



(Invited Editorial Article)

Guru Ravidass, Egalitarian Social Order and Dalit Consciousness

Guru Ravidass, one of the most famous untouchable Sant-poets of the 15th-16th century, is known as a leading star of the Bhakti movement, especially the *nirguna sampradaya* or *santparampara* (sect or tradition of devotees of a formless God) of the later medieval centuries in Northern India. He was a cobbler, sage, poet, philosopher and social reformer, all rolled into one, who adopted Bhakti (loving devotion) as a method of social protest against the centuries old inhuman system of untouchability. He did not discard the religion he was born in nor abandon his so-called degraded lowest caste-based occupation of leather-work to move up on the scale of social hierarchy, as is often referred to in the case of two widely accepted as well as cited models of upward social mobility – conversion and Sanskritization – in India and elsewhere. Instead, Guru Ravidass chose Bhakti of *Nirakar* (formless) God and earning livelihood through his hereditary leather-work as a middle path to protest against the rotten caste-based evil of social exclusion and oppression. This unique middle path method – free from religious rituals and sectarian formalities – was very novel and daring given the religious bigotry state-of-affairs of his time. Guru Ravidass laid emphasis on fearlessness, self-respect, dignity of labour and compassion for all. It reflected the democratic and egalitarian traits of his social philosophy based on simple devotion to God. It was daring in the sense that he chose to challenge his tormentors by employing the iconography of their dress as a symbol of social protest which was not only highly objectionable but was equally deadly for a low caste of his times. He challenged the tyranny of Brahmins and defied their hegemony by adopting the prohibited dress – *Dhoti* (cloth wrapped around the waist), *Janeue* (sacred thread) and *Tilak* (sacred red mark on forehead) – for the untouchables. It is important to note here that in the popular calendar culture of Punjab, Guru Ravidass is invariably presented in the above-mentioned dress code which was anathema for the lower castes. His iconography seems to work as a suitable pedagogic tool to convey the message of self-respect and the dignity of labour to the downtrodden who were not only completely debarred from entering into the spiritual sphere in the Hindu society monopolized by the priestly class of Brahmins, but were also treated worse than animals because of their so-called low caste birth and brutally imposed lower status nature of their occupation. It is in this context that his emphasis on Bhakti and adoption of unique iconography produced a

new text of a lower-caste peaceful social protest.

Guru Ravidass became prominent because he unleashed a frontal attack on the long tradition of social oppression and untouchability in the Hindu society. Though born and brought up in Uttar Pradesh province of North India, Guru Ravidass came to command large followings among the lower castes of Punjab, which he believed to have visited during his journeys towards Rajasthan. Another factor that made him further popular in Punjab is the inclusion of his Bani (spiritual poetry 40 hymns and one *Shloka*) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, sacred scriptures of Sikh faith. His stature grew still further when the Ad Dharm movement made him its patron Sant and a political rallying point. The Ad Dharm movement which came into existence in 1920s used his pictures as its emblem, poetry as its sacred text and legends about him as illustration of lower caste pride and power. The fact that Guru Ravidass came from one of the lowest castes, acted as a catalyst in the emergence of dalit consciousness in Punjab. His fellow low caste followers, who consider him their Guru, dedicated to him temples, memorial halls, educational institutions/chairs, cultural organizations, and hospitals. They founded several missions to accurately establish facts about his life and works, and to disseminate his message of compassion, equality, and brotherhood in India and abroad. In fact, his lustrous image played an instrumental role in mobilizing the outcastes especially the Chamars (leather workers) who also joined the Ad Dharm movement in large numbers. Consequently, the Chamars of Punjab and Punjabi Chamar diasporas organized themselves into various Guru Ravidass Sabhas (societies) and established a large

number of Ravidass shrines popularly known as Ravidass Deras within the state and abroad.

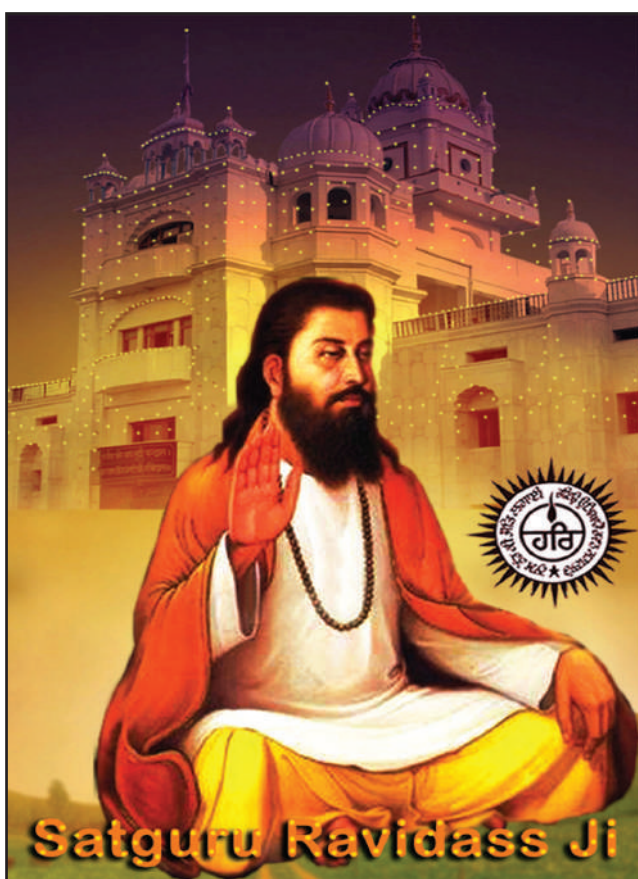
But made Guru Ravidass the most venerable among his fellow community folks was his steadfast determination to proudly exhibit his otherwise degraded caste identity. Though he attired himself like a Brahmin, he did never hide his caste. Attiring like a Brahmin, Guru Ravidass did not want to convey the superiority of the profession of priesthood at all. He did not pretend to show any pride in the dress of the priestly Brahmin caste. His only motive, it seems, to dress like priests, was to challenge hegemony of the high-caste people. He kept on making and mending shoes while sitting amidst leather. He did not discard his caste in any way. Rather, he became very vocal about it and the oppression perpetrated in its name on the lower caste people. He repeatedly mentioned about his caste in his widely appreciated scared poetry. This is what made him a prophet of Dalit consciousness in North India and distinguished his innovative 'middle path' from the stereotype models of religious conversion and Sanskritization. While adopting the prohibited dress and other symbols of the upper castes, and at the same time sticking to his hereditary occupation, he probably tried to show how lower castes could achieve social mobility without sacrificing/compromising their distinct Dalit identity. It seems that Guru Ravidass's middle path model of Dalit social mobility liberated Dalits from what Schuetz called the dilemma of 'a man without a history'. In other words, it taught a new way of achieving Dalit social mobility without hiding one's caste as well as ethnic social ties and customs. Indeed, a unique method of Dalit social mobility! Moreover, this noble Dalit social mobility model helped the lowest of low castes to rise up to reclaim their lost indigenous socio-cultural and na-

tive religious heritage.

