

The Media & Dalit Empowerment

Prem Kumar Chumber

I feel delighted to inform the readers of this site that <ambedkartimes.com> is going to complete three years on August 04, 2009. The purpose, for which this site is created, as you all know, was to spread the mission of AD Dharm Samaj of Babu Mangoo Ram Mugowalia along with that of Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar & Lord Buddha based on liberty, equality and fraternity. We are encouraged to receive a great response from various scholars who have contributed to the site in the form of research articles, letters, field work pictures, rejoinders and valuable opinions. This web-site has also been functioning successfully as a platform to give visibility to the otherwise ignored Dalit activities and achievements. Shri Guru Ravidass, Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar & Lord Buddha Anniversaries have regularly been covered with prominent space devoted to such columns on the site. Last year, 2008, Professor Ronki Ram visited the headquarters of the site in Sacramento, CA on the invitation of the Editor-in-Chief of www.ambedkartimes.com. We in collaboration with Shri Guru Ravidass Sabhas of Pittsburg, Bay Area, Selma, Yuba City, Sacramento and Fresno organized his special lectures on the life and teachings of Guru Ravidass, the philosophy Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the contributions of the glorious Ad Dharm movement towards the formation of Dalit consciousness in Punjab. Very recently the English site has been reinforced with a Punjabi counterpart under the name <ambedkartimes.org>. We are planning to open similar sites in Hindi and Marathi also. I am glad to announce that on the birthday of Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram Ji the ambedkartimes.com is releasing a print paper in English for wider circular among the Bahujan Samaj. This paper is dedicated to Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram Ji. All the readers and contributors of the <ambedkartimes.com> are requested sincerely to contribute regularly to this paper and make it a big success. The main objective of this paper is to facilitate our Samaj brothers and sisters and the general public at large to be aware of about the community activities and issues of current concern at their doorsteps.

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THE MESSIAH OF THE DOWNTRODDEN SAHIB KANSHI RAM JI

Sahib Kanshi Ram, the messiah of the downtrodden and an organic scholar, was born on 15 March 1934 in a Dalit family of Ramdassia (Ad-Dharmi) community in Khawas Pur village of Ropar district in Punjab. He did his B.Sc in 1955-56 from Panjab University. And thereafter he joined the research cell of Kirki's Explosive Research and Development Laboratory (ERDL) at Pune in 1957. It was at this very place where he encountered a crucial situation when a fellow Scheduled Caste employee (Deena Bhan) was suspended by the management of the organisation for protesting against the discriminatory policies of the ERDL. Deena Bhan was raising his voice against the cancellation of holidays for Dr. Ambedkar and Lord Buddha Jayantis and being replaced with the Hindu festivals. When asked by his fellow colleagues what should be done now, Deena Bhan showed an exemplary courage by saying that the Job is my constitutional right and the Brahminical management could not deter me to oppose the sick Hindu system of caste and that was what Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar had taught us. This bold stand by a Dalit fourth class employee had touched the inner core of Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji who immediately extended full support to Mr. Bhan and filed a case against the termination of his suspension. Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji paid initially Rs. 500/ for the legal case charges to the advocate. As a result, Bhan's suspension was annulled and holidays for the Jayantis of Lord Buddha and Baba Sahib Dr. B R Ambedkar were restored. This particular event changed the course of the subsequent life of Babu Kanshi Ram. He left his lucrative job and jumped into politics for the rest of his life for the cause of the community. His involvement was so intense that he decided to remain bachelor and also not to return home. He also wrote to his mother, Mata Bishan Kaur Ji, about his decision that he dedicated his entire life for the emancipation and

empowerment of the downtrodden.

