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Guru Nanak and his Vision of Egalitarian Social Order

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After Tathagath Lord Buddha, it was Baba Guru Nanak who raised a thundering voice against the oppressive social system of caste divisions and untouchability. His engaging approach and consistent efforts for the establishment of egalitarian society both through teachings and practice distinguished him from his predecessors and contemporaries of the Prema-Bhakti path of famous North Indian Bhakti Movement (Great Revolutionary Movement), which is known for its emphasis on equality of all persons irrespective of their caste, sex and creed before the almighty God. Baba Nanak was for social and gender equality in both the realms of spirituality (Parlok) and terrestrial world (lok). He stood with the lowest of the low. He reiterated that if one was desirous of the grace of God, he had to take care of the lowest of the low. In order to institute the principle of social equality in the sharply divided Hindu caste society, he founded the tradition of common community kitchen (langar) which needs to be financed out of the hard earned living by sharing its fruits. KiratKaro, NaamJapo, Vand Shakko was the trilogy for the success of his social revolution. However, this trilogy of spiritual path needs to be understood in conjunction with the another postulate of the egalitarian social structure of Sikhism meticulously nurtured by Guru Nanak. Sharing the fruits of one's hard earned labor was to be practiced across caste boundaries of the given Hindu society based as it was on the divisive Varna order. Baba Nanak advocated decimation of all such oppressive caste based social boundaries. The inclusion of the Bani of different spiritual personalities cutting across caste lines vindicates the egalitarian intent of Sikhism. Had Baba Nanak been alive today, he would not have approved of the emergence of Gurdwaras on caste/community lines. Similarly, for the establishment of a true egalitarian society, Guru Nanak laid emphasis for the emancipation and empowerment of the women who were denied equal rights. While highlighting the various merits of women, Baba Nanak said why to condemn them who give birth to princess. He travelled far and wide to comprehend as well as enlighten the ignorant about their duties towards themselves, society and spiritual world. We need to sincerely adopt his teachings in our routine daily life and social dealings to give shape to the society which he envisioned and truly practiced in his earthly life time. Are we genuinely living the way he exhorted us to live? Let us do introspection within ourselves on the auspicious occasion of 552nd ParkashPurab of Guru Nanak Dev and resolve to follow his teachings in word and spirit.

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Casteization of Politics vs Politicization of Caste

This article talks about the thousands of years (more than thirty centuries) old history of the social precincts mandated by the caste system – a social order that did not accord due respect to some people as human beings. It discusses how religion used politics, and politics used religion. Varnas came into being first, followed by castes. This took around 1,300 years. The scriptures are very clear in that whosoever works with his hands is a Shudra. The caste system still survives and is a social evil.

Religion plays a key role in the making of the Indian social system. Along with religion, complexities generated by the intermingling of caste and politics is what further makes its understanding more cumbersome. Caste and religion are so inextricably linked to each other that they have become almost complementary in their day-to-day connotations. The association of religion with human life is often depicted more in terms of ones' social status than from the perspective of his/her actual life-conduct. The way religion and caste influence politics together, one wonder whether religion and caste make religionisation/casteisation of politics or politics leads to politicisation of religious and caste. The adulators of religion and caste blame politics for their internal weaknesses. The politicians, on the other hand, never tire of stressing that religion and caste blocked their way to politics like a monster. An attempt to understand religion, caste and politics separately does not take us to any concrete conclusion because the three have got so indistinguishably mixed that studying them individually would deprive us of comprehending their real nature (Kothari 1985)

Every religion and caste has its own identity, ideas and lifestyles. And each one of them tries to glorify what is theirs. Scholars often consider society as a single entity and analyze the religions and castes as distinct units within it. The fact is that politics is not being practiced only by politicians nor is it the sole occupation of politicians. Members of different castes and followers of different religions play politics both wittingly and unwittingly to maintain their status. This happens because of the mixing of religion and castes. Caste, along with religion, does not only build a new identity but also determines social status. The attempts to perpetuate the stratified hierarchy and the struggle by those relegated to unjust status give birth to organisations that are centred on politics. In such a scenario, it is difficult to determine whether religion is responsible for pushing politics in a particular direction or caste is deploying religion to serve its interests. It is not easy to categorically answer the question whether religion influences politics or vice-versa.

Before trying to understand the interplay of religion, caste and politics, we need to develop a fresh understanding of religion and caste. First, let us try to understand religion. We will dwell on its relationship with caste and politics later. One more issue, which needs our attention here, is that of Varna. Scriptures say that Varna is first and religion comes next. They locate the origin of religion in the Vedas. The Vedas are supposed to have been articulated sometime between 3500 BCE and 1500 BCE. This also happens to be the period when Aryans arrived in India. There is no doubt that the concept of Varna predated that of caste by about 1,300 years. In the tangled tale of the metamorphosis of the Varna system into the caste system is hidden the emergence of politics. Therefore, to understand politics, we need to understand religion

and Varna. This will help us critically analyze the complex structure of caste and its deep connections with politics (Altekar 1962; Bandyopadhaya, 1927).

Varna and Religion

We will take the help of religious scriptures to understand Varna and religion. The scriptures are an amalgamation of two different knowledge sources - Dharmasutras and Smritis. By word 'Sutra' is meant expressing knowledge about a thing or a thought in a very limited number of words. The process of doing so is called Sutra. It is believed that Vedas existed much before they were rendered to writing. Before being put to paper, the Vedas were preserved through oral tradition. These were called Smritis. Clearly, memorizing the entire text with its complicated interpretations was a tall order. And that was why, the Vedas were committed to memory in the form of Sutras. That explains the origin of words like Veda, Dwivedi, Trivedi, Chaturvedi etc. That is why; the Vedas are interpreted in the form of Sutras. That was how Sutra literature came into being (for more details see: Ghoshal 1959).

Though Vedas do not systematically describe the rules of life, but the basic source material of such rules can be located within the Vedas. Norms related to marriage, different kinds of sons and inheritance, detailed in the scriptures, are derived from the Vedic literature. Many key writers of Dharma Sutras including Gautama, Apastamba, Vashistha, Manu and Yajnavalkya agree that the Vedas are the real wellspring of dharma (Yajnavalkya is among the Vedic scholars credited with having written the Yajur Veda). Dharmasutras and Smritis both are expressed in Sutras. While the Dharmasutras are in the form of commentaries, the Smritis include both commentaries as well as verses. Both are written in ancient language though the language of the Dharmasutras is older than that of the Smritis. As compared with Smritis, the Dharmasutras lay little store on the observational technique and on making a systematic presentation of the subject matter. Here it would be pertinent to mention that the writers of the Dharmasutras, especially the leading ones, do not present themselves as the religious-minded or as great Rishis (for details see Kane 1930-35). But the writers of the Smritis, especially Manu and Yajnavalkya, declare that the knowledge preserved in these texts is 'revealed' or divinely ordained. This 'divinity' stuff is the mask for politics. It is used to justify the one-sided division of society (Banerjee 1980).