Sacred poetry of Guru Ravidass eventually emerged as a vehicle of social protest during the early decades of 20th century colonial rule in India. His poetry, written in the vernacular of common man, is full of radical fervour. It provides what Gail Omvedt underlined 'hope for a better world and a fight against exploiters, power-holders and oppression going on under the name of religion'. It reflected his vision of the social and spiritual needs of the downtrodden and underlined the urgency of their emancipation. He, therefore, is regarded as a messiah of the downtrodden who revere him as devoutly as Hindus revered their Gods and Goddesses, and Sikhs their Gurus. They worship his image, celebrate his *Jayantis* (birth and death anniversaries), recite his hymns every morning and night, raise slogans like *Ravidass Shakti Amar Rahe* (the spiritual power of Ravidass live forever) and repose faith in his spiritual power. This unique 'middle path' model of Dalit social mobility and social protest based on the negation of the viability of religious conversion on the one hand, and the utility of following into the footsteps of the upper castes on the other, was well received in Punjab – a vast Dalit constituency groomed by the Ad Dharm movement – for the following interrelated reasons: A) Dalits in Punjab had a rich background of Ad Dharm leadership, which facilitated institutionalization of an alternative iRavidass culture, in the cities as well as rural areas in the state, based on the teachings and life styles of Guru Ravidass; B) the fact that Guru Ravidass himself belonged to one of the lowest castes (Chamar caste) acted as a catalyst in the adoption of his unique path; C) Dalits in Punjab were not politically motivated enough to follow radical separatism perhaps because of the influence of Ad Dharm movement. They were also not equally willing to tread the path of assimilation because of the fear of losing their very own culture in the whirlpool of the



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'Touchdown confirmed': Indian-American scientist helps NASA land rover on Mars

Swati Mohan Mohan was the first to confirm that the rover had successfully touched down on the Martian surface

As Perseverance, the NASA rover, landed on the Martian surface Friday, millions of miles away in the US space agency's control room, a woman's voice rang out: "Touchdown confirmed!"

The announcement was from Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan who leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of NASA's Mars 2020 mission. In her role as flight controller, Mohan played a pivotal role in the landing of the historic craft.

Mohan was the first to confirm that the rover had successfully touched down on the Martian surface after surviving a particularly tricky plunge through the atmosphere of the Red Planet.

"Touchdown confirmed! Perseverance safely on the surface of Mars, ready to begin seeking signs of past life," Mohan announced, prompt-

ing her colleagues at NASA to fist-bump and break into celebrations.

Mohan, who emigrated from India to the US when she was only a year old, said the Guidance, Navigation, and Controls Operations (GN&C) are the "eyes and ears" of the spacecraft.

Commenting on her team's role in the current mission, Mohan said their job during the cruise phase heading towards Mars was to figure out how the spacecraft is oriented, and make sure it is pointed correctly in space—"solar arrays to sun, antenna to Earth, and maneuver the spacecraft to get it where we want to go", she is quoted as saying in her bio page on the NASA website.

There were "seven minutes of terror" leading to the entry, descent, and landing on Mars, she said. GN&C determines the position of the spacecraft and commands the manoeuvres to help it land safely.

"As the team's operations lead, I am the primary point of communication between the GN&C sub-



system and the rest of the project.

"I am responsible for the training of the GN&C team, scheduling the mission control staffing for GN&C, as well as the policies/procedures the GN&C uses in the mission control room," Mohan noted.

Raised in the Northern Virginia-Washington DC metro area, she completed her bachelor's degree from Cornell University in Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering, and her M.S. and Ph.D from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Aeronautics/Astronautics. It's not clear how old she is.

Over the course of her career with NASA, Mohan has worked on the

Cassini mission to Saturn and GRAIL, a pair of formation flown spacecraft to the Moon, and has been a mainstay with the Mars 2020 mission since its beginning in 2013.

Mohan said she got interested in space after watching the popular TV show "Star Trek" when she was nine.

"Seeing the beautiful depictions of the new regions of the universe that they were exploring. I remember thinking 'I want to do that. I want to find new and beautiful places in the universe.' The vastness of space holds so much knowledge that we have only begun to learn," she had told NASA.

Mohan said her passion for space increased further when she took her first physics class at the age of 16.

"I was lucky enough to have a great teacher, and everything was so understandable and easy. That was when I really considered engineering, as a way to pursue space," she added.

Source Courtesy: The Tribune, February 19, 2021



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upper castes' cultural lifestyles; and D) they were, rather, well convinced of the potentiality of their indigenous religion (Ad Dharm) to salvage them from the abyss of social exclusion and oppression caused by the asymmetrical and oppressive structures of the Hindu social order. Since Ravidass himself did not embrace any other religion nor he tried to escape social exclusion by getting assimilated into the mainstream social system of the upper castes, and above all he belonged to their own caste, Dalits of Punjab found in him an exemplar of the 'middle path'. The presence of simple but sharp elements of social protest in his teachings along with the commonality of his caste provided the basis for the rise of radical

consciousness among Dalits in the state. The mere mention of his name evokes a sense of confidence and self-respect among them. So much so that a large number of them prefer to be identified as 'Ravidassia' rather than be known by their customary caste titles colored with derogatory connotations.

