



Ambedkar Times *Weekly*

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WELCOME STEP TOWARDS THE ERADICATION OF CASTE IN CALIFORNIA STATE OF THE USA



Picture credit: Prem K. Chumber (Ambedkar Times)

“Ambedkar Times” and “Desh Doaba” Weeklies thank the members of the California State’s Senate Judiciary Committee for voting in favor of SB 403 and sending the legislation on to the next committee for consideration. If the bill is passed, it will make California the first state in the USA to declare caste

bias illegal by adding it as a protected category in the state’s anti-discrimination laws. It is a matter of pride for the lower castes who had to suffer for their so-called low birth. This bill promises eradication of caste prejudices and restoration of their genuine human rights of dignity, equal treatment in public

sphere and no discrimination of any sort based on the hoary social stratified system of graded caste inequality. This bill is not divisive at all as has been projected by those of oppose it.

Prem K. Chumber

Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL (SB 403)

SUPPORTED BY CALIFORNIA JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

California Judiciary Committee, in its meeting held in the Building 1021, O Street, Sacramento (CA) on April 25, 2023, favored the above mentioned bill, proposed by Aisha Wahab, State senator from Hayward, Fremont Area of California. This definitely clears a big hurdle in the way of passing this Bill. This bill will now go the Senate Appropriation Committee before it is submitted to the Senate for approval and signatures of the Governor.

This historic bill, if passed by the Senate, will be a landmark decision and will explicitly add caste to the list of protected categories already on record in the state statutes and those who are discriminated on the basis of caste will be able to seek legal remedy for violation of their rights.

Hundreds of supporters and opponents of the proposed bill gath-

ered outside the Capitol Building in Sacramento on April 25, 2023, dis-

and guidance of the Capitol police.

This historic gathering in-



Picture credit: Prem K. Chumber (Ambedkar Times)

playing their signs and raising slogans in favor and opposition of the bill.

The demonstrations went through very peacefully and successfully without any un-toward incident under the strict supervision, control

cluded community members from all parts of California including the Bay Area, Bakersfield, Sacramento and Yuba City.

Two Busloads of supporters (Numbering about 50) came from Shri

Guru Ravidass Temple, Pittsburg , California including some prominent community members named Mr. Shashi Paul, Ramesh Suman, Gyan Suman, Kulwant Kaur Banga , O. P. Balley Dharampal Chonkria, Vinod Jakhu, Niranjn Singh, Dashvinder Paul, Jagtar Bhatia and Salinder Bhatia. Dr. Nirmal Singh from Bakersfield played a vital role in co-ordinating this momentous get-together. Mr. Prem Chumber, Editor-in-Chief, “Ambedkar Times” and “Desh Doaba” Weeklies provided a very vital role in professional and video coverage of the entire event.

More detailed information about this historic bill will be shared with all as it moves further in the senate proceedings.

Thanking you all.

O. P. Balley

Founder member

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha Pittsburg, CA

CALIFORNIA SENATE PANEL PASSES BILL TO END CASTE DISCRIMINATION

'First big legislative hurdle cleared'

New Delhi, April 26- The California Senate Judiciary Committee has unanimously voted to move an anti-caste discrimination bill forward to the Senate. This is for the first time that a US State legislature would consider legislation on caste.

The move has set off a firestorm in the politically active sections of the Indian-origin community in the US. "Today, I proudly stand in solidarity with my caste-oppressed community members, caste equity movement organisers, and allies to say that caste-oppressed Californians are now one step closer to attaining the protections they deserve and are entitled to," said Thenmozhi Soundararajan of Equity Labs, which was the force behind the anti-caste discrimination campaign in the US.

She said the bill was a result of 15 years struggle of the caste-oppressed people.

But there is strong opposition from Indian-American business and temple organisations. "This bill is misguided and will promote prejudice against all In-

dian-American businesspersons including shop owners who form the backbone of

out of market," he added. Hindu Mandir Executives Conference, the Hindu Busi-

discrimination laws.

Tejal Shah, convenor of the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), said the organisations and individuals behind the bill have made their disdain for Hindu customs and traditions very clear.

"Common Hindu greeting 'Namaskar' ('I bow to the divinity within you'), traditional Hindu practices such as classical dance, music, and sacred festivals such as Diwali and Holi have been vilified. Passage of SB 403 will legitimise this assault on the freedom of religions and make Hindu temples more vulnerable to physical attacks," Shah said.

Equality Labs had also led the campaign that led to Seattle becoming the first American city to outlaw caste discrimination in February. The resolution was moved by

Kshama Sawant and approved by the Seattle City Council by six to one. In California, State Senator Aisha Wahab, the first Muslim and Afghan American elected to the state legislature, introduced the bill last month. *Courtesy- The Tribune*



Picture credit: Prem K. Chumber (Ambedkar Times)



'One step closer to attaining rights'
 Today, I proudly stand with my allies to say that caste-oppressed Californians are now one step closer to attaining the rights they deserve.
Thenmozhi Soundararajan, rights activist
 Picture (Ambedkar Times)

California's economy in these challenging economic times," said Vipul Patel who, Asian American Shop Owners' Association head. "We fear that this bill, if passed, will encourage frivolous lawsuits against small businesses, causing many of them to go

ness Network and the Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective also criticised the bill.

If passed, the bill could make caste bias in California illegal by adding it as a protected category in the state's anti-



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D. C. Ahir

The Ad Dharm Movement and Dr. Ambedkar

When in 1915 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was giving final touches to his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University in New York, a Punjabi

nationalists led by Lala Hardayal. By his sheer devotion and sincerity to the cause of India's freedom, he came to be regarded as the most dependable and reliable member of the organization. In 1915, Mangu Ram volunteered to be one of the five Ghadarites accompanying a shipload of guns and propaganda material headed for India. This ship was unfortunately intercepted by the British as Batavia, and was sealed. It remained sealed for nearly a year, with the five Ghadarites as prisoners inside. In the meanwhile, they were prosecuted in absentia, and sentenced to death for taking out the weapons illegally on the ship. On hearing the capital punishment, some patriot Indians in Germany decided to help the imprisoned Ghadarites. Somehow, they managed to smuggle the prisoners out from the sealed ship, and sent them in different directions. Mangu Ram was put in a ship going to Manila. By mistake,

for fear of being intercepted. Taking him, therefore, as dead, his wife married Mangu Ram's elder brother, who was a widower. The validity of the death warrant issued by the British Government lapsed in 1924. Then Mangu Ram thought of returning to India. Accordingly, he came back to Punjab in 1925. Soon thereafter, Mangoo Ram became involved in another kind of freedom struggle, the liberation of the untouchables, the people among whom he was born, and the people who were meekly suffering the atrocities of the Hindus. Babu Mangu Ram's association with the Ghadar Party had broadened his outlook, and sharpened his skills as an organizer. Soon he found a band of like-minded young men involved in the social work, and began organizing them in order to liberate the downtrodden from the clutches of the Hindu social slavery.