Smritis came after the Dharma Sutras. That the Smritis are ancient text is undeniable. Dividing them into two separate categories would help us gather detailed knowledge about them. We can define them in either broad or narrow terms. In broad terms, Smritis include the entire corpus of ancient literature other than the Vedas, for instance the works of Kalp and Yajnavalkya. In narrow terms, Smritis are considered complementary to the Dharma Sutras. Manu believes so. Rishi Vashistha and Gautam also consider Smritis as important

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texts for analyzing religion. Seen from this perspective, there remains no difference between Dharma Sutras and Smritis. Rishi Gautam, one of the important and initial writers of the Dharma Sutras calls himself Dharma Sutraakar and Manu the Smritikaar. Rishi Vashitha also considers himself a Smritikaar along with Gautama, Prajapati, Yama, Harita and Manu. Besides Dharma Sutras and Smritis, the Puranas also talk about religion. The Puranas are also ancient texts, which find mention in Chandogya Upanishad and Gautama Dharma Sutra. Some scholars contend that the Puranic literature caught the imagination of the people after Buddhism and Jainism losing their grip of society and Brahmanism reasserting itself. Puranas are 18 in number of which Matsya Purana talks a lot about religion, especially about the rituals connected with Shradha, Vrata and Rajdharma etc. The Puranas detailed the nitya (daily) and naimittika (performed on special occasions) rituals as also about the Varnashram system. As far as the popular interpretations of religion are concerned, Yajnavalkya Smriti comes next after Manu Smriti. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad presents Yajnavalkya as a great philosopher, who imparted knowledge about Brahma and the principles that determine what immoral conduct is (Banerjee 1980).

Based on the interpretation of Dharma in these sources, Medhātithi, a scholar and the writer of one of the key commentaries on Manu Smriti, divides Dharma into five parts. They are Varna Dharma (related to the four Varnas – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra), Ashram Dharma (related to the four Ashrams – Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyas), Varnashram Dharma (duties of members of the different Varnas during the different Ashrams), Naimittik Dharma (related to mandatory duties (such as repentance) on special occasions in life and Guna Dharma (for instance the duties of a king towards his subjects). According to this classification, Dharma is mainly about one's duties as members of different Varnas in different Ashrams of life and with reference to the casts system. The duties of people of all castes at all stages in their life are predetermined. The duties are a function of one's caste. The duties of different castes are based on their status in society. Adhering to these prescribed duties is Dharma. Thus, Dharma has nothing to do with worshipping god or philosophical speculations about the nature of god. It is about who is allowed to worship god and who is not. In other words, following religion means sticking to the prescribed norms and adhering to one's duties (Ambedkar 1995).

Kabir expresses this in the following words:

Ved ki putri smriti bhayee / Sankal, jevri lai hai aye /1/

Aapan nagru aap te baadhia / Moh kai phadi kaal saru sandhiall1ll rahau//

Kati n katai tuti nah jayee // Sa saapni hoyee jag ko khayee //2//

Ham dekhath jinni sabhu jag lutia // Kahu Kabir main Ram kahi shuteia // (Guru Granth Sahib, p 327)

What Kabir is saying here is that the Smritis, based on the Vedas, are tied by the shackles of Varnashram and rituals. Those who believe in the Smritis cannot hope to break free from the norms prescribed in them. Comparing Smritis with a Nagin (female snake), which eats up its own offspring, Kabir says that the rules and the norms prescribed in the Smritis, corrupt (dirty) the minds of those who believe in them. This Bani shows that Smritis are about the social structure and social life based on the Varnashram system and has no relation whatsoever with spirituality. Guru Arjun Dev, in his Bani, writes about Smritis:

Smriti Bed Puran pukarini pothia // Naam bina sabhi kudu gaahli hochia // 1// (Guru Granth Sahib, p 761)

The men who on reading Vedas, Puranas, Smritis and other religious scriptures, relegate spiritual knowledge to the margins and publicize rituals etc talk nonsense. Except for the name of the almighty, all this is fake and hypocritical. Similarly, Guru Amardas, in his Bani, says

Padi padi pandit jotki thake bhekhi bharmi bhulaye // Guru bhete sahju payee aapni kirpa kare rajai // 1// (Guru Granth Sahib, p 68)

What it means is that Pundits, astrologers and Sadhus who wear different attires – all are treading the wrong path after reading the Shastras and other religious books and due to which they have been unsuccessful in attaining the 'Sahaj' state. Those who receive the blessings of the almighty achieve 'Sahaj' state and acquire true knowledge through their Guru.

Padi padi pandit moni thake chauthi pad kee saar n paavnia //5// Aape range rangu chadaye// (Guru Granth Sahib p 117)

Meaning that the Pandits and the learned get exhausted reading Vedas and other religious books but are unable to attain the spiritual state. Baba Nanak offers a solution to the Gordian knot of Varna, caste and religion. He says that the flame of the almighty burns inside the persons of all castes.

Janahu joti na puchau jati aage jati n he rahau //1// (Guru Granth Sahib p 347)

It would be pertinent to mention here that in religious scriptures, Varna and caste are used as synonyms, which comes in the way of developing a correct understanding of caste. As we said at the beginning, about 1,300 years separated the emergence of the concepts of Varna and caste. The four Varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) were not defined on the basis of their birth but on the basis of their occupation. But as the caste system emerged an offshoot of the Varna system, occupation was replaced with birth. And

religion was used to lend legitimacy to this shift from occupation-based to birth-based Varna system. At the time of the writing of the Vedas and Dharmashastras, religion was seen as a means for ensuring that the different sections of society perform their duties. Later, duty yielded a place to social status. Duty was related to Karma. But it was later associated with religion and that became a hurdle on the path to social consciousness. I believe that all this became possible due to politics. Hence, to understand politics, we need to understand how religion, Varma and caste are related to one another.

Before discussing the mutual relationship between religion and caste, we need to discuss how Varna got converted into caste. During this process, politics tightened grip on society. No doubt this question has been much discussed but it is yet to find mention in Punjabi literature. Male-dominated society, class divisions and the state played a key role in the transformation of the institution of Varna into the institution of caste. Caste system did not come into being in the entire country at one time. In a given period, it was at different stages of evolution in different parts of the country. Male-dominated society was founded by implementing the concept of Sagotra marriage. It played an important role in transforming Varna into caste. Business exigencies, social structure based on different levels of status and atrocities against women etc. also played a role in the creation of caste-based society. These all factors also point at the social relations between different tribes and the castes that arose between them. Astonishingly, the same factors are operating in Indian society in one form or the other even in the 21st century and that is why, we are not able to break free from the stranglehold of caste.

