



Ambedkartimes.com and the so-called Upper Castes

Dear Readers,

Ambedkartimes.com received an e-mail seeking its opinion on the question of whether this World's fastest expanding website entertains reports, articles and essays written by scholars belonging to Non-Dalit or so called Upper Caste categories?

Let me (the editor of this site), clarify at the outset that <www.ambedkartimes.com> firmly believes in the philosophy and teachings of Bharat Rattan Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and aims at in its modest way to keep the caravan going on. Babasaheb had very clearly said that Brahmanism is a state of mind and an ideology rooted in Hindu Shastras. Brahmanism is not a person. A particular person who belongs to an Upper Caste but does not believe in the muck of the Hindu Shastras and is critical of its Chaturvarna theory cannot be tied with Brahmanism simply by virtue of the fact that he is born Upper Caste. Such thinking totally negates the very radical philosophy of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar who clearly condemned any kind of discrimination based on birth/caste.

After the episode of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1936, Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar decided that henceforth he would not go to any Caste Hindu organization but will welcome any one from the Upper Castes if he or she believes in Annihilation of the Caste system and agree with his philosophy of emancipation and empowerment of the Dalits.

Thus, Ambedkartimes.com is of the firm view that if any one, whosoever she/he may be, tries to distort the path of Babasaheb's struggle and creates a wedge between the Dalits and the Dalit-sympatric scholars (who irrespective of their caste repose faith in the Philosophy and teachings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar) is an enemy of the Dalits and the cause of the community.

<www.ambedkartimes.com> encourage and welcome scholars of Dalits as well as non-Dalit background to contribute their valuable writings that will enlighten the cause of the Dalits and further the on-going struggle both in India and elsewhere.

Further <www.ambedkartimes.com> does not discriminate simply on the basis of birth, rather it is duty bound to make all efforts for the elimination of this disastrous practice of Brahminical ideology that has made the life of Dalits a hell for centuries all together.

It also caution that we too should not fall victim to such nefarious designs of the Brahminical ideology and warns to be at guards so that Brahmanism should not enter the rank and files of the Ambedkarite struggle from the back door!

With Regards,

Prem K. Chumber
Editor

Ambedkartimes.com

4th Agri Business Conclave 2023 India-Africa: South-South Cooperation during the International Year of the Millets

By Ambassador V.B.Soni

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies & gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to participate in this session devoted to creating awareness of the contribution of millet to food security and nutrition.

It has been suggested that I speak on India-Africa: South-South cooperation on Millets.

India and Africa have had historical linkages. Century old relationship between India and the countries on the African continent has always been warm and dynamic. Since the dawn of history the peoples of the two regions have interacted in a friendly manner. The seas and the oceans associated with the writings of historians, poets and voyagers have added enchantment to the scene. These routes were vehicles and carriers of trade, peoples and ideas. Also, concerns on issues of security, stability and prosperity have brought India and African continents together as a mutually reinforcing bond.

I have had the privilege of having served as Ambassador of India to Senegal, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, and Mauritania. (1990-94). It will surprise you to know that India's foray in helping countries in West Africa in millet production was started 30 years back. Our agriculture scientists, have been providing technical help in the production of this wonder crop in the region since then. As Ambassador I initiated the process of facilitation of the process through the local institutions back then. It is so satisfying that that process has been taken to its logical conclusion.

Scientific and research development is central to rapid economic development of any country. It has a direct effect on human development. Higher agricultural production is linked to better seeds, better water use, and the use of more efficient and less toxic fertilizers.

Developing countries in Africa and India are now turning attention to emerging trends in agriculture sector, nutritionally enriched, genetically modified crops. The challenges faced by Africa are a lot similar to India's. So, the relevance of Indian technologies for African societies is relevant and hence the need for strengthening joint R&D initiatives, and exchange of technical know-how.

Africa faces a significant challenge in accessing appropriate, adaptable and affordable technologies that would allow them to be more cost-effective and globally competitive, while at the same time, giving a push to economic development and poverty reduction.

The challenge is not simply to transfer and apply existing technologies in Africa. The process of technology acquisition involves domestic modifications and adaptations that are not cost

free. The efficient application of existing technologies involves considerable technical efforts. Creative approaches need to be developed for blending new technologies with old ones, to provide the best solutions to pressing problems.

