



# Ambedkar Times *Weekly*

Editor-in-Chief: Prem Kumar Chumber

Contact: 001-916-947-8920

Fax: 916-238-1393

E-mail: [chumbermedia@yahoo.com](mailto:chumbermedia@yahoo.com), [editor@ambedkartimes.com](mailto:editor@ambedkartimes.com)

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## Babu Jagjivan Ram Former Deputy PM A True Democrat and Savior of Downtrodden

Prem K. Chumber Editor-In-Chief:  
Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Babu Jagjivan Ram (April 5, 1908 – July 6, 1986) was known for his patriotism, straight forwardness, and concern for lower castes and poor. When in 1937, the Britishers wanted to set up a puppet government in Bihar, Babuji was approached with an offer of a large sum of money and a Ministerial berth and many other similar benefits to shake hand with them, but he simply refused to be on their side. Rather, he stood like a rock with his people who were to tally committed to lay their lives for the liberation of the motherland. He earned the love of the people and leaders of the Indian freedom movement for his patriotism and integrity. Showering praises on Babu Jagjivan Ram for his bold stand on to be remained with his people, Gandhiji said that he 'had emerged as pure as gold in the test of fire'.

Babuji was a born fighter and a crusader for freedom, dignity and social justice. During his middle school education, he refused to avail scholarship meant for Scheduled Castes students and earned it by appearing in open competition and becoming successful on the basis of his meritorious academic performance. It was also during his Arrah Town School days that he smashed twice separate pitcher meant drinking water for Scheduled Castes students and forced the principal to withdraw his discriminatory decision of segregated water arrangement at the premises of the school. He proved his exceptional talent by excelling in studies despite extreme poverty at home as his father (Sobhi Ram) passed away (1914) while Babu Jagjivan Ram was still in his village primary school. He and his mother (Vasanti Devi) fought boldly against poverty and social exclusion all around.

Despite such an oppressive social environment and poor economic conditions at home, Babuji acquired proficiency in Hindi, Bengali, English and Sanskrit besides Bhojpuri – his native Bhasha. It was his command over Hindi and English that attracted the attention of Pt. Madan Mohan Malviyaji during the welcome address by him that finally took him to study at the prestigious Banaras Hindu University. It was at the Banaras Hindu University that Babuji organized, for the first time, Scheduled Castes students to protest against the denial of basic services like meals for Scheduled Castes students in the hostel and hair cuts by local barbers. After qualifying his Inter Science examination at BHU, Babuji left BHU and completed B. Sc. degree from the Calcutta University in 1931. It was during his stint at Calcutta University, Babuji organized Mazdoor Rally at Wellington Square in 1928. This mammoth rally in which approximately 50,000 people participated brought Babu Jagjivan Ram closer to Netaji Subash Chandra Bose who got convinced of his organizing skills and political acumen.

Babu Jagjivan Ram devoted his entire life strengthening India and empowering poor and lower castes. He was a great inspirer and organizer of people against oppression. He was an eloquent orator, a distinguished parliamentarian and a talented administrator. From his school days to the celebration of freedom at midnight, he remained in the forefront of various struggles (including the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942) launched during the historic freedom movement of India. On the national political platform, he established himself as the savior of lower castes and poor people. He became the youngest minister in the interim government of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946, Labor Minister in the first cabinet of India as well as member of the Constituent Assembly of India. He played a constructed role in the meeting of the Constituent Assembly of India for promoting the cause of the Scheduled Castes and poor people. He served as a minister of various portfolios at the level of Central Government exceptionally for more than forty years as a member of the Indian National Congress. In 1977 and joined the Janata Party alliance, along with his Congress for Democracy. He also served as Deputy Prime Minister of India (1977-79). In 1981, Babuji formed Congress (J). Till his passing away in 1986, he remained active in the service of the nation and the downtrodden.

"Ambedkar Times" and "Desh Doaba" Weeklies fondly remember Babuji on his Birth Anniversary and pay him floral tribute!

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## Agrarian Lives and Livelihoods: Contextualising Farmers' Movement 2020-21

**A**t the time of Independence, Indian agriculture was an example of everything that was wrong with the economy of an "underdeveloped" country. Even when nearly three-fourth of its working population worked on its vast farmlands, served by an extensive spread of rivers and a wide range of climatic conditions, India could not produce enough food for its population. The newly independent country had to import a considerable amount of food grains from the "developed" countries of the First World, with United States of America being the chief supplier. While the food-surplus countries of the western world eagerly agreed to sell, or even give-away food as aid, their supplies came with "conditions" unfavourable to a nation trying to restore its scarred dignity after a long history of colonization.

The local agriculture during the pre-colonial period had not been a "backward" system where cultivating peasant had little knowledge of the vagaries of nature or qualities of the soil they culti-

century. Some of these movements were led by the Congress Party under the leadership of Gandhi, while others by communists. They all demanded change in the political regime and restoration of their rights over the lands they cultivated. It was in this context that the agrarian question became an urgent priority with the native political elite who inherited power from the colonial rulers after Independence in 1947.

The early initiatives by the independent Indian state were in form legislative interventions that attempted to restore



**Surinder S. Jodhka**

Prof of Sociology, CSSS, SSS, JNU,  
New Delhi  
Email: [ssjodhka@yahoo.com](mailto:ssjodhka@yahoo.com)  
Mob: +91-9811279898



vated. Indian cultivators had evolved a range of sustainable systems, including modes of irrigating their fields with wells and ponds. They did not depend only on rains. Indian agriculture also produced a substantial surplus. Thriving urban centres and flourishing political empires of medieval times are a proof of this. Much of their wealth was sourced from the land revenues they collected from the cultivators. It was during the British rule, with their alien policies driven exclusively by their colonial interest that the Indian agriculture lost its balance. They introduced land revenue systems that required the cultivators to produce cash crops, such as cotton, which was exported to England for the newly opened cloth mills in emerging industrial cities. Their policies also killed the local craft and industry of India, leading to de-urbanizing and increasing burden of population on the agrarian economy.

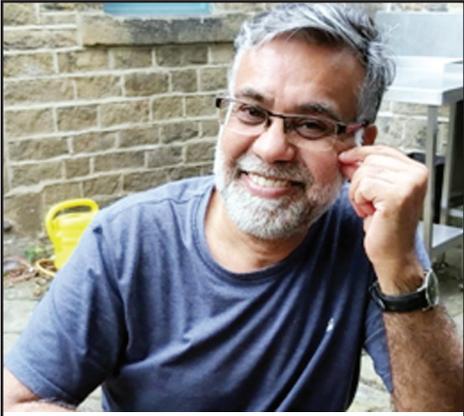
The frequent famines in different part of the subcontinent and a general sense of desperation in the countryside produced anger against the colonial rulers. It manifested itself in a series of 'peasant movements' during the first of the 20th

ownership right to tillers of the land and provide them security of tenure. The Land Reform legislations were enacted by the state governments on the directives of the national government and produced mixed results. They helped in reducing the hold intermediaries and traditional zamindaris in some parts of the country. They succeeded only in those states where the cultivating peasants could build a pressure on the local state functionaries. The government of India also introduced a Community Development Programme (CDP) hoping the villages to cooperatively work towards rebuilding the local communities, as Gandhi had envisaged. However, these initiatives had very limited success in improving productivity of land.

By the late 1960s the Nehruvian state managed to find the resources to invest in modernizing its agrarian economy. Helped by some global agencies, and using the new technologies developed elsewhere, India moved on to a path of increased productivity. Though confined to a few promising pockets, the state investment in agriculture provided an impetus and, within a short period of a

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# Urban Space, Administrative Rationality and the making of New 'Ordinary' Citizens



**Prof. Sanjay Srivastava**  
Institute of Economic  
Growth, Delhi University, Delhi

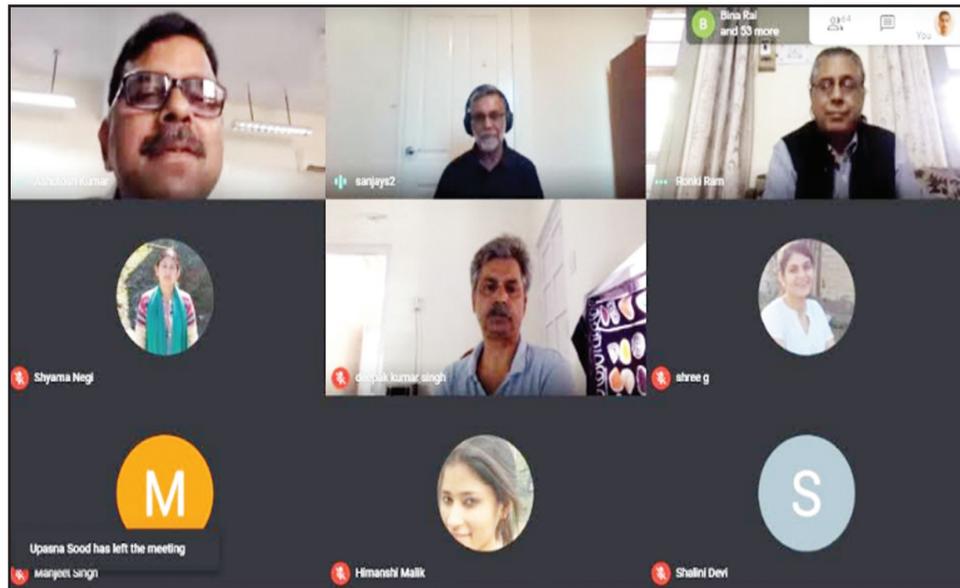
Department of Political Science organised Shaheed Bhagat Singh Memorial Lecture which was delivered by Professor Sanjay Srivastava, a noted and widely published sociologist from Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi. In his lecture titled 'Space, Administrative Rationality and the making of New Ordinary Citizens in Gurugram', Srivastava with the help of his field based research in a particular self-enclosed city within the city of Gurugram referred to the intricate relationship between private and public space in the upcoming gated/self-enclosed townships all over India especially near the mega cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, among others. As was clear during his presentation, his research findings would easily have much wider applicability in case of other gated-

edcities/neighbourhood as well. These 'new' micro cities adjoining the larger older cities are planned exclusively to cater to the consumerist needs of the 'new'/metropolitan middle class, beneficiary of the neo-liberal economic reforms in 'new' globalising India. Viewing itself as 'primary agent' of market forces, the

ing how the state acts at the behest of both corporate sector and 'new ordinary citizens' (read upper-middle/metropolitan class) constituting supposedly democratic civil society. The state invokes selectively the language of administrative rationality/efficient administration for the 'proper' use of the legal public

essentially relates differently to the two sets of people: underclasses and the 'new' middle class. The youth for instance belonging to the latter category would be allowed to develop their 'new association' with the street, 'taking back' the street so to say, by performing raahgiri (street play) in the streets. However the people coming from to the city for their livelihood from nearby villages or underprivileged neighbourhood would be kept under 'cultural surveillance' by the guards as well as the state agents, be it them having access to park, open spaces or even the street for offering prayers or other collective activities. The subalternity would be thus defined by both caste and religion along with the class divides in economic terms. The netizens on the other hand would be celebrating their cultural and religious festivities in these spaces and it would be okay with the corporate sector and the state. Not only this, the corporate sector would be virtually dictating the state and owners to allow or not to allow the usage of public land, legalised or not, depending whether a particular construction would add or rather undervalue the property at its disposal in the gated city. This is how the much celebrated 'new' forms of urbanisation is taking place in the 'happening cities', in terms of ideas and practices in contemporary India, Srivastava concluded.

