from Kabir's' teachings, the name of Nanak Shah, who has been credited with laying down the foundation of Sikhism, is taken in high regard. Sant Kabir had his own way of conveying his message which was quite idiosyncratic. Considering the period of Sant Kabir, we are unable to get specific information about him. Many different versions and legends about his background are discussed. Yet, the most strongly accepted one admits of him being brought up in the house of a person named Niru who was a Muhammadan weaver. Lack of specific information about Sant Kabir does not make any difference because of his contribution and wisdom. His greatness makes his less known past immaterial.

Sant Kabir was primarily associated with the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti movement was a serious attempt to revive religion on different lines. The term Bhakti is in reality **(On page 12)**

Vivekananda- Caste and Inclusion

Nishant Kumar

Swami Vivekananda's engagement with the issue of caste and social inclusion helped him philosophize a panacea that was not only efficacious for social transformation making it inclusive and egalitarian, but also laid the basis for a new form of cultural nationalism.

Late 19th century Indian society witnessed the growth of a number of revivalist and reformist movements. This was particularly relevant in the context of the post-1857 phase of history and the pioneers of such projects were not only responding to the challenges facing Indian society in the wake of colonial modernity, but were also creatively engaging in producing alternative forms of nationalism. This nationalism was not always ostensibly or explicitly anti-colonial.

At times, it aimed at regeneration of national consciousness among the otherwise diverse Indian masses. One of the major figures of this period was Swami Vivekananda, who not only advocated the ideals of Vedanta as a liberatory philosophy, but also saw in it the capacity to create a renewed identity of the self, based on a spiritual redefinition of the values of equality and fraternity. For Swamiji, unless Indian society understood the root of its problems, of which colonialism was only a manifestation, it was not possible to devise effective strategies for its eradication. **(On page 13)**

(From page 11) related to devotion to God. It necessarily means transcending any specific religion and defies restrictions. This movement comprises various aspects - from having its roots traced to South India to emphasising on Vaishnavism. Bhakti movement cannot be understood as a single periodical movement as it had its influence over a long period.

Sant Kabir's involvement in the Bhakti movement started at a time when the society was on the threshold of change. Society was gripped with ritualism; obscurantist practices and orthodox attitudes were being challenged. The arrival of Turks and Islam had brought a big blow to the dominance of Hindu religious practices. In this context, one can find Sant Kabir as one of the earliest figures and the most profound personality of the 15th century movement. One of the chief features of this movement was the denial of dominance of either of two religions - Hinduisms and Islam He outrightly rejected orthodoxy perpetuated by them. The era of which Sant Kabir belonged, criticized issues like caste, idol worship and sectarianism.

We need to consider different factors while trying to understand Sant Kabir as a social reformer. Let us begin with religion. Religion has always been a very delicate phenomenon. Along with being an embodiment of one's faith and allegiance, which gives structured direction to an individual, religion also has the ability to act as a source of disruption and division in the society.

Against this backdrop, Sant Kabir established himself as a staunch supporter of eradicating the social evils. Kabir took his philosophy to the people in a simple manner and style, disseminating real knowledge. Sant Kabir's poetry is the most recognised one. He always endeavoured to create a connection with the people in general. He made special efforts for the purpose. Poetry was one popular form through which Kabir created a special place for himself. The flow and spontaneity of his poetry came from his own inner experiences. The main constituting elements of Kabir's poetry were nature and its various facets, the day-to-day experiences and anecdotes of the common man. Kabir never had to work hard as far as his articulation of poetry is concerned. Poetry always is an attractive medium of sharing one's views and experiences through a more creative and long-lived manner. Sant Kabir's teachings through his poetry, songs and couplets always reflected his vivid and creative imagination. His poetry was not confined to any one specific domain. Its scope was vast and encompassed different subjects.

His poems were not like those of a well learned, literate and learned personality. There were various impediments in his life, which did not allow him to pursue a methodical education. Sant Kabir's poetry can be understood as what are referred to as Padas and Ramainis which comprise short lyrical and well rhymed strands and the other known as Dohas or slokas or Sakhis. Dohas and the Sakhis composed by Sant Kabir have gained a lot of acceptance and popularity among the masses at large. What is of great significance is that his poems are that common people can easily identify with its meaning. They can easily relate to Sant Kabir.

Sant Kabir and his writings gained quite a lot of popularity in the northern belt of India. The other aspect about Kabir's Sakhis was the eclectic approach. A very distinct feature of Kabir's style of working was how he used to make something solid out of the ordinary which used to get etched in the hearts and souls of individuals.