The past few years have seen the idea of "green technologies" float out of its specialist moorings in environmental economics and into the mainstream of policy discourse. Mounting evidence suggests that transitioning to a green economy has sound economic and social justification.

According to an estimate I came across, there are about 525 million small farms in the world, 404 million of which operate on less than

two hectares of land. Greening the small farm sector, through promotion and dissemination of innovative practices, could be the most effective way to make more food available to the poor and hungry. It has been demonstrated that even small increases in farm yields, contribute directly to reducing poverty in Africa.



Ladies and Gentlemen, India is one of the leading voices in the realms of science and technology, innovation to the needs of developing societies. To create a win-win situation for both India and Africa, we need to get all these equations right.

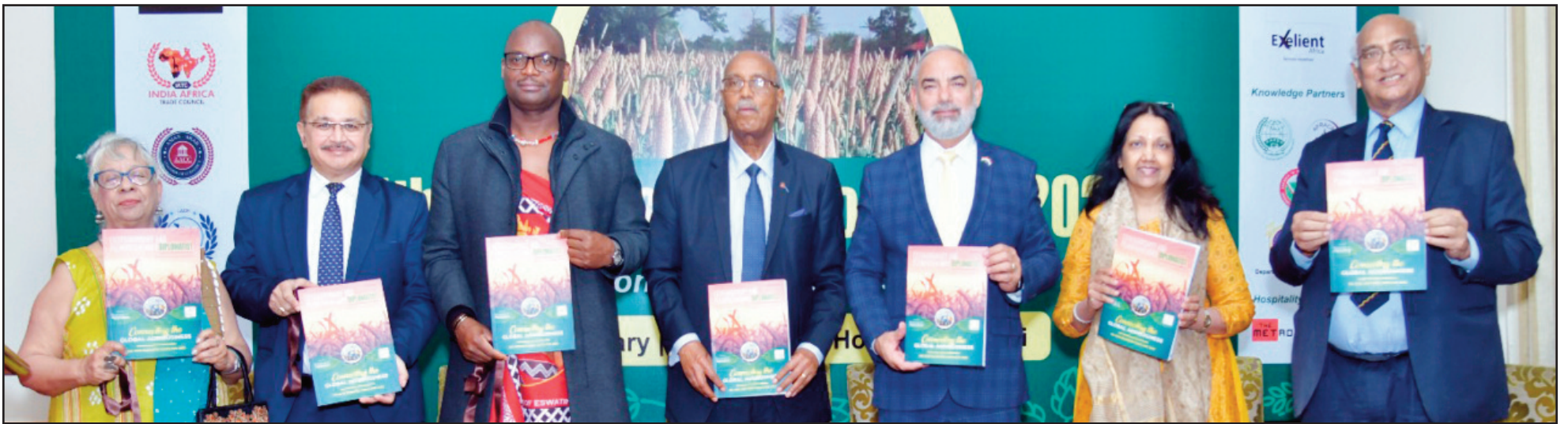
To understand the importance of the wonder food called the millets, let us go back to the situation prevailing prior to the era of the green revolution in India. Millets used to account for 25% of the staple food supply for many communities in the rural area till early 1970s. With green revolution technology consumer bias, wheat and rice came to be designated as finer or superior cereals, and millets as inferior, poor variety for the lower strata of the society. Millet's share plummeted from 25% to 6% in recent years. This despite the fact that the millets are the least water demanding crop, emitting less carbon and can survive in harsh environmental conditions and drought. Scientific evidence suggests the millet is a storehouse of vitamins and minerals and helps reduce the iron and calcium deficiencies, as also tackling Type 2 diabetes.

For increasing global production, efficient processing and better use of crop rotation and promoting millets, as a major component of the food basket, at India's initiative, the United Nations declared 2023, as the International Year of Millet (IYOM). Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), has taken it forward to:

- a) Increase awareness about the contribution of millets for food security and nutrition;
- b) Inspire stakeholders on improving sustainable production and quality of millets;

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India-Africa: South-South Cooperation during the International Year of the Millets



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c) Draw focus for enhanced investment in research and development and extension services to achieve the other two aims.

d) Capacity building for promotion of millets.

