



Ambedkar Times

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Electoral Politics, Social awakening and Political Empowerment

- Prem K Chumber (Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times)

The introduction of electoral politics in colonial India during the British Raj aroused critical awareness among the lower castes that their numerical strength can be translated into political power – a key to their empowerment. The first political initiative on the part of the ex-untouchables took shape in 1910 that witnessed the formation of the All India Depressed Classes Federation under the inspiration of the Bombay Presidency Social Reforms Association. The Government of India Act – 1919 expedited the move further under its scheme of communal representation in Indian legislature. In fact, the Government of India Act – 1919 was the benchmark for the emergence of Scheduled Castes political awareness leading to the formation of their 'coherent political blocks'.

Promises of electoral politics gave rise to social awakening among the Scheduled Castes (officially known as Depressed Classes) who perhaps for the first time in the long history of their persecution and neglect come to realise the importance of their head counts for the purpose of their political empowerment and social emancipation. They started demanding separate electoral constituencies and the right to register themselves under their long-forgotten indigenous religion. In Punjab, the Scheduled Castes made an ambitious proposal for a separate religion of their own and they fought systematically for the same under the stewardship of Babu Mangu Ram, a renowned Gadharite and founder of historic Ad Dharm movement. Babu Mangu Ram won the battle. The Ad Dharmis were allowed to register themselves under their newly declared religion - Ad Dharm - in the 1931 Punjab Census. As per Punjab Census Report, 1931, part A, Chap.11, subsidiary table 1, p. 318; the total number of 418,789 Ad Dharmis registered themselves under the Ad Dharm. By registering under the newly declared Ad Dharm, the Scheduled Castes of Punjab made a bold statement that they were neither Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Christian, but a separate qaum who want their due share in the local structures of power of the society, polity and economy. Subsequently, Ad Dharm contested 1936 and 1945-46 Punjab Legislative Assembly elections. Out of the eight reserved seats, it got seven in 1936 election. In the 1945-46 election Babu Mangu Ram got elected from Hoshiarpur constituency.

Since the days of Ad Dharm movement, Scheduled Castes in Punjab had been actively participating in the electoral politics of the state and parliamentary elections. But surprisingly enough, their own political parties, Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF), Republican Party of India (RPI), and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), failed to win over them who constitute about 1/3 of the total population of Punjab. In the recently concluded 16th parliamentary election, the BSP failed to win any seat even in its stronghold in Uttar Pradesh. However, still there is good news that in Uttar Pradesh the BSP retained its vote bank intact with some addition. But in Punjab, where the percentage of Scheduled Castes population is highest in comparison to all other states in the country, the percentage of the BSP votes has further dwindled.

What does the rout of the BSP signify? Is it that the Scheduled Castes politics has come to an end? Or does it that they lost faith in their own political initiatives? With a solid tradition of political participation and a rich legacy of Ad Dharm movement, SCF, RPI and BSP, it would be immature to conclude that the fate of Dalit politics for its self-governing route is closed. The failure in electoral politics should not be construed as the failure of social awakening too. The failure in parliamentary constituencies cannot suffocate the strong breath of social awakening among the Scheduled Castes in Punjab. They very well understand the golden message taught by their messiahs – Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Bharat Rattan Bodhisattva Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Sahib Kanshi Ram – that political power is a key to their ultimate emancipation and empowerment. This message will never go waste!



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An Exhibition and Public Function on Dr Ambedkar at Bedford