The memorial lecture was presided over by Professor Ronki Ram, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chair Professor in Panjab University.



upper middle class living in these privileged spaces unabashedly pursues a 'good life' marked by professional mobility, security, luxury and market based wider choices. To cater to the material desires of the inhabitants, these self-enclosed townships are dotted with multiplexes, exclusive clubs, community centres, and high-rise residential complexes. The intricate relationship between civil society, private capital and the state was unravelled by Srivastava, show-

spaces in the self-enclosed city. Subalterns from the neighbouring unplanned/unintended semi-urban spaces who come to work daily in the offices, high rises and the shops in the planned/intended city basically to serve the local inhabitants are asked regularly to 'behave', 'maintain order' and not 'misuse' or create 'nuisance' in the public spaces. However, the same rules are not made equally applicable to the privileged netizens of the gated community. So the state

## Agrarian Lives and Livelihoods: Contextualising Farmers' Movement 2020-21

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decade or so, the country was producing enough food for its rapidly growing population. Green Revolution was made possible not only by the enterprising farmers but also by the kind of investments that the Indian state made in establishing agricultural infrastructure. From the construction of dams and canal networks to setting-up agricultural universities, marketing networks and provision of cheap credit from institutional sources on "priority" basis, the Indian state played a critical role in enabling its farmers to pursue the path of intensifying production. The idea of Green Revolution has since spread to other "less-developed" pockets as well, though the required investments in building agricultural infrastructure are no longer coming forth from any agency of the central or state governments.

Envisaged in North America, the Green Revolution was a technology driven programme focused on increasing productivity of land. It assumed that an increase in income would eventually also "trickle-down" to the poor. However, the empirical research showed that this was not happening and the number of those living below a subsistence level of nutrition, the poverty-line, was quite large. The central government responded by introducing special programmes targeting the poor. These initiatives were put together into a single scheme called the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

The neo-liberal reforms of the early 1990s fundamentally changed the orientation of the Indian state towards agriculture and its farming populations.

The broader orientation of the Indian economy also began to change. Once unleashed, the private corporate sector began to grow rapidly. Thus, the size of the national economy expanded. But the corporate economy was at first largely focussed on the high-end service sector, which did not generate many jobs.

Unlike the "classical" growth trajectories of the industrialized nations of the global North, even when the share of India's agriculture declined rather rapidly, a much larger proportion of the workforce remained employed in agriculture. Such a decline in the relative size of agrarian economy in terms of its value addition has produced many imbalances, going beyond the sphere of income and employment. The growing size and power of the urban and corporate economy marginalized its agrarian economy in the national imagination, the effects of which began to also be felt by those working in the sector. For example, the earlier growth in agriculture had given enough incomes and aspiration to the landowning classes/castes to educate their wards, hoping that they would find employment outside the village. However, those who controlled the corporate capital preferred their own, those from the urban upper castes and urban educated individuals with the required cultural capital, leaving those coming from agrarian backgrounds in the lurch.

As the power and influence of the corporate capital grew, it also began to diversify its economic enterprises. Beyond the traditional manufacturing and business outsourcing in software, agricul-

ture and food processing began to attract them as avenues of possible investments and incomes. The growing size of the urban middle-classes and its increasing aptitude for consumption provided a sure source of demand for processed food. Processed food products could also be exported to emerging markets abroad. To the neo-liberal policy makers of the Indian state, these appeared to be the most desirable solutions for an agricultural sector complaining of crises for a long time.

Given the diversity of legal frameworks governing agricultural lands and restrictions on corporates buying or lease-in agricultural lands, however, they could not easily enter the agricultural economy.

The only mode available for them was through contract farming. Post-liberalization India also saw global agro and food processing corporates expanding their operations. While they were already invested in supplying seeds and pesticides, they began to expand their operations to consumer goods, ranging from potato chips and tomato sauce to processed cereals and dairy products.

Contract farming operations are as such not new to India. They are legalised by the state governments under their Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) or Agricultural Produce and Livestock Market Committees (APLMC). Beginning with production of seeds to procurements of tomatoes and potatoes, a good number of corporates have been working in different parts of the country. Ranging from global companies like Nestle, Monsanto and Pepsi to the Indian corpo-

rate houses such as ITC, Reliance, Tata Rallis, Mahindra, Hindustan Lever and Adani Group, many companies have been slowly expanding their operations. Profit in the food business, has spurred an expansion of their operations in the agricultural sector.

Knowing the eagerness of the Indian state for corporate investment in agriculture, they have also been lobbying with the government for doing the required ground work for them to enable this expansion. The new agricultural laws must be seen in this context. However, the farmers' experience of contract farming has at best been mixed. The available evidence tends to suggest that while it is easier for big farmers to work with corporate entities, the smaller farmers find it hard to benefit from contract farming and are often at the mercy of bureaucratic business arrangements. The farmers also see the new laws disturbing the existing marketing eco-system, with which they are familiar and find them more easily accessible. All this was done without any active consultation with the primary stakeholders creates even more anxiety and mistrust.

The passing these laws has also become a context for the farmers and those closely tied to agrarian economy to bring their issues to the table. The ongoing farmers movements will thus decide how the Indian state manages to balance different interests and bring them together in a manner that the farming citizens do not feel marginalized and excluded from the national agenda of development and a better future.

# SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT DOUBLING THE INCOME OF FARMERS

**O**n March 28, 2021, Dr. Ramesh Chand, Member (Agriculture) of the NITI Aayog, said that if the Agriculture Acts are not implemented soon, the target of doubling the income of farmers by 2022 would not be achieved. He said that the government was ready to discuss these laws with the farmers section by section. Farmer leaders should consider this offer. He said that the solution to this problem could be found only by giving and receiving something and if the farmers persisted on their demands then it would be difficult to find a way forward. He also said that the government has made a good alternative for the farmers not to implement these laws for a year and a half.

The UPA government had constituted a committee headed by Dr. Ramesh Chand in April 2013 to review the procedure adopted by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices while making recommendations of MSP of different crops to the Central Government. The committee submitted its report to the Central

(Agriculture) in the NITI Aayog set up after the Planning Commission was abolished by the NDA government and now he is advocating market forces to double the income of farmers.

The first question regarding doubling the income of farmers by 2022 is that on 28 March 2021 Dr. Ramesh Chand is pushing for speedy implementation of the three Agricultural Laws enacted by the Union Government, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi made this promise in a speech on February 28, 2016 in Bareilly. At the time of his promise, he had not laid down any condition for enactment of any new law relating to agriculture. When inquired about the income figures of farmers in the Lok Sabha, it was found that the government does not have such figures. Based on the 2011-12 estimates of the National Sample Survey to know the income of farmers for the year 2015-16, the annual income of an Indian farming family for 2015-16 was estimated at Rs. 96703 which works

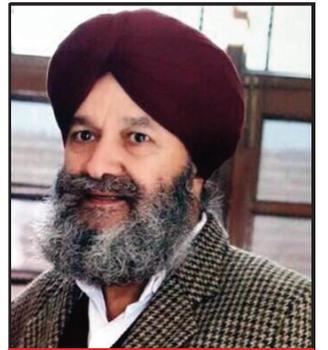
are implemented immediately, in the remaining 1 year out of 6 years, how will the private markets increase the income of farmers by more than 75 per cent when their aim is to increase the profits of the businessmen and not the benefit of the farmers.

In 2016 and even now, statements are being issued by the rulers to double the income of farmers. There are some very important questions in this regard. According to the government's own data, the per capita income of farming families during 2015-16 was Rs.54. If the Central Government keeps its promise, the per capita income will reach Rs. 108 by 2022. An income of Rs. 108 does not even cover the cost of three meals a day, while basic necessities of life include food, clothing, housing, education, health care, clean environment and social security. Per capita income represents the average income. Often the average figures conceal more than what these reveal. All the farmers in the country do not belong to one category. Different cate-

keep the stove burning for merely two time meals.

The worst of the different farming sections are Landless farm labourers and rural artisans as the increasing trend of mechaniza-

tion and the use of herbicides in the agricultural sector are rapidly reducing their employment. Both these sections have no means of production other than selling their labour. These two sections are the two poles at the bottom of the agrarian economy ladder that are more prone to wear and tear, and more likely to be beaten. In this regard, it is important to consider



**Dr. Gian Singh**

Former Professor, Department of Economics,  
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab.

+1 (424) 422-7025



Government on April 1, 2015. The recommendations made by the committee headed by Dr. Ramesh Chand regarding the MSP of agricultural commodities far exceeded the suggestion made by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan to pay 50 per cent profit on the total cost of production (C2) due to which Dr. Ramesh Chand's recommendations were considered pro-farmer at that time and were also appreciated by the farmers' organizations. In addition to the other recommendations of this committee, it was recommended to pay 10 per cent extra on MSP in view of the risk involved in agricultural production and its management functions. The committee suggested that to consider the labour charges of the head of the household he/she should be considered as a skilled labourer. The committee also recommended that to pay the gap between MSP and market prices is the responsibility of the government.

These recommendations were considered pro-farmers. Apart from these recommendations, according to the committee, it is not possible for the farmers to meet their needs due to non-availability of remunerative prices, which leads them to commit suicide due to debt burden. In this regard, the committee had expressed the view that farmers need protection from market forces (looting). Dr. Ramesh Chand became a member

out to Rs. 8059 per month for a family of five and Rs. 1612 per capita per month or around Rs. 54 per capita per day. In order to double the income of farmers in the six years from 2016 to 2022, their income has to increase by 10.4 per cent per annum. Lack of access to accurate income figures for farmers is a major problem. The data from the National Sample Survey, one of the Union Government's own offices, was the subject of newspaper discussion on the declining income of farmers during 2018. The government later withheld the release of the figures. Gross Value Added in the agricultural sector (Agriculture GVA) can be used to estimate the approximate growth of farmers' income in India. Since 2016, when the farmers' income has been promised to double in 6 years, there has been an increase of 24.5 per cent in the last 5 years and according to Dr. Ramesh Chand, this increase may be 3.5 per cent in the coming year.