Another dimension of Sant Kabir's creative endeavours was the use of an ambiguous language. There was a sense of 'confusion' and hidden meanings which was easily visible in Kabir's work. He tried to convey his feelings and message in a way where one would leave wondering initially as to what is being conveyed. Whatever style of communication or language was used by Kabir, it reflects a unique combination of words and meaning, which was the result of his depth of thinking and enriched emotions.

We need to consider different factors while trying to understand Sant Kabir as a social reformer. Let us begin with religion. Religion has always been a very delicate phenomenon. Along with being an embodiment of one's faith and allegiance, which gives structured direction to an individual, religion also has the ability to act as a source of disruption and division in the society. Religion also has been the root cause behind various social practices initiated and institutionalized, which cut through the unity of the social realm. Sant Kabir, himself, being from a section which was at the receiving end of discriminatory practices was able to empathise with the social evils. He tried to simplify the religion to the best of his capacity. His spiritual teachings tried to understand religion in its most basic form.

Sant Kabir emphasized that religion cannot be a privilege bestowed to only a few individuals. He wanted religion to be open to all irrespective of the rigid compartmentalization in the society. There was a sense of omnipresence which was attached to one divine. Sant Kabir emphasized in one God to create a sense of oneness, which will take up the people above all sectarian loyalties.

For Sant Kabir, religion was a source of liberation and unifying the people. It was never a divisive force for him. Sant Kabir was well aware of ground realities as he had deep roots here. He was well familiar with the mindset of the people. He strongly believed in the change of people mindset to eradicate social ills

like casteism, discrimination and inequality.

The essence of Sant Kabir's thoughts lies in the fact that he tried to use the concept of religion as a force of bonding and unity in the society. He strongly believed that God belongs to all and does not differentiate among the people. He did not believe in separation of God in temples, churches and mosques. Sant Kabir wanted to transcend the structural aspect of religion and bring out the 'power' aspect, which emanates from the divine.

Sant Kabir thrived for bringing all the people to one level, which is equality. He tried to bring an end to discrimination. He considered caste-based differentiating systems as degrading human behaviour. He emphasized that all human beings are equal by birth and should not be treated differently. He linked nature with human aspirations and said that human values should spread all over human beings like the sun shines equally for all.

Sant Kabir always tried to establish a connection with the masses. The motive behind connecting with the people at the base was certainly to empathise with their cause and be able to create changes from within the society. He never tried to preach anything in a dogmatic and strict manner. Sant Kabir's ideas on religion, equality, caste and various other social issues are still relevant today.

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Vivekananda - Caste and Inclusion

(From page 11) His quest for such issues and his consistent efforts to revitalize Indian society warranted his engagements with some of the most rabid realities of Indian society, including the caste system.

He saw the subject of social integration as seminal and this was particularly important in the context of his historical analysis of the problems that plagued Indian society. He opined that there were two primary reasons that were responsible for India's downfall in history, particularly at the hands of foreign invaders, beginning from the Muslim invaders to the Europeans (British included). First of these was the loss of confidence and sense of weakness among Indians; and second was the absence of unity because of its social problems that had plagued Indian society and gradually degraded its human and social capital. In this Article, I primarily deal with the second aspect trying to understand his views regarding caste system and social inclusion.

Often, scholars like Jyotirmaya Sharma have claimed that although Vivekananda was contemptuous of untouchability, caste system as an ideal was "central to his plan for the regeneration of India". Claims like that of Sharma have a tendency to conceal more than it revealed. For example, it does not tell anything about how Swami Vivekananda visualized the caste system, leave alone its utility. For him, the caste system originated as a natural division of labour that provided autonomy to individuals to express their nature or prakriti. So social mobility based on natural talent and merit was an integral aspect of the caste system he was advocating. He firmly held that determination of caste by birth, endogamy, or even water tight compartmentalization of vocations was never its true features. It is evident that he does not differentiate a lot between Varna and Caste and his approach resembles similarities with Gandhi's understanding. It is not that Vivekananda was not aware about the manipulations with the system in the later days. In fact, he opined that the primary reason for the oppressive form that caste system took was the selfishness among the dominating caste i.e., Brahmins, and their strategy to hold power.