Thus, it is for such reasons, as mentioned above, that Guru Ravidass was embraced by the leadership of Ad Dharm movement as an exemplar of the 'middle path' in whose life and teachings the Dalits of Punjab found the necessary ammunition for the ignition of radical Dalit consciousness in the state. The establishment of a large number of Ravidass Deras by the Dalits in Punjab and in other parts of India over the last few years

is a case in point. Ravidass became very popular among the Punjabi Dalit diasporas as well, who 'have built Ravidass temples in almost all the towns of the world wherever they happened to live even in small numbers' in order to assert their separate caste identity. The number of Ravidass Deras has been multiplying very fast, and has taken the form of a sort of an alternate socio-cultural Ravidass Deras movement for the emancipation of the Dalits.

It has generated a sense of confidence among them and provided them an opportunity to exhibit their hitherto eclipsed Dalit identity. These Deras, in fact, have been functioning as missions to sensitize the Dalits and to facilitate their empowerment. In order to look different from the

shrines of Hindu and Sikh religions, and to distinctly project their separate Dalit religious identity, Ravidass Deras have formulated their own religious symbols, ceremonies, prayers, rituals and messages of social protest against the oppressive structures of caste domination in the agrarian society of Punjab. Led by varied Ravidass Deras, Guru Ravidass movement has offered a new hope to the ex-untouchables who have also been empowered by the various state affirmative action related provisions in the Constitution of Independent India. The goalmouth of the Ravidass movement, based as it is on the teachings of Guru Ravidass, rooted in the ideal of *Begampura* (a city free from sorrows and sufferings of all sort).

Supreme Court's Forestland Ruling

What Lessons can Himachal Pradesh Learn from Other Hilly States



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On 15 February 2021, a three-judge Green Bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde allowed the Himachal Pradesh government to clear 614 hectares of forest and move ahead with 138 currently existing infrastructure projects. Apart from this, the bench also gave approval for 289 other projects involving diversion of 122 hectares of forest land subjected to certain conditions. Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Jai Ram Thakur has welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court saying the development work of the state will be accelerated now. All of these projects had been suspended from March 11, 2019 as they were barred by the Supreme Court under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980 and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006. The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh said that he discussed this issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah and the state government also filed five petitions in Supreme Court; one in 2019 and four in 2020 seeking commissioning of these projects.

Disclosing the details of these projects Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh said that the 138 projects under FCA include 20 hydropower projects, 88 roads, 3 bus stands, 2 degree colleges, 1 Manali ropeway, 1 helipad, 1 IIT, 1 cowshed, 1 Shiv Dham temple, 1 school and so on. Out of total projects 465 got clearance from FRA 2006 by the Supreme Court include 334 road projects, 53 schools, 20 community centers, 10 dispensaries, 7 anganwadis and so on. The bench comprising Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V.Ramasubramanian also gave the approval of Rs. 1337 crore Green Corridor National Highway Sirmour and the construction of two-lane national highway in Dharamshala.

Development of any state lags behind due to non-approval of development work. Although the Supreme Court has given a commendable verdict in approving development projects, only time will tell how the government of Himachal Pradesh will implement it. The state of Himachal Pradesh, like Uttarakhand state, is mountainous, earthquake prone, rich in forests and covered with snow. It is important to seek the opinion of geologists, environmentalists and locals before any development can take place here. Failing to do so, Himachal Pradesh may have to bear the brunt of tragic tragedies like Kedarnath (2013) and Chamoli (2021) in Uttarakhand. Development work in mountainous areas requires removing/cutting of

forest cover and mountains/hills. Absence of forests erodes the topsoil cover while cutting off mountains/hills disturb the balance/stability of mountains/hills increasing probability of landslides, resulting in the huge loss of life and property.

Feeling happy about the approval of the above projects the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh said now the state would grow rapidly because these projects include 20 hydropower projects, four-lane Green Corridor National Highway of Sirmour, Manali ropeway, helipad and more than 400 roads. But these projects fall in the jurisdiction of FCA 1980 or FRA 2006. It is important to mention here that if the reserved forests or eco-sensitive zones are



used for hydropower projects and multi-lane road development projects then this area of the state could be devastated like Uttarakhand. The construction of one kilometer road in the hilly area would extract at least 30,000 to 40,000 cubic meter of soil and stones. During the construction of roads and dams, mountains are usually blown up with explosives causing cracks in the mountains. As a result they slid down during monsoon season either by excessive rainfall or by heavy snowfall in winters. This leads to heavy loss of life and property. In the Himalayan region, on average one person is killed every year by landslides in an area of 100 square kilometers. In 2014 landslides killed 500 people in the country. A recent avalanche in Uttarakhand has killed 58 people and left 150 missing unaccounted for in the tunnel. A landslide on February 16, 2021 near Garola on Kharamukh-Holi road in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh closed traffic for several hours. Road widening work was underway at the site and some part of the mountain was blown up a day earlier with explosives. There are a number of incidents of landslides which have occurred in the country and some of

them are mentioned in this article. The landslides destroyed an entire village in Guwahati district of Assam on 18 September 1948, Malpa village of Uttarakhand in 1999 and Malin village of Maharashtra in 2014. In the mountainous district of Darjeeling in west Bengal, a 60 kilometer road length collapsed in 1968 and thousands of people were crushed to death. In Kerala, 40 people died in 2001 and 60 in 2020 while 67 people died in Mumbai due to landslide incidents. In 2013, about 4200 villages in Uttarakhand were affected and countless locals buried under the mountains. Landslides in Malin (2014) in Maharashtra, Kedarnath (2013) and Chamoli (2021) in Uttarakhand have been caused by the construction of

the third pole of the world as it contains a huge amount of glacial ice. Himalayan glaciers are melting at a rapid rate due to the rise in average temperature of the earth. Rapid melting of glaciers creating glacial lakes which could lead to a tragedy in the state like recent tragedy of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh acknowledged the fact that the state would take up the issue of the Chamoli incident while implementing a plan for hydropower projects.