Some scholars assert that the Vedic priestly class problematized the natural changes in women's bodies and the women were ostracized from Vedic rituals. Branding menstruation, which is a biological process, as something that makes women impure is a gross misdeed rooted in male chauvinist thinking. Literature written before this view became the norm shows that many Indian tribes did not consider menstruating women impure prior to their association with caste-based society. Thus, we can conclude that the status of women vis-à-vis men got lowered during the transition from the Varna to the caste system. It would be logical to conclude that the casteist social order was responsible for demeaning women. Dr Ambedkar has dwelt on this issue in his maiden research paper 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', which he wrote as a student of the Columbia University. He believes that this attitude cannot be understood without first understanding the concepts of Sagotra and exogamous marriages. In his paper, he contends that male-dominated so-

ciety and subjugation of women were key factors that shaped the structure of the caste-based society (Ambedkar 1917).

Sagotra Marriage

As regards the theory of exogamous marriages, sociologists have widely divergent views on it. S.V. Karandikar (1950), Irawati Karve (1966) and G.S. Ghurye (1972) says that the Aryans were not acquainted with the principle of marrying outside the gotra before their arrival in India and they got to know about it through their interaction with the indigenous people (Kosambi, 1956; Habib, 1995; Habib, 1985). In contrast, well-known scholars like Benveniste and John Brough argue that the theory of Sagotra marriage had been formulated during the time of the Rig Veda. They also believe that the Brahmanical theory of Gotra-Sagotra marriages was born out of the interaction between the Indian tribes and the Indo-Europeans. Be that as it may, male-dominated society, theory of Sagotra marriage and the oppression of women did play a key role in the building of the structure of caste-based society. The Rig Veda refers to the tradition of women, after their marriage, leaving their maiden family to live with their in-laws. The word 'Janj' (marriage procession from bridegroom side) used in connection with marriages, according to some scholars, is related to 'Jana' (relatives). The Atharva Veda says that the groom is related to a family different from that of the bride's. The groom and the bride are related to different 'Janas'. The word 'Jana' has evolved from the word 'Janj' and symbolizes marriages outside the Gotra. According to Indologist Heesterman, 'Janyamitra' means someone related by marriage. Winding up this discussion, we can say that the concepts of Sagotra marriage and marriage outside the Varna, relegated women to a secondary position and played a key role in strengthening the caste system (Jaiswal July 1979 – January 1980). The later Vedic sources tell us that the concept of male-dominated society played a key role in dividing the Vedic clans into different Varna and classes. During this process, some clans were given a higher status and others were relegated to a lower class. The word 'Rajan' evolved in the Rig Vedic era and finds mention in the Purushsukta. The Brahmans, which form part of the later Vedic literature, distinguish between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. Brahmanical norms and rituals, especially the Yagyopaveet Sanskara, contributed immensely to the building of caste-based society. Talking about how Yagyopaveet Sanskara created social distancing, Ram Sharan Sharma says that it deepened the caste system. By the end of the later Vedic period, the Varna system had come into being. By that time, the institution of caste had developed three distinct characteristics: 1) Graded hierarchy.

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2) Expertise in hereditary occupation and 3) Sagotra marriage. According to the Baudhayan Dharmasutra, Brahmin clan was shown evolving from within the different kinds of sub-clan families in a systematic way. In the Satapatha Brahmana it is mentioned that a Kshatriya is born of Kshatriya, a Vaishya is born of a Vaishya and a Shudra is born of a Shudra (Jaiswal 2000). In his treatise, Rishi Patanjali talks about Varna changing into caste.

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be said that the caste-based society emerged from the subdivision of the Varna system and inclusion of new clans and tribes in it. This analysis also proves that the institutional and ideological foundations of the Varna theory were used to promote the evolution of caste-based society. Some scholars also believe that the clashes between Aryah clans, their confrontation with the indigenous inhabitants and the attempts by the Aryans to subjugate the indigenous inhabitants also contributed to the development of caste-based society. The Varna system lost its flexibility towards the end of the Vedic era and got converted into a system of concrete classes. Laying down the norms of the caste system, Rishi Patanjali writes that metal utensils used by Shudras who were not outcasts (viz. Gandikas, Shakas, Yavanas) can be purified by baking them in fire but the utensils used by outcast Shudras (Chandals and Martapas), who carried the dead to the funeral grounds and washed their clothes cannot be purified (Jaiswal 2000). Later literature lays down detailed norms regarding ranking of Shudras.

Divine Theory

In the eyes of the conservative Brahmins, everyone other than them, everyone pushed to the margins is a Shudra. They believe that your caste identity determines your occupation and your social cast. The transformation of the Varna system into the caste system was achieved by invoking divine ordainments. The way the theory of divine sanction was used to justify the fragmentation of society into four Varnas and innumerable castes and stripping a majority of Hindus of their human rights smacks of political skullduggery. It was declared that a person's birth as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra was god's will. This was done to perpetuate the unjust social order. There was politics behind it. The objective was to enable the three upper Varnas to live off the toil of the majority Shudras. Another objective was to convince the Shudras that they are born to serve and that by their service, they would compensate for the sins committed by them in their previous births and thus attain salvation. A critical study of the Varna system would reveal linking the hierarchical social order with divine will served not only to screen its inherently unjust nature but also to present it as a system meant for achieving the common good. The supporters of the system of four Varnas argue that it gave rise to specialization of varied professional occupations, which eventually led to prosperity in the society. It is also argued that the caste system is a distorted form of the Varna system and if once it is purged of the element of hatred, it can be used as a constructive tool for social welfare. But that doesn't seem to be happening. Assuming that the Vedic age began around 1,500 BCE, the caste system is at least

3,750 years old and despite the passage of such a long time, there is nothing to show that this inhuman system of graded inequality created by caste is coming to an end.

The journey from Varna system to caste system was covered riding piggyback on religion. Religion is about norms, principles, customs, traditions, morality and the rules of behaviour and conduct. It is often presented as a set of rules and theories, which regulate the conduct of human beings as individuals and as members of society and community. The realm of religion is so vast that it covers all activities of humans and human society and its different sections. Religious norms are also used to decide what is right and what is wrong. The religious scriptures link religion with Dharma or your duties. Dharma is another name for perpetuating the Varna system and the caste-based society. One who follows the religion is expected not to transgress the boundaries set for him and which, in turn, are determined by his Varna. Violation of the restrictions imposed by the Varna and caste system is considered a violation of religion.