Rich Tributes paid to the Champion of Human rights



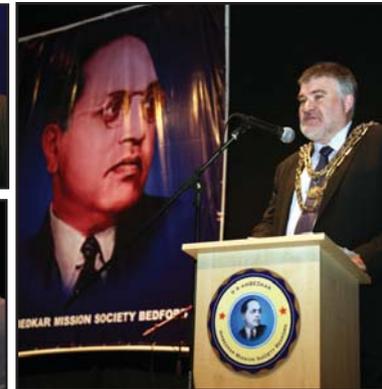
Arun Kumar
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On 11 May, 2014, a huge function to commemorate the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar was organized at the prestigious venue in Bedford, Corn Exchange by Ambedkar Mission Society Bedford. The event included an exhibition on Dr Ambedkar's life, work, caste discrimination in India and UK. Also on display were some of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar's personal belongings- courtesy of Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee of GB, Wolverhampton. The exhibition contained copies and originals of over three hundred rare photos of Dr Ambedkar,



the caste atrocities on Dalits including rapes and killings of Dalit women and the history of campaign against caste discrimination in the United Kingdom from 1976. It was an eye opener for those who refuse to accept prevalence of caste based discrimination (CBD) and its effects on the victims of CBD. The exhibition was designed and prepared by Pirthi Kaeley and Arun Kumar and it was opened by Dave Hodgson, Mayor of Bedford.

The function was at-



tended by local councilors, MP and representatives from different organisations and public at the public at large from all over UK. A large delegation comprising of Dr Vijay Kadam, Ramesh Katke, Avinash Kamble, Dnyaneshwar Bhimrao Nile, Sudhir Sudhakar Kalsulkar, Mahendra Bhimrao Nile, Balu Nitnaware, Mrs Vandana Nitnaware who had come from India especially to attend this function. Bhim Smaran-Bhim Stuti, a new version to pay tribute to Dr Ambedkar led by Siddharth Prabuddha joined by other guests was recited. A short film on the life and works of

(Contd.. to Page 3)

Ambedkar Events at the London School Economics and House of Lords

Report by Arun Kumar

To commemorate the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar two historic events took place on 8th May 2014 in London. One was at the London School of Economics (LSE) where Babasaheb studied from 1916 to 1923 and another at the House of Lords-the Upper

Ambedkar's various events took place in LSE, Grays Inn, Oxford and Cambridge Universities and the British Parliament.

The workshop at the LSE was chaired by Dr Alpa Shah, Associate Professor (Reader) Department of anthropology (LSE). After a brief introduction about Dr Ambedkar's life



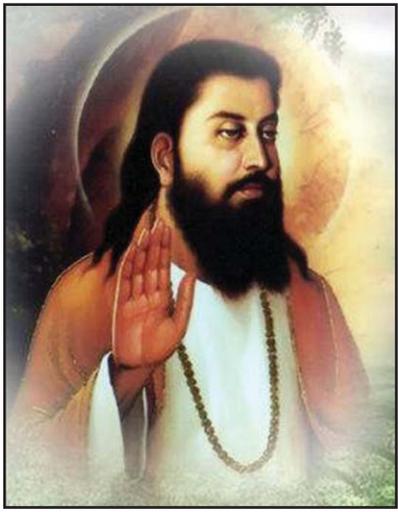
House of the British Parliament. Both events were organised by the Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisations UK (FABOUK). The LSE event was in collaboration with the department of Anthropology at the LSE. The House of Lords conference 'Dr Ambedkar-his Life and Works' was chaired by Lord Harries of Pentregarth, Chair All Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits. These events remind us of those years in 1990s when Dr



and work by Arun Kumar, Jayseelan Raj, Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Anthropology, LSE, read his paper on the conditions of Tamil Dalits in Kerala.

He explained that the migrant Dalit Tamils face extreme discrimination in Kerala on the basis of their caste and language. Dr Clarinda Still, Department lecturer, Modern Indian Studies, Oxford and Inequality and

(Contd.. to next Page)



SRI GURU RAVIDASS SABHA, PITTSBURG (CA) CELEBRATES 29TH ANNIVERSARY OF THIS GURUGHAR AT ITS PRESENT LOCATION ON JUNE 29TH 2014. THE ENTIRE SANGAT IS CORDIALLY INVITED TO JOIN AND GLORIFY THIS HISTORIC EVENT WITH FRIENDS AND RELATIVES, AS PER FOLLOWING PROGRAM

**6-27-2014 (Friday)
Arambh Akhand Path 10:00 A.M**

**6-29-2014 (Sunday)
Bhog Akhand Path 10:00 A.M**

The occasion will be graced by prominent Kirtankars, preachers and speakers well versed with the history of its existence, being the first Gurughar in USA, associated with the holy teachings of Shri Guru Ravidass Ji Maharaj.