An important area for cooperation is agribusiness. India has particular knowledge of a range of areas that Africa would benefit from tapping in to help address its food security challenges, including small-farm mechanisation. Recently India launched a three-year project in West Africa to help boost the region's declining cotton industry. A success story in the sector is Ethiopia where Indians are developing new farms. Indian investors have also articulated their plans to spend \$2.5 billion on millions of hectares of land in East Africa, to grow produce such as maize, palm oil and rice for export, mainly to India.

What sets apart India's engagement with Africa is, its focus on innovative capacity building

programmes and the deployment of ICT to help build a knowledge economy in the African continent. No project illustrates this thrust on innovation and development-driven partnership better than the India-assisted Pan-African e-network that provides telemedicine and tele-education to Africans, living thousands of miles away, by linking them with top educational and leading research institutions in India. Training institutes would prove to be an asset in Africa's ongoing efforts to create a new generation of skilled and technology-empowered workers. The Make in India and Digital India missions will also have ripple effects in its outreach and diplomacy in Africa. In this context the recent announcement by Government of India to provide budgetary support for a centre of excellence to be set up in Indian Institute of Millet Research, Hyderabad assumes importance. Unlike rice and wheat, where technological breakthrough was facilitated by international agricultural research

institutions, the onus for technology development in millet rests on India, as in Africa that infrastructure has still to take shape. This is so because millet requires processing which is quite complex and difficult. Millet specific machines and equipment need to be developed to handle large scale production. Finally millet value chains with participation of millet producers should be helped in setting up.

To sum up it is my conviction that to bring new dynamism to India-Africa economic relations some important steps should be considered. For a start it should leverage the strengths of the unique Indian model. It should showcase its long term approach towards Africa, which is based on professional training, technological assistance, transfer of technology and trade. It should also hinge on empowering Africans.

India should become a stakeholder in Africa's development, one that is well informed of African aspirations and help them refashion indigenous structures to achieve

them. The sharing of India's experience in agriculture sector and farm technologies should be promoted with an eye on food security. Indian agro-processing firms should be encouraged to invest in Africa and transfer Indian experience in the field.

Let me conclude with some trivia on the wonder crop millet.

i) In the path breaking iconic film Mother India released in the mid-1950s, the lead characters played by Nergis and her husband cultivated 'bajra' (pearl millet) on their farm.

ii) The ruler of Delhi Sultanate, Sher Shah Suri famously lamented: "For a handful of 'bajra', I almost lost the Empire of Hindustan", praising the valour of the Rajput Commanders' after the Battle of Sammel in 1544, where he had stopped by to augment food supply for his forces.

iii) TAIWAN got its name from the community Paiwan, which grew Taiwan oil millet.

iv) 'Nartaki' is the ayurvedic name of finger millet, which in South India is known as 'Ragi'.

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Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD



Goodie Takhar, PhD

Style and charming personality defined S.K.Chander

by Ambassador V.B. Soni

My first introduction as a 15 year old shy boy, with Sudurshan Kumar Chander (SKC) was about 66 years back, when he got engaged to my elder sister Asha (then named Maya). On his selection to the Indian Revenue Service (IRS), my father took me to the Delhi Railway Station for a sendoff, while he was on way to the Income tax Training Institute in Nagpur. He noticed me hiding in a corner, withdrawn. He moved forward, took my hand in his own, engaging me in polite conversation to put me at ease. He helped me break the shell. In due course he became my mentor, a lifelong friend, but above all a father figure. We shared common interest in international relations, politics, society's evolution and evil practices like the caste system, in addition to sports.

Chander Sahib helped me prepare for joining the Indian Foreign Service. He advised me on the intricacies of working in the Government system and in matters of social grace.

Later the game of golf brought us even closer. It became a lifelong passion for both of us. During his visit to Kyiv in 2001, he was touched by my gesture of gifting him a Cobra brand golf set.

like Maths and Urdu. This is where he had his earlier education. He was good at picking up things and became a favourite of the Headmaster of the school.

SKC's earliest memory of adventure goes back to when he was barely 4 years of age. Herding the family cattle out in the neighborhood for grazing, he found that the animals refused to go past a particular bush, apparently because of the lurking fear in the form a snake. He did not realize then, but it turned out to be a providential escape.

There being no facilities for games in the village, his group of

ing was in Jullundur. For his graduation studies it was his sister in law who pawned her ornaments to make available the required funds. Rising to the occasion he acquitted himself creditably, gaining merit scholarship.