Who Benefits, Who Loses

The next question is who benefits and who suffers due to adherence to scriptural stipulations. Clearly, the Varna and caste system favours the three upper Varnas. Nothing except serving others and getting exploited comes in the share of the lowest Varna – the Shudras. The above question can be answered easily if one considers who the Shudras are, what is their proportion in our society and what is their condition. Shudras include all people who work with their hands. As for the three upper classes, they work as public administrators, advisers to the rulers, protectors of the state and businessmen and traders. The administrators and the advisers wield pen and the businesses use balances and scales. But they are not part of the productive class. It is Shudras who are the producers. Those among the Shudras who were assigned the work of cleaning human excreta, disposing of dead cattle and sanitation were known as Ati-shudras or untouchables. They have been listed as Scheduled Castes in the Indian Constitution. The Shudras and the Ati-Shudras constitute almost 85 per cent of the population. The three upper Varnas form the remaining 15 per cent. Questioning the lower status accorded to 85 per cent people vis-a-vis 15 per cent is considered pointing fingers at religion. All this, when closely studied, indicates the close relationship between religion, caste and politics. The scriptures do not link religion with morality but only proclaim what is right and what is wrong. And the rightness or wrongness of an act is decided on the basis of pre-determined norms. Adherence to these norms is considered good and proper and their violation is considered wrongful conduct. Morality is not about norms. It is about principles. Norms only tell us what is right and wrong – what should be done and how. The norms laid down by the Dharma Sutras and the Smritis expect Hindus to adhere to them. Norms and rules only make men obedient while principles develop creativity and purity in them. Norms and rules only stipulate your conduct. Principles are about accountability and freedom. Therefore, religion should relate to principles not to rules. Dr Ambedkar believes that a principle may be wrong but what is done in ac-

cordance with it may be fruitful. Similarly, a rule might be right but what is done in pursuance of it may be wrong. Rules demand obedience. Principles have to do with a person's conscience and they force a person to differentiate between right and wrong. The norms laid down in the scriptures do not help us to identify what is right or wrong. They simply ask us to adhere to the rules related to the Varna and caste system.

When a religion is assessed from the perspective of its norms, it has no connection with spiritual/moral values and is only about what should be done and what should not be done – rules and regulations. The above-mentioned rules and norms patronize Varna and caste-based systems and fix the social and economic role of various castes. For instance, a cobbler's son will be a cobbler and his specific occupation of making/mending shoes would determine his social status. Such a sightless policy of discrimination has not only divided people on the basis of their social status but also badly affected the feeling of fraternity, which is the soul of any society. Any talk of philanthropy in a caste-based society remains confined to a particular caste. For instance, different communities construct buildings etc. for the convenience of the members of their community only. This can be seen in Dharmashalas and buildings constructed in the name of different castes. This gives birth to a kind of politics, which does not bind the society but breaks and disintegrates it. Thus, religion and politics are two sides of the same coin. A caste-based society has been able to sustain itself with the support of the rules prescribed by scriptures. These rules are no longer just rules. They have taken the place of religion. These rules are used to stop the untouchable community from entering places of worship and paying obeisance to the gods. It is a contradiction in itself that while the Shudras and the Ati Shudras are considered a part of Hindu society, yet they are not allowed to participate in the religious affairs of their own community. If the untouchables are getting drawn to Islam, Christianity and Sikhism, it is because they are oppressed. Untouchable Hindus embracing other religions only deepens casteist politics. Caste tensions turn into communal tensions. Love Jihad etc. are the outcome of this only.

Many religious, social and political movements arose from time to time in opposition to the social evils traceable to the Varna and Caste system. Many of such movements were initiated by the Ati Shudra castes. Among all these, the contribution of the Bhakti movement has been very important. The Bhakti movement began from the 7th century in the South and became very powerful in north India in the 15th century. The teachings of Kabir and Ravidas seek to free man from the tangles of caste and teach them real spiritual religion. The Bhakti movement's origins were in the resistance to the religion based on scriptures and the politics born out of it. The Sikh philosophy enunciated by the Gurus was a concrete step in the direction of the building of a society free from caste boundaries and based on egalitarian principles universal brotherhood. The philosophy of the Gurus is not merely theoretical. It establishes a new society, the foundation of which was laid by Baba Nanak at Kartarpur. Baba Nanak's Bani: "Neecha andar neech jati neechi hu ati neech // Nank tin kai sangi sathi vandiyan sio kiya

rees // Jithe neech samalian tithei nadri teri baksees' exposes the real face of the caste based society. In his Bani, Nanak says that the way to god does not lie through rituals and worship. God's blessings can be obtained by embracing the large section of society, which was oppressed for centuries. The maturity of his path is evident in the line 'jithe neech samalian tithei nadri teri baksis. Baba Nanak's Bani and his philosophy based on equality was the foundation on which a society was built during the time of Guru Govind Singh. A society in which there is no place for caste and in which men and women are equal. This path does not allow the use of religion as the basis for politics. The emergence of Deras, within the Sikh society, based on caste, is an indication of the presence of politics within the Panth. It is politics, which precludes the manifestation of real nature of a religion. If a religion has something, which promotes politics, then both the religion and the politics turn out to be ruinous. So, it is very difficult to arrive at a fair conclusion regarding the mutual relations between Varna, religion, caste and politics. This article is a small attempt in that direction. A deeper and more extensive study is needed to explore it fully.

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My pleasure to be at the Punjab Raj Bhawan at Chandigarh

During the course of my functional duties in the IFS and Ministry of External Affairs, I have had several opportunities to be at the first house of India – Rashtrapati Bhawan at New Delhi since 1974 till my retirement in 2010 and even thereafter with regard to some of my social and public activities. But I did not have an opportunity to see and visit Punjab Raj Bhawan at Chandigarh till November 17, 2021. The occasion was a solemn function to release the Punjabi edition of the book “Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar: Jiwan Te Chintan” – a collection of articles written by some prominent personalities and compiled by Hitesh Shanker for the RSS mouthpiece the Panchjanya and translated by Dr. Lakhvir Lezia and printed by Apna Sahatiya of Jaland-

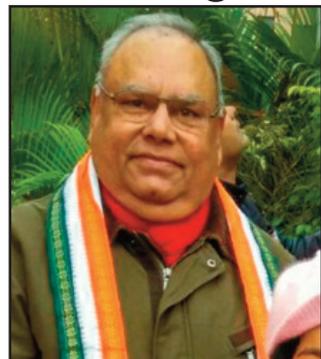
hara. On approach and request by Scheduled Caste Ekta and Empowerment Forum (SCEEF) of which I happen to be the Chief Patron, Hon’ble Governor of Punjab Shri Banwarilal Purohit hosted the function and released the book in the presence of prominent members and office bearers and also the well wishers of the Forum namely; Dr. Varinder Garg, OSD to Hon’ble Minister of Health of India, Rajesh Bagha, a senior leader of the BJP, Former Chief Parliamentary Secretary of Punjab, Avinash Chander among others.