Attached to this was also his understanding about who really qualified to be called a Brahmin. Vivekananda explicitly rejected the claim of Brahmin supremacy based on one's birth. He opined that India had an admixture of bloods, and therefore the claim about purity of blood and "the super-arrogated excellence of birth of any caste in India is only pure myth".

He was very critical about the approach of the Brahmins and claimed that "it seems most of them are only nursing a false pride of birth". He asserted that Brahmins should understand that they had the responsibility to attach themselves to spirituality and the duty to raise others to the same levels of spirituality. Equally, he was concerned that the Brahmins played the slightest role in improving life of the poor and the destitute. All these, according to him, were unbecoming of Brahmin in the truest sense. He firmly held that only as long as the Brahmin worked for the salvation of others he was worthy to be called a Brahmin and the moment selfishness began to guide his thought and conduct, he ceased to be a Brahmin.

On the question of caste reforms, Vivekananda was very critical of the approach of social reformers of his time. He indicated that most of these reformers were working on selective issues that impacted only a particular section of society, without examining the

larger issues at hand. Such approaches, according to him, were "ill-conceived and thoughtless", and had potential to damage "the social fabric posing one class against another". About his own approach, he held, "I must frankly tell you that I am neither a caste-breaker nor a mere social reformer. I have nothing to do directly with your castes or with social reformation. Live in any caste you like, but that is no reason why you should hate another man or another caste."

Vivekananda firmly believed that the reform in the caste system as it existed in its modern avatar, could only be achieved through a two-pronged process. On the one hand, he claimed that the higher castes should realize that the age of their dominance was over. They needed to understand the importance and worth of lower classes and not create hurdles in their upliftment. "Especially do I regret that in modern times there should be so much dissension between the castes. This must stop. It is useless on both sides, especially on the side of the higher caste - the Brahmin, because the day for these privileges and exclusive claims is gone", he remarked. He even questioned the relevance of religious texts, without naming any, that legitimized oppression of the lower classes. For example, he held that suggestions like pouring molten lead into the ears of the shudras if found listening to sacred words were nothing but "diabolical barbarism". At the same time, he believed that the lower classes should empower themselves and raise themselves to higher levels as only fighting higher castes was not the right strategy for reforms. He underlined that one of the primary sources of power and dominance of higher classes was education and therefore the lower classes also needed to rise in the right spirit and direction through education.

> Vivekananda explicitly rejected the claim of Brahmin supremacy based on one's birth. He opined that India had an admixture of bloods, and therefore the claim about purity of blood and "the super-arrogated excellence of birth of any caste in India is only pure myth". He was very critical about the approach of the Brahmins and claimed that "it seems most of them are only nursing a false pride of birth". He asserted that Brahmins should understand that they had the responsibility to attach themselves to spirituality and the duty to raise others to the same levels of spirituality.

One of the significant philosophical formulations, whereby Vivekananda tries to overcome the conflicts within the caste system was his conceptualization of Practical Vedanta, which was deeply influenced by Adi Shankara's Adwaita philosophy. Like the latter, it propagated the ideal of spiritual humanism based on the perception of spiritual oneness of all beings. One of the key features of this philosophy was the realization of godhead in all and viewing everyone in society as a spiritual extension of oneself, even the most poor and needy in society. In Practical Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda envisioned an inclusive ideal of human society that transgressed the moral barriers of one's rudimentary identities. As such, it reflected the potential to overcome the divisions based on one's caste/class/religion and rather laid emphasis on a collective endeavour to experience true freedom or sarvamukti. This ideal advocated by Vivekananda could also be seen as an alternative way of imagining the human self and its relation with others in society through the prism of non-dualism, thereby laying the prospects for a harmonious and collective living.

His idea of social inclusion and social reforms

was actualized and epitomized in his vision for Ramakrishna Ashram that continues to serve the cause of the poor and needy, without discriminations, even in contemporary times. Locating his idea of social inclusion in the context of India, we find that his identification of the problems and the solution was not only indicating an agenda of social reform, but also proved a precursor to what someone like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo or Savarkar were suggesting in later periods. Therefore, although Swami Vivekananda suggested that no political meaning be attached to his ideas, it became the basis for a new form of cultural nationalism through national regeneration and decolonization of Indian minds.

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Empowering tribal women in remote regions

Empowerment of women does not take place because of social work or any kind of assistance but it takes place when the women are actually given the power. Women empowerment in Melghat region is evident from some facts. The women are struggling by putting their efforts to bring about change in the lives of not their own but also of their families. In absence of opportunities, what does empowerment mean to these women? But they are trying to carve out their own space.