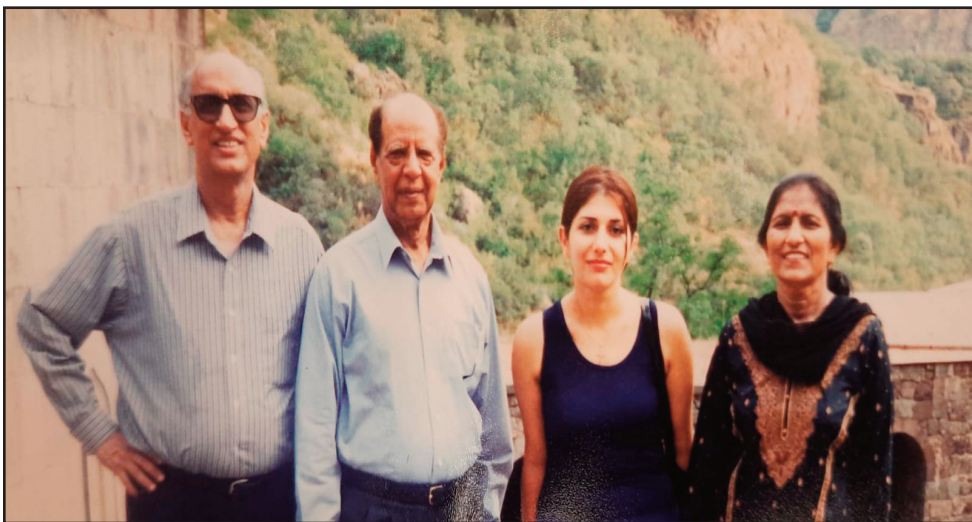
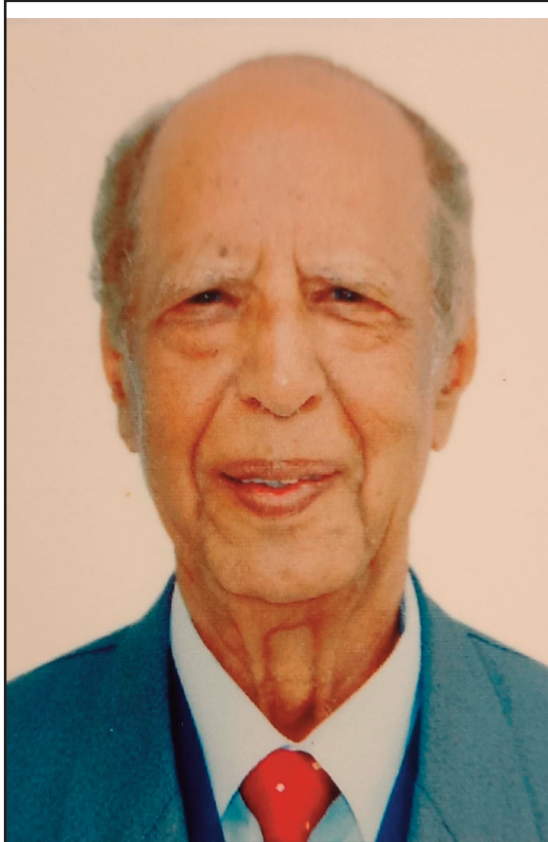
At the time of the partition of the country in 1947, SKC witnessed wide spread violence, killings, rape of innocent women, wanton destruction, indiscriminate looting all around. Estimates point to about 14 million people being displaced and more than 2 million people losing their lives or going missing. He

must have been traumatized by those gory scenes, observing the mayhem on the trains passing

breadth of India by his personal car. His first vehicle was FIAT, followed the robust work horse AMBASSADOR. During the long drives, the description of scenes along the way in his travelogue makes for fascinating reading. His encounter with the outlaws, while driving with the family, through the dacoit infested area in Madhya Pradesh, shows his presence of mind, in bravely getting out of the tricky situation.

Another experience happened, not far from Indore, in the evening hours. Half way through the drive on the highway, Asha smelt of petrol wafting in. On checking the petrol tank, its cap was found missing! With the overflow through the outlet there was not much stock of the fuel left. In the wilderness at that twilight hour no petrol station could be located. It was decided by the couple that instead of staying exposed to the dangers at the night time, it would be worth a try to drive on, as far as it would take them, and leave the rest to the divine force.