Prominent social and political activist Paramjit Kainth of National Scheduled Caste Alliance briefly explained the purpose and work of SCEEF and welcomed the participants. Prof. S.K. Deweshwer who supervised the translation work spoke and appreciated the initiative of Dr. Varinder Garg to get the book translated and released under the aegis of SCEEF and hoped that it would the wider audience in Punjab and beyond. Yet another eminent intellectual who also shared the dias, Padam Shri Dr. Digambar Behra, a distinguished pro-

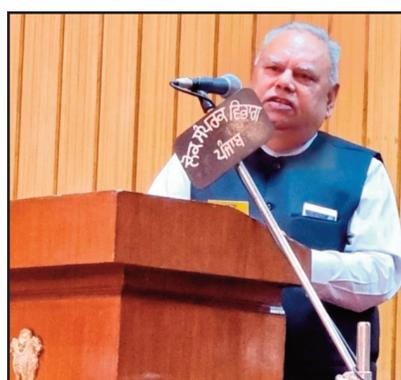
fessional in respiratory ailments also spoke and mentioned about the fact that Dr. Ambedkar was not only a constitutional expert or a jurist of caliber but also an economist and a social reformer of his own standing. He added that it will be wrong to consider him a dalit leader alone. Hon’ble Governor Banwarilal Purohit, in his thoughtful remarks, was very candid in his assertions and termed Babasaheb Ambedkar as the ‘tallest man of the 20th century’ and referred the event of his embracing Buddhism in October, 1956 at Diksha Bhoomi in Nagpur as a spiritual and cultural ‘Revolution’. He also recalled Dr. Ambedkar’s warnings given in his last speech in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949 and said that we were to ward off the dangers of

the national interests. I and I think the discerning audience too was much impressed by the sagacity and vision of the Hon’ble Governor Banwarilal Purohit. As the Chief Patron of SCEEF, the honour of giving the Vote of Thanks fell on me. While thanking the Hon’ble Governor for hosting the function at the Raj Bhawan and encouraging SCEEF and making a thought provoking speech at the occasion and also the dedicated participants and stake holders, I said that India was India, in the face of challenging times, only because of the Constitution of India so laboriously framed by our forefathers under the stewardship Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar. It was a matter of great satisfaction that we could make good strides in the development and progress of

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



losing our independence once again, as feared by the visionary leader, Babasaheb Ambedkar, if we gave preference to our political creed over

ਬਾਬਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਡਾ. ਅੰਬੇਦਕਰ

ਜੀਵਨ ਤੇ ਚਿੰਤਨ

ਸੰਪਾਦਕ: ਪਾਂਚਜਨਯ
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ਲਖਵੀਰ ਲੋਚੀਆ

India under the constitutional arrangements. I further said that the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar was so potent that it had the potential of taking India to further heights in the years to come and added that, to my mind, there were three things which we must do. One, there was a greater need to ‘Recognize’ Ambedkar. It was a pity that the much needed recognition of the icon came late and that too half-heatedly. Second, it was time to ‘Reconcile’ the thinking of the mainstream of the society with that of the lofty vision of one of the greatest sons of India. There was an immediate and greater need to do that to bring about ‘Samrasta’ in the country and the society at large. Third, it would be good to ‘Appropriate’ the legacy of Babasaheb by recognizing and reconciling and not by ‘Twisting’ for short term gains. It was all the more needed to meet the challenges of the

(Pay attention to what is happening and what is going to happen. What good there is in repeating the tales of the old glories?)

I concluded my brief remarks with Nazam of Allama Iqbal and wished to create an ideal society with the mantra of ‘Fraternity’:
Aa ghairiyat ke parde ik baar phir uThā deñ
Bichh᳚oñ ko phir milā deñ naqsh-e-du᳚ miTā deñ
Suunī padī huī hai muddat se dil kī bastī
Aa ik nayā shivālā is des meñ banā deñ

I also presented a copy of my book ‘The Bits and Pieces – Reminiscences and Reflections of a Novice’ to the Hon’ble Governor. A senior functionary of SCEEF, Advocate Mohit Bhardwaj conducted the proceedings of the function ably as ‘Master of Ceremonies’. The function was concluded with the generous hospitality of the Raj Bhawan with hot snacks – Gulab Jamuns, Cocktail Smosas, Veg Cutlets served by the appropriately uniformed service staff of the ‘first house of the State of Punjab, the Raj Bhawan.

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Kanshi Ram Tells Dalits

SPECIAL SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. KANSHI RAM JI

AT 1ST WORLD DALIT CONFERENCE IN MALAYSIA ON 10TH & 11TH OCTOBER, 1998



Dalits should become rulers instead of being ruled. We must not be always at the receiving end, instead become the givers, Dalit Leader Mr. Kanshi Ram told the world Dalits. It's long we have been ruled. It is long we have been taking. Now it is time we change the destiny to rule and give, he said. Mr. Kanshi Ram who is the Founder President of Bahujan Samaj Party delivered a key-note address at the opening of the 1st World Dalit Convention 'A new vision towards a casteless society' at the Kuala Lumpur Mines Resort City.

The two day convention held on 10th and 11th October 1998 was well attended by more than 700 delegates throughout the world including famous politicians noted leaders from Dalit movement, champions of down-trodden, social reformers, renowned economists, famous educationists and great scholars.

The Malaysian Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Sabbaruddin Chikofficially opened the conference which saw the opening very colorful with Malaysian cultural and traditional dances performed by Indians, Malays and Chinese. Mr. Kanshi Ram garlanded the Portrait of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar while Dalit Sena President Ram Vilas Paswan garlanded the portrait of the great Periyar.

Mr. Kanshi Ram in his speech

continued to trace the history of caste and Brahminical social order. He asserted by virtue of his vast experience that elimination of caste was impossible at this stage. He also elaborated the very purpose of creating caste. In context of caste oppression and Justice Mr. Kanshi Ram referred the role of Dr. Ambedkar. He commended the merit of 'Communal Award' which he achieved after a long struggle.

Dr. Ambedkar could not sustain the going due to the constant pressure of the mighty upper caste Hindus, Mr. Kanshi Ram told the delegates who packed the hall. 'Babasaheb Ambedkar was able to get reservation for the oppressed in legislative houses, job opportunities in government departments and also places in higher educational institutions.

I wish to stress upon that reservation is not the solution to our problem. We must become rulers instead of being ruled; givers instead of being takers, Mr. Kanshi Ram told the crowd to a thunderous applause. It is my duty to prepare my people not to get reservation but to grant reservation. Who can gain reservation? Only rulers can grant reservation. Hence, I will prepare my people to become rulers. If we do not become rulers, our problems will remain forever, Kanshi Ram said.