Indiscriminate deforestation could lead to severe water shortages in the state in near future as the roots of trees absorb excess rain and snow water and later on gradually release this water which flows into rivers, springs and waterfalls. These projects even include those forest areas which fall under FRA 2006. The law covers the tribal people who are totally dependent on forests for their basic needs and development rights. The use of their land for development works means complete displacement of these people. Even if these people appeal for a lawful hearing in such situations, it often goes unheard. In this regard, based on his research Dr. Sujeet has brought out that in the state of Himachal Pradesh, 2223 appeals were made under the Act in 2018 out of which only 136 were settled. In this way by using the forestland for development, falling under FCA and FRA is harming the environment and the rights of tribal people.

Sometimes, public welfare institutions such as schools, colleges and universities are built on forestland and later on it comes out that these constructions were not for public welfare but for corporate-houses. For example, Manav Bharti University in Solan is involved in about 36,000 fake degrees scandals.

The governments while using the forestland for development purposes should keep in mind that economic development should be for the benefit of people and people shouldn't be sacrificed for the development. The development should be sustainable and protect the interests of the working class people and not the corporate sector.

The Himachal Pradesh government should now seek the opinion and advice of geologists, meteorologists, environmentalists and local people before embarking on these projects and develop them in such a way as to sustain natural resources of the state.

dams in environmentally sensitive areas. Himachal Pradesh state also falls in the seismic sensitive zone. The Indian and Arabian tectonic plates are constantly pushing India towards the Eurasian plate, which is likely to cause major earthquakes from Jammu and Kashmir in the north-western region to Mizoram in the north-eastern region of the country. Geologists are well aware of this fact, they had expressed concern after the earthquake in Nepal, 2015 and stated that a major earthquake could strike in Himalayan region at any time. A renowned scientist from University of London, Dr. Kesho had expressed fear in 2015 that a massive earthquake could hit Himachal region. The jolts of an earthquake were felt in Himachal Pradesh even more recently in 2021 on 12 February at 10.34pm and on 14 February at 3.49pm. It is pertinent to mention here that Nepal's earthquake of 2015 killed 30 people in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh even the epicenter of the earthquake was at the distance of 300-400 kilometer away from the Indian border. This earthquake shook 11 states of our country.

The state of Himachal Pradesh is nestled in the Himalayas. Himalayan mountains are also called

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦੇ 644ਵੇਂ ਯੂਕਾਸ਼ ਦਿਹਾੜੇ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਮੂਹ ਮਾਨਵਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਲੱਖ-ਲੱਖ ਵਧਾਈਆਂ

The Relevance of Begumpura in Today's World



We are going to celebrate the 644th Gurburab for the revolutionary saint, Sri Guru Ravidass Ji, in February 2021 worldwide. Undoubtedly, it is important to ponder the relevance of Begumpura and what it means in today's world at large. The current circumstances in the world especially here in the United States of America and also in the context of Farmers agitation in India in response to three agricultural bills passed by Indian government.

During his time, Guru Ravidass Ji, saw a lot of discrimination and inhumane treatment of human beings based on poverty and caste. However, he did not react in anger and did not promote hatred for those who humiliated him and his community members. Rather he used that agitation and anger to raise his voice against policies of discrimination based on caste, race, social status and economic status. He only promoted one message that God created everyone equal. Therefore, he worked for social justice, liberty and humane conditions especially for those who were and or are downtrodden and socially oppressed.

The essence of Begumpura (a Village or Place without suffering) and its meaning was also enshrined in the Declaration of Independence which

being promoted by current Indian government, where public education system is being destroyed through privatization of the education system so that the poor people from bottom of the social hierarchy cannot go for higher education. We saw that even the stipends of SC students were withheld in India by Akali/BJP alliance in Punjab during their rule. The so-called "enlightened class" of India knows that if these people become educated, they will change their destiny and the destiny of their surrounding communities. Nobody would work to clean their homes, work in their fields and or in their factories for cheap labor.

We need to imagine during those days of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji, when discrimination and untouchability was so severe against some sections of the society and when they were treated worse than animals. It was during that time Sri Guru Ravidass Ji raised his voice against those injustices. He fought with his spiritual wisdom with Kings, rulers and Pundits of his times against their practices of discrimination. That was the reason that Guru Nanak Dev Ji enshrined his writings in Holy Guru Granth Sahib (The Holy Book of Sikhs).

His pure spirit of fighting for

others is evident in American and Indian societies, the oldest and largest democracies of the world. We saw that example in recent election where Americans elected the first woman vice-president of black and South Asian descent. This awareness in human consciousness to eradicate discrimination from today's world is the living example of the message of Begumpura promoted by Sri Guru Ravidass Ji.

The concepts of "Begumpura" or "Ram Rajaya" or "Jannat" demonstrate the ideals of pureness of great and unadulterated souls who promoted freedom, equality and justice for all. They campaigned against the darkness of exploitation and greed. It is contributions from such great souls that people can enjoy dignity and respect without discrimination of race, caste, religion, gender, national origin, disability and sexual orientation. We know that when we look at the period of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji, it was very hard for certain sectors of society to protect themselves or their families from indignity, humiliation and violence.

Therefore, the need of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji's Begumpura is very relevant today as it has been centuries ago. We all need to create a state of mind where everyone lives in peace without suffering or anxiety. The true learning from this concept will be to create awareness against the current system of exploitation or unfair taxes on the commodities trapping people to lower levels of welfare thus, increasing the inequality between haves and have nots. The agricultural bills in India would lead to widening of that gap as we do not have adequate infra-structures in place like we have in America. We saw the long lines in front of food banks in America during this pandemic and long lines of those laborers walking for hundreds of miles without any help from Indian government during this pandemic. We see the safety net have been eroded over the last few decades as we march towards individualism of the West rather than egalitarian and cooperative models of the East ancient philosophies.

It is true that Sri Guru Ravi-

dass Ji's message motivates us to work to establish a system of no fear, blemish or downfall for anyone. He visualized the "perfect state of mind; it is where there is lasting peace and safety for all. Certainly, this is what we desperately need today. He wrote; "God's Kingdom is steady, stable and eternal, there is no second or third status; all are equal there".

He was able to dream about the city which was very populous and eternally famous and those who live therein were wealthy and contented. He continues; "They stroll about freely, just as they please. They know the Mansion of the Lord's Presence, and no one blocks their way."