Path and langarsewa for all the three days will be performed jointly by sangat.

For more information please call (925) 439-2355.

**FAQUIRA MEHMI
CHAIRMAN**

**SALINDER SINGH
PRESIDENT**

**ABHISHEK PAL
GENL. SECRETARY**

**GYAN SUMAN
TREASURER**



Faquira Mehmi (Chairman), Salinder Singh (President), Shashi Paul (Vice President), O P Balley (Former President), Sohan Singh Damaria (Former Chairman), Abhishek Pal (General Secretary) & Granthi Singhs honoring Harmesh Lal Sheemar with Siropa on releasing Dr. Ambedkar songs CD at Shri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg (California)



Ambedkar Events at the London School Economics and House of Lords

Poverty Research Programme, LSE, had spent one and half year in the house hold of a Dalit family in Andhra Pradesh to study the day-to-day life of Dalit women. She found that they were burdened with more responsibilities than those of upper caste women. She said, "Apart from looking after families, they have to work in the fields to earn livelihood to run the house. Dalit women are the victims of extreme discrimination. Caste based sexual violence is used as a tool of control over the women and the Dalit community as a whole". She also found, "Women are also discriminated by their own men in the name of honour. Women are educated only to find a good match for marriage and after marriage they end up doing house hold chores and their careers are over."

Ms Santosh Dass MBE, President of Federation of Ambedkarite & Buddhist Organisations, UK (FABOUK) and Vice Chair, Anti caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) gave a forceful presentation on the campaign to outlaw caste discrimination in the UK. She explained, "On 23 April 2013 Parliament agreed to outlaw Caste-based discrimination in the UK but the time table to implement the law published by the government in July 2013 was overly elastic. The timetable indicates that the legislation might be brought into force by October 2015-five and half years after it became law". She further added, "Caste based Discrimination is a human rights, equality, and justice issue. It has sadly become a political football."

The conference at the House

of Lords was chaired by Lord Harries of Pentregarth, Chair, All-Parliamentary Group for Dalits. It was attended by Lord Eric Avebury, Baroness Verma, Baroness Northover, Lords Spokesperson for Women and Equalities, Mr. Virendra Sharma MP, Dr Ruth Kattumuri, Co-Director India Observatory & Asia Research Centre, London school of Economics (LSE), Dr Alpa Shah Associate Professor (Reader) Department of anthropology (LSE), Dr Clarinda Still, Department lecturer, Modern Indian Studies, Oxford and Inequality and Poverty Research Programme, LSE, Ms Santosh Dass MBE, President of Ambedkarite & Buddhist Organisations UK and Vice Chair ACDA, Meena Varma, Director, Dalit Solidarity Network and many representatives of various organizations. A short documentary film on Dr Ambedkar was also screened.

Introducing the event, Ms Santosh Dass MBE explained that the aim of this first House of Lords event was to raise awareness of Dr Ambedkar and his contribution to equality and justice in India, and his impact on those around the world with an interest in human rights, the theory and practice of equality issues and civil rights movements. She 'hoped to see the events at the LSE and House of Lords become annual platforms around the birthday of Dr Ambedkar from which issues that concern Dalits in the UK and abroad could be discussed with a sufficiently high profile." Dr Ruth Kattumuri stated that Dr Ambedkar's ideals were based on equality and justice not just for Dalits but for everybody.

Speaking on Dr Ambedkar's constitutional provisions for affirmative action measures, Dr Alpa Shah said, "There is no doubt the affirmative measures have improved the economic and social conditions of millions of people and Dalits are able to achieve high profile positions but it has adverse effects as well. To get benefits every caste is asserting and feeling proud in caste identity. Dr Ambedkar wanted affirmative action for certain period of time.

