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Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Ad Dharm and Dalit Social Mobility in Punjab

(Invited Editorial and Article Combined on the 44th Anniversary of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia)

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia is to Punjab what Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is to Maharashtra, and just as the Maharashtra Dalit movement owes its origin to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, the Punjab Dalit movement is similarly indebted to Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia. If Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, the famous English-born American political activist, theorist, philosopher and revolutionary of the nineteenth century, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia learnt his lessons of equality and freedom from the proclaimed democratic and liberal values of the United States of America wherein he came into contact, during his sojourn, with the revolutionary freedom fighters popularly known as Ghadari Babas, of the historic Ghadar Lehar. This further cemented his resolve to fight for a dignified life for the masses by liberating India from the clutches of the British Empire, and to establish in its place democratic and egalitarian home rule with equality and freedom for all irrespective of caste, class, creed, language, gender and regional differentiations.

Like his nineteenth century Maharashtrian counterpart who was also a revolutionary social thinker of the so-called lower castes, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia – from one of the lowest castes in Punjab - established the first school of its kind in his native village of Mugowal for the children of those self-same socially excluded sections of the society that later came to be designated Scheduled Castes (SCs) under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) order, 1936, which contained a list (or schedule) of castes throughout the British-administered provinces. He also faced stiff opposition, like his predecessor in Maharashtra, from the so-called upper/dominant castes of Punjab in his fierce struggle against oppressive structures of domination including untouchability - the most egregious one among them. Following into the footsteps of his revolutionary Ghadarite leadership in the United States of America, he aspired to both fight against the caste-based social evil of untouchability and to replace it with an all-encompassing social freedom, as well as to join the fight to free the subjugated India and return to it its political freedom.

On return to his native village after spending 16 years abroad and discovering the pervasiveness of untouchability, Babu Mangu Ram decided to dedicate rest of his life for the emancipation and empowerment of the so-called low-caste people. In his own words: "While living abroad I had for-

gotten about the hierarchy of high and low, and untouchability; and under this delusion returned home in December 1925. The same disease from which I had escaped started tormenting me again. I wrote about all this to my leader Lala Hardyal Ji, saying that until and unless this disease is cured, Hindustan could not be liberated. Hence, in accordance with his orders, a programme was formulated in 1926 for the awakening and upliftment of the Achhut qaum (untouchable community) of India" (*Kaumi Udarian* 1986: 23-24).

To give a practical shape to his above-mentioned resolve, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia founded the famous Ad Dharm movement in the first quarter of the 1920s. It was the only movement of its kind in the north-western region of the country that aimed at securing a respectable place for the lower castes through cultural transformation, spiritual regeneration and political assertion, rather than seeking patronage from above. Comprising all the lower castes people of the state, the Ad Dharm built its headquarter named 'Ad Dharm Mandal' in Jalandhar. Seth Kishan Das of Bootan Mandi - leather business centre in the vicinity of the British military cantonment at Jalandhar – provided major financial support to the Ad Dharm movement. Babu Mangu Ram literally took the movement to the doorsteps of the untouchables in the region and soon emerged as a cult figure of the Dalits (lower castes) in Punjab. Like the Satyashodak Samaj movement in Maharashtra, the Ad Dharm soon became a household name among the Dalits of Punjab. It was for the first time in the forgotten history of the lower castes in the state that a golden opportunity knocked at their doors to get them united on a common and distinct platform under the leadership of their fellow-travellers to fight for the most sought after goal of dignified life and to collectively press their long-pending

claim for a share in the local structures of power.