As per the promise made by the country's Prime Minister to double the income of farmers by 2022, the six-year increase would be 100 per cent, compared to only 28 per cent achieved during the first five years. Farmers and other working classes in the country are struggling for the repeal of the three Agricultural Laws enacted by the Central Government. The serious consideration in this regard is that even if these laws

gories of farmers include marginal, small, semi-medium, medium and large farmers. According to the Centre's own data, around 68 per cent of the farmers in the country have less than 2.5 acres of land and around 18 per cent have 2.5 acres to less than 5 acres of land. These figures make it clear that around 86 per cent of the farmers in the country fall into the categories of marginal and small farmers and the remaining 14 per cent fall into the categories of semi-medium, medium, and large farmers. The category-wise break up of farmers makes it clear that the income of marginal and small farmers will not double even after doubling the income of farmers. In addition to these facts, there are considerable inter-regional variations in the income of the farmers.

About 50 per cent of the country's population depends on agriculture for livelihood. This population includes farmers, farm labourers and rural artisans. Different research studies conducted in different parts of the country have revealed the fact that the income of marginal, small, semi-medium and medium farmers, farm labourers, and rural artisans is so low that they have to bear the burden of debt.

What to think about repayment of debt, they are not even in a position to pay the interest on their debt as they have to take loan to

the fact that even in the promises made to the farmers to double their income, these two sections were completely neglected, while increasing their income should be the first priority.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that human beings can survive without cars, bungalows, airplanes, phones and the like, but bread is essential for their survival. The well-being of the farming community is essential for the survival of the human race. Overcoming economic, political, intellectual and other types of pollution is essential to make the lives of farmers, farm labourers, and rural artisans comfortable. In order to overcome the growing economic and other inequalities in the country, the corporate economic development model must be replaced by a people and nature-friendly economic development model. To control political pollution, it is necessary for the people to unite and question the politicians and force them to fulfill their promises.

In order to control intellectual pollution, the pro-people economists have to compile the relevant statistics, conduct major studies and expose the so-called intellectuals who are fabricating data for conclusion-oriented studies to please the government and the corporate world in the hope of getting meaningless petty benefits.



# Sue Frost

Sacramento County Supervisor. District 4



Sue Frost

## Shortchanging Sacramento County on Vaccines

As we work toward what will hopefully be the end of this now year-long pandemic, a natural discussion topic is around vaccines. Through the roller coaster of the COVID-19 response, for many people the vaccines offered hope for bringing all of it to an end. Understandably, since the first doses



of vaccines became available, I have heard from countless constituents frustrated with how challenging it is to access the vaccine or even get connected with information on the process. I get it. Some of the challenges in this process fall on the county. We could have come out with a better website and had a more thought-out plan for distribution. Like many of the struggles we have all gone through over the last year, I am afraid that the leading cause of our woes is the state once again.

When vaccines first became available, there was a simple explanation of why there were not enough vaccines to go around: limited supply. Not all of the vaccines that are available today were even approved for distribution back in January. The ones that were approved and in circulation were limited and had to be stored under specific conditions. Of course, there is also the fact that both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines required recipients to receive two doses, limiting the supply even further. Thanks to the approval of the Jansen vaccine, the total supply is increasing. Unfortunately, the state's increase in supply being distributed does not necessarily benefit Sacramento County residents hoping to get their dose(s).

The inconsistency in distribution became blatantly apparent in February when the state's total vaccine supply rose 20%, and Sacramento County's allocation dropped by 18%. Unfortunately, this has become a pattern. In January, Sacramento County received 2.83% of the state's total distribution of doses. Since then, we have seen that percentage steadily decrease. On March 8th, even with the newly available Jansen vaccine, Sacramento County's allocation from the state fell to just 1.65% of total doses distrib-

uted. There is some explanation for this, including that Sacramento County's population of eligible or priority populations is lower than neighboring counties. The best explanation I've heard came from our Acting Director of Public Health. During the March 9th Board of Supervisors Meeting, he said that what is essentially happening is that the governor changes his mind every two weeks. The distribution formula changes, and it never benefits Sacramento County.

At this point, are any of us surprised? The state's response to the pandemic has been a series of changes based on state officials' whims uninterested in looking at challenges at the local level. As other counties take

larger percentages of the state's distribution of doses, they are blazing past Sacramento County through the tiered system of eligible vaccine recipients. Meanwhile, my office is still receiving calls from individuals eligible since the first dose was administered, struggling to access the vaccines that will bring them peace of mind or closer to normalcy. At the same time, Sacramento County's public health officials have to spend their time advocating to the state for a distribution method that accounts for the fact that Sacramento County is a regional distribution hub, and even with 3% of the state's population, we have never received 3% of the state's distribution.

I think everyone that wants the vaccine should be able to get the vaccine. I understand the challenges with rolling out an emergency vaccine amid a global pandemic, and I knew it was never going to be easy. However, the reality of what is going on at the local level continues to be an afterthought for the state, and it seems Sacramento County is somewhere in the far back.

Thank you for reading – and as always, if you want to contact me, call me at 916-874-5491, or reply to this e-mail.

## Learn About Drug and Alcohol Facts

In late March, teenagers and scientists across the United States took part in "National Drug and Alcohol

Facts Week. The weeklong health observance was organized by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), both part of the National Institutes of Health. The goal of the observance was for teens to feel comfortable to ask questions about drugs and alcohol and to get scientific answers from experts.

While drugs can put a teenager's health and life in jeopardy, many teens are not aware of the risks. Even for those teens who do not abuse drugs, many have friends or family who do, and they are often looking for ways to help them.

Let's shatter three drug and alcohol myths according to NIDA!

**Myth: Cannabis is legal in California, so I shouldn't worry if a teen is experimenting with cannabis use**

**Fact: Cannabis can be addictive and can have long-term effects on teens' brains, which are still developing. Studies have shown links between cannabis use and psychosis, anxiety and depression. These are important reasons why recreational use of cannabis is only legal for adults age 21 and over in California.**

**Myth: White youth drink less alcohol than other groups their age.**

**FACT: A greater proportion of California students who are white report having consumed alcohol at least four times more.**

**While substance use disorders are not more common in communities of color, people of color are less likely to access treatment. That's because communities of color have faced longstanding discrimination, institutional racism and barriers to insurance coverage.**

**Myth: Using tobacco is a normal part of growing up**

**Fact: Fewer than one in eight California students report using tobacco, so NOT smoking actually is far more popular.**

Sacramento County Substance Use Prevention and Treatment Services would like to remind the community of their prevention and treatment services for youth and families. The program contracts with an array of community-based service providers throughout Sacramento County including outpatient treatment, medication-assisted treatment, withdrawal management (detoxification), residential treatment, perinatal services, and sober living environments/recovery residences.

"We want teens to have the opportunity to learn what science has taught us about drug and alcohol use, abuse and addiction," said Lori Miller, Division Manager, Substance Use Prevention and Treatment, Sacramento County. "There are so many myths about drugs and alcohol cluttering our popular culture. National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week® is for teens to get honest answers about drugs so they can make good, informed decisions for themselves and share accurate information with friends."

A presentation by Sacramento County Office of Education on How to Talk to Kids about Alcohol and Drugs is available to view on the Sacramento County website.

## Got a Room or House For Short-Term Rental?

Got a room or a home you want to list, or are listing, on Airbnb or a related service? Sacramento County would like to remind homeowners that prior to accepting guests, short-term/vacation rentals require a permit and a business license, and they must register to pay transient occupancy taxes for visitors.



Short-term/vacation rentals are defined by stays of less than 30 days. Sacramento County updated its regulations in 2018 to clarify that houses and apartments cannot be used exclusively for short-term/vacation rentals. Rentals must be an "accessory use" to the property, meaning the owner must live in the house for at least six months of the year.

The Board of Supervisors adopted this requirement to make sure short-term rentals do not disrupt neighborhoods and to limit traditional rental units from being converted to short-term use.

Stays of 30 days or longer do not require a permit.

If you are using your primary residence as a short-term rental, or are thinking of taking the plunge, please follow these steps:

Review the guidelines and application materials for a Short Term Rental Permit

Apply for a General Business License. You will need to set up an account with the Department of (Contd. on next page)



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Finance to complete the application. Please do not submit until after you have received your Short Term Rental Permit.

Register with the Tax Collector's Office for Transient Occupancy Tax returns once you have your business license.

For more information, please contact the Office of Planning and Environmental Review at [sacplan@saccounty.net](mailto:sacplan@saccounty.net) or the Business Licensing Division of the Department of Finance at [BusLicense@saccounty.net](mailto:BusLicense@saccounty.net).

### Our Essential Social Workers

Sacramento County is helping celebrate this year's Social Work Month with the theme "Social Workers are Essential" to highlight the priceless contributions social workers make in our community, especially during COVID-19.

The goal of Social Work Month is to inform the public, policy-makers and legislators about the way the nation's social workers each day meet people where they are and help them live to their fullest potential. Social work is one of the fastest-growing professions in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

There are currently about 700,000 professional social workers in our nation, but that number is expected to rise to more than 800,000 by 2029. Social work has been around for more than a century and has made significant contributions to our nation. For example, social workers such as social reformer Jane Ad-

dams, former Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, and civil rights leaders Dorothy Height, Whitney Young and Ida B. Wells have helped Americans secure voting rights, equal rights, Social Security, unemployment insurance and other programs.

You will find social workers throughout society – protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect and providing men-



tal health and substance use disorder treatment. They can be found assisting active-duty military, veterans and their families; in schools; helping corporations better serve their communities; in community organizations; and in local and state government.

Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services (DCFAS) has 524 social workers across the department. They work across a number of areas, including child and elder abuse and neglect investigations and follow-up. They help keep children and families safely together and/or reunify them or help children find "forever families." Some social workers assess the need for home care services that allow individuals to remain in their homes, rather

than institutions. Others serve individuals that are gravely disabled and those who are living with severe mental illness, supporting them to live in the least restrictive settings within our community.

DCFAS social workers link individuals and families to housing services and supports, benefits, employment and so many other resources that promote the safety, health and well-being of community members across the age span. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social workers have also been on the frontlines along with doctors, nurses, law enforcement, grocery store employees and other essential employees that provided

critical services during this time.

Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA) currently has a team of 45 Human Services Social Workers (HSSWs) assigned to various programs, including Employment Services, Homeless Services and CalWORKs. Since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, much of the customer contact associated with this work has shifted from in-person to virtual services.