The true reflection of Begumpura will be to help create a community, city, state, nation or a global village where everybody lives in peace and harmony. It is where everyone is our friend. At last, everyone has affordable housing, food and universal health care all over the globe including here in United States of America.



Dr. Harmesh Kumar
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Goodie Takhar, PhD

Kirti Kissan Panchayat Punjab

Convention: Workers, Farmers, Constitution: Assault and Defense

Ludhiana (February 21, 2021) - A large number of intellectuals, social activists, retired bureaucrats and other well wishers of the downtrodden held a convention in Guru Nanak Bhawan, Ludhiana today to mobilise support for the farmers' agitation from those quarters that are not sufficiently represented at the movement. Agricultural labourers, workers from the unorganised sector and other manual workers, whether skilled or not, are under serious attack from the forces advocating liberal agenda and pushing most of the economic activities to the market place. The purpose of the convention is also to highlight the abolition of 44 labour protection laws and bringing 4 labour codes in their place.

The convention feels that if farmers are under attack, and are living under the fear of loss of their lands after the promulgation of three "black laws" by the Modi government, the danger of starvation deaths to dalits, OBCs and other working people can hardly be underestimated. In fact, both rural and urban working people will be the first to feel the

pinch of deprivation and starvation if the three black laws are not repealed. Government is no more ready to buy food stuff for the 81 crore people who have been promised subsidised food under the Food Security Act,



2013. They have also lost their right to protest in more than one ways ever since the labour laws are repealed. It is clear that the government has decided to give red-carpet welcome to corporate lobby at the cost of the labour welfare schemes. In the backdrop of Covid-19 and consequent

economic recession there was an urgent need to enhance budget for MGNREGA but it has been cut by 34.5% compared to the revised budget of the previous year.

No wonder that the Farmers' agitation progressed to Jan Andolan effortlessly as the pending disastrous consequences for the poor in general and working people in particular are as evident as day light. Promulgation of three "black agricultural laws" and four "black labour codes" is a clear instance of the ill designs of the government that seems to be bent upon killing the spirit of the constitution, particularly targeting the social welfare schemes. The Convention therefore demands:

1. That all the three black agricultural laws be repealed and purchase at

MSP be guaranteed.

2. All the four "black labour codes" be revisited and the hard earned labour welfare and protective rights be restored

3. Any further amendments in the laws/ constitution should not be carried out without the proper consultation of affected sections of society. In no case any change be made to preamble of the constitution, fundamental rights of the people and directive principle for the state.

The convention further decides that if our voices go unheard we would further intensify our struggle by mobilising larger sections of people in order to register voices of dissent.



S.R. Ladhar
IAS Retired

Bhim Army's Chandra Shekhar Aazad, 5 Indian-origin persons on TIME list of emerging leaders

Time100 Next noted how Bhim Army practices a 'distinct brand of assertiveness', and also made note of Aazad's 'aura of charismatic approachability' and 'luxuriant' moustache.

New Delhi: Bhim Army Chief Chandra Shekhar Aazad has been featured in TIME magazine's annual list of 100 "emerging leaders who are shaping the future".

The TIME100 Next, which was published Wednesday, is an expansion of the magazine's flagship TIME100 franchise that highlights 100 emerging leaders who are shaping the future across genres — including artists, advocates, leaders, phenoms, advocates and innovators.

The magazine noted how Aazad's Bhim Army "runs schools to help Dalits escape poverty through education". The Bhim Army, it further said, "practices a distinct brand of assertiveness, sweeping into villages on loud motorbikes to protect victims of caste-based violence and organizing provocative demonstrations against discrimination".

The Bhim Army had also "spearheaded a campaign for justice" in the September 2020 gang rape and assault of a 19-year-old Dalit woman, allegedly by four upper caste men, in Uttar Pradesh, the magazine said.

TIME recognised Aazad's political ambitions and the formation of his Aazad Samaj Party in March last year. The party's "first real test", it noted, will come during elections next year in Uttar Pradesh, where "Hindu nationalists are politically

dominant".

The magazine also said that even though the Bhim Army has maintained a "muscular stance", Aazad has cultivated "an aura of charismatic approachability through deft use of social media". The article also took note of how Aazad's "luxuriant" moustache was a form of re-



sistance, a style often seen by upper castes as a "status symbol".

Other Indian-origin people on the list

Five Indian-origin personalities have also made it to the list, including Rishi Sunak, chancellor of the exchequer in the United Kingdom; Vijaya Gadde, Twitter's top lawyer and its head of policy; Apoorva Mehta, founder and CEO of Instacart; Dr Shikha Gupta, executive director of the nonprofit Get us PPE; and co-founder of nonprofit Upsolve

Rohan Pavuluri.

Sunak's rise, the magazine noted, has been noteworthy — from an "unknown" minister in the British government to becoming the "benevolent face of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic". He was chosen to lead the government's treasury in February 2020.

However, the report also said that Sunak perhaps carries more blame than most others for Britain's failure to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

Lawyer Gadde, TIME noted, was the one who had reportedly pulled the plug on former US president Donald Trump's Twitter account following the 6 January attack on the Capitol. It also described how she takes all decisions on "content-moderation" for the social media giant,

was the architect of the 2019 decision to ban all political advertising, and is responsible for the warning labels that Twitter applied to "Covid-19 and election-interference misinformation".

"While Twitter is still home to much misinformation and harassment," the magazine said, "Gadde's influence is slowly turning the company into one that sees free speech not as sacrosanct — but as just one human right among many that need to be weighed against one another."

Instacart, founded by 34-year-old Mehta, is a grocery pick-up and delivery service in the US that became popular during the Covid-19-induced lockdowns and which had raised \$500 million in venture capital last year.

The magazine also recognised Washington-based Dr Shikha Gupta, whose NGO called Get us PPE is one of the largest organisations in the US that has arranged PPEs for frontline workers in the country. It has helped distribute more than 6.6 million PPEs in America so far.

TIME also noted how Pavuluri's Upsolve helped relieve more than \$300 million in debt. Upsolve offers a free online tool to help users fill out bankruptcy forms on their own. Filing for personal bankruptcy is an effective way in America to eliminate debt and re-enter the economy. But high legal fees and complex paperwork often make the process difficult for low-income families.