In the wake of the limited democratic political process in 1919 prised from the British Government for the institutionalization of the electoral system, every community was busy in organizing its respective members into well-organized socio-political forces (political parties/organizations); and as a young man freshly-returned from the US, and meticulously chiselled in the superb companionship of the proud Ghadarite Babas, Babu Mangu Ram



Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia
January 14, 1886 – April 22, 1980
Founder of the Ad Dharm Movement Punjab

successfully gathered many of his fellow community members to build a separate social and political organization at par with that of the upper caste communities like the Hindu Mahasabha of the Hindus, Muslim League of the Muslims and Singh Sabhas of the Sikhs. This limited election-based legislature-forming process also led to the formation of similar Adhi-movements in other parts of the country like Adi-Andhras, Adi-Dravidas, Adi-Karnataka in South India and Adi-Hindus in the Uttar Pradesh province of North India. Though these different Adi-movements emerged almost at the same time in different regions of the country, there is no evidence to prove that they were instrumental in the rise of one and another. Each Adi-movement was influenced by the then prevailing situations in its own specific context in the given state.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia formed the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab to fight for land rights of his people who were legally denied to purchase agriculture land by the Land Alienation Act of 1900, which prohibited the lowest castes along with other non-agriculture castes from owning agricultural land. Moreover, under the local customary law, popularly known as 'rayit-nammās', the so-called untouchable peoples were even denied the ownership rights on the residential plot of their houses in the segregated

neighbourhoods of the mainstream villages and neither were they allowed to build 'pucca' houses. They were only permitted to build mud/thatched houses and in return were supposed to perform some begar (forced labour without wages) in the agriculture farms of the legal owners of their residential plots. Another important task towards the material empowerment of the lower castes that this versatile leader of the Ad Dharm movement included in its mandate was the official provision of education and government employment for the lower castes under the state affirmative action.

Apart from the material upliftment of the lower castes, what made Ad Dharm the most politically noticeable and powerful movement of its time was the foresight of its visionary leader in setting the goal of bringing the divergent lower caste communities under a single flag and to transform them into a distinct single Qaum at par with other separate Qaums of Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians etc. This was the most crucial political move on the part of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the master strategist, who intervened at a critical period when limited direct elections were scheduled to be held in the state. He pressed for a separate religion for the lower castes of Punjab to be recorded in the 1931 Census, who in his opinion were neither Hindus, Sikhs, Muhammadans nor Christians. The lower castes, reiterated Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, were the original inhabitants - Moolnivasīs (aboriginal people) of this nation. The alien Aryan invaders, he continued further, deprived them of their kingdom, looted them, and finally enslaved them. In the poster announcing the first annual meeting of the Ad Dharm movement, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, along with Swami Shudranand and Babu Thakur Chand, devoted the entire space to the hardships faced by the Moolnivasīs at the hands of the caste Hindus. He also made an appeal to the Moolnivasīs to come together to chalk out a programme for their liberation and upliftment. Addressing them as brothers, he said: "We are the real inhabitants of this country and our religion is Ad Dharm. Hindu Qaum came from outside to deprive us of our country and (Contd. on next page)



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Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, Ad Dharm and Dalit Social Mobility in Punjab

(Contd. from page 1)

enslave us. At one time we reigned over 'Hind'. We are the progeny of kings, Hindus came down from Iran to Hind and destroyed our Qaum. They deprived us of our property and rendered us nomadic. They razed our forts and houses, and destroyed our history. We are seven crores in numbers and are registered as Hindus in this country. Liberate the Adi race by separating these seven crores. ... Our seven crore number enjoy no share at all. We reposed faith in Hindus and thus suffered a lot. Hindus turned out to be callous. Centuries ago, Hindus suppressed us; sever all ties with them. What justice can we expect from those who are the butchers of the Adi race. The time has come; be cautious, now the Government listens to appeals. With the support of a sympathetic Government, come together to save the race. Send members to the Councils so that our Qaum is strengthened again. British rule should remain forever. Make prayer before God. Except for this Government, no one is sympathetic towards us. Never consider ourselves as Hindus at all; remember that our religion is Ad Dharm" (*Kaumi Udarian* 1986: 21-22). Keen readers of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia have observed that he was conflicted on the issue of the British Raj - on the one hand he feared even greater oppression under Hindu majoritarian rule than under the British - whom he also viewed as possible partners in facilitating a more equal Indian society - but on the other hand he aspired for the dignity of national inde-

pendence, which necessitated the removal of the British. This remained a recurring paradox in his political approach till the achievement of Indian independence in 1947. In his brilliant article entitled *Achhut da Swaal* (Untouchability Question), Shaheed Bhagat Singh supported the Ad Dharm leadership in its tirade against the caste system, but at the same time had cautioned them to keep their distance from the British.