Encouraged by the response to his

Dharm Mandal were established in Jalandhar city from where the movement was organized in a systematic manner, and the devoted missionaries spread the message far and wide in the Punjab, and even beyond. Since the Mandal had accepted Sahib Shri Guru Ravidass Ji as its spiritual leader, the movement became primarily popular amongst the Chamars, and they readily adopted the nomenclature of Ad Dharmi.

At the time, Babu Mangu Ram was organizing the untouchables of the Punjab under the banner of Ad Dharm; Dr. Ambedkar was fighting a similar battle in another part of the country. Though they were thousands of miles apart, yet their ideas and methods of struggle were almost identical. Both believed that the present day Scheduled Castes are not Hindus, and that their salvation lies only in being independent of the Hindu religion. Both believed in self-help and advocated peaceful means to achieve their goal. Both laid the greatest emphasis on 'education'. Babasaheb considered "education" the key to all progress, and Mangu Ram says that only "education can lead us to Sachkhand (the realm of truth)." Again, Babasaheb exhorted the people to follow the Three Commandments of 'Education, Agitation and Organization' to gain power. According to Mangu Ram, the poor have three kinds of power: "Qaumiat (collective solidarity), Mazhab (spirituality) and Majlis (organization)".

Within a year of its founding, the Ad Dharm movement created quite a stir in the Punjab by constant rallies and conferences, if forced the Government of the day to take notice of the problems of the untouchables. One of the reasons of the poverty and exploitation of the untouchables was the pernicious system of beggar, the system under which they were forced to live at the beck and call of others and were obliged to do a great deal of work without any remuneration whatsoever. The Ad Dharm Mandal agitated against the system of beggar, and demanded its abolition. The Mandal also agitated for repealing the Punjab Land Alienation Act which prohibited the untouchables from buying even a small piece of land. The Ad Dharm movement reached its peak at the time of 1931 Census. As a result of their sustained propaganda, more than half a million untouchables declared themselves as Ad Dharmis. This showed the organizational skill of its leaders. "The massive support", as says Mark Jueregensmeyer, "created political capital, and Mangu Ram used that capital in political ways. Ad Dharmi candidates stood for public offices and an alliance was created with the Unionist Party. In both instances, scheduled caste leaders supported by the Ad Dharm organization achieved public positions".

Courtesy: Dr. Ambedkar and Punjab by D. C. Ahir

youth, who had gone to America a few years earlier, was involved in a dangerous mission of smuggling guns from California to the Punjab for inciting mutiny in India. This Punjabi youth later became famous as Babu Mangu Ram, the founder of the Ad Dharm Movement. Mangu Ram was born in a small village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur, Punjab on 14 January, 1886 in an untouchable family; his father was a leather merchant. As by then the doors of education had been opened to all by the British rulers, Mangu Ram was sent to the school in the nearby village, Mahilpur, but the treatment meted out to him by the Hindu teacher was far from human. Like Bhim Rao in Satara, Mangu Ram too was made to sit outside the classroom. Not only that, even the teacher would not teach him directly; he was invariably given lesson through a Muslim student. Somehow, Mangu Ram passed his middle examination and joined high school at Bajwara, a nearby town. Here too. He was subjected to the same humiliation, and was made to sit outside the classroom. One day, it rained so heavily that in spite of taking shelter under a tree, Mangu Ram was completely drenched. And when the snow-balls, accompanied by high velocity winds, fell like missiles on him, he was unable to bear it any longer. So, he ran to take shelter inside the classroom. As soon as he had entered the room, the teacher saw him, and instead of showing any sympathy, he started beating him with a stick for having come inside. Weeping and crying, Mangoo Ram went out, and somehow reached his home.

Unmindful of the insult and beating, Mangu Ram again went to the school next day. As soon as he reached there, he was surprised to see the teacher in the process of purifying the classroom by sprinkling water on the wooden table, chair and the tats on which the students used to sit. On seeing him, Brahmin teacher cried out, "Oh Chandal, you have come again". Fearing another beating, Mangoo Ram hastened back, never to go again to the school. And that was the end of his education.

With his education coming to an abrupt end, Mangu Ram became unemployed, and bit frustrated too. In 1909, he, along with some other young men from the village, went to California, U.S.A. in order to earn some money by working in the Peach Orchards of Fresno and elsewhere in the San Joaquin valley of central California. Instead of earning money, he, however, became involved in the activities of the Ghadar Party, an international network of militant Punjabi



however, the ship reached Singapore. Unfortunately for Mangu Ram, here he was recognized by some traitor Indians who had earlier worked for the Ghadar Party. They informed the Police. By now, for running away from Batavia, death warrants had been issued by the British Government to be executed wherever any one of them was found. Accordingly, the Singapore Police began preparing for his execution. Then a miracle happened. Just half an hour before his execution, a gentleman named Barde, whom Mangu Ram had never seen or met, came, caught him by the arm, took him out of the Thana, and putting him on the same ship in which Mangu Ram had come, he asked the Captain of the ship to sail for Manila. By the time the Police swung into action, the ship had crossed the Singapore Port Limits. Having failed to intercept the ship, the police caught hold of some drunkard; executed him to cover up their lapse, and announced that Mangu Ram had been executed. This news was later published in the Indian Newspapers.

For the next 7-8 years, Mangu Ram hid in the Philippines, and during this period he had no contact with his family as no letters could be written



ideas, Babu Mangu Ram convened a Conference at his village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur on 11-12 June, 1926. Addressing the largely attended Conference, Babu Mangu Ram proclaimed that the Untouchables constituted a separate Qaum, a religious community like the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and those they were the original inhabitants of this country. Hence, the movement was named as Ad Dharm; and its leaders devised distinctive costume, bright red turbans and shashes; coined a new sacred mantra or symbol, "So-hang" and exhorted the people to call themselves as Ad Dharmis.