The onward journey was continued with prayers on lips. In that hour of crisis, he was reminded of the prophecy heard in childhood: Not to fear and keep going. Lo and behold the prayers were answered! He was somehow able to drag the



SKC's life's experiences and challenges make a fascinating study. His autobiographical chronicle: "Follow Your Dreams" captures those moments graphically. It is well worth recounting these, which begin with some strange supernatural experiences, and encounter with King Cobra, who makes appearance at various stages of his life, ending up as a savior and protector.

Chander Sahib was born in a family with modest means, amidst rustic surroundings in a hamlet on Nakodar-Jullundur Road in Punjab. Though his official date of birth was given as April 4, 1930, he claimed to have been born on the auspicious day of Diwali, a few years earlier. Village TAJPUR had a small concentration of 200 odd families. Majority of population comprised of land owning Jats, cattle breeders, low caste labourers called 'kamis' and carpenters. It was not well developed then. The village did not even have basic facilities, schools or medical centres. A small group of students were taught informally on basic subjects

friends would run and play around the open spaces, orchards, uncultivated land with thick foliage. In pre-teen age years he talks of next encounter with the reptile in a less frequented park. He came out of it unscathed. He became convinced that a Guardian Angel was protecting him. The vivid description of the

Armenia visit Chanders with Bal anand & VBS. August 2001

village scene in its natural habitat is stunningly captured in his imagery.

During the growing up years he was upset by the social issues around. Injustice to the poor people, the pernicious caste system, low position of the women in the society, rape of dalit girls, inadequacy of educational institutions, and the lack of hygiene etc. troubled him. He was unable to understand as to why were there three separate taps of drinking water at the Jullundur Railway station, one each marked for the Hindus, the Muslims and the for achhuts (untouchables).

SKC's next stage of school-



through his backyard in Punjab. But he felt helpless. He did some voluntary work to alleviate the sufferings of the fleeing refugees. That gave him solace. This part of oral history covering such heart rending scenes is touching.

SKC then moved to Delhi to pursue higher studies, as also to explore job opportunities. He got a clerical job in a Government department, landing up as Inspector in the Income Tax Department. During this period his elder sister and brother in law posted in Delhi, went out of the way to support and host him. Eventually he was selected for the Indian Revenue Service in 1957. When the time came for settling down in life, SKC felt lucky to have found in Asha, from a distinguished family from Delhi, as his ideal life partner. They got married on February 13, 1958. After finishing his training at Nagpur, SKC's on job postings took him to Bombay, Akola, Poona, Surat etc. His latter career was spent in Chandigarh, Gauhati and Delhi. He travelled through the length and

car right up to a petrol station miles away. The attendant there was aghast to see the miracle of the car driven with virtually bone dry petrol tank such a long distance! The King Cobra makes appearance as saviour, yet again.

A fascinating picture of the rising professional career graph at various stages, ends up by reaching to the top position of Judge Member at the Appellate Income Tax Tribunal.

Chanders with Shanti Bua in the 1950s.

Along the long journey, SKC faced challenges. The adversarial situation pertained to sensitive cases of dreaded smugglers of gold and contraband items, active during the 1970s on the Western coast of India. There was real danger to his life but he carried on courageously, with many close shaves, in close encounters with anti-social elements. He came out triumphantly. He got commendation for the filling the Government's coffers with his effective tax collection drive, without

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RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat on Caste System

Caste system in India based on the Laws of Manu was one of the most challenging and responsible factor for India losing its independence in the past and also remained a major obstacle in the socio-economic development of the country till date. It never allowed India to be a comprehensive and inclusive society and tended to divide the people on the basis birth and not worth. In spite of the fact that caste system has been abolished in the constitution of free India and all the citizens of India that is Bharat are equal before the law yet the scourge of caste system persisted in one way or the other. It is not only inhuman but also an anti thesis for the much needed harmony in the society. The main stream of the society and polity of the country are still struggling to change the mindset of the upper crst of the society and bring about Samrasta, equitable social order as visualized by our fore-fathers in the changed scenario. I always felt that our socio-cultural outfits never did their best to change the system in the name of so called Aastha on one hand and on the other; the ruling dispensations did not show political will to take the issue head on. It is a matter of gratification, of late; some fresh air has started blowing. The recent take on the caste system by no other than one of the top men in the socio-cultural hierarchy, RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat, has taken the courage of addressing the issue of caste system by putting the things in its perspective in the larger good of the country. Thank you Sir, I stand by you and wish that we take the matter seriously and save our beloved country and the society from these inhuman and degrading effects of caste system becoming a major hindrance in our development.