On 14 April 1965 Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji took the oath that "I will complete the unfinished mission of father of modern India Bharat Rattan Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. I will look after the welfare of my Bahujan Samaj. I will spend each and every moment of my life for the cause of the Bahujan Samaj". After that Baba Sahib never went to the office of ERDL. From 1965 to 1971 he meticulously spread the mission and message of Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar among the Dalits. In 1978 he launched his first organisation: All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) and Minority Communities' Employees' Federation, popularly known as BAMCEF. Three years later, Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji founded another organisation: DS-4 (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti). And on 14 April 1984, Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji announced the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party. In 1996 Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji elected to the Lok Sabha from the Hoshiarpur constituency, from where 50 years ago Great Ghadri Baba Babu Mangoo Ram Mugowalia founder of the Ad Dharm Movement had been returned to the Punjab assembly in 1946. Interestingly, it was at Hoshiarpur, the stronghold of Ad Dharm, that the BSP celebrated the 75th year of the Ad Dharm movement on 18 February 2001. On this occasion Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji exhorted the Bahujan Samaj to follow the principles of the Ad Dharm movement of which the BSP has now become the torch-bearer. Km. Mayawati (Bahan Ji) took the struggle to great heights by repeatedly forming government in the heartland of Chaturvarna system. For her the next target is Delhi: the highest seat of political power in the country. Punjab, the birth place of Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji, which has been housing the largest (29 percent) proportion of Scheduled Castes in comparison to rest of the country must learn lesson from the UP experiment. This would be a true tribute to Sahib Kanshi Ram Ji.

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MAYAWATI AND THE SECOND SOCIO CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN UTTAR PARDESH

Mayawati, the BSP supremo, sworn in as 40th Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh on May 13, 2007. This is the second socio-cultural revolution in the history of Uttar Pradesh where during the medieval Bhakti movement Guru Ravi Dass, an untouchable poet-saint of very high repute, convinced the Brahmins that it was not caste but ones deeds which are important. Brahmins and Rajput Kings prostrated before him and Ranis and Maharanis of the then rulers and the rulers themselves became his followers. It seems that history was repeating itself when Brahmins and Thakurs among others were touching the feet of BSP supremo Mayawati during the swearing-in ceremony of the new cabinet at Lucknow. Once again Mayawati has proved that hollow prestige based on birth when put on trial in the democratic court of social justice failed to stand any more. But proving that is much easier said than done. Guru Ravi Dass fought a relentless battle against his tormentors who were adopting all fair and foul tactics to prevent him from entering into the mainstream of the social space. He unleashed a frontal attack on the long tradition of social oppression and untouchability. He took the battle right into the capital of the Brahminical Social Order (BSO) and lay bare its fraudulent social structure. He employed Bhakti (loving devotion) as a method of protest against social exclusion. In his Bhakti he laid



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emphasis on compassion for all and absolute faith in God. His method was very daring and noble. He choose to challenge his tormentors by adopting the iconography of their dress code as a symbol of revolt which was not only highly objectionable but was equally deadly for a Shudra of his times. He rejected all forms of religious rituals and sectarian formalities. He challenged the tyranny of Brahmins and defied them by wearing Dhoti (cloth wrapped around the waist), Janeue (sacred thread) and Tilak (sacred red mark on forehead) that were forbidden for the untouchables.

Though he attired himself like an upper caste, he did not hide his caste. He continued with his hereditary occupation of making/mending shoes. While adopting the prohibited dress and symbols of the upper castes, and at the same time sticking to his hereditary occupation he, probably, tried to show how lower castes could achieve their human rights without compromising with their separate Dalit identity. His Bhakti method of social protest reflected the democratic and

egalitarian traits of his social philosophy. When challenged in their own estate and even in their own fiefdom of Bhakti, Brahmins had no option but to participate in a debate on the shastras thrown open by the Kashi Naresh (King). As Chandrabhan Prasad argues, "Ravidas's genius found no match. The pandits turned pale, bending before the saint in recognition of his greatness. The saint rode the royal chariot through the lanes of Kashi, the King standing by his side. That was the Dalits' first war of independence. Kashi was secured. The cow belt Brahmins never recovered from the shock, and were forced to reconcile to the Dalits' cerebral superiority".

History was repeated on May 13, 2007. The place was Lucknow, the current capital of power in UP. And the star of the battle was Mayawati. To be more precise this time the battle was not around the shastras but about the numbers in the game of electoral politics. To win in such a fierce modern battle is to prove ones metal. And more so when you have been fighting while sharing the chariot with the ones who were very recently sitting in your opposite camp. Mayawati did very well. She proved her metal and turned



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