The primary object of the Ad Dharm was to give the untouchables an alternative religion. Its another object was to reform the society from within. As social movement, the Ad Dharm exhorted the people to abstain from immoral practices; to lead a life of purity and piety; to discard the use of alcohol, drugs, give education to boys and girls, and to treat all men and women equal in the society. On the whole, the movement was aimed at giving the untouchables a sense of pride and dignity as members of the Ad Dharm.

The headquarters of Ad

International Day of Equality – When will we wake up?

The birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, April 14, has come again. Let me avail of the opportunity to remind the Government of India on the proposal to declare April 14 as International Day of Equality under the aegis of the UN which is resting with the Ministry of External Affairs since June, 2015. I wrote on the subject in my blog in September, 2022 under the heading – International Day of Equality – a subject close to my heart which may be accessed at: <http://diplomatictitbits.blogspot.com/2022/09/international-day-of-equality-subject.html>

denied him his due for too long'. With the passing time, the 'Ambedkar Phenomena' has increasingly over taken the known and recognized personalities like; Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela among others. It is gratifying to note that, without any organized and governmental support, Ambedkar's statues, busts, memorials are coming up not only in India but throughout the civilized world. I write this with a sense of gratitude and thanks to the supporters, promoters and stakeholders in the proposal to honour Babasaheb Ambedkar viz.; several outfits pertaining to Ambed-

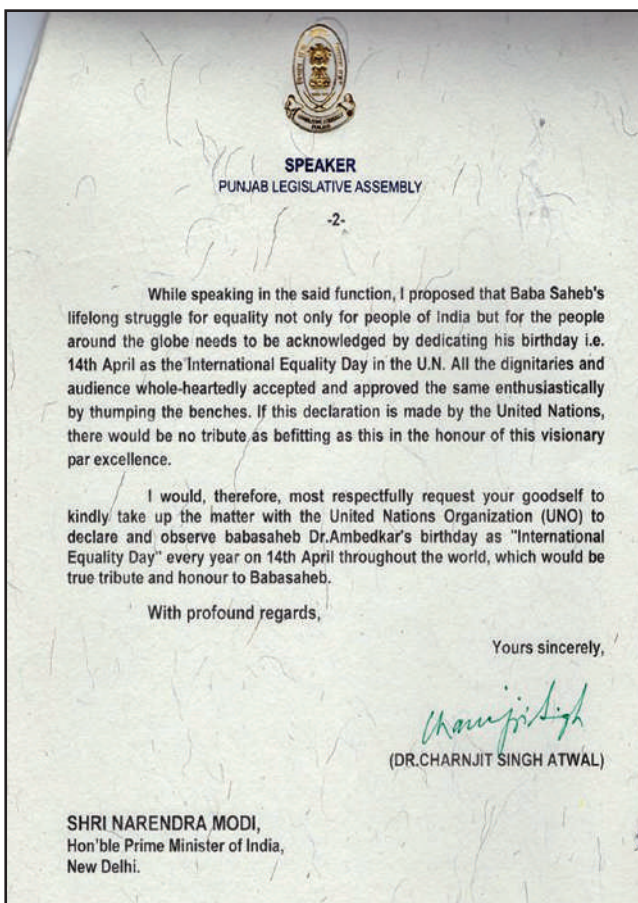
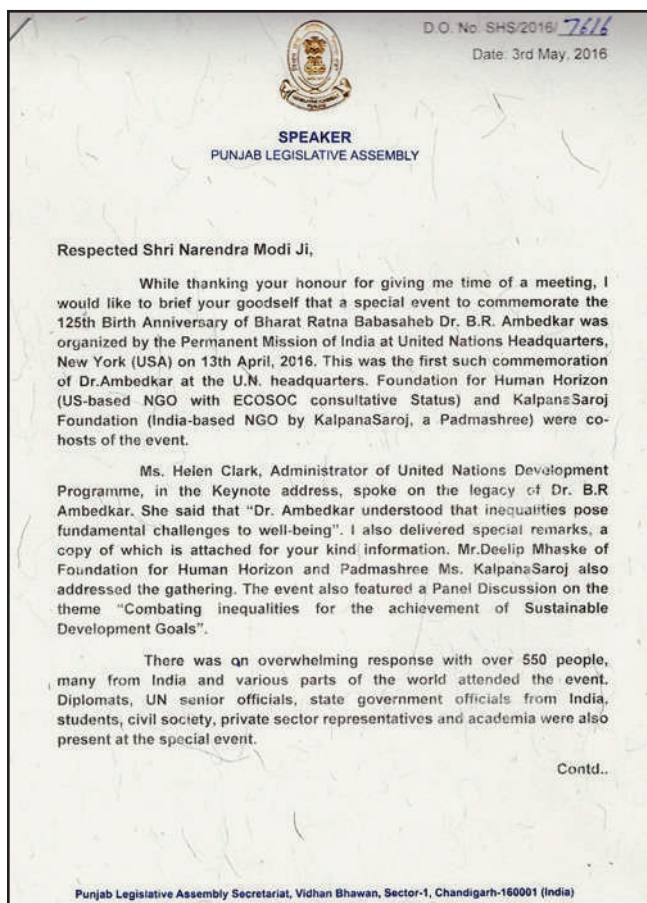
placed bureaucrats and professionals of the community who willfully choose to be oblivious of the matter. So much so, my direct approach to important personalities and activists like Prakash Ambedkar, Raj Ratan Ambedkar, Jignesh Mewani, Chandra Shekhar Azad among others did not elicit any positive response. I don't know why it was so. Besides this, I have tried my every best to apprise



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

and engage political bigwigs of the community both in the ruling and opposition parties but could not succeed. We even tried to engage with our Deras and spiritual Gurus but they did not show much interest. I am purposely giving all these details not because we are deterred or tired but to inform the interested and concerned of the situation in which we are passing through. Here comes the question as to why the Governments should listen to us when we ourselves are not fully ready to go ahead and pursue matter. We are to wake up and reiterate our resolve and demonstrate our strength. The answer is very clear. I am fully convinced in my mind that the proposal on April 14 as the International Day of Equality will certainly see the light of the day, sooner than later. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the staunch opponent of Babasaheb Ambedkar, had rightly said, 'you may criticize Ambedkar but you cannot ignore him'. This utterance is as good today as it was before. Ambedkar's thought and legacy is potent enough to surge forward on its own steam. Anybody trying to undermine Ambedkar owing to one reason or the other will do so at ones on peril.