Before we proceed further, let us see as to who invented caste system in India? I am not a historian or a dharma Guru and may not know the so called religious explanations. I, as usual consulted the Google guru which informed me and I quote, "the caste system is a clever device invented by the Brahmins in order to place themselves on the highest ladder

of social hierarchy. It further adds. "Caste is a Brahmic child of Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and then transferred to other parts of India." Yet another assertion is, "caste system is a class structure that is determined by birth. Loosely, it means that in some societies, the opportunities you have access to depend on the family you happened to be born into. It is enough for a layman to understand that caste is manmade



and has nothing to do with religion as such.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat speaking at a function in Mumbai on Guru Raavidass Jayanti on February 5 made an important statement on the caste system and urged all of us to discard the degrading an uncivilized system said, "Based on scriptures, what the Pandits say is a lie. By getting entangled in this imagination of superior and inferior castes, we have lost our way. This delusion has to be done away with." "We are misled by caste superiority illusion and this illusion has to be set aside," he added. Mohan Bhagwat took on, and rightly so, on the caste system and said candidly "No one is high or low. On the basis of scriptures, scholars talk about caste-based highs and lows – they are lies. We have been confused by being trapped in the idea of caste. This confusion should be removed." Let us stand behind Mohan Bhagwat in this fight to eradicate the scourge of caste

from the face of India for which the great Guru Ravidass and the modern Gurus like Babasaheb Ambedkar showed us the way to make our society clean of its ills. It is a matter of satisfaction to note that it is not for the first time Mohan Bhagwat has said his mind on the subject. In October 2022, speaking at a book launch in Nagpur, Bhagwat had said that "varna" and "jaati" (caste) should be completely discarded, adding that "the caste system has no relevance now... everything that causes discrimination should go out lock, stock and barrel." He further explained his thinking on the subject as hosted in RSS-linked 'Samvada' website quoted Bhagwat as having said in Karnataka: "The main problems of Hindu society such as untouchability, differences and inequality exist mainly in the mind. These problems do not exist in the scriptures... These problems have existed in our minds for many generations and their solution will take time. We have to slowly work to remove them from our minds." I wrote about this in my blog which may be accessed at: diplomaticitbits.blogspot.com/2022/10/rss-chief-on-varna-and-caste-cursory.html

These thoughts of Mohan Bhagwat have created flutter in many orthodox and vested quarters in the society. It has been reported in the media that even the RSS media head, Sunil Ambekar has given some clarifications on the far reaching statements in the face of obvious but unjustified opposition from the Thekedars of dharma, the Hindu priestly class. With the opposition latching on to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's statement that caste system was not ordained by God but created by "Pandits", RSS media person clarified that by "Pandit", Bhagwat meant "intellectuals" and not Brahmins. He added: "Sarsanghachalakji always speaks about social harmony. What he was saying is that

everything that people may interpret from the scriptures may not be right. And he was talking about the experience of Sant Ravidas. No one should take it in the wrong context and hurt social harmony. The RSS has always spoken against untouchability and protested against all social divisions."

With or without clarifications, let us, to my mind, take Mohan Bhagwat's statements at their face value. It is up to him to see how he defends himself. It is his problem. Why I say so is because some of the vested interests on the other side too tend to doubt the credentials of Mohan Bhagwat. We are interested in a casteless society as stipulated in the constitution of India. Any effort, big or small, in bringing about Samrasta in the society should be appreciated and supported. There is no other way as Babasaheb said, "Political democracy has no meaning if it is not transformed it into a social and economic democracy" From where the caste system came? Who created it? How did it flourish? These questions are irrelevant to a common man like me. Leave it to Pandits the so called intellectuals to break their heads on these useless excersisaes. We are interested in eating Aams (mangoes) and not counting Guthalies (mango stones). We want casteless society to live in harmony and with dignity. It will be a befitting tribute to Guru Ravidass who thoughtfully said in his vani:

कह रवदिस खलास चमार;
जो हम शहरी सो मीत हमारा.