Instead of implementing these measures, political classes used them for their benefit and kept on extending. Dr Ambedkar wanted to annihilate caste and caste identities. Whatever Dr Ambedkar wanted opposite is being practiced." Baroness Northover, the Spokesperson for Women and Equalities and the Department for International Development said that she visited India and saw the work of NGOs engaged in the empowerment of women. She was happy to know that Government of India had started many schemes to alleviate poverty and improve the conditions of women. She further stated that the British government encouraged such programmes. Meena Varma informed that Dr Ambedkar Principles framed by the International Dalit Solidarity Network in 2006 had been adopted by many European countries. The European firms engaged in the business activities in India must adhere to these principles and include them in their corporate social responsibility. Dr Clarinda Still focussed on the precarious conditions of Dalit women in rural areas.

Lord Eric Avebury and Ravi

Kumar the General Secretary of the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance gave a Lord's and lobbyist view of the campaign for legal protection against Caste-based discrimination in the UK. Lord Avebury said "When you reflect on the lifetime Ambedkar spent in fighting caste discrimination, and the fact that it has continued for more than half a century after it was prohibited in the constitution he drafted, the obstacles we face pale into insignificance; but the lessons from his struggle are important to us today. Caste is deeply embedded in the cultures of south Asia, and since discrimination persists there long after it was made unlawful, it is hardly surprising that it also continues in the Diaspora. To extinguish it requires relentless action by its opponents against stubborn resistance over many years.

So instead of resting on our laurels having got the legislation onto the statute book, we need to continue the struggle to mobilise the wider public through Parliamentarians", Ravi Kumar said ` now that a law that provides protection for victims is in place, once implemented it will help communities unite, and start to work afresh in a spirit of equality, and harmony. As campaigners, we never wanted preferential treatment, but only a level playing field for our families, friends and children to compete in".

All participants unanimously condemned the government for delaying the caste legislation and demanded to implement it immediately. Baroness Verma and Virendra Sharma MP also paid tribute to Dr Ambedkar.

THE AD-DHARAM - AN APPRAISAL



Ramesh Chander
Ambassador (Rtd. IFS)
91-99885-10940

The prevailing social milieu with regard to the human and social rights of dalits in India came into discussion and focus in the 20s of the last century. The Congress Party took note of the depressed classes for the first

time in 1917 in one of its annual sessions. With the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the scene in the late 20s, the issue of the condition of depressed classes started attracting attention both in political and social circles. The Ghadrite leader Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia of Punjab returned back from abroad sometime in 1925. He was much distressed on seeing the political, social and economic condition of dalits in Punjab and throughout the country. The main stream political parties and communities were engaged in freedom struggle against the British rulers. Nobody was interested in ameliorating the sufferings of the depressed and oppressed segments of the society. Dr. Ambedkar started his activities in Maharashtra and some other parts of the country with regard to empowerment of depressed classes. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia picked up the threads in Punjab started a focused movement to address the issues of the depressed classes. His vision was to establish a separate identity for the dalits outside the affiliation of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians. He felt that as long as the dalits would remain in the fold of these religions, they would remain oppressed and exploited as per the dictates of Hindu shastras and practical

behaviour and treatment by the so called upper-castes.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia initiated and established Ad-dhram Mandal on June 11-12, 1926 along with his associates Basant Rai, Thakur Dass, Shudranand and many more at Hoshiarpur in Punjab. The Headquarters of the Ad-dhram Mandal was shifted to Guru Ravidass School, Kishanpura Mohalla, and Jalandhar in November 1926. The Ad-dhram Mandal professed that dalits were the original inhabitants of India and should be recognized as such. The agenda and goal of the Mandal was emancipation and empowerment of dalits. With a view to unite all dalits, they said that Ad-dhram was their religion. It was said that the Sant Mat of Guru Ravidass, Bhagwan Valmiki, Sant Kabir and Sant Namdev was "Ad-dhram. The symbol of ad-dhram was "Sohang". The mode of greetings and social salutation was "Jai Guru Dev" and "Dhan Guru Dev". They also approved, in consultation with Sant Sarwan Dass of Dera Ballan, a separate granth called "Ad-Prakash" which contained the vani of all the above said dalit Gurus. The 'Adi-Danka' was issued as the mouthpiece of the movement. The leaders of Ad-dhram Mandal struggled to achieve their goal under the leadership of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia. The Dera Ballan of Jalandhar under the leadership of great Sant Sarwan Dass fully supported the Ad-dhram Mandal. With this, the general dalit masses in and around the doaba region of Punjab joined the movement with their leaders namely Master Gurbanta Singh, Seth Kisan Dass, Seth Sunder Dass and many more and professed themselves as "Ad-dhramis". The Ad-dhram Mandal submitted a Memorandum to the Gov-