Let us revisit the subject and pass appro-

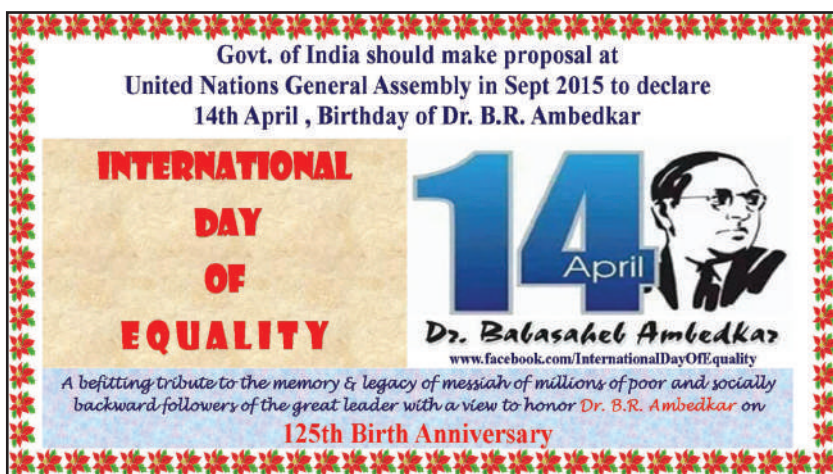


As a matter of my considered opinion and being a true Ambedkarite, from the day one, our approach to pursue the matter has not been of agitation but of suggestion and persuasion. In the process, we have reached a stage where we find ourselves satisfied on hand and equally dejected on the other. We feel 'Dejected' by the indifference shown by the Government of India to the proposal consciously or otherwise and 'Satisfied' or gratified by the positive response by the international community to the proposal. I have decided

to broach up the subject again and share my thoughts to register our firm belief that the day will come when the proposal on the International Day of Equality will see the light of the day as it is increasingly becoming difficult to ignore the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar, one of the greatest sons of India with a vision to establish an 'Equitable World Order' as envisaged in the UN Charter.

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Whereas the proposal on International Day of Equality is increasingly getting support in countries like Canada, USA, UK and many more, it is surprising to note that the authorities in India, by and large, are still indifferent in their approach to consider and support the initiative. I don't see any plausible reason but to accept the fact that 'Ambedkar never received anything easily even in his life time and the successive leaderships in India



kar in India and apex organizations namely; Chetna Association of Canada, Federation of Ambedkar and Buddhist Organisation of UK, Ambedkar International Coordination Society, the Ambedkar Times Group of papers of California in US, the Samaj Weekly of UK among other in foreign lands for their un-

stinted support in this regard. Since, I have nothing much to hide, I must register here my sense of regret too to put the things in perspective. Frankly, I did not get the expected response from the political class of the community which otherwise never miss any opportunity to encash Ambedkar for their political purposes. Most of the Ambedkar organizations which fall on each other to shout from the rooftops 'Babasaheb Teri Soch Te Pehra Diyange Thokke' have proved themselves as rubble rousers and as such could not understand the importance and relevance of the proposal. I am all the more dismayed rather perturbed by the indifference and feigned ignorance of the intelligentsia including the highly



appropriate Resolutions at the congregations to celebrate and observe April 14, birthday of the great icon, as Day of Equality locally and send those Resolutions to the GOI, PM Narendra Modi and EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar. By doing so, we would only be paying our debt of gratitude to one of the greatest sons of India who did everything possible to bring about – Equality, Liberty, Justice and Fraternity to empower the suffering humanity not only in India but the world at large.

While I greet my readers on Ambedkar Jayanti, I recall a poetic expression to sound and alert my fellow Ambedkarites:

Tu Pehle Baat; Phir Baat Ka Andaz Paida Kar,
Phir Duniya Mein Tujhe Koi Nazar Andaz Kar
Nahin Sakta.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Jayanti celebration, April 14, 2023 by Himachal Pradesh Shri Guru Ravidas Mahasabha, Distt. Una

"A Dream Trip" : Chief Guest Ambassador V.B.Soni. I.F.S. (Retd.)

In the annals of pre-independence history of India, one of the few shining stars, who rode like a colossus, was the charismatic figure of Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He was indeed an icon, a beacon and a light house who guided the destiny of hundreds of millions of Indians. He gave them hope, respect and dignity. His depth of knowledge in wide varied fields was vast and profound, and personality so well rounded that it

during many interactions after my marriage. It was from him that I was to learn that after the reorganization of Punjab, Una District was taken out of Hoshiarpur, and became part of Kangra District in 1972, of the newly created state of Himachal Pradesh.

So, when the invitation came for me to be the Chief Guest, I considered it as the call for pilgrimage and I came to breathe the salubrious air of the surroundings, while paying

hilltop in the village called Saloh. The commanding view of the city below, leafy green, wide-open space, peaceful, neat, clean, and unpolluted air took my breath away.

The picturesque surroundings bore the stamp of the Bhatti family. My wife's Massi Savitri Devi Bhatti and Massar Sadhu Ram Bhatti ji waited for my arrival to give a hearty welcome, ready with marigold garlands, showering rose petals on me. I

function. The hosts vied with each other to pile up marigold garlands on me, as a gesture of their affection for me.

As a symbolic ritual I was asked to launch the blood donation drive, initiated by the youngsters belonging to the Balmiki Mahasabha. This gave me immense pleasure. It was a proud moment to watch the two sister organisations joining hands to make it a common cause. The



elicited jealousy among his well-established peers. Attempts were made to put him down and discredit him but he never felt cowed down, always bouncing back stronger. Regrettably he was never given his due in his life time. The highest-ranking Bharat Ratna award was conferred on him only in 1990, post humously.

To celebrate the 132nd birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Himachal Pradesh Shri Guru Ravidas Mahasabha, District Una, sent me an invitation through Mr. Pamas Rai Bhatti to be the Chief Guest at their celebration on April 14, 2023.