Tekchand

As COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly across the world, urban centres came to a halt. All the business activities including markets, malls, theatres became empty. But what happened to those parts of the country, particularly tribal regions? Sudden halt in urban centres, which are considered as hubs of activities, affected the overall economy. But what happened to the tribal areas, whose contribution to the economy is already low?

Like other parts of the country, vaccination drives were also launched in tribal regions. But one has to understand the existing pattern of economy, empowerment and urban-rural divide is unavoidable while thinking about the issue. Vaccination in tribal regions was launched at the beginning of January 2021. But the local administration faced several problems because of a great amount of hesitancy among the local population. Vaccination was initially restricted to people, who were above 60-years-old. Later age restriction was gradually lifted once pandemic spread.

Mitali Sethi, Assistant Collector and project officer, Dharni, Amravati district in Maharashtra shared her experience with The Indian Express. She says, "In July 2021, it was difficult for us to get even 50 people vaccinated in a single day in Melghat. The people would just not turn up in this remote area. Gradually we could vaccinate 800 people in Melghat, which is absolutely remote with dense forest".

The success of the vaccination drive did not merely depend upon government efficiency and reach. Low

response was also because of other factors like dynamics of the tribal regions concerning urban-rural divide, the economic growth, education status, overall empowerment and availability of resources like electricity, roads and the internet played a crucial role in carrying out the vaccination drive.

Unlike urban areas, tribal regions lack logistic support which include electricity, internet and education. Benefits of the economy are yet to reach there. One should not be surprised about reluctance among the tribals as the educated urban population was also involved in critical analysis on whether to opt for vaccination and which vaccine should be chosen?

Reluctance or hesitance among the tribals on vaccination can be attributed to misinformation, which they received. They were also victims of rumours, which gripped not only educated urban pockets but also rural areas during the pandemic. In the given scenario, it was difficult, rather impossible for the tribal population to get correct information.

Empowerment of women does not take place because of social work or any kind of assistance but it takes place when the women are actually given the power. Women empowerment in Melghat region is evident from some facts. The women are struggling by putting their efforts to bring about change in the lives of not their own but also of their families. In absence of opportunities, what does empowerment mean to these women? But they are trying to carve out their own space. Melghat region is compelled to take only one crop every year because of tropical limitations and water management. Agriculture, being the only source of income, further reduces employment opportunities, making life difficult. However, people are trying to get help from nature and its resources to change their lives. With the government's help, women have started to use renewable energy in the region. The energy source and the possibilities attached to it are also limitless. Their understanding of the power of renewable energy is evident. Solar lamps are seen in several villages in Melghat region.

The trend in Melghat region is to work in agriculture farms during monsoon and migrate to some other places after monsoon. Employment was never an easy matter for them. It is normal practice that the entire village or family gets shifted to the employment place during summer and winter.

The availability of employment at the local level benefitted several women. Because of this, many women have opted to be part of the scheme. Their work schedule revolves around solar looms throughout the year. During rainy season, they work in the fields to get maximum output while they use solar energy in the remaining days. Cotton industry gets 1.5 quintal of thread from using the charkhas. This is for every month. These women are directly connected with big power loom companies, which purchase thread from them. This has come as a big help for power loom companies as their work is decentralised and less investment in terms of capital and man force. This has gone a step ahead as it is not restricted to providing employment to women.

Program coordinator explains how it has become helpful to the women. He says that a woman, who works for half day on charkha, gets Rs 50 (less than $1), which takes care of a major portion of her family's daily requirement, including mainly food. Now authorities are planning to distribute 500 charkhas, which will be of great help to the beneficiary families.

While the entire exercise is financial – materialistic, the human element therein is also important. Compassion and empathy for fellow brothers and sisters' boosts moral of the women and their family members. This is happening in the remote areas, where no infrastructure is available. All these people did not have roads for decades after independence. No medical/health facilities, no power and no connectivity. Despite this, tribal women are taking great efforts to uplift themselves in thick forests.

This is happening because local people believe in the concept of coexistence. As explained by an old man, availability of modern facilities hardly bothers them. What makes change for them is synchronising lives with nature. For them coexistence with nature is key. Man and animal conflict is a matter of routine in the region. But this happens if the natural cycle is hampered. The people here have once again realized that they have to live in nature. This feeling has made them more united and empathetic for each other. They have a huge amount of gratitude for each other and for nature. Instead of complaining, they try to come up with solutions whenever they come across any problem.