The leaders of Ad Dharm thus chose to restore dignity and freedom to the untouchables by detaching them completely from Hinduism and re-consolidating them into their own ancient religion (Ad Dharm). The long domination by the Aryans, they alleged, made them oblivious of their native religion. In fact, the task of reviving their ancient religion was not an easy one for the *Moolnivasis* who had forgotten their Gurus and other religious symbols during their long period of persecution under the rule of the outsiders. They had been condemned as impure and declared unfit to have their own theology. In order to establish their hegemony and legitimacy over the enslaved *Moolnivasis* of Bharat, the Aryan invaders eventually metamorphosed themselves into upper castes of the first three Varnas (Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) of their imposed fourfold social order based on Chatur-Varnavyavastha. The natives of the conquered land were pushed into the fourth Varna of Shudras - consisting of artisan castes and still other further reduced into lowest of the low castes, contemptuously dubbed as Untouch-

able peoples. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia strongly put forth the demand of a separate religion for his low caste peoples in order to forge them together into a distinct Qaum. To revive Ad Dharm was tantamount to developing a new religion for the native lower castes people. Babu Mangu Ram's claim that the Dalits were the real inhabitants of this land made an enormous psychological impact on them. It provided a theological podium to sustain and reinforce the new Dalit identity. The British Government granted them, as demanded, distinct status of a separate religion - Ad Dharm. The Ad Dharm was based on the teachings and inspiration from the spiritual figures of North India Bhakti movement, particularly Guru Ravidass, Bhagwan Valmik, Sant Kabir and Sant Namdev. In fact, the leaders of the Ad Dharm movement placed the spiritual figure of Guru Ravidass in the centre of their discourse around which the entire socio-political and spiritual paraphernalia of the movement and the separate Dalit religion of Ad Dharm was woven. In this way, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia played a dominant role in chiseling the distinct markers of separate Dalit identity and restoring the natives their lost heroes, Gurus, rich cultural heritage. He strengthened their resolve to become rulers themselves.

During the Census of 1931, around half a million SCs in Punjab returned themselves as followers of their newly recognized religion - Ad Dharm. Thenceforth, the followers of Ad Dharm took pride in being addressed as Ad Dharmis. Another equally great

achievement of the Ad Dharm movement was that it swept the Punjab Provincial assembly elections in 1937 & 1946, which made it an equally important stake-holder in the Punjab legislature, perhaps for the first time in the history of the lower castes in the colonial India. Moreover, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and the Ad Dharm movement provided a fertile ground for sowing the seeds of the mission of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar in Punjab. During Dr. Ambedkar's struggle for the separate electoral status for the Depressed Classes at the London Round Table conferences, Babu Mangu Ram supported him by sending many telegrams in his favour in a tie with Mahatma Gandhi over the question of the leadership of the Depressed Classes in India. An eminent American social scientist, Mark Juergensmeyer, had also noted in his classic 'Religious Rebels in the Punjab,' the tremendous contribution of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia towards Dalit upliftment in Punjab, by his founding of the Ad Dharm movement to generate social and political consciousness among the lowest of the low to help them rise against the centuries old discriminatory caste system and to establish an egalitarian socio-political order in the image of Begampura of Guru Ravidass.

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Congratulation to Sh. Ram Das Sharma on his 101st birthday

Prof & Mrs. Ronki Ram felicitating Sh. Ram Das Sharma (Retd. Asstt. Registrar, PU) on his 101st birthday at his residence in Chandigarh

Ambedkar Times forum congratulates Sh. Ram Das Sharma Ji and his family entering into his 101st year of his healthy, happy and wholesome life. We wish him many more active, healthy and happy years ahead.

