



Ambedkar Times Weekly

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VOL- 13

ISSUE- 9

May 12, 2021

California (USA)

www.ambedkartimes.com

www.deshdoaba.com

Shahu ji Maharaj: The Saviour King of the Backwards and Dalits

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About 115 years ago, Shahu ji Maharaj introduced 50 per cent reservation for the first time ever in India. He belonged to the Kunbi caste (a backward caste). He took several steps to break the back of brahmanism. Remembering him on his death anniversary is

- Dr Siddharth

In the brahmanical tradition, "Ramrajya" is the ideal kingdom and Ram is the greatest ruler ever born. But subjects of the Ramrajya had to follow the varna system. In other words, the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras had to serve the dwijs, and women were had to be subservient to men. Violation of the tenets of the varna system invited death and the king, Ram, himself executed the sentence. In contrast, the Bahujan-Sraman tradition witnessed many kings who upheld justice and worked for public welfare in every sense. They devoted their lives to the arduous task of dismantling the varna and the caste system, and the elaborate structure of discrimination based on it. Shahuji Maharaj was one of them. He concretized the dreams of Jotirao and Savitribai Phule.

Shahuji was anointed the king of Kolhapur on 2 July 1894. Soon, he was loosening the stranglehold of Brahmins on the administration and society. On 26 July 1902, he took a path-breaking step – something no one had even imagined. Amid stiff opposition from the Brahmins, he implemented 50 per cent reservations for Dalits and the Backwards in educational institutions and in government jobs in his state. This was the first instance of caste-based reservation in modern India. That is why Shahuji Maharaj is often described as the father of modern-day reservations. Later, Dr Ambedkar incorporated the pioneering initiative of Shahuji Maharaj in the Indian Constitution. The Constitution mandated reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but the decision on OBC castes was kept open. The OBCs got reservations on 16 November 1992, about 45 years after Independence and 90 years after Shahuji made the provision for his subjects.

In 1894, when Shahuji took over as ruler, Chitpavan Brahmins had monopolized most of the positions in the administrative set-up of Kolhapur. Brahmins occupied 60 of the 71 senior administrations positions. There

were only ten non-Brahmins among the 500 clerks. Following the implementation of Shahuji's reservation policy, only 35 Brahmins were left among the 95 administrative officers in 1912.

Shahuji was in complete agreement with what Phule wrote in his Gulamgiri:

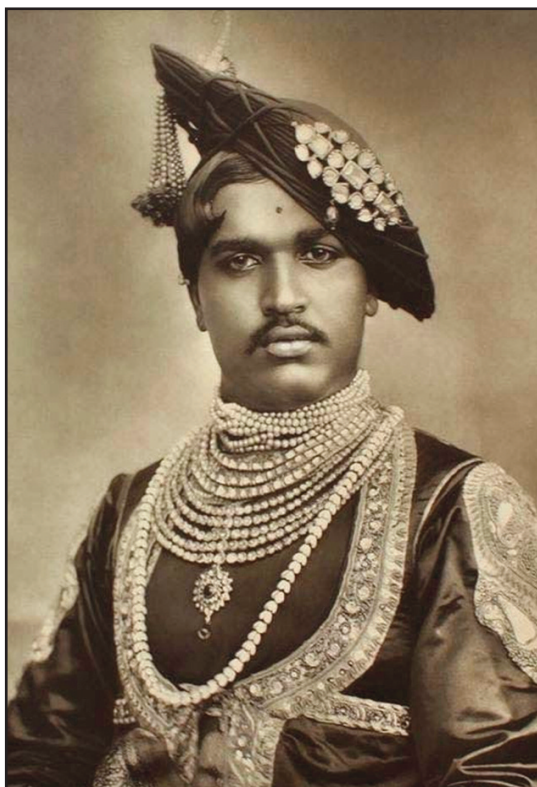
"Without education, wisdom was lost, without wisdom, morals were lost, without morals, development was lost, without development, wealth was lost, without wealth, the Shudras were ruined, so much has happened through lack of education."