ernor of Punjab on December 10, 1929 and pleaded that in the general census they should be registered and shown as Ad-dhramis as distinct from the main stream religions i.e. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The demand was considered and accepted and for the first time Ad-dhram was recognized as a different religion in the Census of 1932. It was a great victory for the Ad-dhram Mandal. The struggle was being intensified. Dr. Ambedkar came firmly on the scene. He made his assertions at the round table conferences with regard to the rights of the depressed classes. The Ad-dhram Mandal under the stewardship of Babu Mangu Ram whole heartedly supported Dr. Ambedkar. The result was the Communal ward by PM Ramsey MacDonald which granted separate electorate to the depressed classes. The Congress Party under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi opposed this. The rest is history. Under considerable pressure and duress, Dr. Ambedkar was made to relent in the larger interests of the freedom struggle and to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi who resorted to fast unto death against the separate electorate for the depressed classes. The Poona Pact was signed between Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi providing for reserved seats for the depressed classes. In the ensuing elections in 1937, Ad-dhram Mandal won 7 seats of the 8 reserved seats and established its credentials successfully under the leadership of Babu Mangu Ram. It was a great success. The Congress Party could not relish this. The leaders like Prithvi Singh Azad, Master Gurbanta Singh, Yashwant Rai, and Seth Sunder Dass parted their ways and aligned with the Congress party and opposed Babu

Mangu Ram and Dr. Ambedkar. The seeds of division and disintegration were shown nourished. Subsequent political developments after independence in 1947 further marginalized the Ad-dhram movement. Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism in October, 1956 and advised his followers to do so. Unfortunately, he died soon after on December, 1956. It resulted in further set back to Ad-dhram movement. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia who was getting old could not hold and sustain. A renowned Indian scholar and authority on the subject, Prof. Ronki Ram has done an intensive study in his thesis "Mangoo Ram, Ad Dhram & the Dalit Movement in Punjab" and said:

"The Ad-Dharm movement succeeded in raising the consciousness of the downtrodden people of the Doaba region of Punjab in particular and of the entire state in general. It gave those gurus to believe in, a qaum to belong to and a sense of history to relate with. It envisions the possibility and potentiality of social change for the Scheduled Castes. The process of cultural transformation and spiritual regeneration started by the Ad Dharm movement under the leadership of Mangoo Ram has continued to reverberate in the cities and villages of Punjab into the 21st century through different platforms and political formations." (Source: ad-dhram.com)

Yet another American scholar Mark Juergensmeyer in his study "Religious Rebels in the Punjab" and "The Ad-Dharm Challenge to Caste" said:

"With the Census of 1931 the Ad-Dharm had carved out a niche for itself. In the public world of the Punjab that time – the world of the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabha, and the (Contd..to page no 4)

An Exhibition and Public Function on Dr Ambedkar at Bedford

Dr Ambedkar was also screened.

This whole day function was packed with entertainment with Bollywood, dance, Punjabi folk dance, 'Bhangra', poetry by Mehar Chand Jassal, joginder Mahay, Khushminder Kumar and musical recitals by K.L. Chand and B.S. Jamla and group.