HSSWs in DHA are busy helping customers receive necessary resource and case management services. Some focus on helping families who are experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, truancy or other family crisis. There are other HSSWs in DHA that help customers

learn skills such as job searching, resume building and interviewing. The biggest division of HSSWs in DHA supports those who are homeless and assist with resources, crisis response and addressing barriers to housing. There is also a team of HSSWs that help customers navigate the challenging disability benefits process and a social worker who provides support at the General Assistance office to assess client needs and makes referrals to other social service agencies and community service agencies.

Despite the great value of social workers, the social work profession faces challenges. There is a shortage of social workers in schools where they are needed to help young people cope with complicated issues such as trauma, poverty, the opioid addiction crises and the need for more resources to help students learn during the pandemic. There is also a need for more social workers in the fields of child welfare and aging and adult services.

"Social workers are unsung heroes that are essential to community well-being. They are driven by several core values, including service, social justice and the dignity and worth of human beings," said Michelle Callejas, Director of Sacramento County, Child, Family and Adult Services.

"During social work month, we hope you will reach out and say a kind word to the social workers in your lives, and, if you are so inclined, advocate for policies and legislation that benefit the profession and the populations they serve."



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# Appropriation of Caste Spaces in Pakistan: The Theo-Politics of Short Stories in Sindhi Progressive Literature

## Introduction

Sindhi society and its rural culture is predominantly Sammat (sammā) in its values. Sammat is the group of castes that share local political economy with Baloch castes. At the periphery of this Sammat-Baloch nexus (mostly Muslims) live Dalit communities (mostly Hindus in culture if not in religion). The construction and appropriation of local semi-historical narratives is one of the ways this discriminatory structural imbalance is regulated by Sammat, Baloch, and Sayed elite. This Muslim caste elite is generically referred to as Ashrafia (ashrafiyya), and of 'upper caste' Hindus as Savarnas. In Sindh, the province of Pakistan, the Ashrafia elite frames and presents its narrative through Sindhi, the dominant language of the province. The supposedly progressive section of Ashrafia elite frames its ideology in Sufi-nationalist idiom that I call political Sufism, an ideology that asserts Hindu-Muslim harmony without necessarily confronting the issue of casteism and Dalit exclusion. Inspired by the international modern progressive movement in politics and literature during the 1950s and 1960s, the Ashrafia (also Sindhi Savarna) writers identified themselves as 'Taraqqi-Passand' (progressives). Irrespective of seemingly egalitarian modernist impulses, the postcolonial theo-political terrain seems to have led the progressives to produce the literature that undermines the Dalit question and sanctifies the hegemony of Ashrafia-Savarna classes.

During my fieldwork in 2016 in lower Sindh, I found that the popular literature produced by the progressive class had deeply influenced Dalit issues. It was not only the level of 'hegemonic' influence of Ashrafia-Savarna class over Dalits, but also their epistemic narratives played a significant role in the coordinatization of Dalits in their self-perception. For instance, when the 'Dalit' question was invoked using the 'Dalit' and the 'Scheduled Castes' identity markers by the Dalit activists, the Sindhi nationalists and most of the contemporary Sindhi progressive writers and their followers attempted to reject Dalit activists' re-identification and their claims. They discouraged the Dalit activists from problematizing Dalit exclusion beyond a certain threshold.

Such an underplaying of casteism and Dalit exclusion was primarily legitimized through Political Sufism based on Hindu-Muslim harmony as against the two-nation theory of Pakistan based on Hindu-Muslim binaries. Consequently, the progressives did not consider casteism as the major problem, and did not make Dalit exclusion the subject of political debate or critical enquiry. Notwithstanding, the progressives did indulge in Dalit spaces on occasion, particularly when Dalit agency compelled them.

In this article, I contend that this occasional intervention into Dalit spaces by the progressives has been counter-productive for Dalits as it hampers Dalit agency and rather appropriates it. One of the potent ways to counter or legitimize narratives and, thus, dissipate dissonance is to use literary media, such as short stories to render the narrative accessible to the common people. I specifically critique the casteist aspects of the progressive literary-political terrain as it manifests from the presentation of short stories in everyday politics by the progressives. Despite occasional anti-caste and anti-patriarchal narration in a few short stories, the progressives primarily frame these issues in a manner that makes them correspond with their agenda of 'political Sufism' and facilitate the appropriation of the spaces and histories of Dalits. I inter-



Bhagwanti, wife of Versi Kolhi knitting Raksha Bandhan, the ritual thread that symbolizes brother's commitment to a Sister, at a Kolhi settlement near Naon Dumbaalo, Sindh. Source: Author (Sept 5, 2015)

rogate this appropriation of Dalit spaces and Dalit identities as it is reflected in those short stories considered as having emancipatory potential for the Dalits, in general, and Dalit women, in particular.

## Theoretical Framework

The Ashrafia-Savarna class of feudal, Pirs (spiritual persons) and Vaniyas (Hindu merchants) 'imagined' social solidarity essentially on the basis of a modern nation that could accommodate their tribal and casteist legacy. The 'Sindhi nationalist' narrative, promulgated by these classes before and after partition has grown over the decades through the extensive use of print media, literary circles, and lately through social media to construct the social imaginary that it hardly identifies the Ashrafia-Savarna elite as the internal oppressor. The local Ambedkarites, however, do not wholeheartedly accept the Progressive's narrative and complain of its casteist bias. While holding the Progressives, the society at large and state, responsible for casteism, racism, and extremist tendencies, local Ambedkarites also criticize their own Dalit community for not reacting against oppression. They

urge Dalits to unite by forewarning them that they can succeed in their goal only through their own politically conscious efforts, and that 'no other Mahatma, or emancipator, will descend to change their lot, neither did it come in the past, nor it will ever come in the future'. This Ambedkarian trajectory of thought thus demands the explicitly self-reflective anti-caste stance from the social critics, academicians and scholars.

This way of analyzing casteism from the Ambedkarian perspective considerably improves upon the existing critical approaches to the sociological and literary-historical criticism. It differs from the Gandhian critique of 'untouchable' treatment of Dalits that was first adopted by Munhi Premchand who wrote short stories both in Hindu and Urdu. Ghulam Rabbani (2016) writes:

the Sindhi language has the second richest stock of literature in Pakistan. This richness to Sindhi literature, however, is not equally harmonized in terms of content and the sociopolitical location of the writers. Since the Sindhi Ashrafia-Savarna elite have dominated the literary-political domain for centuries, most of the prominent short story writers, poets and the scribes have hailed from Ashrafia castes. Inspired by the progressive movement that ushered in subcontinent in early 20th century, the Sindhi Ashrafia class also evolved its own version of progressive idiom framed in Political Sufism. Departing from their predecessors, they qualify their Sufism with the modern (Marxist-nationalist and romantic ideas).

This modernist, but theo-political drift, also reflects in the short stories whereby they condemn waderā culture (feudalism) and Mullah (the superstitious religious cleric). For instance, feudalism is critiqued in stories such as 'Billu Dadā' and 'Kutte jo maut' by Ayaz Qadri; 'Munh Kāro' and 'Pashoo Pashā' by Jamal Abro; 'Sheedo Dhārel' by Ghulam Rabbani Agro. Similarly, religious fanaticism and extremism is busted in stories such as, 'Mān Insān Ahiyān' (I am human) by Ayaz Qadri, and 'Amān Mān School na Wendus' ('Mom, I won't go to school') by Hafeez Shaikh. Notwithstanding the egalitarian import of when it comes to religious and gender-disparities, these stories or the narratives emergent of it do not intersect with the problem of casteism, and rather give an impression that casteism, particularly Dalit exclusion, is a normative phenomenon about which agents of social and political change need not worry about. Take as another example the story in which 'upper caste' Sammat-Baloch protagonist Pishu Pasha is depicted as a socialist revolutionary against a local landlord. Pishu Pasha is depicted as the untouchable who dares to drink water in the glass of Raes Gul Khan, the local landlord. While narrating the incident, the writer uses the metaphor of 'Chuhra' (Dalit caste) to explain the reaction against Pishu Pasha's daring act. He writes:

Once, [Pishu] passed by the guest of house Raes Gul Khan. He was dying of thirst. Without caring for consequences, he entered the guest house and grabbed the glass of Raes Gul Khan. All present on the scene tried to stop him, saying,

(Contd. on next page)



**Dr. Ghulam Hussain**

Senior Research Associate  
Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad  
Email: sufi.hussain2020@gmail.com

# Appropriation of Caste Spaces in Pakistan:

## The Theo-Politics of Short Stories in Sindhi Progressive Literature

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'Nope, Nope!; But, by that time this gentleman had drunk two-three glasses of water. Putting down the glass, [Pishu] said 'Brother why affront! Did that glass belong to any Chuhra?'

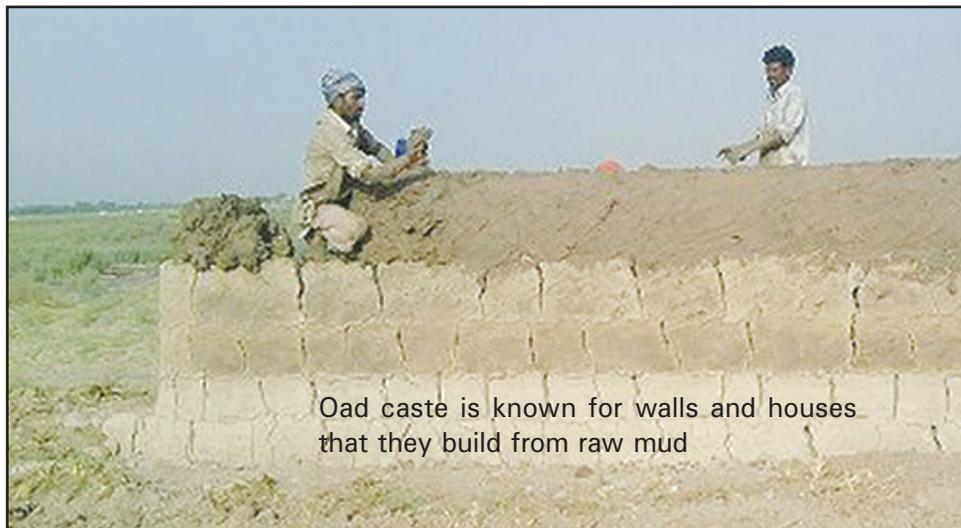
The last sentence 'Did that glass belong to any Chuhra?', clearly shows that while untouchability against Chuhras (Dalits) was/is normative, it is not as such practiced against 'upper castes' to which Pishu Pasha belonged. Since Pishu Pasha was not a Chuhra, but an 'upper caste' and equal in status to the local landlord, therefore, they should not mind his drinking water in the same glass in which the landlord drinks. The real thrust of the narrative here is not to bring to light to untouchability against the Chuhras (Dalits), but the class difference within Ashrafia castes. This portrayal of Pishu (upper castes) as the new 'untouchable', and the projection of socialist confrontation depicted as merely lying between the two protagonists of the privileged castes, one dominating the other, may not be vouchsafed by the Ambedkarites who, first and foremost, want to problematize caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

The progressives have also written a few remarkable short stories that expose the exploitative character of Sayeds. For instance, Jamal Abro's (2015) story 'Shah Jo Pharr' (Progeny of Shah) first published in 1959 directly confronts Sayedism, in which the discriminatory differentiation between Sayed and Ummati (Subject Muslim) is depicted, and in 'Mau Ji Jholi' (Lap of Mother) an Ashrafia class woman is depicted as embracing a Bhangi (Dalit) child. Similarly, Noorul Huda Shah, a Sayed woman herself, has written a few anti-Sayed short stories that indirectly defend the Dalit bahujan right to equal social treatment. Her short story 'Dozkhī' also brings to light the racism of Sindhi people against Sheedi caste of the Black African descent.