Let me recount my personal connect with the soil of the region. Una happens to be the birthplace of my wife Kamlesh's parents, Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar and Mrs. Lakshmi Devi. Pawar Saheb belonged to Sanehra village and grew up and had earlier education in Una. He often talked fondly of this connection



my personal respect to the charismatic, messianic personality of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

On April 13, 2023 as I arrived at Una Railway Station, I was overwhelmed by the red-carpet welcome extended by an enthusiastic welcoming party, headed by President of the Mahasabha, Smt. Shakuntala Sandhu and other high-ranking dignitaries. Their whole hearted greetings moved me immensely. I was driven in a motorcade all the way to the place where arrangements for my stay had been made in the scenic backdrop of a huge mansion on a



was made to feel important with that right royal treatment. From then on Pamas ji spared no effort to make me feel important, catering to all my needs. He would offer me the biggest hospitality by cooking all the meals himself. What a fabulous cook he is! The four-day stay in the tasteful surroundings, would compare with a 5-star hotel stay anywhere.

On arrival at the venue of the Ambedkar Jayanti function, MC Park, Una on 14th April, 2023 I was accorded a grand welcome by the huge gathering. More than 350 persons had collected to participate in the

organisers deserve our commendation.

The main programme was packed with interesting items, including cultural skits, presented by 60 odd young boys and girls, portraying main features from Baba Saheb Ambedkar's life and his message. High dignitaries, retired government officials and the heads of the various Blocks in

the District, rose to express their sentiments and high regards for the Mahanayak.

To add a personal touch, I took the liberty of bringing out my family's personalised links with the leader. My father, Bankey Lal was one lucky youngman, among a group selected by Dr. Ambedkar, for personally mentoring for the leadership role. The proudest moment for my family was when Baba Saheb graciously accepted a dinner invitation at our home, around 1946 during which he blessed me.

(Contd. on next page)

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Jayanti celebration, April 14, 2023 by Himachal Pradesh Shri Guru Ravidas Mahasabha, Distt. Una



(Continue from page 5)

It was Dr. Ambedkar who recommended my father for the post of Honorary Magistrate, which he held for 9 years (1945-54). Again, at his instance he was additionally made Municipal Councilor (1948-50).

During my formative growing up years my father fed me with fascinating, inspiring stories from the life of Baba Saheb that encouraged me to work harder. I attribute my selection to Indian Foreign Service in 1967 and eventual appointment as Ambassador of India to a dozen foreign countries to Baba Saheb's inspiration.

It was a poignant and sad moment one wintry December 6 evening of 1956 when my father led me as a teenager to Sansad Marg near our ancestral home at Hanuman Road, when the cortege bearing mortal remains of the Messiah was being taken around

the city for the last darshan.

It was a pleasure to have been invited as the Chief Guest at another similar function organised on April 16, 2023, in the village of Saloh, where the Bhatti family resides. The enthusiasm and gusto with which the programme was celebrated made me so pleased that in the countryside the name of Baba Saheb Ambedkar reverberates with such devotion.

It was a fine gesture indeed that Mr. Pamas Bhatti, on the spot invited the youngsters to his mansion nearby to honour them, gifting a copy each of Chaudhry Ishwar Das Pawar's moving autobiography "My Struggle in Life." It is bound to prove an inspiring story to the budding youngsters. The generous host also distributed a cash incentive to keep the youngsters' enthusiasm in Dr. Ambedkar going. The Bhatti family's humanitarian gestures

of helping local deserving deprived children for their education and social upliftment has become the talk of the town.

After staying on the West coast of U.S. Pamasji has decided to divide his time between the California home and the ancestral village here, on premature retirement from Government job to help his parents settle down in Saloh, for which he is busy upgrading the residential surroundings. Rare occasion to find the devoted son sacrificing his personal comforts to take care of the aged parents single handedly. A word about the splendid community work being done by Mr. P. K. Chumber in California by bringing out two weekly publications, Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba, to cater to the aspirations of the community, by keeping them in touch with developments back home,

and remind them of Baba Saheb's message regularly.

It is important that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's core message is carefully planted in the minds of the youngsters. His monumental, authoritative, and scholarly discourses must be made compulsory reading. His birthday should be celebrated as the World Knowledge Day. He measured the progress of the community by the status and the position women enjoyed in the society, inspired by the sacrifices his own mother had made in shaping him.

We must not rest content till Baba Saheb Ambedkar's dream of bringing his people on par with the rest of the society is fulfilled. It is an arduous task and the journey long and daunting. We have to gear up and march forward.

Jai Bhim, Jai Bharat!

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Tribute to the Nightingale of Maha-Punjab on her Death Anniversary (23 April, 2013)

Shamshad Begum: A Jingle Bell Voice Full of Affinity!

"What a voice, a flow like the five-rivers of Punjab", exclaimed the famous music director O.P. Nayyar, for that sweet, clinking vocalist Shamshad Begum. She had a strong Punjabi folk accent, expression and abandon, an excellent command over rhythmic cycles with short intervals and a full throated, spirited voice with a rough but suggestive timber. A legend with a voice like liquid gold gleaming in the sun, she was one of the pioneer playback singers in Punjabi Cinema and the first superstar playback songstress of Indian cinema. The singing sensation from Lahore, an exponent in folk music, Shamshad captured the imagination of listeners with her mellifluous, crisp and deep voice. The present generation, however, visualise her a singer, who excelled in the rendition of mischievous, flirty and

appointed to find that it was marketed as the voice of some Hindu singer 'Radha Rani'. In a very short span of time, she developed a popular appeal for her repertoire of crispy, youthful and lively songs.

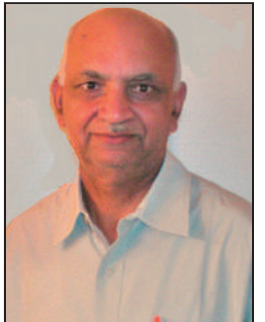
Her first Punjabi song 'Hath Joda Pankhiya Da' was a big hit and the company paid her six rupees in addition to her usual fee. Her popularity, as a gramophone singer, fetched her an offer from All India Radio (AIR), Delhi. But she was reluctant to leave Lahore. In 1934, she took up the assignment at the newly established AIR Peshawar. After two years, she reallocated herself to AIR Lahore. Her renditions of ghazals, nagma and non-film songs, composed mostly by Master Inayat Hussain and Budh Singh Taan, were directly broadcast. She got tired of singing her popular song 'Ik Baar

Lahore to sign Shamshad Begum as playback singer for the new heroine Nargis in his film "Taqdeer" (1943), on fabulous terms of providing a bungalow, car and servant in addition to a handsome fee. After the success of "Taqdeer" at the box-office, she was flooded with many offers. The films like Humayun, Bairam Khan, Shahjehan, Chal Chal Re Naujan and many more came to her kitty. In her early career, three Gs i.e. Ghulam Haider, Ghulam Mohammad and Pt. Gobind Ram composed great songs for her.