Source Courtesy: The Print, SHUBHANGI MISRA, 18 February, 2021

Legacy of Guru Ravidass – Greetings on the GURPURAB



He underlines in his Bani that slavery or subjugation is the crime of the first order and cajoles the people to understand that nobody loves the weak. One should be strong and self confident. He rightly said:

पराधीनता पाप है; जान लओ रे मीत
खदिस दास पराधीन से कौन करे है
पूरीत !

With this, I would like to dwell on the present day effect and relevance of Guru Ravidass – 'A Chamar – low caste untouchable' of his times about 650 years ago. One of the 'Great Chamars' of present day scenario – Chandrashekhar Azad of Bhim Army and President of Azad Samaj Party has proved himself in upholding the mission of Guru Ravidass by making to the list of 100 personalities of the world as "emerging

leaders who are shaping the future" as published in the annual issue in February, 2021 of the prestigious magazine the Times. The Times has

nore the honour which Chandrashekhar earned through struggle and toil as a true follower of Guru Ravidass. One of the national TV channels, ZEE NEWS, even tried to downsize Chandrashekhar Azad and castigate the integrity of the Times magazine. It was height of shameful-ness. Guru Ravidass is more relevant to such 'narrow mindsets' to address the social malady of caste based discrimination in the larger interests of the society.

It is also a message to the followers Guru Ravidass that they are to break the shackles of subjugation and graded inequality themselves as taught by the great Guru.

President Ram Nath Kovind while speaking at a function organized by Shri Guru Ravidass Vishav Mahapeeth in New Delhi on February 21 said and rightly so, "श्री गुरु खदिस जैसे महान संतो का आगमन सदियों में कभी-कभी होता है। उन्होंने केवल अपने समकालीन समाज का ही नहीं बल्कि भावी समाज के कल्याण का मार्ग भी प्रशस्त किया था। अनेक विद्वानों की मान्यता है कि संत खदिसजी की असाधारण दीर्घायु के कारण तत्कालीन समाज एवं संतों की कई पीढ़ियों को उनका मार्गदर्शन मिला रहा।"

आधुनिक भारत की शासन व्यवस्था की दिशा बताने वाले हमारे संविधान में उल्लिखित अनेक नीति निर्देशक तत्व भी गुरु खदिस द्वारा सुझाए गए मार्ग का अनुसरण करते हैं। समान न्याय और



Ramesh Chander
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नशुल्क कानूनी सहायता, काम करने की मानवोचित व्यवस्था, श्रमिकों के लिए नरिवाह व मजदूरी, अनुसूचित जातियों, जनजातियों और अन्य दुर्बल वर्गों की शिक्षा व आर्थिक हितों से संबन्धित नीति निर्देशक तत्वों में भी श्री गुरु खदिस द्वारा प्रसारित आदर्श परलिकषित होते हैं। हमारे संविधान के प्रमुख शिल्पी बाबासाहब डॉक्टर भीमराव आंबेडकर ने संत खदिस की संतवाणी में व्यक्त अनेक आदर्शों को संवैधानिक स्वरूप प्रदान किया है। इस प्रकार, संत शशिमर्णा खदिस व डॉक्टर आंबेडकर जैसे संतों व महापुरुषों को पाकर आज देश गौरवान्वित हो रहा है।" Mahamahim Rashtrapatiji further said,

while highlighting the relevance of Guru Ravidass's legacy of establishing an ideal state, "गुरु खदिसजी ने समता-मूलक और भेदभाव-मुक्त सुखमय समाज की कल्पना की थी और उसे बे-गमपुरा नाम दिया था। उन्होंने कहा था: बेगमपुरा शहर को नांउ, दुसु अंदोहु नहीं तहि ठांउ अस्थातः

बे-गमपुरा उस शहर का नाम है जहां किसी भी तरह के दुख या भय के लिए कोई स्थान नहीं है।"

President Ram Nath Kovind informed the congregation at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi that his predecessor President Giani Zail Singh termed this Sabad – Begumpura Shehar Ka Naon - of the great Guru as "Preamble of Socialism".

The legacy of Guru Ravidass is relevant and important to address the social ills of the society. The followers of Guru

Ravidass has a special responsibility to bring about unity and cohesiveness in the community and society at large to realize to the vision of 'Begumpura' by adhering to the Bani of Guru Ravidass - साध संगत मति रहिये माधो; जैसे मधुप मखीर ! It will be a true tribute – Shrdha Suman - to the great Guru Ravidass on his GURPURAB which is being celebrated throughout the world.



recognized Chandrashekhar Azad as the one who is trying to 'escape poverty through education'. It seems, as a proud Chamar, Chandrashekhar is convinced of and dedicated to the philosophy of Guru Ravidass as enshrined in his Bani:

माधो अवदिया हति कीन वविक दीप मलिन

It is a matter of remorse that the main stream media in India both print and electronic has tended to ig-

नै जब गुरु खदिस के जीवन दर्शन, सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक मूल्यों और उनकी प्रसंगिकता पर विचार करता हूँ तो मुझे यह देखकर प्रसन्नता होती है कि सामाजिक न्याय, स्वतन्त्रता, समता तथा बंधुता के हमारे संवैधानिक मूल्य भी उनके आदर्शों के अनुरूप ही हैं। हमारे संविधान द्वारा सुनिश्चित - समता का अधिकार, अवसर की समता, असंपृश्यता का अंत, अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतन्त्रता जैसे - मूल अधिकार भी संत खदिस के आदर्श समाज की ओर देशवासियों को आगे ले जा रहे हैं। इसी प्रकार,

This year the GURPURAB of Guru Ravidass falls on February 27. I take this opportunity to greet my friends and millions and millions of followers of

Guru Ravidass in India and the world at large. The mission and legacy pertaining to 'Equality, Justice and Fraternity and also socialism' of the great Guru is as relevant today as it was before. The lofty philosophy of Guru Ravidass keeps the ball rolling for the present day dictum of 'Democratic Socialism' on one hand and the establishing an 'Equitable World Order' on the other. Guru Ravidass said in his Bani:

ऐसा चाहूँ राज मैं, जहं मलि सबन को अन्ना

छोट बड़ो सब सम बसै, खदिस रहे प्रसन्न

In the present days of communal turmoil and increasing intolerance all around, the Bani of Guru Ravidass upholds the values of tolerance and fraternity

which we would ignore at our own peril. He said in simple words:

कह खदिस खलास चमार;

जो हम शहरी सो मीत हमारा !