Prem Kumar Chumber
Editor-in-Chief : Ambedkar Times



BABU MANGU RAM MUGOWALIA

A SYMBOL OF PATRIOTISM AND CRUSADER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the history of his struggle for India's freedom from British rulers and unrelenting efforts for social justice during the first half of the 20th century the contributions of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, though overshadowed for a while by unruly elements of society, have come back with a renewed spirit of a glittering empowerment.

As the mortal frame of human body is subject to extinction sooner or later, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia departed from this world on April 22nd, 1980 and the following few lines, on the occasion of his 44th death Anniversary, are just a humble tribute to his remarkable legacy as a true patriot with an eternal quest for equality and social justice.

Victim of discrimination in his youth:-

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, born in a untouchable family in Muggowal, a small village, in Hoshiarpur District of Panjab (India) on 14th January, 1886, had to face all the odds and difficulties so inherently built in a society dominated by Brahminical Samaj. In spite of being a brilliant student he was hardly able to go upto high school education.

Migration to USA:- Babu Mangu Ram's father who owned a flourishing business in leather trade managed to send him to U.S.A where he arrived in 1909 to better his prospects in life. In U.S.A he became an active member of the Ghadar movement to fight for India's freedom from the British rule for which he even risked his life when captured on coming back to India with a shipment of weapons for use by Ghadarites in India. He luckily escaped with the help of some German supporters and remained in hiding for many years.

Return to india:- On coming back to India in 1925 he was shocked to find social discrimination worse than slavery which agitated his mind to lay the

foundation of Ad-Dharm Mandal in 1926. The movement was so strong that he became an indisputable leader of the untouchables in Northern India from Delhi to Peshawar, winning seven seats out of eight in the provincial legislature.

The following are some of the salient and indelible features of his lasting legacy for future generations:

The most prominent contribution of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia's mission and foundation is that he was able to establish a distinct identity for the Ad-Dharmi Community, separate from Hindu Hierarchy by claiming to

be the original inhabitants of India before the invasion of Aryans from Easter Europe and Central Asia. Ad-DharmMandal was one of the most successful movements for Dalit Mobilization and empowerment with a separate identity.

Revelations of Professor Mark Juergensmeyer:

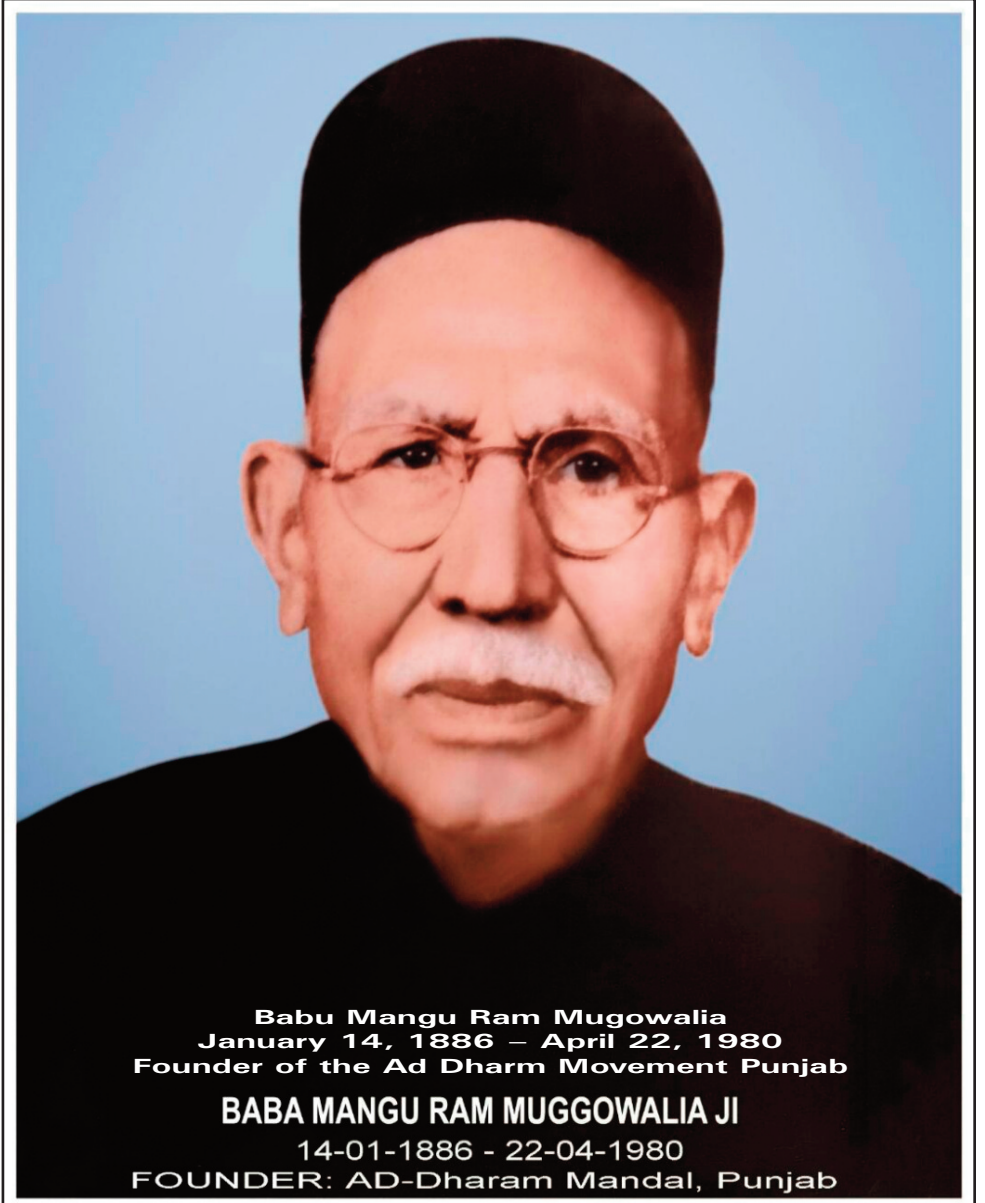
-Prof. Mark Juergensmeyer, now a renowned Professor in Santa Barbara University and an eminent scholar of international fame was the first international scholar who met Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia personally in India more about fifty years ago and made an extensive study on him as revealed in his book "RELIGIOUS REBELS IN PANJAB" "The Ad-Dharm Challenge to Caste".

Staunch Supporter of Babasaheb Dr.

B. R. Ambedkar: - Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia stood shoulder to shoulder with Dr.Ambedkar with his support and telegrams during his crusade in Round Table conferences in London, reiterating Dr. Ambedkar as the sole representative of the down-trodden to participate in the deliberations for award of separate electorates for the depressed classes and rebuffing the claims of Gandhi Ji that untouchables were a part of the Hindu Community. He even started a counter fast unto death against Mr.



O.P. Balley (General Secretary)
Supreme Council
Sri Guru Ravidass Sabhas USA



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BABA MANGU RAM MUGGOWALIA JI
14-01-1886 - 22-04-1980
FOUNDER: AD-Dharam Mandal, Punjab

Gandhi's which ended in the signing of Poona- Pact in 1932.

Desh Doaba & Ambedkar Times: The two weekly publications in circulation among the Indian diaspora all over the world have played a very prominent role in reviving the legacy of this forgotten hero to be remembered by the modern youth and future generations.

A special souvenir issued in 1985 by late Mr. C.L. Chumber, Editor "Kaumi Udarian" (National Flights) Jalandhar depicted a remarkable resuscitation of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia's accomplishments of life. Let us commemorate the 40th death Anniversary of this true patriot and a valiant fighter for human rights, denied to the down trodden for centuries.