In order to become rulers we must learn how to handle caste. Dr. Ambedkar, Nehru, Gandhi and Indira Gandhi were experts in handling caste. Nehru handled caste so well that he made Dr. Ambedkar helpless and retain the Brahminical Social Order. Indira Gandhi also handled caste well to benefit the Brahminical Social Order. Dr. Ambedkar prepared the SC/ST to handle Caste. That is how we could get many benefits from the British, he added.

Mr. Kanshi Ram expressed concern for 10 crores slum dweller, which are deprived of proper drinking water and electric supply. People migrating from villages to cities are also being denied of many facilities and end up in polluting the environment. But those refugees who came from Pakistan after independence were duly taken care of by the then government and a special budget was allocated to meet their basic necessities, he pointed out to the delegates.

According to Mr. Kanshi Ram, slum dwellers presently living in urban areas are the Dalit refugees who have migrated from the villages because of acrimony's & atrocities committed by upper caste Hindus.

They have not been able to influence the Planning Commission and the Government of India to allocate separate budget to provide them bread, clothes and shelter.

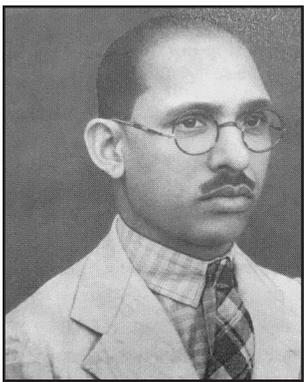
A decent life is a matter of fundamental right of every citizen in accordance with the constitutional mandate, Mr. Kanshi Ram asserted.

He advocated separate settlement for Dalit people as once formulated by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He was very critical of the evil impact of caste-system in India.

Wherever the Indians went they never failed to carry with them this spreading disease he told the laughing and cheering crowd. The Indians are prepared to leave anything behind.

They leave behind their little property, small land and their huts. But they will never leave behind their caste. They carry with them wherever they go, he said. While urging the Dalits to unite he also called upon the Dalit intellectuals to shed away the approach of existing analysis only.

They should instead come with forward-looking approach in education, economic and social problems. They must also come up with some sort of effective solution programme, Mr. Kanshi Ram added. Mr. Kanshi Ram impressed upon the delegates that Dalit problem can only be solved through political power to rule the country. 'We must become the rulers instead of being ruled,' he told the cheering and applauding delegates.



Ishwar Das Pawar
District and Sessions Judge (Retd.)

My Struggle in Life

My Unforgettable Friends

Passing references have already been made elsewhere to some of the friends with whom I came into contact. Mention of a few more names needs

to be made. A few days after I had joined the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, Lahore, in June 1927, a young man, who was not known to me, met me and gave a message that Sant Ram Ji wanted to see me. He also handed over to me a small informal piece of paper on which his address was written. I did not know who Shri Sant Ram was. In deference to the message, I went to see him at his residence. He received me very warmly and affectionately. I found him extremely straight forward, unassuming, and loveable. I was fascinated by the way he talked. I felt perfectly at home with him. The purpose of the invitation was to discuss a matrimonial proposal. The item, however, did not assume much importance.

Thereafter, I became a regular visitor at his house. His wife, Sundra Bai, was a Maharashtrian Prabhu Brahman. She was equally affectionate and loving. I used to address her as Mata Ji. Shri Sant Ram is a noted Hindi writer, and Mata Ji was a great help to him in his work. I thought Sant Ram Ji was a Brahman as people addressed him as Pandit Ji. Sometime later, however, I learnt that he belonged to Kumhar (potter) caste. This fact brought me mentally much closer to him. He was an ardent Arya Samaji (person belonging to Arya Samaj "noble society," a Hindu reform movement founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875) but belonged to the dissident group of those who did not subscribe to some of the important aspects of Hinduism and the rigidity and bigotry of Hindus, particularly in the matter of caste system, which is another name of Varnavyavastha (caste system).

This dissident group included the well-known Hindi and Sanskrit scholar, the late Acharya Vishwambandhu of the Visheshwaranand Vedic Research Institute, who was also an avowed opponent of caste system whether based on birth or on worth-signifying gunah (sin), karma (deed), and swabhava (one's nature or own-being) — the misleading and fallacious exposition.

In the early twenties, Shri Sant Ram had founded an organization at Lahore named Jat-Pat Torak Mandal for the purpose of carrying on a relentless campaign against the pernicious caste system. Two monthlies, The Kranti (name of monthly journal) in Urdu and The Yugantar (name of a monthly journal) in Hindi, were also started by him for the same purpose. The aims and objects of the organization and the two monthlies did not fit in the thinking and beliefs of the general body of the Arya Samaj. The matters came to ahead when the dissident group asserted that the Vedas (the oldest scriptures of Hinduism) contained historical facts also. There was a serious clash of ideas. For these reasons, the group was, for all intents and purposes, ostracized by the Arya Samaj. The differences and the tension grew all the more when the Jat-Pat Torak Mandal decided to invite Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to preside over its annual conference. There was bitter opposition and criticism of the Mandal, especially in view of some references in the draft presidential address which were considered highly objectionable by the Arya Samaj. Ultimately, the conference had to be abandoned. But Dr. Ambedkar did not let his address go waste; he got it printed in a booklet titled Annihilation of Caste, which is regarded as a masterpiece on the subject. Shri Sant Ram initiated me into the philosophy and the necessity of the anti-caste movement launched by him with the active help of his devoted colleagues, prominent among them being Bhumanand, Mahanand, Har Bhagwan, and

the tireless and flamboyant Indar Singh as well as Tek Chand and Mast Ram; and he explained to me his views about the baneful effects of this social system. By and by, I started getting enlightened on the subject. In the Arya Samaj educational institutions, I had learnt to appreciate and applaud the caste system invented or codified by Manu and to learn by rote the rights and duties of each Varna-Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. We were taught that our true dharma was to uphold the dignity and sanctity of this social order. Manu was always referred to reverentially as Manu Ji Maharaj. The exposition propounded by Shri Sant Ram exploded the myth of sanctity surrounding this system whether attempted to be justified on birth or on worth. His clinching point was that the caste system was impracticable in any form as it was inhuman, being based on the idea of high and low, graded untouchability, and chiefly aimed at oppression and exploitation of the weakest section of society in order to safeguard and perpetuate the vested interests of the so-called high castes. The exposition of the subject, spread over a considerable period of time, completely changed and transformed my thinking on the subject. I was a changed man, and I understood the reality, the true position. Here was the enemy of the untouchables in disguise and an inherently destructive foe of the Hindu society itself. I owe so much to this great lifelong social reformer for putting me on the right path.