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Sarnath : Where Buddha set the Wheel of Law into motion

During the Sunga period, about a dozen carved pillars were erected as a part of a stupa railing. To the Kushan period belongs a colossal image of Bodhisattva of red sandstone standing under a stone umbrella-an import from Mathura- set up in the chankama (pathway) of Buddha in the third year of Kanishka by the monk Bala. He also made similar gifts elsewhere as well. Two foreigners, the Great Satrap Kharapallana and Satrap Vanaspara, local governors of the Varanasi region, participated in this work of piety.

Dr. Manjiri Bhalerao

Sarnath, (District Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh), 10 kms to the north of Varanasi, is one of the holiest sites of the Buddhist world. The whole landscape has been considered extremely sacred due to its proximity to the confluence of Ganga and Varuna. Varanasi has been a very revered place since time immemorial for the Hindus. Not far from it is Sarnath, where Gautama Buddha went after getting enlightenment. It is told to us that after his enlightenment at Gaya, he stayed there for eight days and thought over the knowledge that was revealed to him. Then he wanted to share his knowledge with the people with whom he had spent his early days of asceticism. Hence when he came to Sarnath, which was known as Rishipatana (in Sanskrit) or Isipattana (in Pali) and also as Mrigadaya (a free park for deer).

It is told to us that on his way to Sarnath, Gautama met five of his old acquaintances. When they came to know about his enlightenment, they requested him to give a lecture to them about his newly gained knowledge. He started telling them

and at the same time a group of deer joined them to listen to Gautama's lecture. This event of giving his first lecture after the enlightenment, made the Wheel of Law (Dharmachakra) turn. Hence this event is also recorded as the Dharmachakrapravartana (Sanskrit) or Dhammachakkapabattana (in Pali).

This event is also known as the First Sermon of the Buddha. This event has got an immense significance in the history of Buddhism. It led to the foundation of the Sangha or the monastic order for the monks. The thoughts became regularised resulting in the foundation of a religion. It is told to us that by giving this lecture he set the 'wheel of law into motion'.

This wheel of law was the cosmic wheel of changing the lives of the people, bringing the happy days after sad ones. It had become static and there was grief everywhere. By setting it into motion, Buddha assured people that now the peace will prevail. Sarnath enjoys a high position in the Buddhist world and it is one of the Eight Great Places. Hence emperor Ashoka constructed various structures at Sarnath. These are the earliest remains at Sarnath. Ashoka erected a pillar (only the lower portion of which is now in situated and the other pieces are kept in the same campus) here and inscribed on it his Schism Edict threatening rebellious monks with expulsion from the Sangha. This warning was not an empty threat as the Pali literary sources tell us about the actual action taken up by Ashoka of driving more than 1000 monks not only out of the Sangha but also out of the country. The pillar has on its surface an exquisite polish. The detached magnificent capital is now displayed in the Sarnath site museum. It consists of four components (a) a lotus at the base; (b) a circular abacus carved with an elephant, bull, horse and lion separated from one another by a wheel; (c) four lions set back-to-back over the abacus; and (d) a surmounting wheel (a few fragments have been recovered). The lion-part of the capital with the abacus, of superb workmanship, has now been adopted as the National Emblem of India. On this pillar, were inscribed in later periods two more records, one, of the Kushana period, referring to the reign of Ashvaghosha, a ruler of Kausambi, and the other, of the early Gupta period, mentioning the teachers of the Sammitiya sect.

Another monument attributed to Asoka is a stupa, the ill-fated Dharmarajika, to the south of the pillar, which was extensively demolished in the last decade of the eighteenth century. In its core, was found a sandstone box and a green marble relic-casket, the latter placed inside the former and containing a few pieces of human bone, decayed pearls, gold leaves and other jewels. The sanctity of this stupa is amply borne out by the six enlargements which it successively underwent, the last addition being in the twelfth century A.D. The last object which is ascribed to Asoka is a monolithic railing, which was found buried inside the foundation of the south chapel of the Main Shrine.

During the Sunga period (i.e. in 2nd century B.C.), about a dozen carved pillars were erected as a part of a stupa railing. To the Kushan period belongs a colossal image of Bodhisattva of red sandstone standing under a stone umbrella-an import from Mathura-set up in the chankama (pathway) of Buddha in the third year of Kanishka by the monk Bala. He also made similar gifts elsewhere as well. Two foreigners, the Great Satrap Kharapallana and Satrap Vanaspara, local governors of the Varanasi region, participated in this work of piety. This image along with the umbrella and also the pillars mentioned above are now exhibited in the local museum at Sarnath.