One highly critical short story 'Secrets of Mansion' by Manik depicts the nexus between patriarchy and Sayedism. In it, the writer shows how strict caste endogamy and patriarchy prevalent in Sayed families creates conditions of celibacy for women and sexual relations outside of wedlock. A progressive activist told that Manik was abused, ridiculed, and even socially boycotted to the limits to eventually commit suicide. Some of the leading Sindhi progressive writers vehemently criticized him for his exposition of patriarchy embedded in Sayedism. Shaukat Shoro, a progressive short story writer opined that, 'Manik is [a] merciless, murdering and oppressive writer. Amongst the comity of Sindhi writers, he stands apart and alone, to whom the most privileged Sindhi literary writers do not accept, while the readers, after having avidly read,

begin abusing him'. This shows the level of the critique that Manik had mounted, and because of which he was deliberately alienated from the mainstream progressive circles as he did not even explicitly subscribed to Sufi nationalist narrative and delved in existentialism.

Notwithstanding their extraordinary self-critical and anti-Sayed stance and the feminist inclinations, these selective progressive writers do not draw the clear line between the level of exploitation and humiliation of the Sayed women and the Dalit women, or the Dalit Sindhi and Savarna Hindu. In fact, the Progressives applied their own standards of gender (dis)parity when it served their purpose. For instance, the two stories 'Mubārakhon' and 'Sagar je La-



Oad caste is known for walls and houses that they build from raw mud

harunTe', which show Sindhi women rebelling against patriarchy and the forced marriage, are not held in good light by Progressives, such as Rasool Bux Paleejo, who considers it the prime illustrations of 'negative' rebellion. Moreover, the scathing criticism that a few of these anti-Sayed Ashrafia class writers faced is also an indicator of the lack of 'shared space' for the Dalit intellectuals (mostly identified as Hindus as well) to expose Sayedism. Hence, although their ideological and discursive trajectory was highly critical from the Ashrafia egalitarian or the Sufi nationalist perspective, it did not seem to qualify for the wholehearted approval by the Dalit-feminist intellectuals and or the Ambedkarites. In the sections that follow, I would further explain through Ambedkarian perspective, the excerpts from these popular short stories by Amar Jaleel and Naseem Kharal with respect to how they (mis)fit as the anti-caste and anti-patriarchal progressives.

### The Reframing of 'Infidel' to Uphold Interfaith Harmony

'Kāfir' (infidel), a short story written in 1960s by Naseem Kharal – the Ashrafia class feudal – furnishes one of the exceptionally counterintuitive anti-caste narratives. Presented by the Progressives presented it as the explanation of both the religious and caste discrimination. It also proves that Sufi nationalist path is the most appropriate one for the (Hindu) Dalits to mutually coexist in the predominantly Muslim Sindh. Before, fur-

ther elaborating upon it, I quote from the story a dialogue between a supposedly Hindu Dalit convert to Islam and a Mukhi (a community head):

Mukhi, the panchayat headman of Oad [Dalit] community begged in the name of holy Gita and even threw his turban at Seetal's feet, but Seetal just didn't care much and replied:

"Mukhi! Do whatever you like, but I shall change my religion.

Mukhi: But why after all you want to change your religion?

Seetal: My choice, my wish simply.

Mukhi: Even then?

Seetal: I just don't like my religion. That's it.

Mukhi: Alas! Why on earth don't you like your religion?

Seetal: Alright Mukhi. Tell me, who are we?

will remain untouchable in their eyes).

Seetal's adventure eventually ends up with his realization that in case his ailing wife (who had also converted along with him) dies, he cannot be given woman for marriage from Muslim castes, simply because he was considered as 'lower caste' or 'untouchable'. Ultimately, Seetal converts back to his former faith. The story, thus, ends with the bigoted disappointment of the Molvi (religious) at the re-conversion of Seetal, who says the 'Infidel is after all infidel'. Hence, from this narrative, it becomes evident that the writer of the story conveys the social fact that although Mullah (religious cleric) primarily expresses his social imaginary through religious binaries, yet caste comes into the foreground when it comes to actual relations. Unlike a Mullah, the Hindu Dalit community is presented as more realistic as they imagine caste and religion as embedded in each other. They are presented as cognizant of the fact that they even cannot marry into Shaikhs (converts from Savarnas). However, what if Muslim Oad families also existed as do Shaikhs converts from Bheels, and Baghri Muslim families? The story/narrative does not help understand the consequences of the voluntary conversions in such cases.

Hence, although at the generic level, the story brings out very sharply that caste discrimination is a trans-religious phenomenon, and even stronger than religious affiliations, yet the Progressives try to bring into focus its religious dimension more than that of caste. Rita Kothari, a Sindhi (Savarna) based in Ahmedabad in India, has translated 'Infidel' from Sindhi into English, and has discussed primarily to show that such stories were the product of nostalgia of business class (Jati) Hindus and the post-Partition redemption of Sindhi Muslims who desired to reclaim their imagined syncretism that supposedly existed before Partition between Sindhi Hindus (mostly Savarnas) and Sindhi Muslims. With her emphasis on Sufi identity of Sindh, Kothari, however, does not shed much light on the anti-caste dimension of the story and rather treats both religion and caste as being equally implicated. In this particular case, deviating from the Progressive's typical stance, Dr. Ghafoor Memon, however, argues that major import of the story is to show that cultural and class/caste-based norms are stronger than religion. He argues that Muslims are proved to be hypocrites as on the one hand as they believe that there is no discrimination in Islam based on caste; while on the other hand they continue to discriminate as do the Hindus. Rasool Bux Paleejo, a leading Marxist-nationalist also affirmed the factual relevance of the story:

One the one hand we surpass all limits of exaggeration and slogan mongering to prove that there is not caste system in Islam and on the  
(Contd. on next page)

Mukhi: We are Hindus.

Seetal: Why then Hindus cremate the dead, whereas we bury them?

Mukhi: It's our ritual.

Seetal: Alright. Why do we eat goat after butchering it (like Muslims)?

Mukhi: This too is our ritual—since the times of old ancestors.

Seetal: But these are the rituals of Muslims?

Mukhi: These are theirs. But ours too!!

Seetal: Then how can you say, we are Hindus?

Mukhi: Then what the heck are we, crank?

Seetal: Half Hindus-half Muslim. (We have) body of sheep, head of goat." (Excerpt translated from *Kāfir*, a short story by Naseem Kharal).

In this conversation, Seetal stands accused before the Oad (Dalit) community of betraying communal norms to convert to Islam, and proclaim that the Hindu religion is based on falsity. Although infuriated, members of the Oad 'panchayat' (caste council) were not very harsh at Seetal, as they believed that Seetal had been bewitched by a Mullah (Islamic cleric). They tried to convince Seetal that he had made a blunder, but Seetal remained adamant that he was happy with his conversion. Having seen his resolve Mukhi made the final attempt to convince Seetal saying, 'Remember Seetal! No matter how lavishly you harness donkeys like horses, they will remain donkeys, and never become horses.' (i.e., no matter how good a Muslim you become, you

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other, in reality, we are the leading custodians of the system of untouchability and casteism.

The recognition of casteism, however, does not bar the Progressives to resort to Marxist and nationalist explanations as an antidote to it. The moral of the story that is often upheld by them emphasizes 'interfaith harmony' instead of patriarchy and casteism that is embedded under the gloss of religion. As Memon argues, this story 'Infidel' supports the argument of the communists that social equality (devoid of casteism) can be achieved through socialist change or through communism, and that would eventually eradicate casteism and untouchability. In this manner, this conventional Marxist-nationalist approach relegates the problems of casteism and untouchability to the second-order issues supposed to vanish away once communism would prevail.

'Infidel' is also presented as the explanation of caste discrimination by the Muslims against the Hindus in general to convince the Dalits that conversion cannot bear the requisite benefits. For instance, motivated by Taj Joyo (the Ashrafia Sindhi nationalist activist and the writer), who projected that story to prove that the recurrent abortive attempts at conversion to get rid of 'untouchability' and religious discrimination do not work. Taj Joyo, for instance, wrote in Hemandas Chandani's (Scheduled Caste activist and poet) book:

I remember for sure that it was the night of 11 December 1977, when I met at Hemandas' home. I had a chit chat with Kanji Mal (officer national bank), Ganesh Balani, Bhani Mal, Sarvan Kumar, Naraern and Heman [all Dalits of Meghwar caste]. If I remember correctly, either Ganesh Mal (or any of the friends present) put up a proposal that 'we Meghwar are considered as lower-class Hindus, by caste Hindus. Therefore, our survival lies in converting to Islam'. There, I opposed that thinking that it is not the solution, because caste-based class discrimination also exists among Muslims. No Sayed Muslim will allow marry his daughter into any other caste, not to mention of Machi Muslim (fisherman caste considered the lower among Muslims). Although the days have much changed now, but even then, I narrated them the fiction story (based on social reality of casteism among Muslims) of Naseem Kharal.

Finally, we came to a consensus that the solution of social discriminations lies in education and only education. Today I feel proud that it is the effect of my ideas and the fiction story of Naseem Kharal narrated by me, that Ganesh Balani's four daughters have now reached the highest educational achievement: Shabnam Rathore made Sindh famous by doing PhD from Germany in 'Underground Saline Water'. Another

Pushpa Kumari has done M.Sc. from Agricultural University Tando Jam. Third daughter Nimrita, is a lecturer in Sindh University's microbiology department. Fourth Sushhma Devi who did M.Sc from botany and serving as lecturer in Karachi.

As it is evident, Taj Joyo suggested the Dalits to get Sindhized-without conversion. He tried to convince them that there was caste discrimination and untouchability even among Muslims. This suggestion was in line with the Sindhi nationalist ideology that desired unity between Hindus and Muslims, and that did not offer the political way out of the caste discrimination and untouchability. The best of the solutions that Joyo proffered to these structural and political issues was the uplift through educational achievement at individual level. Dalit activists seemed to take the suggestion of Joyo, as they began to discourage conversions.