Shri Sant Ram had written a number of books on Hindu social system, one of them is Hamara Samaj, a masterpiece on the subject, besides a host of books on general subjects. He was honored by the government and other levels on several occasions for his meritorious services and contribution to the cause of the Hindus. He is now in his midnineties, living in his village Purani Bassi, only about two miles from Hoshiarpur. He is looked after by his brother Nathu Ram and his family. Gargi, his only child, is married and in Delhi, and she lives there with her family. She is very much attached to her father and grasps at every available opportunity to visit him in the village and spend as much time with him as she possibly can. I have always regarded Sant Ram Ji as my mentor on social matters. (Mata Ji is no longer among us). A great man indeed who has dedicated his whole life to fighting against the social injustices inbuilt in the Hindu social system. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar apart, nobody else has fought against caste system so vehemently and relentlessly as Shri Sant Ram has done. He died on May 31, 1988 at the age of one hundred years and three months.

Chaudhri Sunder Singh, with whom I came into contact in 1928, always thought of the untouchables. He would not miss any opportunity to attend meetings and conferences relating to the affairs of our people. He used to say that his real place was among his people and not in a government office. Whenever he spoke about the depressed people, his whole being would shake with deep feelings. While referring to the soul-depressing conditions of these people, how with emotion, he would kneel down, stand up, and rock his body to and fro with his arms outstretched as if under a spell was a scene better to be seen and appreciated. To a distant onlooker, he would appear to be dancing.

After serving in the High Court office for about twelve years, he gave up service in 1946 on the eve of the provincial assembly elections to be held that year against my advice and the stiff opposition from his wife, and he jumped into the political arena. He has proved that we were wrong, and he was right. He is honest, bold, and fearless to a fault, rare qualities in a politician. He has been continuing as a member of the state legislature, and now of parliament, for the last thirty-seven years without any break, which is a record and some-

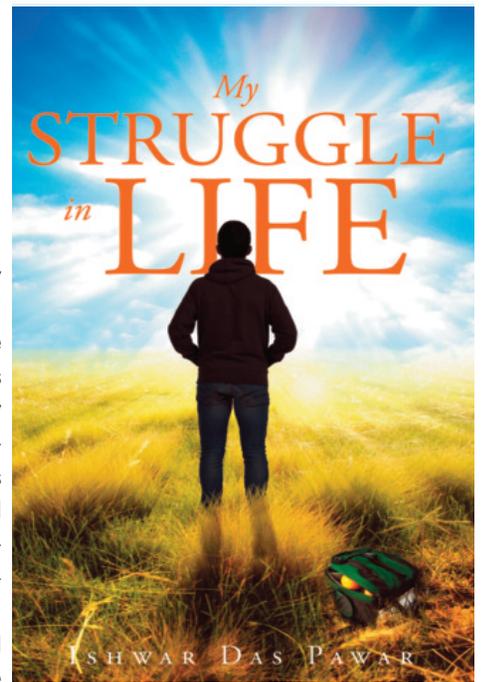
thing very creditable. This is the index of his popularity with the people. He has rendered unique service to the oppressed and the exploited people. He

has weathered, with courage and fortitude, adverse circumstances in his political life particularly in the times when Partap Singh Kairon was the chief minister. He had to pay heavily for his candid and independent views. He has held high offices and was a cabinet minister for a number of years. He does not care for positions. He always maintains that offices and positions are not achieved by begging, and that when a person earns and deserves them, they come on their own. "First deserve and then desire" is his oft-quoted proverb. His faith in honesty and dedication to work is unshakable. He draws much inspiration from the works of Swami Vivekananda and is fond of lengthy quotations from his works. He is a staunch admirer of Gandhiji and considers his life as ideal and a model to emulate. Above everything else, service of the poor and the downtrodden remains his unmatched passion.

Another name that must find a mention here is that of Devindar Nath Syal. When I joined the High Court office in 1932, he was the first person to come into contact with me and on the very first day of my service. There must be something instinctive. He got so much associated with me that people mistook him to be an untouchable. They would not believe that he was a so-called high-caste Hindu. Like myself, he too came into contact with Sant Ram Ji. He was senior to me in service by over one year. Our friendship bonds were cemented. I will just briefly refer to what is an unforgettable event. It was in 1934 that the date of marriage for Devindar Nath had been fixed. The marriage party was to go to Gurdaspur from his native town Jalandhar. A list of persons to be included in the marriage party was to be prepared. Devindar Nath gave two names: one of Vimal Chandra and the other of mine. But his parents and relatives were opposed to the inclusion of our names on the ground that it might create trouble if others came to know that we were untouchables. Devindar Nath quietly slipped away from his house and came back to Lahore, leaving behind a message that instead of him, his next brother be married as he would not proceed with his marriage without us. It created a piquant situation for his parents. His father, accompanied by his (Syal's) brother-in-law Mehta Manohar Lal, followed him and reached Lahore in the evening. Ultimately, they gave in and agreed to invite us to join the marriage party. Accordingly, both of us were duly invited. Before going back to Jalandhar, he took a firm promise from us that we would be joining the marriage party.

Vimal Chandra and I were to go directly from Lahore to Gurdaspur. The marriage party had reached Gurdaspur a little ahead of us. Devindar Nath was waiting for us, and his anxiety was allayed only when he saw us reach the place. What a romantic and unforgettable gesture of love and affection! Hindu society is not without persons who can easily be described as gems, rare though they are. Devindar Nath is one who thinks more keenly, clearly, and deeply about the problems of the Harijans (people from low caste) than any Harijan does. He had completely identified himself with the

(Contd. on next page)



Kirandeep Kaur Sahota, the first IAS OFFICER of the Rangreta family



Kirandeep Kaur Sahota, the first IAS OFFICER of the Rangreta family. We are proud of our sister who set an example for our students by achieving such a high position. Listen to this interview by clicking on this link and share it with our students as much as possible.
Dr. Avtar Singh 8360342500
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My Struggle in Life

(Continue from page 6)

cause of our people. A fine example of a fine person! He is no longer with us. Vimal Chandra had been associated with the welfare work of the weaker sections of society as deputy commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes on all-India basis for over two decades and had rendered great service in their cause. He extended help to these people not only in his official capacity but also at his personal and family's inconvenience. In the case of a number of poor young persons, he and his good wife, Shanti Devi, who has since winged her way to heaven, would accommodate them at their residence, provide them with food and sometimes also clothes, arrange for their training at their own expense preparatory to employment, and get employment for them by contacting different departments and other sources. Not only hundreds but thousands of helpless and resourceless young boys and girls were thus enabled to get into service and stand on their feet. Vimal Chandra became very popular among our people. He was a regular visitor to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and had imbibed his spirit. Nobody else can claim to be any-

where near him in the matter of serving the weaker sections of society. He retired as director of the parliamentary forum for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Even now, he is a member of several recruiting bodies of the central government and, in that capacity, is looking after the interests of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In connection with the recruitment work, he had to visit different parts of the country and occasionally even goes abroad. He does all this ungrudgingly because he considers the job as a labor of love. It also suits his genius and mental makeup to help the people.