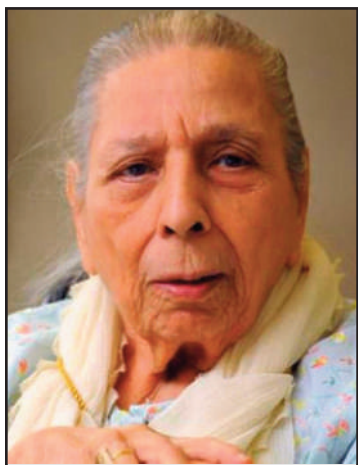
Her singing characterised by a nasal twang and ghazal-inflected folk style made her a favorite of the leading music directors of her time. Under their baton, she moulded her voice to sing songs of every mood. In the 1950s, another great trinity of Naushad, C Ram-

hiyan), 'Lamma Lamma Bajre Da Sitta' (Yamla Jatt) and 'Gora Rang Na' (Daaj) etc.

Her magnanimity, non-assertive nature and professional approach earned her the fond nickname 'Appa' in the film industry. Unfortunately, her life became a series of generous gestures to the extent that some composers used her as a stepping-stone. Madan Mohan, who had beseeched her to sing for his debut film Ankhen, turned to Lata Mangeshkar, O.



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juicy songs. Her voice was like a temple bell and fans cocked their ears to gramophone reeling out the mischievous 'Kahin Pe Nigahen' or the racy 'Meri Jaan Aana Sunday Ke Sunday' or it could be 'Kabhi Aar Kabhi Paar' or 'Kajra Mohabbatwala'.

The vox that kept its face hidden like a fairytale princess bewitched the paramours of film music. I was lucky to have an audience with Shamshad Ji on 20 January, 2011 at her Hiranandani Gardens abode, in connection with my project 'History of Punjabi Cinema'. As she wove all the pieces of her life starting from carefree childhood to the vagaries of Bollywood, the proposed half an hour meeting went beyond three hours. She told that she was born on 14 April, 1919 in Lahore and not Amritsar as misquoted in the social media. Her father Mian Hussein Baksh was a contractor. Her talent for music was discovered early by her school principal. She hardly had any initiation into the realm of classical music. In 1935, she was married to a lawyer, Ganpat Lal Batto, who passed away in 1955. She was a big fan of K.L. Saigal and watched for 14 times his movie "Devdas" (1935).

Her paternal uncle Ameeruddin recognised her singing talent and took her to Jien-o-phone Records Company for an audition. She rendered Sthai and Antara of the ghazal 'Mera Yaar Mujhe Mile Agar' to the entire perfection. Master Ghulam Haider, a musician with the record company, instantly signed her for 12 songs @ Rs 12.50 per song, a big sum in those days. Her father reluctantly permitted her but with strict conditions that she would sing under veil and would never let herself be photographed. She spent few weeks learning the mannerisms of studio-singing from Masterji. Her first record was a devotional song 'Tere-Poojan Ko Bhagwan'. She was little dis-

Phir Kaho Zara' on repeated requests by her gullible listeners. Due to her Jien-o-phone contract, she did a number of film versions, which are lost with the movies too.

Shamshad Begum made a debut as playback singer for the heroine Hemlata in Dalsukh Pancholi's Punjabi film "Gul Bakavi" (1939). She sang three songs 'Ghuk Meri Kismat Saun Gayi'; 'Main Teri Tu Mera' and 'Mahiya Ve Oh Aayan' in this movie composed by Master Ghulam Haider. In her first released movie "Sassi Punnu" (1939), she rendered four popular songs 'Punnu Diye Murte'; 'Chunni Rang De'; 'Hoven Tu Chan Asmani' and 'Sohne Desan Chon Des Punjab'. However, her song 'Kankaan Diyan Faslaan Pakkiyaan Ney' (Yamla Jatt-1940) proved a phenomenal hit. Thereafter, she never looked back and gave playback in most of the Lahore made Punjabi films like Chaudhary, Dulla Bhatti, Sohni Mahival, Mera Punjab, Mera Mahi, Mangti, Sehti Murad, Patwari and Ravi Paar etc. Master Ghulam Haider chiselled her voice akin to polishing of a diamond and introduced Shamshad Begum as playback singer in the Hindi film Khazanchi (1941), produced by Dalsukh Pancholi. The addition of meaningless syllables like 'la lala' to the song 'Sawan Ke Nazaare Hain' enhanced the impact of abandon latent in her voice. Her mellifluous rendition reverberated across the sub-continent and the audience used to throw coins on the silver screen. The premier playback singer of Punjabi Cinema, Shamshad had now established herself as the queen of playback singing in India. The film offers started pouring in not only from Lahore but also from Bombay. She emerged as the main singer in films like Khandan, Zamindar, Poonji, Nishani, Shukriya and Shirin Farhad etc. The renowned film maker Mehboob Khan, specially went to

chandra and OP Nayyar arguably composed best songs for her. Naushad made Shamshad as his lead playback singer in 19 super hit films like Shahjehan, Anokhi Ada, Anmol Ghadi, Babul, Mela, Dard, Aan, Jadoo, and Mother India etc. There was no stopping of Shamshad's juggernaut and she went from strength to strength.

Some nuggets in her husky voice include: 'Naina Bhar Aye Neer' (Humayun), 'Baadal Aya Jhoom Ke' (Shahjehan), 'Dharti Ko Akaash Pukare' (Mela), 'Chandni Aayi Banke Pyar' (Dulari), 'Chup Chup Khade Ho' (Badi Bahen), 'Aana Meri Jaan Sunday Ke Sunday' (Shehnai), 'Mere Piya Gaye Rangoon' (Patanga), 'Ye Duniya Roop Ki Chor' (Shabnam), 'Milte Hi Aankhen' (Babul), 'Saiyan Dil Mein Aana' (Bahar), 'Boojh Mera Kya Naam', 'O Le Ke Pehla Pehla Pyar' & 'Kahin Pe Nigahen' (C.I.D.), 'Kabhi Aar Kabhi Paar' (Aar Paar), 'Reshmi Salwar Kurta Jaali Ka' (Naya Daur), 'Teri Mehfil Mein Kismat' (Mughal-e-Azam), 'Meri Neendon Mein Tum' (Naya Andaz), and 'Kajra Mohabbatwala' (Kismat) and many more still rule the charts in their remix avatar.