Like Joyo did, the Progressives have convinced many Hindu Dalits not to convert and express their fidelity with the Muslim-dominated and Ashrafia-led Sindh through the Sufi nationalist medium. This has rather led Dalits to get Ashrafized or adopt certain norms of dominant Muslims that reflected in their expressed reverence for Sayeds, Pirs and Sufis. This form of ritual inversion to adopt Ashrafia values without conversion, however, does not seem to resolve the fundamental problem either, that is, caste discrimination and untouchability. Resultantly 'dissonance' persists between the assumption of being Sufi Sindhis and the empirically existing caste based discriminatory practices. Moreover, contrary to the claims of Progressives, the Ashrafia intervention into Dalit spaces of decision-making and identity (re)formation proves the persistence of hegemonic influence of Ashrafia elite. This, I argue, is tantamount to the appropriation of Dalit's epistemic space as it disallows and discourages Dalit activists to come up with their own alternative counter-hegemonic narratives.

There are, however, very few among Dalit activists, particularly the Ambedkarites, that radically depart from Sufi-nationalist trajectory. Consciousness of being sandwiched in between Brahminic and Ashrafia hegemony, these Ambedkarites have turned into crypto-Buddhists, that is, while politically they tend to follow B.R. Ambedkar and cherish Buddhist practices, but also loosely adhere to the normatively sanctioned Hindu and Ashrafia practices. These varied approaches to live a dignified life, however, does not bar a common Dalit to try out conversion to Islam, Christianity, or Ahmedia sect/religion. Generally, at the level of society, the voluntary conversions of Dalit families, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable ones, continues unabated, and often go unnoticed. This proves that while Progressive's polit-

ically motivated narratives may influence Dalit activists, particularly the Dalit middle class not to convert, such as through the specific rendition of short story 'Infidel', the poorest or the ultra-subaltern castes or sub castes and the most vulnerable Dalit families may often see conversion as an open option.

### Invoking Self-Pity in 'Dust of Earth and Stars of Sky'

The short story 'Dust of Earth and Stars of Sky' (*Dharti ji Dhoor, Asmanjaa Taara*) by Amar Jaleel arouses the compassion for Bali, a Bheel (Dalit) woman who had been seduced and raped by Shahu, a Sayed patriarch. Although, the story seems to be highly critical of Sayedism, which is a rare theme in the Sindhi literary domain, it does not sufficiently invoke Dalits to resist against it. The reasons for this epistemic and ontic lopsidedness can be partly attributed to the politico-ideological predilections of the writer, and the targeted Progressive audience receptive to Sufi-nationalist narrative. The story depicts the tragic socioeconomic vulnerability of Dalit women due to which they are often raped by Ashrafia men. The writer enters into the minds of both the oppressor and the oppressed and brings out the casteist arrogance of the Sayed, and the haplessness and humiliation of the Dalit woman. In a highly pro-Sayed society in which even the Progressive writers are reluctant to speak against Sayeds, the writer has shown a great dare to impute Sayeds, the risk that no Dalit intellectual can afford to take.

The Ambedkarites may not accept that apology and the conferring of credit to the Ashrafia-laden Progressive class, and may raise certain fundamental concerns. They may acknowledge that although the story has considerable emancipatory value, yet may contend that the writer does not suggest any escape for the Dalits out of that situation thereby leaving them in the depressed state. Hence, it fails to invoke agitation against the structural violence meted out to Dalit women and infuse the spirit of resistance against Sayedism. For instance, Bali, as a Dalit woman, is shown to give birth to the child, but her psychological strength is not depicted as to surpass the social and political prowess of his Sayed seducer. Fearing that her child could be killed by the Sayed(s), she even hides the act of seduction and the fact that a Sayed was a father of her child. Although this exemplifies the caste-based and religion-based structural violence of high order and the counter-resistance by the individual Dalit woman, the Ambedkarites may have liked to take it further into the collective domain of resistance to enthuse the spirit of collective resistance. Hence, the story ends up abruptly leaving the Ashrafia reader in a state of compassion for Dalits, and to Dalits in a state of self-pity.

Although in many other short stories and public statements, Amar

Jaleel certainly seems to stand against Sayeds and Pirs in so far as his own caste privilege (dis)allows him to be, yet the frequency and the number of such stories that depict Dalit oppression in relation to Sayedism is comparatively very low. This story, therefore, is the only one of its kind written by him that projects Dalit-women's oppression, but that too does not take the reader towards Dalit emancipation and social protest deemed necessary by the Dalit activists. This fact then complicates the writer's personal life at the level of commitment to eradicate caste discrimination or to emancipate Dalits. Playing the role of the Dalit liberator, Amar Jaleel, in fact, defines the Ashrafia definition of Dalit women's oppression. Colored in Sufi nationalist ideology of interfaith harmony, Jaleel condescends to take Sayed Patriarchy and misogyny to the task that does not help invoke Dalit women's emancipation as the Dalit women's depiction of her naivety and sexual vulnerability to Ashrafia patriarchy are not sufficiently counterpoised with the Dalits or Dalit women's agency to strive for emancipation. Resultantly, the Ashrafia reader of the story, instead of feeling remorse or shame on his or her patriarchy, is led to enjoy the Dalit woman's sexuality and body.

Hence, it can be safely assumed that the story does not specifically take the anti-caste stance and wavers in its emphasis on Hindu-Muslim, Sayed-non-Sayed, Dalit-Sayed, women-men binaries. It, thus, casts the ambiguous and rather counterproductive impact on the public opinion as regards the nature and the level of religious and caste-based persecution. The sociopolitical consequences of this ambiguity can even be seen on the Sufi nationalists as well as on the Dalits impressed by the narrative offered by Amar Jaleel or the Progressives. For instance, Dalit activists were found to be carried away by the Savarna-Ashrafia narrative of 'forced conversion' of Hindu and Dalit girls or women.

Despite the fact that most of such marriages and conversions are consensual, Dalit and Hindu girls were depicted as Marvis (oppressed women) of Sindh under the bondage of Umar, a mythologized Savarna/Ashrafia king of the yore who had kidnapped Marvi, a Dalit girl. This reframing of the folk narratives serves as the hegemonic instrument to reduce seduction, rape, consensual sex, or marriage-based conversion to a single libelous denominator of 'forced conversion', the religious connotation that is in line not only with Sufi nationalist ideology but also acceptable problem identifier for the protagonists of Political Islam and Hindutva ideology. Hence, in this manner, these narratives of force, coercion, seduction and rape derived from the folktales and re-framed by the Progressives in Sufi nationalist idiom are conveniently

(Contd. on next page)

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and uncritically grafted upon Dalit women's vulnerability. This re-framing of vulnerability in Sufi-nationalist idiom hides both the casteist and patriarchal bias of Savarna-Ashrafia Progressives and the hegemonic class to which they primarily represent.

## 'The Prisoner of Karoonjhar' and the Appropriation of Dalit Heroes and Spaces

The inversion of the history of a Dalit rebel/fighter is exemplified in 'The Prisoner of Karoonjhar' (Karoonjhar jo Qaidi), a short story written by Ali Baba (Rind Baloch by caste). In this story, RooploKolhi is depicted as the hero of Sindh who fought bravely during the middle of the 19th century when the British attempted to establish its writ over Parkar, a small mountainous region surrounded by Rann of Kutch to the south and the Thar

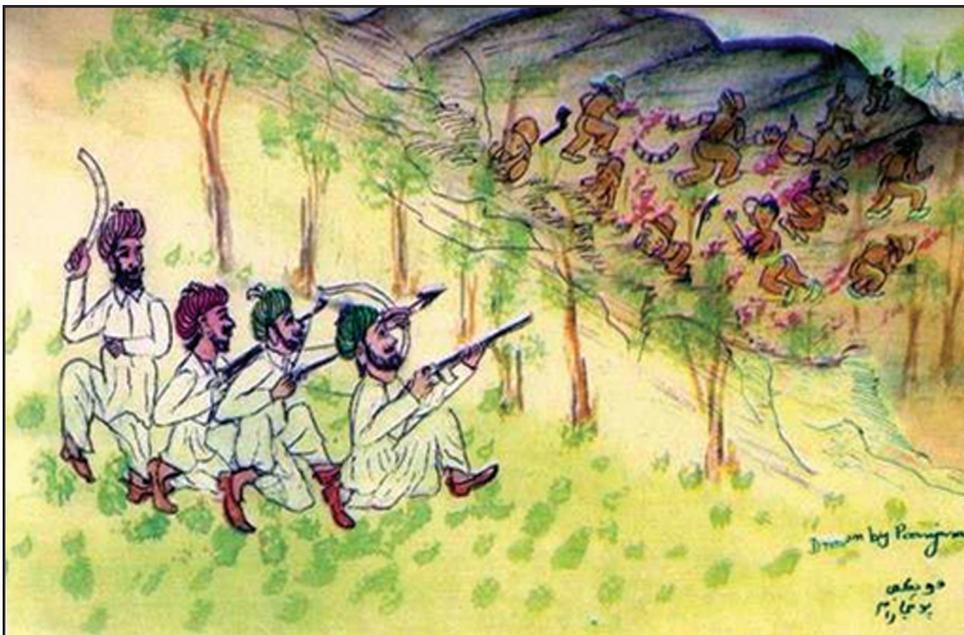
that was resisting against the British. In a latest 'progressive' compilation of essays in Sindhi, RooploKolhi's confrontation with the British is represented not just as fidelity to the local 'upper caste' rulers but to nation.

This nationalist reframing, that legitimizes the subordination of the oppressed castes to the local oppressor castes for the sake of freedom from or resistance to the external forces (the British), undermines the agency of the Dalits both in the historical past as well as in the present by suggesting Dalits to play second fiddle as loyal subordinates to the Ashrafia-Savarna castes. In contemporary Sindh, where these caste-based or the tribal relations of domination and subordination still exist with some minor variations, though this nationalist logic that has

Phule...she writes that they were the English people who came in and freed us from clutches of the upper castes. They see the coming of the British as the precursor of emancipation. They supported the British during the 1857 war, the Sikhs allied with the British to get rid of Mughal persecution. Similarly, Meghwar like Madhu, and the people of Parkar, particularly Dalits, sided with the British as the emancipators who got them rid of the domination of Sodha Thakurs. And this [Rooplo], who was the paid mercenary of Sodha Thakurs, is now reckoned as the hero in history. But those like MadhooMeghwar who supported the British to get rid of Sodhas persecutors are condemned as the rebels. Like Dalits themselves, this counter-narrative is also very marginal and very few even among Dalit activists subscribe to an essentially Ambedkar-

port for Kolhis, Dalits, and the Progressives alike. It has contemporary political relevance as it seems in line with the Dalit's tendency to Ashrafize by labeling Rooplo as 'Shaheed' (Arabic-Sindhi term for the martyr), and by tracing the existing descendants of him. Off and on, individual Kolhis claim to be Rooplo's great-grandsons and are invited in annual anniversaries organized to pay homage to Rooplo as guest speakers. This desire to associate with Rooplo is a post-1970s phenomenon, resonating with the Sindhi nationalist narrative as it was reframed through political speeches and the politico-literary writings as that of Ali Baba.