Shahuji Maharaj took upon himself the task of combating ignorance and lack of education among Dalits and the backward castes. By as early as 1912, he had made primary education compulsory and by 25 July 1917, he had made it free. He was the first Indian ruler to do so. Like the Phule couple, he laid great stress on women's education. He opened schools in all villages, each to serve a population of at least 500 and up to 1,000. In 1920, he established a free hostel named Prince Shivaji Maratha Free Boarding House.

He outlawed two obnoxious traditions, thus bringing about a sea change in the position of Dalits in society. First, in 1917, he abrogated the archaic Balutdari system, under which an Untouchable was given a small piece of land and in return, he and his family had to render all kinds of services to the entire village without any compensation. Second, in 1918, he promulgated a law putting an end to the oppressive Vatandari system and introduced land reforms to enable Mahars to become owners of land. This ended the economic slavery of Mahars to a great extent. The pro-Dalit Kolhapur ruler, with

obvious pride, told a vast assemblage of Dalits in Manmad in 1920: "I believe you have got an emancipator in Dr Ambedkar. I hope that he will break your chains of slavery." He not only showered praises on Ambedkar but also helped him complete his education abroad and make politics a weapon for the emancipation of Dalits.

Shahuji's efforts to secure equality and justice for the Backwards, Dalits and women earned him the ire of the Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra. Numerous efforts were made to humiliate and run him down. Ordinary Brahmins hating Shahuji can be understood. After all, he had ended their dominance in society. But what was painful was that people like Balgangadhar Tilak and Sripad



Amrit Dange, a founding member of the Communist Party of India, also brimmed with anger and hatred towards him. Tilak fought a running battle with him.

Born into a Kunbi (Kurmi in North India) family on 26 June 1874, Shahuji Maharaj became the ruler of Kolhapur when he was just 20 and ruled the state for 28 years. He was the grandson of Chhatrapati Shivaji and the son of Aapasaheb Ghatge Kalgarkar. Yashwant Rao – as he was called in his childhood – lost his mother when he was just three years of age. Anandibai, the queen of Kolhapur, adopted him on 17 March 1884, and the title of Chhatrapati was conferred on him. In June 1902, the Cambridge University conferred on him an honorary doctorate of law. He was the first Indian to receive the honour. He was honoured with the title of Rajashri at the 13th national convention of the Akhil Bharatiya Kurmi Mahasabha held in Kanpur from 19-21 April 1919. He was also a recipient of the titles of GCSI,

GCVO and MRES.

This great emancipator of the Backwards and Dalits breathed his last on 6 May 1922, aged 48. But the lamp which he had lit, inspired by Phule, is illuminating our lives even now.

Translated by Amrish Herdenia

We all know that the brahmanical Peshwa rule had led to Brahmin dominance in every field of life – religious, political, economic and social – in Maharashtra. They were in control of almost everything. With the provisions of 50 per cent reservation and free and compulsory education, Shahuji aimed at ending that dominance. He also decided to dismantle the brahmanical supremacy on religion. On 9 July 1917, he issued a declaration that the income and the assets of religious institutions in Kolhapur belonged to the government. He also ordered that Marathas (a backward caste) be appointed priests in temples. In 1920, he established a school to train priests in conducting religious rituals. We all know about Dr Ambedkar's Hindu Code Bill, but few of us are aware that Shahuji Maharaj also passed a Hindu Code Bill on 11 November 1920, ending the stipulation that Hindu succession laws would be governed by the Mitakshara School of Law. Mitakshara is Vijnaneswara's commentary on Yajnavalkya Smriti and broadly rules that women cannot inherit the property of their families. It imposes several conditions and restrictions. Shahuji also brought to a close the tradition of assigning villages to Brahmin priests. Shahuji took a series of steps to ensure that the Untouchables (Dalits) were treated on a par with others and to improve their living conditions. Until 1919, no Untouchable could get treatment in a hospital. In 1919, Shahuji issued a declaration that any Untouchable could visit a hospital and get treatment. In the same year, he issued another order outlawing discrimination in primary and high schools and in colleges against students on the basis of caste. Besides ensuring that Dalits got a foothold in government service, he also issued an order that said Dalit government employees should be treated with dignity and respect, and that government offices should be free of the practice of untouchability. "The officers who are unwilling to follow this order should resign within six months," the order said.