After partition, Shamshad Begum became the most sought-after playback singer of Punjabi Cinema. Her block-busters included Lachhi, Posti, Chhai, Bhaiyaji, Koday Shah, Madari, Jugni, Vanjara, Bhangra, Do Lachhiyan, Balo, Vasakhi, Yamla Jatt, Billo, Jatti, Jeeja Ji, Dhol Jani, Pardesi Dhola, Pind Di Kudi, Laajo and Mama Ji etc. All these films became popular even beyond the national boundaries and brought Shamshad name and fame. Some of her popular Punjabi film songs are: 'Meri Lagdi Kise Na Vekhi' (Lachhi), 'Oh Vela Yaad Kar' (Jugni), 'Main Taan Jatti Maluk Jehi' (Vanjara), 'Batti Baal Ke' & 'Rabb Na Kare Je Tu Chala Javen' (Bhangra), 'Teri Kanak Di Rakhi Mundiya' (Do Lach-

P. Nayyar, who just couldn't compose without her at one time (Aasman, CID, Aar Paar), later focused mainly on Asha Bhosle. When Lata heralded the advent of a new era in film music, Naushad took no time in dumping Shamshad. Shamshad boosted Chitragupta's career with success of Sinbad the Sailor (1952), but he too ditched her.

Shamshad tried valiantly to ward off Lata's onslaught and remained on the scene throughout the 1950s. But in early 1960s, her assignments started dwindling as the new generation of heroines preferred to lip sync in the voices of Lata/Asha etc. Her voice was as booming as ever, however, she was not getting the same vibes during the recordings and she decided to quit. She bade her adieu with all-time hit 'Kajra Mohabbatwala' (Kismat-1968). However, many previously recorded songs for films like Heer Ranjha, Raaton Ka Raja, Parde Ke Peechhe, Banke Lal and Ganga Maang Rahi Balidaan etc. were released much later. In 1969, she performed live for the first time at Mumbai's Shanmukhanand Hall, creating frenzy among her fans. Shamshad's shy persona stopped her from mingling with people and thereafter she went in oblivion. Nevertheless, the thriving audio-video culture, remix boom and All India Radio kept her voice alive. In a career spanning three decades, Shamshad sang more than 1600 songs in Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Marathi, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Urdu and Pashto languages. Government of India conferred on her the third highest civilian award 'Padma Bhushan' in 2009. Bollywood lost one of its most versatile singers, Shamshad Begum on 23 April 2013. Her death was the end of her four decades of reclusiveness. But the artistes like her never die and the music-web she had created will continue to enthral the connoisseurs of melody for ages to come.

Special feature on the 80th birthday of lyricist Shabab Alawalpuri

Shabab 'Alawalpuri': King of Songs, Favorite of Poet gatherings

Let's fly in the deep sky,
make a nest of the clouds,
Channa under the stars,
let us sing the song of love.

Sung by Asha Bhonsle from the Punjabi film "Dera Aashiqan Da" (1979), this song whenever heard on Jalandhar/Jammu or any other radio station and Jalandhar Doordarshan, the listeners would unknowingly remember the famous lyricist Shabab Alawalpuri.

Moninder Singh Sodhi alias Shabab Alawalpuri was born on 30 April 1943 at Beas (District Amritsar). But his upbringing and early education took place in his maternal home Alawalpur (District Jalandhar). Because of this, the grown up Moninder Singh Sodhi had associated Alawalpur with his name forever and he is known as Shabab Alawalpuri. Moninder was fond of singing and acting since his childhood and the

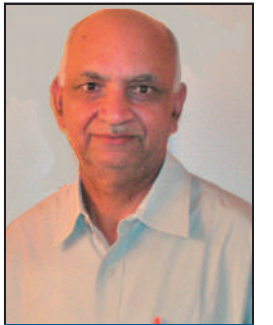
Moninder Sodhi was also fond of writing Punjabi poems, ghazals and songs. He often graced the stage at poetic conventions organized by Doordarshan and All India Radio, Jalandhar. He considered Sajan Dehlvi, a famous Urdu poet and film-lyricist from Delhi, as his guru and learned the nuances of songwriting from him. With the permission of his guru, he adopted his surname 'Shabab' and was known in literary circles as Shabab Alawalpuri.

Based in Delhi, Shabab also got the opportunity to anchor various programs of Bollywood stars. Meanwhile, Moninder met the famous director of Doordarshan Delhi, P Kumar Vasudev, who was making the epic serial "Hum Log" in those days. He was well aware of Moninder's artistic talent and roped him into his team as chief assistant director for this serial. After the great success of this serial,

jha Ranjha Kion Na Jap Laan, Mera Rabb Ton Sohna Mahi' sung by Kuldeep Manak was very popular. Shabab never looked back after this. Shabab Alawalpuri as a lyricist wrote hit songs in many other Punjabi films. These films include Gori Diyan Jhanjhan (1980), Sardara Kartara (1980), Sarpanch (1982), Unkhili Mutiyar (1983), Vairi-Jatt (1985), Uchcha Dar Babe Nanak Da (1987), Kudmai (1987), Shareeka, SuhaagChura (1988), Saunh Mainu Panjab Di (1990), Sohni Mahiwal, Saunh Rakhi Di and Mitr Pyare Nu Haal Mureedan-DaKehna (2004) are among others. Two songs written by him in the Punjabi film "Gori Diyan Jhanjhan" 'Ma De Hundiyaan' and 'Billiye Billor Lachhiye' were loved by the audience. He gave playback as MS Sodhi in the song 'Suno Bharao' (Sarpanch-1983) while he was credited as Shabab Alawalpur, the song writer. Shabab

ored with a large-sized key of the city. This key was a symbol that the doors of Denmark are always open for Shabab. In the same year, Mohammad Rafi Memorial Society, Amritsar also gave him the best Punjabi lyricist award.

It is not that Shabab wrote only romantic or serious songs, he also wrote disco and fast music songs very well. These songs include 'Disco Di Raat Channa'; 'Ang Ang-Farkhe'; 'Disco Di Rutt Aayi'; 'Mere Long Da Ek Lishkara' and 'Ding Lung Ding Lung' etc. are enumerated.