The narrative of the story, however, loses its historical grounding and the authenticity as there is not much historical evidence to support the facts related to Rooplo or Kolhi



**Figure 1.** The painting by Poonja Ram Kolhi, first appeared ParuMal's book Lok Sagar Ja Moti. It was popularized by ParkariKolhis depicting RooploKolhi along with his rebel friends attacking the British in Karoonjhar Mountains at Parkar (Source: Parkari Audio-Visual Project, PCDP).



Desert of Sindh to the north (see Figure 1, painted by a Kolhi for the book on RooploKolhi). RooploKolhi, as the locals believe, was a Girasia, that is, the tribal chief recognized as such by rulers of the time, particularly by the Mughals. Although the narrative depicted in Ali Baba's (1994) story is not much different than most of the Kolhis and Sindhi people believe in, it becomes problematic when Dalit activists undermine its pro-Savarna history and let the Ashrafia elite appropriate their agency. Hence, it has both the emancipatory as well as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic aspects depending upon who patronizes whom.

Ali Baba's narrative of Rooplo's bravery portrays Rooplo as if in direct confrontation with the British. The character RooploKolhi is depicted as the independent freedom fighter that fought against the British to reclaim his 'Mulk' (Parkar). The impression is created that Parkar was a part of Sindh and Rooplo, therefore, fought for Sindh. Karoonjhar symbolizes Sindh in miniature and the local castes symbolized the Sindhi nation

re-identified Pakistani establishment or Punjabi domination as the new 'other', in a way, allows the subordination of Kolhis or Dalits to Sodha Thakurs, Khosas, Mir Talpurs, and even to Sayeds. Hence, this tribal-nationalist ethic even applies today, and may continue to be applied by the Ashrafia-Savarna castes on the excuse of the external threats to the internal tribal-caste (dis)harmony.

Prior to that appropriation of RooploKolhi by the Sindhi nationalists, it was almost vice versa. The review of the vernacular literature written by ParkariKolhis, and the conversations held by me with the local Parkaris in 2019 indicate that Parkaris did not always imagine Parkar as a part of Sindh. A Tharparkar-based Dalit activist inverted the nationalist narrative in the following manner:

MadoMeghwar, who gave refuge to Trawat [Tyrwhitt]. Do you know why he gave refuge to tarawat? Very few know. You must see, during that period, the poor classes...in 1800s.the first Dalit woman who wrote a letter...she only was class VIII pass. She was ...Savatri Bai

ian perspective on history and historiography. Yet there are many points on which they converge and that deviate from the Ashrafia-dominated nationalist narrative. Before the partition of the subcontinent, Parkar was imagined by Kolhis, as well as by other Parkari communities, as 'Mulk' (literally, a country different from Sindh). This social imaginary often sometimes reflects in the political claims of ownership of Parkar made by Kolhi activists (see for instance, pamphlet in Figure 2, of local Kolhi leader, which reads 'Parkar is not the private property of anybody, but our fatherland').

Given the profile of the characters, which look more of history turned into legend, this story by Ali Baba (1994) cannot be interpreted like the other two discussed above that are essentially based on fictitious characters. In this story history is inflated through fiction while, in the previous stories, fiction is created to depict contemporary social reality. Hence, the characterization of RooploKohi through Ashrafia literary narrative has the historically real im-

community's role in the fight against the British. The historical chronicles, mostly written by the British officers, do not mention any such dramatic debacle involving RooploKolhi. Although the narrative apparently looks emancipatory for Dalits as it highlights RooploKolhi, yet it loses ground as it fails to fully discredit the dominant role of the Sodha Thakur rulers of Parkar. Ali Baba's narrative undermines the fact that Rooplo fought as a tribal chief of Kolhi's Gohel sub-caste under the supervision of Ladhoo Singh, a Kshatriya or upper caste Hind ruler. Parkar had been under the control of Sodha Thakurs during the past several centuries. Talpur and Kalhorarulers of Sindh occasionally used to intervene in Tharparkar to establish their writ, which was often thwarted by the Sodhas. Sodhas of Parkar had their own communal system of management that they used to call 'Gurr Raj', and variant of land tax collection called 'Raney jo Jalang' (sack of Rana) was invogue by virtue of which all Rajputs/Sodha Thakurs were exempt from the land tax. (Contd. on next page)

# Appropriation of Caste Spaces in Pakistan:

## The Theo-Politics of Short Stories in Sindhi Progressive Literature

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While Parkar had its own semi-autonomous political economy, it was not completely independent of the influences of the rulers of Sindh and were given various exemptions and waivers to collect taxes from the local pastoralists and peasants. When

by Tharparkari people. Abdul Qadir Junejo writes:

Thari people have unique instinct of liking and making heroes for themselves. Mughal Emperor Akbar was a legendary figure for them only second to local deities, so was General Taroot (Tyrwhitt). Despite the fact that Taroot was the one who overwhelmed Sodha Rajputs and hanged RooploKolhi, he was highly praised and eulogized by Tharis in folk songs, and folklore during and after Taroot's times.

This pre-colonial narrative was gradually overtaken by the post-colonial nationalist narrative whereby the praise of Tyrwhitt was considered as symbolic of the slavish imperialistic attitude. Given this ambiguous history, it can be argued that the Progressives' narrative of Rooplo Kolhi, that is inadvertently, picked up by Dalits as well, is premised on the self-serving all-unifying nationalist fantasy that more than giving the emancipatory push to the Dalit cause rather hampers it. Kolhi activists consider this representation as the sort of recognition of the value and worth of Kolhi community within the comity of Sindhi castes, and see this re-nationalization of 'Amar (eternal) or 'Shaheed' (Martyr) RooploKolhi', as the drive to create social and political space for their marginal community. Hence, except the minor antipathy towards Ashrafia-dominated Sindh that

sometimes reflects in Kolhi's hidden script, Parkar is largely imagined by them as the integral part of Sindh, and Rooplo as the foremost Sindhi national hero, the recognition that could not be had without the approval of 'authentic nationalists' (i.e., Ashrafia-Savarna elite).

To reciprocate that recognition and to reaffirm their fragile bonding with the Ashrafia class, Kolhis invite Mirs, Sardars, and Sayeds as special guests in their programs held to commemorate the martyrdom of Rooplo. See, for instance, Figure 3 in which Nawab Yousif Talpur (a local Ashrafia politician from the ruling elite stands in the middle surrounded by local Kokhiactivists during the 157th Anniversary of RooploKolhi at the Ghousia Complex, Umerkot on 20 August 2016). Yousaf Talpur, in his capacity as the member of National Assembly announces additional school building for a Kolhi village. To demonstrate their closeness to and confidence in Yousaf Talpur, local Kolhi activists NemdasKolhi, Poonjho Mal Bheel (Ex, MPA), Asu Bai Kolhi and other Dalit activists stand close to Yousaf Talpur on the stage. The innovatively deceptive inversion of caste identity was observed when Sardar Shah (Sayad) proclaimed in a procession that 'he is

Kolhi' (Dalit).

This ritual of inversion by Ashrafia elite to arbitrarily identify with the Dalits, under the influence of the Sufi nationalist narrative, dilutes the question of casteism such that Rooplo Kolhi (a Dalit), HoshooSheedi (an Afro-Sindhi descendant of slaves), Dodo Soomro (Sammatt ruling caste elite), and Raja Dahar (7th century Brahmin king of Sindh) are represented as standing on the horizontal socioeconomic plane that demands of them to struggle for Sindh. It creates the false dichotomy between the two groups of Ashrafia-Savarna classes, namely the Sindhi nationalists and separatists, and the pro-state feudal Sindhi Ashrafia class. For instance, a Kolhi activist aligning himself with the nationalists as against the ruling feudal class of Sindh uploaded a Facebook status:

The 159th anniversary of Shaheed RooploKolhi was celebrated by Jeay Sindh Mahaz at Sachal village, Karachi. Chairman of Mahaz, Abdul Khaliq Junejo said that Raja Dahar, HoshooSheedi and RooploKolhi are our valiant heroes, and that Muhammad-bin-Qasim is historically condemned as the imperialist. He said that the anniversaries of Rooplo are being celebrated lately by the ruling elites since the last two-three years to appropriate Rooplo for their vested interests. But they must remember that the resistance of Rooplo was not simply for capturing seat in legislative assembly or to appease any specific sect, but for his land Sindh, the

It's not just that simple, that democracy fascinates Dalits. Under it, they eagerly sell out their heroes to nationalists, and give away their gods to Brahmins and Lohanas; they are willing to banish all their ancestral gods to exclusively worship Ram, Krishana and Ganesha.

The unabated influence of the Sindhi Progressive narrative had been lately (between 2016 and 2019) disturbed by the group of activists affiliated with Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, who were working within several other splinter groups. The change was noticed during the 160th anniversary celebrations held at Judho and Hyderabad by Sindhi Kolhitehad and Pakistan Kolhitehad in which they consciously took the decision not to invite, as chief guests, the feudal or political class person elite. Yet this not yet institutionalized and abrupt change is not without ideological problem as the majority of Dalits continued to imagine Rooplo and Dalits through a Marxist-nationalist lens instead of an Ambedkarian one. Pahla-jKolhi, the organizer of anniversary at Jhudo, posted on Facebook a happy note:

This was a political anniversary. In this anniversary there was no minister, advisor or senator. Despite that the sea of people flooded in, which proves that people have now do not accept this waderko-bhotarko (feudal) system.

This supposedly a political statement about the program in which they awarded Dalit activists af-



Figure 2. Local government elections (2013) pamphlet of VeerjiKolhi. Source: Author (2016).

the British conquered Sindh in 1847, they reduced the Rana's right and share of taxes to a half, while allowing them to maintain their own jagreers (fiefs). (Similarly, both the Ali Baba as well as ParkariKolhis do not bring into framework the fact that the Meghwar community (Dalits) had already submitted to the British to emancipate from the Sodha Thakurs. They also undermine the fact that Talpur rulers of Sindh were also subdued by the British and even employed against the Sodha Thakurs. They also neglect the fact that it was the army of Talpur rulers of Sindh that fought together with the British to crush Sodha Thakur resistance in Nangarparkar. They do not acknowledge that ParakariKolhis, in fact, fought as army men for the SodhaThakur (Savarna) rulers of Parkar, who did not even consider Kolhis as proper Hindus.