Arun Kumar, General Secretary, Ambedkar Mission Society Bedford explained that the idea for this exhibition and the large scale public function was to raise awareness of Dr Ambedkar and his contribution to the human rights movement in India, and his impact on those around the globe with an interest in equality and justice. Giving introduction to the exhibition, Pirthi Kaeley stated, "Everybody knows about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela and their contribution to the human rights movement, but not many people are familiar with Dr Ambedkar's contribution to equality and justice. His stature was not less than anybody who stood and fought for equality and human rights." Dave Hodgson, Mayor of Bedford described Dr Ambedkar as a remarkable man who was born as a pauper and obtained high position by mere hard work and his belief in him. He further added, "The Constitution framed by him is a reflection of his vision of a just society where nobody is discriminated." Praising

Lord Eric Avebury, one of the champions of caste discrimination legislation, he remarked, "His party, 'Liberal Democrats' is committed to the legislation against all sort of discrimination."

Commenting upon Dr Ambed-



kar's contribution to gender equality, Ms Santosh Dass MBE, President, Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organizations, UK (FABOUK) said, "If there is a key figure in the empowerment of women in India in the 20th century, that status falls to one man: Dr Ambedkar. His words of encouragement for, and about women on equality could easily be cloaked as modern-day feminism. 'Educate yourself' As a mother, educate your children, and instill ambition into them. Remove from them any inferiority com-

plexes'...Stand by your husband as his friend and equal." She further added, "Dr Ambedkar left a huge body of writings spanning forty years and covering a variety of subjects, amongst them history, economics, anthropology, politics philos-

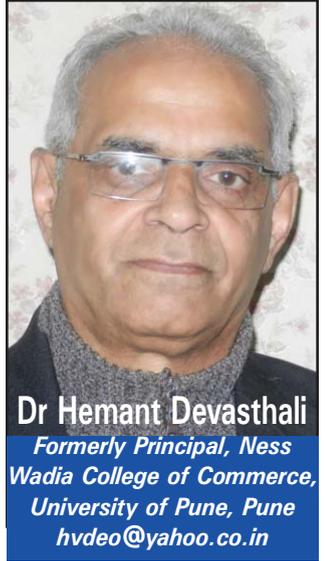
ophy and law. These writings are proof-positive of his prowess, his intellectual rigour and his clarity of thought. Leaving so much written work – speeches, journals, books – are his gift not only to subsequent generations of Indians but also to anyone anywhere with an interest in human rights, the theory and practice of equal treatment issues and civil rights movements. Paritam Lal, first Secretary Coordination, Indian high commission said that Dr Ambedkar's ideals are as much relevant today as they were in his

life time. Bedford MP Richard Fuller who made powerful speeches in Parliament to support the legislation against caste discrimination again reiterated his support and regret for the delay in implementing this piece of legislation. Examining the contribution of Dr Ambedkar, he stated, "Starting from a humble background and achieving so much in his life time tells about this man's greatness. His belongings displayed in the exhibition reflect that he was a simple man. There are so many things about Dr Ambedkar that could be discussed but his vision and his struggle for equality and justice are important than anything else. His constitution is a testimony to his beliefs in the democratic system. Bedford is fortunate to host this important exhibition of this most influential campaigner for justice." He praised the members of Ambedkar Mission Society for organising the exhibition on Dr Ambedkar and wonderful programme in Bedford. He also released a souvenir published by Ambedkar Mission society Bedford. Dev Suman, Dhanpat Rattu, Councillor Jasbir Singh, Gira Ashok Chakravarty, Megha Sonawane and many more paid tributes to Babashaeb. The programme was anchored by Ram Pal Rahi and Arun Kumar.

- Arun Kumar, General Secretary
Ambedkar Mission society, Bedford UK

Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha: The organisation that marked the birth of a remarkable career

The formation of Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha in 1924 that marked the birth of the exceptionally remarkable career of public service of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar must be regarded as a milestone in India's Dalit movement. The month of July this year will mark the ninetieth anniversary of the event.