In our social edifice of caste ridden order and graded inequality, Guru Ravidass's message of 'self-confidence and human dignity' is all the more relevant and important for uplifting and empowerment of the marginalized sections of the society.

Greetings on the GURPURAB of Guru Ravidass

It gives me great pleasure in greeting the esteemed Ambedkar Times and The Desh Doaba and also their readers on the auspicious occasion of the GURPURAB of Guru Ravidass, the harbinger of equality and fraternity. It is a matter of satisfaction to note that over the years Editor-in-Chief Prem Chumber has been doing his utmost in turning these important media organs into vibrant mouth-piece of the weaker and marginalized sections of the society in the scenario when the main stream-media is engaged in supporting the vested interest. It is

all the more important and relevant that The Ambedkar Times and The Desh Doaba is fully dedicated to mission and philosophy of Great Masters like Guru Ravidass, Bhagwan Balmik, Satguru Kabir, the great Sikh Gurus and contemporary icons like Babasaheb Ambedkar, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Manyawar Kanshi Ram among others.

It is not easy to carry this responsibility alone. He deserves our support and understanding both financial and moral. I am confident that our Diaspora in the USA and other

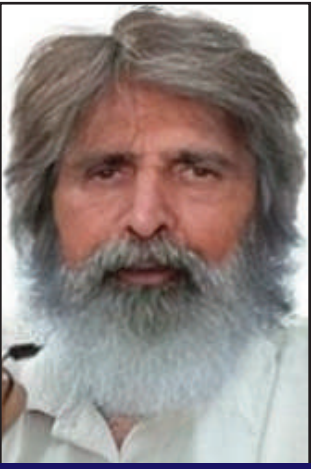
countries abroad would come forward and help these important media organs of the weaker sections of the society. I take this opportunity to greet and congratulate all of you and solicit their support in realizing the lofty concept of "Begumpura" – The Preamble of Democratic Socialism given by the great Guru Ravidass.

Ramesh Chander

Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)

91-99885-10940

Evolution, Genetic Diversity, And The Cause of Inclusion



Dr. Jagdish Rai

The theory of evolution was proposed by Charles Darwin in the 1850s to explain the origin of species. It was also applied by Darwin on the evolution of human facial expressions, then

In the process of evolution, the diverse hereditary characteristics in a population are selected according to their adaptive value in the environment. If there is no diversity then there is nothing to select upon and a single change in environmental condition may wipe out the species. Pursuing 'eugenics' as purported by Francis Galton not only pushes the population towards genetic homogeneity, but the characteristics aspired are also not purely genetic and not always adaptive. Intellectual abilities are a result of interaction between nature (heredity) and nurture (environment). The methods to measure intellectual abilities and their adaptive value in terms of success in a career are still not well established.

Contrary to the presumption of Francis Galton, high achievers in intellectual pursuits also come from ordinary families. Very often the excellence is achieved by individuals inspired to work hard for it. In cultural arts and creativity, individuals from ordinary backgrounds often catch the imagina-

tion of many ethnic groups and adopting the better thoughts of other cultures.

In the near future, the next-generation technology will make it affordable for a common person to get their personal genome sequence. This new information can be very valuable for prescribing medicine and preventive lifestyle measures according to individual genetic makeup. This upcoming concept is called personalized medicine or pharmacogenomics. But the new information of the personal genome may also create new ethical issues of privacy, genetic discrimination, and a misinformed self-perception. Here evolution has to be understood in its population genetics context.

In population genetics, a population is defined as a group of individuals who have a free flow of genes amongst them through marriages/reproduction. Therefore, a marital community is a population unit in population genetics, and its combined genes in totality are called the gene-

pool. In a gene-pool, various variants or alleles of a gene of a hereditary characteristic will have respective proportions in the gene-pool which is called allele-frequency. The frequency or proportion of all alleles of a gene will be 1 in total.

from severe malaria. Whereas the person with both 'A' alleles of hemoglobin will not have anemia but may suffer severe malaria. In this way, the allele S exists in the population for its adaptive advantage against malaria but an individual with both the S allele will pay the price for it. Similarly, many genetic traits have advantages and disadvantages depending on the combination, for example being too tall may make it difficult to maintain a balance for walking whereas the too short may also not win the race due to small step size. It also applies to various behavioral traits, and it is said that schizophrenia is the price humanity is paying for creativity. In this context, we shall remember that rare people born with special handicaps or talent are rare combinations of alleles of our gene-pool. A humanist acceptance of the handicapped by birth is the duty of the community as they are also part of our gene-pool. Similarly, the handicaps by accident are accommodated as it can happen to any of us.

On the other side, once in centuries, a person like Abdul Kalam also emerges by the rare combination of alleles and rare situations of our society.

Most importantly, it shall be noted that evolution has no fixed direction or destination. The adaptive characteristics change as the conditions of the environment change. The living beings also modify the surrounding environment to make a niche and the most important environmental factor for an individual is the other individuals. We can not predict the future environment with certainty which is a classical limitation of prediction or simulation as Albert Einstein said we can not count all that counts and all that we count does not count. The future adaptive

characteristics for human evolution can not be determined without predicting every detail of the environment, whereas prediction of even broad environmental conditions is not feasible so far. But a rich genetic diversity will increase the chances of survival of species in randomly changed environment. The directionlessness of evolution is shown in the picture on the cover of the book "Evolution: the scientific religion" by Jagdish Rai. In that image shown here also, a primate seems to walk over stones in shallow water, but there is no distinct path or direction. The facial expression of this primate is also contemplative but without any purpose and any positive or negative feeling.