Ramesh Chander
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Style and charming personality defined S.K.Chander

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resorting to coercive methods. The thing that rankled him was the deep rooted caste prejudices he faced within the department. Mercifully that did not deter his career graph being affected.

At every stage in life, SKC's confidence in the providence kept increasing. The prophetic voice had ordained that he would get an accomplished and devoted wife in Asha. She became his inseparable lifelong companion, who singlehandedly nursed and looked after him towards the end of his innings. For months when he was bed ridden, she sacrificed her personal life and stayed by his bedside 24x7, forsaking the outside world for months. She was a constant companion, nurse and caretaker. He would never allow her to be out of site even for a moment.

The blessed couple raised a fine family, as ordained by the divine force. All his three children made him proud, earning laurels. The first born Rajiv joined the Indian Foreign Service, becoming a key player on the high table of international diplomacy, at the Geneva Headquarters of the United Nations. Sanjay rose to the top position of Director General of Police, Railway Protection Force. Third born, Anita trained as fashion designer at National Institute Fashion of Technology. It shows that prophesies

do turn out to be true.

S.K.Chander's was a tall, good looking, well rounded, charming personality. He was generous at heart, supporting a worthy cause, offering monetary help where needed. He was committed to helping the cause of spreading education among the downtrodden, especially the girl child, paying for their tuition fees. In his ancestral village he helped open a school for them. For the marriage of daughters of the poor, he would gift a tidy sum of money, to supplement the expenditure. His personal staff was the beneficiary of his bountiful nature at every conceivable opportunity.

We all know that Chander Sahib loved good things in life. He had his own distinctive style and grace. His wardrobe was full of well stitched suits and clothes, large range of neck ties and a wide collection of hats and caps. At a social occasion he would stand out because of the signature head gear.

As a person with refined cultural interests, he was very fond of Urdu shayiri and would come up with appropriate couplets, of which he had a repertoire, relevant to the occasion, from the pantheon of the leading poets. Ghalib was his favourite one.

To return to his passion for the game of golf, though a later starter to the game, he lived and breathed the game. NOIDA Golf Club

was virtually like a place of worship for him. He treated it with reverence. He used to play thrice week in the afternoon, with his regular four ball. His routine involved the well laid out rituals. Post-game refreshment session was reserved for exchanging pleasantries.

Towards the latter part of his innings, when he was unable to swing the golf club smoothly, his past time was to sit in the Club House, soak in the atmosphere there, enjoying the animated conversation among golfers about how they missed a birdie. In that ambience, he enjoyed browsing through magazines and newspapers in the reading room library. Above all, enjoying golden fried prawns/pomfret fish, washed down with a round of Bloody Mary or gin and tonic, as day time drink!

My bonding with SKC was deep rooted. We invariably looked forward to enjoying our favourite brand of Scotch whisky in the evenings, as and when the opportunity arose. Snack of seekh kebab, fish tikka and tandoor malai tikka, were among his favourite dishes. Over extended sessions we would discuss issues under the sun. And to come up with solutions for the problems afflicting the humanity and the international arena.

S.K.Chander and Asha were a perfect couple, madly in love, fully devoted to each other. They could

not part even for a short time. During the more than one occasion when he fell gravely ill, it was Asha who nursed him back with her own tender and loving care. Towards the last stage of life when he was bed-ridden for a prolonged period of life, she withdrew herself from the social scene and was at his bedside 24x7. She sacrificed her comforts and sleep full time, tending to him with full love, care and devotion. Just before he passed away on January 4, 2023 he would often mumble, within hearing distance, that but for her personal attention and care, he would have left the world much earlier. It is bound to be tough for her to a life without life partner for 65 In addition to his delightfully written autobiographical account: "Follow Your Dreams", I had the privilege of listening to his many more enjoyable firsthand account over drinks. The book was released at a glittering function in 2019 by former Central Cabinet Minister Shri Harish Rawat and Rwanda High Commissioner H.E. Mr. Ernest Rwamucyio, organised by Global Achiever's Foundation. He was also conferred the Nelson Mandela Memorial Award for his outstanding contribution to public service at the same function. A well-deserved honouryears! Sudurshan K Chander lived his life fully and enjoyed it till the end. Let's remember and celebrate his zest for life.