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While Dr Ambedkar had started a fortnightly journal Mooknayak (Leader of the Dumb) earlier in 1920, the formation of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha ('Society for the Uplift of the Depressed Classes') on 20 July 1924 was Dr Ambedkar's first organisational effort for the betterment of the conditions of the untouchables. The Sabha was the first ever organisation he started for giving vent to and represent the grievances of the untouchable community.

The formation of the organisation was preceded by a meeting of the concerned persons called by Dr Ambedkar about four months earlier on 9 March at Damodar Hall, Parel, Mumbai which also became the official address of the Society on its formal establishment. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the need to establish an organisation which could place the social and political problems of the untouchables before the government. As another precursor to the formation of the Sabha, a conference was also held at Barshi in May where Dr Ambedkar laid emphasis on the political awakening and rights of the untouchables, and the need for an organisation.

Dr Ambedkar worded 'Educate, Agitate and Organise' as the motto of the organisation, indicating very clearly that the key to the improvement in the conditions of the untouchables lay in their own hands. Thus Dr Ambedkar was very clear as to the means the organisation wanted to employ to achieve its objective of uplifting the untouchable community. It was to bring about a change in the untouchable community itself rather than make efforts for a favourable change in the attitude of the caste Hindus.

The main objectives of the Sabha were conceived as follows:

1. To accumulate information with regard to the present state of the untouchables and publicise it with a view to moulding public opinion.
2. To make efforts so that the government feels called upon to defend the rights of the untouchable community, and to secure such facilities from the government as are needed for its development.
3. To undertake programmes to create awareness of their rights among the untouchables and to engage a cadre of

workers for the purpose.

4. To promote education among the untouchables, establish libraries and hostels, endow scholarships for the deserving candidates, organise kirtanas to foster public awareness and prepare plans for the economic betterment of the untouchables with a view to submitting them to the concerned authorities for action.
5. To make efforts to bring about by any other means an overall improvement in the conditions of the untouchables.

The Board of Trustees of the organisation consisted of well-known public figures of the day. It was presided over by Sir Chimanlal Setalwad, eminent lawyer of the day who had served as a member of the Hunter Commission of Inquiry following the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in 1919. The six Vice-residents were: Meyer Nissim, Justice of the Peace, actively involved in Jewish communal affairs, who later became Mayor of Bombay; Rustomji Jinwala, Solicitor; G. K. Nariman; Dr. R. P. Paranjape, famous mathematician who later became Vice Chancellor of the Pune and Lucknow Universities; Dr. V. P. Chavan, renowned linguist and anthropologist, and B. G. Kher who later became the first Prime Minister of Bombay Province.

The Managing Committee was chaired by Dr Ambedkar himself with Sitaram Namdev Shivtarkar as Secretary and Nivritti Tulshiram Jadhav as Treasurer.

The composition of these two important bodies thus seems to be very carefully devised. The Board of Trustees consisted of Parsis and high caste Hindus so that the organisation gains respectability in the eyes of the wider community cutting across the barriers of caste and faith. On the other hand, in view of the fact that the Managing Committee of an organisation is generally responsible for its ground activities and the implementation of its programmes and policies, all the three members of the Managing Committee of the Sabha were untouchables. Thus the main initiative of the Sabha rested in the hands of those whose interests were directly affected by the success and failure of its programmes.

The annual report of the Sabha for the year 1925 mentioned a range of

activities undertaken by it:

1. A hostel for the depressed classes near Sholapur which accommodated free of cost 15 high school students.
2. General work among the Mahars in the Nasik district with regard to the redress of their grievances in the Watan-dari matters.
3. A library and a reading room for the depressed classes in the Improvement Trust Chawl in Byculla, a suburb of Bombay.
4. A Mahar Hockey Club presumably to wean away the Mahar youth from unhealthy habits like drinking and gambling.
5. Bahishkrit Vidyarthi Sammelan (Depressed Class Students' Association) that aimed at cultivating a taste for knowledge and learning among the students and with this in mind brought out a students' monthly called Saraswati Vilas.
6. Formation of three cooperative credit societies for the depressed classes.