The historically anomalous ethnic and geographical status of Parkar can also be confirmed from the fact that, before the annexation of Parkar to Sindh by the British, Parkar was under the jurisdiction of Bhuj (Katch, now in India), and that both the Dalits and the Savarnas of Parakar were ethnically and politically aligned more with their respective caste fellows and co-religionists in Kutch than with the land and people of Sindh the borders of which lied where from the Thar Desert began. Similarly, the local narrative about the British agent Tyrwhitt, who is now demonized as the persecutor, was hailed as local hero



Figure 3. Ashrafia Picture taken during the 157th Anniversary of RooploKolhi at the Ghousia Complex, Umerkot on 20 August 2016. Source Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (2016).

legacy of which rule-hungry elite cannot be the inheritors.

These acts of counter-appropriation, condensation and equalizing Savarna-Ashrafia and Dalit heroes in the name of resistance against the non-nationalist ruling elite are not liked by some of their co-Dalit activists, best classified as Ambedkarites. For instance, an Ambedkarite interviewed by me lamented:

filiated with different political parties for raising voice of indigenous 'Darawar' communities, framed the issue in the Marxist language of class struggle that obfuscates the problem of casteism. Hence, this Dalit agency that is carried away by the Marxist-Ashrafia ideology, many Kolhi activists see this re-nationalization of 'Amar RooploKolhi' as the drive to

(Contd. on next page)

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create social and political space for their marginal community. Given this ideologically-confused nature of Dalit activism, many of them are not particularly optimistic that the social hierarchies would alter in any fundamental ways.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, this anti-colonial narrative could have been truly emancipatory, if it had also brought into focus the internal colonialism based on exclusion of Dalitbahujans. Since, it was not the case, and the Sufi nationalist representation of the Progressives undermined caste (also gender) as the political factors of oppression and exclusion, the postcolonial emancipation from the British imperialism cannot be understood by the Ambedkarites as the Dalit emancipation from the internal colonialism. Hence, the story of RooploKolhi, as it is depicted and reframed, seems quite the reverse of Ambedkarian way of hero-making. For instance, it is quite the opposite of the battle of Koregaon, often mentioned by local Ambedkarites in Sindh, in which about 500 Mahar (Meghwar) of Bombay Native Infantry of the East India Company fought against the Peshwa rulers. The event is considered as the revenge of decades of treatment of Mahars as untouchables, and which is reframed as the source of revolutionary inspiration by the Ambedkarites. Millions of Dalits gather each year on the 1st of January in Bhima-Koregaon village in Pune, India to celebrate the event.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the discourse emergent of popular Sindhi short stories reveals that even seemingly pro-Dalit narratives do not adequately expose the problem of casteism in the manner that could lead to Dalit emancipation. It was evident that although the Sufi ethic of interfaith harmony arbitrarily invokes Ashrafia morality, and temporarily creates an anxiety in Ashrafia consciousness to confront casteism, yet, at the empirical level, it facilitates the Ashrafia (but also Savarna) elite to appropriate heroes, histories, events, and spaces of Dalits, and invokes token sympathy and compassion for the Dalits and women. Hence, the Progressive Ashrafia reader and the activist, in-

stead of feeling remorse or shame on his or her casteist patriarchy, is led to objectify Dalit bodies and appropriate Dalit agency and spaces.

Given this hegemonic influence of local Ashrafia class, the internal caste frictions are glossed over through political Sufism or Sindhi nationalism. The seemingly pro-Dalit narratives are, in fact tropes of interfaith harmony, such as in the case of the exchange of persuasive dialogue in 'Infidel', which is often interpreted by Sindhi nationalists and the progressive writers as a caution against the threat to an 'exemplary' interfaith harmony that once existed between (Savarna) Hindus and (Sindhi) Muslims; or they, at best, proffer self-pity as in the case of the short story 'Dust of Earth and Stars of Sky'.

These narratives could be imagined out of the semi-historical narratives, such as in the case of RooploKolhi's reframing as the Sindhi national hero along with Dalit heroes, to graft the oppression upon the external 'other'—that previously was the British Colonial power, and now it has been identified as the Pakistani state. Hence, it does not help expose the internal colonialism that predated the British. An Ambedkarite might have taken these stories or the narratives further and have inverted the individual Dalits' tension into the collective resistance at the level of community. They may make the counterintuitive demands from the Progressives to invert both the pure fiction and the fictionalized history so that the frictions of caste and gender, or the embeddedness of caste, gender, and religion, could be brought to the fore. Most of the Progressives seem incapable to fulfill that demand as it conflicts with their Sufi nationalist narrative.

Contrary to what Ambedkarism may demand, the stories, in general, did not seem to sufficiently grasp the Dalit lifeworld. Resultantly, instead of giving Dalits emancipating thrust, the stories end up abruptly leading the Ashrafia reader (for whose consumption they primarily write) to pity the Dalits and sympathize with them, while leaving Dalits in a state of self-pity. The occasional appearances of Dalit men and women in Progressive narratives rather prove the peripherality of Dalits in Ashrafia-dominated spaces, and rather furnish

the Ashrafia reader and the activist with the reasons to objectify the Dalit's vulnerability, helplessness, and women's bodies. This Ashrafized and appropriated reframing of Dalitness by the Progressives and Sindhi civil society leads to the conclusion that although Dalits assert against the caste oppression by priding in their past, their agency to subvert Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony is considerably hampered and appropriated to sever the interest of their oppressors. It can, therefore, be argued that, colored in Sufi nationalist ideology, the progressives' definition of Dalit's oppression does not help invoke Dalit agency to emancipate from Sayedism or Ashrafia domination.

Moreover, the Progressive's narrative resonates with the functionalist approach that does not allow for radical questioning of caste. Amar Jaleel, Naseem Kharal's depiction of Dalits and women, as it is inspired by the Progressive predecessors who were influenced by Gandhi, is comparable to the Hindi short stories of Munshi Premchand. Premchand has given space to Dalit characters and brings forth Dalit's exploitation in his stories, but his antidote was inspired by the functionalist approach of Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswathi, and Gandhi. It seemed supportive of the idea of 'purity' and was against religious conversion. The same holds true of the Sindhi progressives. This ideological trajectory goes against the fundamental premises of Ambedkarian ideology that aims at inspiring courage and zeal to resist not merely against untouchability but for the annihilation of caste and the dignified life. In the context of Sindh, Progressives, unwittingly or wittingly following Gandhian line, come up with the post-hoc explanations and the narratives of history of the oppressed for fulfilling their Sufi nationalist goal of uniting caste or, rather, diluting casteism without necessarily confronting casteism and gender discrimination.

Hence, it is evident that while the 'Progressives' in their writings and the ruling Ashrafia elite in their political acts apparently assume a critical posture towards religious suppression, casteism, and/or Sayedism, they are largely apologetic in their tenor, and do not show any commitment to the annihilation of casteism

and inclusion of Dalits into privileged spaces of politics, society, and culture. Given the epistemological disparity between the vast volumes of Progressive literature that ignore casteism, and the politically significant demographic strength, this Ashrafia (Savarna) intervention into Dalit spaces seems highly problematic.

Related to this epistemological disparity is the lack of privileged space afforded to Dalit writers to express their feelings and emotions that no Ashrafia writer can. Except a few, which lie at the margin, there are no noteworthy Dalit short story writers found among the comity of the Progressives in Sindh. This situation, at least, at the level of epistemic justice or equality, continues to be heavily tilted in favor of the Progressive Ashrafia writers whose primary aim, even while giving voice to the Dalits, has been to suggest the unity of all Sindhi castes, including Dalit castes, against the external Ashrafia oppressor.

The literature produced in Sindhi language essentially gives voice to the Ashrafia-Savarna sentiments and cherishes Ashrafia value systems that are fundamentally premised on the superiority of Sayeds, Sammats, Baloch, and Savarna (Lohana, Brhamin, Thakur) castes. The Dalit middle class finding herself incapable to cope with the highly elaborate Progressive narrative either takes sides with the Sufi nationalists (Sindhi separatists, Marxists, pro-Pakistanis) of one type or the other, all of whom are invariably pro-Ashrafia in their social and political orientation and indifferent to the plight of Dalits. Given this Dalit predicament, it can be argued that the Progressives' social imaginary defies the Ambedkarian approach to society and politics that argues for the eradication of casteism through concrete measures and conscious engagement. It can, therefore, be concluded that the seemingly progressive narratives framed in theo-political idiom may offer to the oppressed no more than token sympathy, compassion, self-pity, and false pride in history turned into a legend. Instead, they allow the appropriation of spaces and events of the oppressed, and the objectification of oppressed bodies by the oppressor.



Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD

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Goodie Takhar, PhD

# Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Pittsburg organized a health camp for Vaccination

Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha organized a health camp for Vaccination on last Saturday, 4/3/21 at 10AM. Volunteers from Contra Costa County Health Services administered the Janssen vaccine to 350 Gurghar members and other community members. Some people came from Fremont, San Jose and Sunnyvale. Janssen vaccine requires only one dose. Committee members helped with

maintaining social distance, set up and directing traffic. They made sure that everyone was wearing a mask and provided masks to people who came without one.

Sangat was served tea and snacks after vaccination.

This was a great community service (SEWA) by the Gurughar committee members and other volunteers.

We look forward to more health camps and community service programs by the committee of Sri Guru Ravidass Temple.

We are thankful to all the volunteers for their help.

**Ramesh Summan**

Former President & Chairman  
Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha  
Pittsburgh (CA)



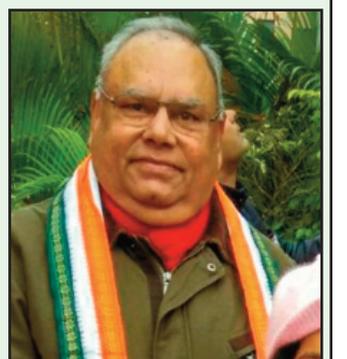
## Congratulatory Message



It is matter of gratification to note that the esteemed mouth piece of the weaker sections of the society, The Ambedkar Times has entered its 13th year of publishing last week on Mach 13, 2021. I take this opportunity to congratulate its Editor-in-Chief Prem K. Chumber and fondly remember its founder and motivator Late C.L. Chumber on the occasion and wish it further success and prosperity in the service of the community and the society at large.

I am confident that the "Ambedkar Times" will continue to provide due space and priority to the issues of the marginalized sections of the society to realize the mission of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and Manyawar Kanshi Ram in the years to come to whom the paper is dedicated.

(Ramesh Chander)



**Ramesh Chander**  
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)  
91-99885-10940