These sketchy accounts of some of the unforgettable friends will not be complete without mentioning an equally important name of Sohan Lal and Shastri Vidyavachaspati, BA. He had been in the close company of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar for about twenty-five years. He is one of his staunch admirers and followers. He can easily be said to be a man of great knowledge and learning. He has written a number of books, chiefly on social matters concerning the scheduled castes. His book in Hindi titled Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar ke Sampark men

pachchis varsh (Twenty five years with Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar) is his notable contribution. Another book, Manu Smriti ki Shav Pariksha (Autopsy of Manu Smriti), written by him is a monumental analysis of the hateful teachings of the Smriti. It has very ably brought to the fore the true nature and evil purposes of the Manu laws which govern the Hindu society even today. The reading of this book is amply rewarding. He wields a facile and powerful pen.

He is an indefatigable crusader against social injustice and exploitation of the downtrodden people. He strongly holds the view that the salvation of the oppressed and exploited people lies in their embracing Buddhism, as there can be no place of equality, honor, and dignity for them in the Hindu society dominated by the caste system and other Manu laws. He is an eloquent and impressive speaker, and it is a treat to hear his scintillating erudition and wisdom through his absorbing conversations. He is deeply dedicated to the cause of the ignored and deprived people and serves them in various ways.



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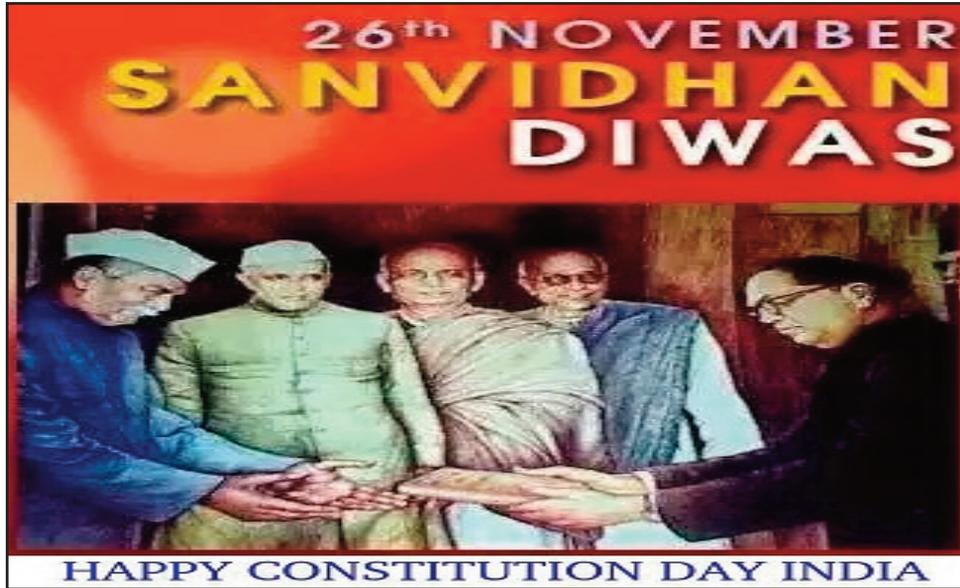
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Indian society needs to examine

Why caste discrimination still takes place: Desmond Tutu

South African Nobel Peace Prize laureate and anti-apartheid campaigner Archbishop Desmond Tutu told The Hindu that he had not heard of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He was pleasantly surprised when informed that Dr. Ambedkar chaired the drafting committee of the Constitution of India.

Asked why African leaders fighting apartheid had not paid enough attention to him unlike Mahatma Gandhi, Archbishop Tutu said: "We were involved in our struggle against the racial injustices in South Africa, and you were looking for allies who would be able to help change your own set up. So obviously there was need to link up with those who had influence and power in their



country." He hinted that it would be natural for an alliance to develop between Africans who struggled against injustice under apartheid regime and Dalits who are struggling against caste prejudices. "More of us should be concerned about it [caste discrimination] and perhaps be interrogating the other part of Indian society as to why they are allowing this to continue if it is an egalitarian society. I mean your Constitution says so." The Archbishop stressed that Indian society should be challenged about the situation of Dalits because it affects one's humanity.

With thanks "The Hindu" Posted on www.ambedkartimes.com November 25, 2014

The Bolina Doaba Welfare Society and Gram Panchayat Bolina Doaba

Respected Philanthropists, We always pray for your good health and wellbeing, you are the support pillar for us with your help and guidance The Bolina Doaba Welfare Society and Gram Panchayat Bolina Doaba is able to set the 'Bolina Skill Centre' where two certified technical courses of 6 month duration each under the guidance of Mehr Chand Polytechnic College have been started. 23 Students are doing Cutting and Tailoring Course for them one teacher has been appointed with monthly salary of 8000 per month. Timings are 10-1PM daily from Monday

to Saturday. 20 sewing machines and 1 Zig Zag embroidery machine have been installed with your support. One computer and one projector is there to make the teaching more interesting.

In computer section 10 computers are there along with one projector. Computer teacher has been appointed with monthly salary of 8000 per month. Timings are 12 to 4 PM from Monday to Saturday with two batches running having 15 students each till now. English classes are being held daily from 4PM to 6PM by volunteers. Short hand type writing classes

held daily, Monday to Friday from 6PM to 7:30 PM by our volunteer Mr Krishan Kumar Judgement writer District session court Jalandhar. Every Sunday from 9 AM to 12 again English and Math classes are being held by our volunteers ER. Munish Bagha and Dr Rakesh Kumar.

We all are thankful from the core of our hearts for supporting and guiding this project. We hope to add more courses in future with your support and blessings.

We are thankful to Mr. Kewal Krishan Bolina Active Member, Indus

Valley American Chamber of Commerce, USA; Mr Paramjit Singh Bhutta C/O Sh Gurdass Ram Yadghari Charitable Trust; Mr Tej Pal Virk, Chairman; Mr Raj Badhan President, Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Rio Linda (Sacramento), USA; Mr Sukhraj Singh Chopra; Mr Vinod Kumar Chumber Chairman, Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Bay Area, Union City USA; Dr Gurbax Bagha; Mr Gurmail Ujager; Mr Jai Pal Bagha S/O Sh Bhag Mal USA; Mr Naresh Singh S/O Dr Sat Pal USA.

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