For a general view of the Sabha's work during its existence, the representations that Dr Ambedkar made as the leader of the untouchables and a range of conferences of depressed classes that he addressed as the founder of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha during its tenure of around 4 years may be added to this list.

In one of the communications to the government, Dr Ambedkar urged the government to consult the Sabha in all matters affecting the Depressed Classes and invited the Governor of Bombay to accept to be the Honorary Patron of the Sabha. In another communication, he requested for details of the procedure to welcome the incoming Viceroy, Lord Irwin, on behalf of the Sabha. Thus, Dr Ambedkar's line of thinking that laid stress on the need for the support of the British government for securing rights and facilities for the untouchables becomes evident even in this first attempt of his to mobilise the Depressed Classes into an organisation.

Dr Ambedkar closed down the Sabha on 14 June 1928 to form Depressed Classes Education Society, presumably to focus his attention and energy on the education of the depressed classes which he always thought to be immensely important for their betterment. As is obvious even

from the report of the activities of the Sabha, a large part of these seems to be devoted to the education of the Depressed Classes.

While during its tenure of less than 4 years, the Sabha did not achieve anything spectacular, for Dr Ambedkar himself it helped him emerge as the most prominent of leaders of untouchables. Backed by a formal organisation like the Sabha and fortified by a line of impeccable academic qualifications from the world-renowned centres of learning, Dr Ambedkar came to be heard during this period with respect alike by the simple members of his community and the educated elite in the highly structured fora like University Reforms Committee (1924), Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance (1925), Bombay Legislative Council (1925) and Simon Commission (1928). One of the objectives of the Sabha was to represent the grievances of the untouchables to the concerned authorities and during this period and Dr Ambedkar had begun well on this count.

As mentioned above, Dr Ambedkar addressed during this period, a large number of conferences of untouchables which helped him to interact with them and mobilise them behind him. The high point of these conferences was reached during the large scale mobilisation of untouchables that was effected by him during the Mahad Satyagraha (March 19-20 and December 25, 1927). The epic event confirmed Dr Ambedkar's stature as the unquestionable leader of the untouchable community. Dr Ambedkar may be said to have owed much to this fledgling though short-lived effort of his for the uplift of his community. For it gave him a formal platform to air the grievances of the untouchable community, helped him crystallise his views on the problem of untouchables and shaped the person he was for the next 32 years that he dominated the Dalit movement in India.

THE AD-DHARAM - AN APPRAISAL

various movements for communal identity, nationalism and reform – the Ad-Dharm had made its mark. It had established a fact which previously had been unproved: that the Untouchable castes were capable of mobilizing for their own benefits, and of organizing in ways that permitted them to compete under the conditions that governed the socio-political arena at large. The time had been ripe for such an achievement, but an achievement it was, and the Ad-Dharm deserved whatever glory it conferred. The year 1931 and the great census would be remembered as the movement's crowning moment." (Source: website: ad-dhram.com)

On the anniversary of the Ad-dhram Mandal (June 11-12), I write this as a piece oral history. I think the outlines of the agenda and programme of the Ad-dhram mandal including the concept Ad-dhram as a religion of the original inhabitant (dalits) is worth studying particularly in the wake of newly initiated Ravidassia Dhram which seems to me an unbaked product of some overzealous people.

Matrimonials

Mehmi family (Ad Dharmi) parents seeking a suitable match for their handsome and well educated son, 28 years old, vegetarian, non-drinker, non-smoker, Graduated in BCA (Punjab, India) and Multimedia & Graphics (Australia), working as a Computer Graphics in Australia, currently living in Australia on TR basis. A girl should be Australian/ American/ European/ Canadian citizen. Caste no bar. For more detail, please call 91-99159-49461

Mehmi family (Ad Dharmi) parents seeking a suitable match for their handsome and well educated son, 26 years old, vegetarian, non-drinker, non-smoker, graduated in B.Sc. and MCA (Punjab, India), currently studying in Chandigarh for the competition of SSC exam. A girl should be American/Canadian/Australian/European citizen. Caste no bar. For more detail, please call 91-99159-49461