American Senior Citizens Group Sacramento Celebrated Vaisakhi/Khalsa Sirjina Divas



The American Senior Citizens Group celebrated Vaisakhi & the Khalsa Sirjina Divas on Thursday May 6, 2021. The virtual meeting celebrations were also attended by representatives of Indus Valley Chamber of Commerce, Punjabi Sahit Sabha Sacramento, Indo-American Cultural Association, and Meditation Group. The celebration included speeches, recital of poetry, singing and discussion on the significance of this special day for the Sikh communities all over the world.

On Vaisakhi day in 1699, to quote Dr. Davinder Singh Sekhon, an eminent Sikh scholar, Guru Gobind Singh Ji infused a new spirit into the community which had no self-respect and pride before, and gave us a distinct identity because of which we are well known in the whole world. However the foundation of this spirit had been laid by Guru Nanak Sahib and the other eight Guru Sahibans gave unparalleled sacrifices to strengthen the spirit. By giving the Sikhs a very tough test, Guru Gobind Singh Ji certified that his Sikhs had attained the spiritual and martial spirit as envisaged by Guru Nanak Sahib. The Khalsa must never forget to promote this spirit. The celebrations started with introductory remarks by the chairman Sardar Sukhchain Singh. He welcomed and recognized the chief guest, Mayor of Elk Grove Honorable Bobbie Singh-Allen, and guests Dil Nijjar, a well-known local Punjabi poet, Joyti Singh, Yoga and

meditation Guru, Lakhwinder Kaur, president of the Indus Valley CHAMBER OF Commerce, and Surinder Singh Bindra, president of Indo-American cultural Association. The chairman also recognized senior members Sardar Daljit Singh Sandhu and Sardar Ajaib Singh Dhariwal for their hard work in organizing this function. He called upon Lakhwinder Kaur to introduce the chief guest Honorable Bobbie Singh-Allen, mayor of Elk Grove. In welcoming the Mayor, Lakhwinder Kaur briefly shared the many career achievements of the newly elected Mayor. She shared the pride she felt at the fact that the mayor belong to our own Punjabi Sikh community. She said make no mistake the popular mayor is the mayor of all the people of Elk Grove. In her remarks Honorable Bobbie Singh-Allen talked about the development agenda she and her elected team has charted for the citizens of Elk Grove. She appealed for everyone to get vaccinated against the COVID 19 and offered assistance for those who still need vaccination. She appealed to the audience to help the victims of coronavirus in India by donations to Khalsa Aid organization. Despite her busy schedule at city hall the mayor entertained questions from



the audience. In answering a question from Daljit Singh Sandhu she promised to always attend our function if she gets invited just like her predecessor used to do. She agreed to further explore and discuss the proposal for American Senior Citizens to have its own building for senior citizens Centre where ladies from our community who do not speak English could also meet and have entertainment functions. The mayor is an excellent communicator and she got big applause for her forward looking comments. She displayed quick grasp and understanding of the complicated issues and finding appropriate solutions. To the delight of everybody she so naturally sprinkled Punjabi in speaking English. Dil Nijjar is a good friend of Senior Citizens and has always accepted senior group's invitation to its functions. He recited a very meaningful poem in Punjabi describing the circumstances which lead to the formation of Khalsa brotherhood of the Sikh Panth by the 10th master Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The poem is titled:

Je Na Hunda Guru Gobind Singh
ਕਿਸੇ ਨਾਂ ਫੜਨਾ ਸੀ ਬਾਂਹ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੀ,
ਕਿਸੇ ਨਾਂ ਪਾਰ ਲੰਘਾਉਣਾ ਸੀ।
ਜੇ ਨਾਂ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ,

ਅਸੀਂ ਗੁਲਾਮ ਕਰਾਉਣਾ ਸੀ।
*full poem will be submitted separately for publishing.