The author also has written a book on these topics: *Evolution: The Scientific Religion*, available

at www.amazon.com/dp/B08SJWFF3T

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by TH Huxley on the evolution of human ethics, and then by various sociologists and ideologues to various aspects of society and ideologies. The theory has not only been used for tracing back the evolution of humans but also to speculate the future of human evolution. Being a very simple theory, it not only can be applied to a wide-ranging system, but it is also very prone to misinterpretations by distortions in the pretext of the system. Francis Galton purported the idea of "eugenics" which was based on a narrow set of adaptive characteristics within intellectual abilities. Such planned intervention in human societies is not only against the well-established ideals of humanism but also goes against the need for genetic diversity for a species to survive the unexpected changes in the environment. Such politically incorrect propositions eventually hampered the research in sociology on evolutionary lines.

In the study of various endangered wild animals like cheetah, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, etc, it is known that genetic homogeneity is the last blow for the extinction of a species. Even if the population of a species is large, but it lacks genetic diversity then also the species is very prone to extinction. A Genetically homogeneous population of species can get extinct by a single selection condition/factor such as the infection of a strain of the virus. In 1983, a captive African Cheetah population in the Oregon breeding colony was decimated by a coronavirus from domestic cats, whereas in cats this virus had only 1% morbidity. O' Brien showed that this population was monomorphic (low genetic diversity). This monomorphism caused difficulty in captive breeding, high juvenile morbidity, and vulnerability to infectious diseases. The rat species (*Rattus macleari* and *R. nativitatis*) native to Christmas Island of Australia also got extinct due to the spread of disease between 1899 and 1908. Ebola virus infection had brought gorillas close to extinction in 1918.



tion of common people.

The cause of ethnic inclusion is consistent with the need for genetic diversity for the survival of a species in changing environmental conditions and challenges. These ideals of humanism themselves have evolved through changes in ideas and competition amongst various ideologies of societies. They have ensured peace and prosperity in societies, specifically preventing counterproductive discrimination. **Every society has some reward or recognition for individuals doing more for society. But such recognition or social status can be stretched too far to the extent of prejudice and deceptive reputation. A hegemonic group may start discriminating against others in a way that is even against the merit and total productivity of the society. The modern ideals of egalitarianism and inclusion are to balance such counterproductive tendencies and promote cultural and ethnic diversity. Great civilizations have emerged by assimilation**

pool. In a gene-pool, various variants or alleles of a gene of a hereditary characteristic will have respective proportions in the gene-pool which is called allele-frequency. The frequency or proportion of all alleles of a gene will be 1 in total.

The proportion of a given allele will be generally in proportion to its adaptive value for the population. The alleles of various genes will make new combinations through independent assortment and an individual has a set of two alleles of each gene. The adaptation of an individual depends on this combination and sometimes a complex interaction amongst these alleles. For example, if an individual has both alleles of hemoglobin gene of the type 'S' then it causes sickle cell anemia, but it also protects the person from severe consequences of malaria. But if one allele of the hemoglobin gene is type 'S' and another is normal type 'A', then the person gets the best of both by not suffering severe anemia and getting protection



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DHAN DHAN SRI GURU RAVIDASS JI
Bole' So Nirbhay! Guru Ravidass Maharaj Ki Jai!

Guru- Piari Sadh Sangat Ji,

February 26-27-28, 2021

Gurpurb Sri Guru Ravidass Ji

Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha CA, Pittsburg is celebrating the 644th Parkash Utsav of SATGURU RAVIDASS JI on Sunday, February 28, 2021 at the temple as per program noted below:

ARAMBH SHRI AKHAND PATH- February 26, 2021 (Friday) 9:30 AM,

Nishan Sahib Hoisting Ceremony- February 27, 2021(Saturday) at 10:30 AM.

BHOG SHRI AKHAND PATH- February 28, 2021 (Sunday) 9:30 AM followed

by KIRTAN DIWAN

Prominent Jatha of Bhai Vijay Singh from Milpitas, Giani Gurnam Singh & Giani Ompal Singh will enhance this Kirtan Diwan along with distinguished Speakers and community leaders well versed with life and teachings of Satguru Ravidass ji.

For the safety of the Sangat and Sewadards, SANGAT is requested to follow

CDC/Contra Costa County COVID guidelines. Everyone must wear a mask/face covering, wash hands or use sanitizer before entering the Gurughar. Anyone with temperature or any COVID symptoms is humbly requested to refrain from coming to Gurughar.

Sri Guru Ravidass ji was born in 1377, in Kanshi, in India, in a humble family of Baba Santokh Dass ji and Mata Kalsa Devi ji. Guru Ravidass Ji was a great religious and social reformer. Guru Ji dedicated his whole life for the welfare of the humanity. He preached social harmony and equality among all human beings. He stood against caste based discrimination.

ਬੇਗਮ ਪੁਰਾ ਸਹਰ ਕੇ ਨਾਉ ॥ ਦੁਖੁ ਅੰਦੋਹੁ ਨਹੀ ਤਿਹਿ ਠਾਉ ॥

ਨਾਂ ਤਸਵੀਸੁ ਖਿਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਮਾਲੁ ॥ ਉਛੁ ਨ ਖਤਾ ਨ ਤਰਸੁ ਜਵਾਲੁ ॥॥

ਅਬ ਮੋਹਿ ਖੁਬ ਵਤਨ ਗਹ ਪਾਈ ॥ ਹਾਂ ਖੈਰਿ ਸਦਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ॥॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

ਕਾਇਮੁ ਦਾਇਮੁ ਸਦਾ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਰੀ ॥ ਦੇਮ ਨ ਸੇਮ ਏਕ ਸੇ ਆਰੀ ॥

ਆਬਾਦਾਨੁ ਸਦਾ ਮਸਹੁਰ ॥ ਉਹਾਂ ਗਨੀ ਬਸਹਿ ਮਾਮੁਰ ॥2

Begumpura, 'the city without sorrow', is the name of the town. There is no suffering or anxiety there.

There are no troubles or taxes on commodities there. There is no fear, blemish or downfall there.

Now, I have found this most excellent city. There is lasting peace and safety there,

Oh my brother, God's Kingdom is steady, stable and eternal. There is no second or third status; all are equal there.

That city is populous and eternally famous. Those who live there are wealthy and contented.

“NANAK NAM CHARDI KALA TERE BHANE SARBAT DA BHALA”

Sangat De Sewadar

Chairman
Jagtar Bhatia

President
Shinder Paul Narabut

General Secretary
Dharam Pal Chonkria

Treasurer
Vinod Kumar