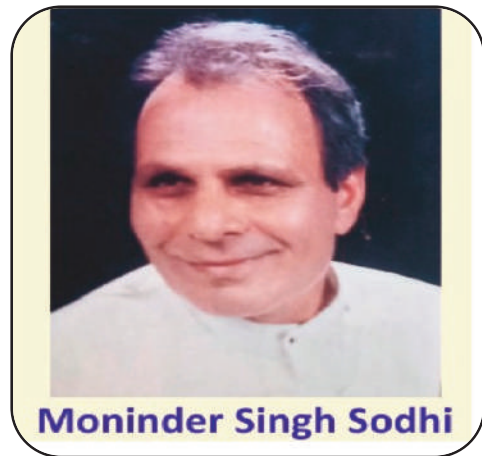
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hidden talent in him gradually came out. After completing his schooling, Moninder started working temporarily in the Posts and Telegraph Department at Nilokheri (now Haryana). While staying there, he used to play the role of 'Bharat' in the local Ramleela. He paid less attention to work and was immersed in music all the time. Due to this, he had to quit his job. Then he worked at Atlas Cycles, a bicycle manufacturing company in Sonapat, but the artist in him didn't let him stay there either. During this time, he got involved in journalism and started publishing a weekly magazine "Jeet Hamari". But this venture also did not last for long.

After this, Moninder got a job as a casual artist in the Department of Song and Drama, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and now he saw the fulfillment of his creative dreams. Moninder Sodhi used to actively participate in the programs organized by his department for the entertainment of army soldiers posted on the border. In these shows, he used to narrate Punjabi folktales especially stories of Mirza (Mirza Sahib), Heer (Heer Ranjha) and Sassi Punnu. The soldiers affectionately called him 'Sodhi Chacha' and requested him to repeatedly recite 'Mirza'. Moninder used to fulfill their requests with great passion in his loud voice and thunderous applause greeted him.

Demonstrating his acting prowess, Moninder played memorable roles in several serials like "Supne Te Parchhawan" and "Chitta Lahu" telecast by Doordarshan Jalandhar.



Moninder got an opportunity to work as chief assistant director in another serial "Ganadev". During this period, a colorful program of Shabab Alawalpuri songs/ghazals 'Ek Sham ShababKe Naam' was organized at Delhi's prestigious Sirifort Auditorium. In this program, popular playback singer Mahendra Kapoor won the audience's applause by singing 'Shabab Ka Pyaar Pale' under the blue sky. Meanwhile, his mentor Sajan-Dehlvi introduced Shabab to many Punjabi filmmakers in Mumbai. Film producer Pawan Dev gave Shabab an opportunity to write songs for the Punjabi film "Dera Aashiqan Da" (1979). All the songs written by him especially 'Ambaran Ch Laiye Chal Udari' became very popular. But this film could not create any magic at the box office. He decided to move from Delhi to Mumbai for the purpose of writing songs for films. The songs from his second film "Vehra Lambar-dan Da" (1982) were also hits. The song 'Ram Japan Taan Rahim Hai Rusada, Mere Gal Sochan Di Phahi, Ran-

sang songs as a playback singer in the films Kudmai (1987), Sarpanch (1982) and Gori Diyan Jhanjhan (1980). Shabab Alawalpuri did cameo roles in films like "Dera Aashiqan Da" and "Sardara Kartara". Shabab also wrote the screenplay of the movie "Mitar Pyare Nu Haal Mureedan-DaKehna"

Apart from Punjabi films, Shabab has also written songs for Hindi films "Bahu Ki Awaaz" and "Bahu Beta Aur Maa". He also wrote the dialogues of the Hindi film "Aulad Ki Khatir". Shabab's other big hit was a Polydor-released record titled "Mangdi Mohabbat Hai Qurbani", in which he rendered songs from Feroze Khan's Hindi film "Qurbani" in Punjabi in a new style. The most popular song 'Aap Jaisa Koi Meri Zindagi Mein Aye' was transcribed as n 'Saun Di Ruttan' and this song was sung by Savita Sathi. Sung by Anoop Jalota and Savita Sathi, other songs such as: Kiya Dekhte Ho (Ja Main Nahi); Qurbani Qurbani (Mangdi Mohabbat Hai Qurbani) and Laila-O-Laila (Toomba Ji Toomba) were also given a Punjabi tinge.

When the first Punjabi children's film "Sajre Phul" (1981) was produced by the Children Film Society of India, Shabab got the opportunity to act in addition to writing songs for the film. This film was released in 1981 on the occasion of Children's Day in Canada, Denmark and other countries besides India. Due to the immense popularity of the songs of this film, Shabab Alawalpuri was specially invited by the Punjabi Cultural Society, Denmark and hon-

Shabab wrote the song 'Rutt Pyaar Di' for Kiran Ahluwalia's Ghazals and Punjabi folk songs record 'Kashish Attraction'. He wrote the song 'Rut VeKaleeran' for composer Surinder Kohli. Shabab Alawalpuri wrote devotional and non-film songs for music director K. S. Narula's many musical compositions. He wrote the devotional song 'Dasmesh Pita Kalgidhar' for HMV's album "Religious Songs of Punjab", which was well received. HMV Company released one of his romantic songs 'Sadi Taar Badal De Babu' and this song was later released by Pakistan company as well. In a Canadian L. P, he wrote the song 'Rut Sawan Di' for the record album "Ek Saah Sajjna Da".

In addition, an LP record of 24 bhajans composed by Shabab and sung by Mahendra Kapoor was also released. In Vani Jayaram's album of hymns "Moksha Ke Moti", Shabab wrote two hymns 'Tan Hai Veena Tar Hai Saansein' and 'Chalo Chalen Jasuda Dham Sakhi Re'. Some of the hymns written by him are 'Re Man Kahe Kare Vichar'; 'Moh Ka Aangan'; The record of 'Nisdin Tanman' was also a favorite record of the audience. Jagjit Singh sang ghazals written by Shabab, which received a warm response from the audience.

Shabab was constantly climbing the ladder of success that suddenly in the year 2002 he suffered a 'brain-stroke' and lost his voice for ever. After suffering physical pain for twenty years, this versatile artist Shabab Alawalpuri, departed from this world last year on September 13, 2022.