The Gupta period witnessed a phenomenal rise in the sculptural and structural activity at Sarnath so that the place, already a holy centre of Buddhism, became an important centre of art. The artists of the Gupta period finally achieved the apt expression on the face of the Buddha image. The expression of calm serenity, springing from a complete mental and physical discipline, and spiritual luminosity combined with grace and beauty of form in these images remain unparalleled by the products of any other schools. Hence the art of this period is called the Classical Art of India. The combination of both the foreign (Gandhara School of art) and the native traditional India (Mathura School of art) resulted in such divine manifestation. Such images were made on a large scale and were transported to various parts of the country. Many composite sculptures narrating the important events from the life of Gautama Buddha were also created at Sarnath and became very popular in no time. Along with these, over the period of time, the images of the deities of the Mahayana-Vajrayana pantheon were also made here like those of Tara, Lokeshvara, Marichi, Siddhaikavira, Nilakantha, Jambhala, Vasudhara, Shadakshari Lokeshvara with Manidhara and Shadakshari Mahavidya and Simhanada Lokeshvara etc.

The Jain tradition associates Sarnath with the 11th Teerthanker Shreyansanath. At this place four out of five important events in the life of the Tirthankara (generally known as the Kalyanakas) took place. Hence this is also a very sacred place for them. Even after the decline of Buddhism, the importance of Sarnath has not fallen. Every Buddhist devotee in the world makes it a point to visit this place. The result is that this place is throbbing with the national and international pilgrims. They visit the ruins of the stupas, viharas, Ashokan pillar and the museum at this place, Numerous international Buddhist associations have constructed their temples at this place making the visit to their own people a comfortable and memorable one.

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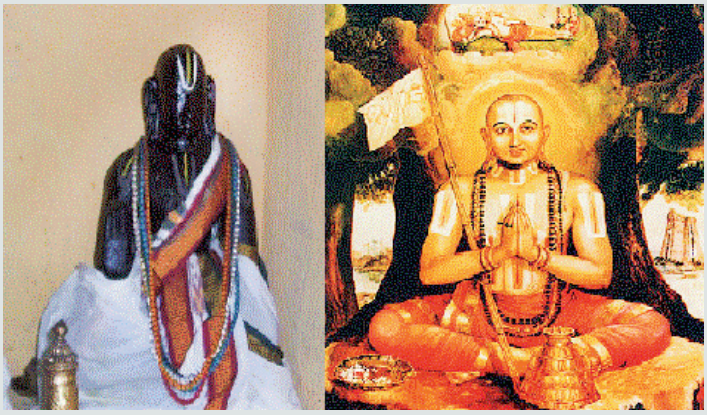
Legacy of Guru-Shishya tradition



Periya Nambi guru aka Mahapurna & Ramanujacharya

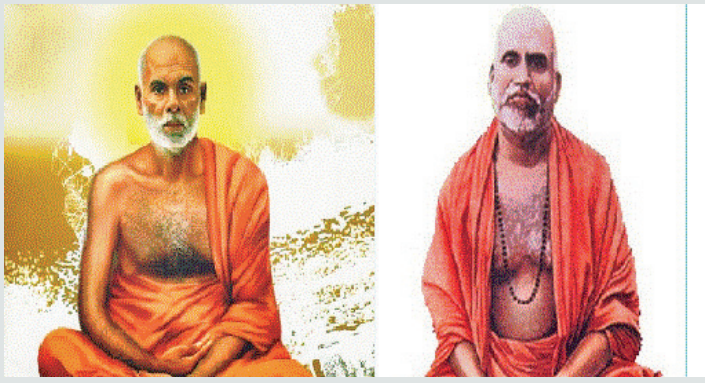
Mahatma Basveshwara and Madar Channaiyya

Sant Acharya Ramanand & Sant Kabir

Sant Acharya Ramanand & Sant Ravidas

Legacy of Guru-Shishya tradition

Sant Ravidas
& Meerabai



Narayan Guru &
Sadguru Malayala
Swamy of Yerpedu

Ramakrishna
Paramhans & Swami
Vivekananda

Guru's of Dr. Ambedkar

Panchanana Giri &
Kanhaiya Prabhu Nand Giri-
Mahamandaleshwar Akhada