Joyti Singh sang a very meaningful song. Her melodious voice with harmonium music captivated the audience. Sardar Surinder Singh Bindra was gracious enough to shorten his prepared speech on the history of sacrifices by the Khalsa including the massacre at JallianwallaBagh, Amritsar on Vaisakhi day in 1919. Gurpal Singh Khaira recited one of his noticeable poem which was well received by the participants. He also led an open discourse on the circumstances at the time of Khalsa Sirjina by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Senior learned members col. Gurmukh Singh Gill, Daljit Singh Sandhu, Ajaib Singh Dhaliwal and Narinder Singh Kahlon made valuable contributions to the discussion by their thoughtful questions and comments.

In the end the Vaisakhi celebration virtual function was a resounding success. The credit for this enormous achievement goes to the dedication of three illustrious individuals, Sukhchain Singh chairman, Daljit Singh Sandhu president organizing committee, and Ajaib Singh Dhaliwal technical coordinator.

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Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD

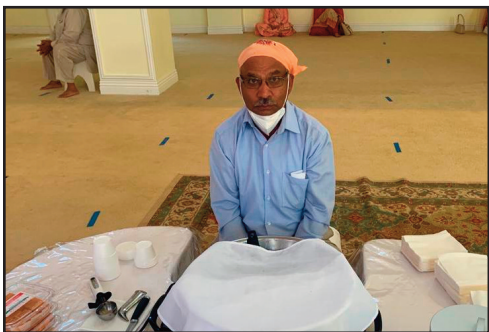
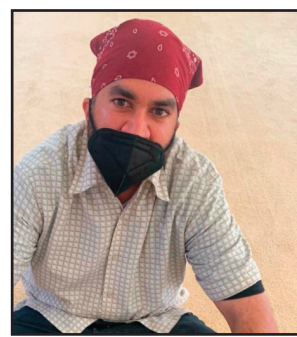
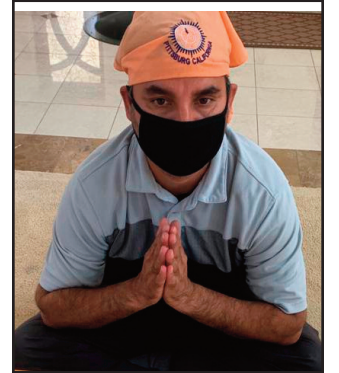


Goodie Takhar, PhD

Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg (California)'s last week community activities

Last Sunday, May 9th, 2021, Bhai Sukhje Singh and Bibi Navjinder Kaur celebrated 1st birthday of their son, Jorabar Singh in the Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg

(CA). May Waheguru bless Kaka Jorabar Singh with long and healthy life. The Gurughar Committee wishes him a very happy birthday and many more.





SHRI GURU RAVIDASS SABHA (CA)

2150 Crestview Drive, Pittsburg CA 94565
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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 130th Birth Anniversary

Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Pittsburg (CA) will be celebrating Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's 130th Birth Anniversary on Sunday, May 16, 2021. You are humbly requested to come and join us in the celebration.



Jagtar Bhatia (Chairman)



Shinderpal Narabut (President)



Dharampal Chonkaria (Gen. Secretary)



Vinod Kumar (Treasurer)



Balvir Chand Mal



Jagdev Ram



O.P. Balley



Dr. Harmesh Kumar,

ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Committee Members & more



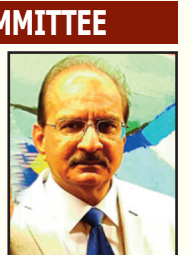
Jaija Jaggi



Salinder Bhatia



Ajai Paul Ram



Shashi Paul

LEGAL COMMITTEE

The New Committee appreciates the services of the previous committee and the selection panel and is looking forward to continued support. Guidance and cooperation of the entire Sangat who is the backbone of our Gurughar. Thank you.

Sangat De Sewadar

Chairman
Jagtar Bhatia

President
Shinder Paul Narabut

General Secretary
Dharam Pal Chonkria

Treasurer
Vinod Kumar