Dr. Ronki Ram, Dean Faculty of Arts & Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chair Professor of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh and a prolific writer has dealt with this subject in a very methodical and an analytical form in his recent article published in Ambedkar Times, challenging the man-made social exclusions as meaningless. We should face this common and invisible foe with feelings of unity and fraternity with no consideration of any kind of exclusiveness.

Let us conclude with deep condolences and sympathies for the families all over the world for irreparable loss of their loved ones to this mass and indiscriminate killer.

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Remembering Ghadarite Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia

Prem Kumar Chumber

(Editor-in-Chief)

Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba
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Ghadarite Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia was one of very few Indians who entered the United States of America in the first decade of the 1900. When the historic Ghadar Lehar was launched in 1913, he had already spent more than three working years in the state of California. That he had the honour of being one of the pioneers of the Ghadar movement is well established by the fact that his name figured in the official record of those five members (Hari Singh, Gambhir Singh, Harcharn Das, Harnam Chand and Mangu Ram) who were arrested on board the ship Maverick. These five Ghadarite comrades carried with them "an ample supply of revolutionary literature," writes L. P. Mathur in his seminal book on "Indian Revolutionary Movement in the U.S.A.," published by Chand and Co., New Delhi in 1970. He further continued: "After some days the ship anchored off the Coronado islands, seventeen miles from San Diego (CA), (then) . . . to proceed to Hilo port to Hawaii, for receiving further orders. . . The Dutch authorities seized the Maverick and arrested the Indians at Anjer. Out of these five Indians four escaped from the custody of the Dutch. They were, however, captured on the coast of Sumatra during their

flight and were taken to Singapore." Another authentic source about his connections with the Ghadar Lehar is "Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste," a seminal book authored by celebrated academic, Mark Jurgensmeyer, who has done exhaustive field research on Babu Mangu Ram and his Ad Dharm

movement in Punjab. Based on his detailed conversations with Babu Mangu Ram, Prof Mark provided vital information about his close association with the Ghadar movement. Yet another equally authentic source about Babu Mangu Ram's deep association with the Ghadar movement is an article published in Milap (Jullundur) on October 3, 1953. It revealed how old Ghadarites in California remembered Babu Mangu Ram even



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after almost forty years. During his extended conversations with Mark Jurgensmeyer, Babu Mangu Ram himself told him that his Ghadar connections were discovered while he was in Philippines. After got exposed by the Marshall Field people, he was interned for six months during the visit of the Prince of Wales to Manila in 1922. Since he was among the earlier visitors

to America and one of the pioneers of the Ghadar movement, his name also figured among the founder members of the first Sikh Temple at Stockton (CA) as mentioned by Charanjit Singh Pannu, the learned author of "Meri White House Pheri" published by Sangam publications of Patiala in 2015.

On return to his village after spending more than one and a half decade abroad, Babu Mangu Ram

Mugowalia pained to experience similar caste-based social discriminations that he used to endure until his departure to America in 1909. His exposure to the equality before law and democratic way of living in the United States of America, on the one hand, and experience of secular and egalitarian mode of social relationship within the Ghadar movement, on the other, prompted him to openly challenge the centuries old oppressive caste-based hierarchies of high-low and pure-impure. When he sought the approval of his fellow comrades in the Ghadar party in America to launch a movement against caste and untouchability back home, true to their mission of achieving freedom from all sorts of social evils and foreign rule, as is clearly evident from their revolutionary writings and patriotic poetry (Ghadar Dian Gunjjan), they quickly agreed to his noble proposal. Consequently, it led to the formation of the historic Ad Dharm movement by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and rest is the story. Had he been alive today, it would have definitely pained him to learn that despite his close association with the Ghadar movement and deep involvement in its various revolutionary activities, his photo is missing among that of his fellow comrades hung on the walls of the Ghadar Memorial (the birthplace of the Ghadar Lehar) in San Francisco (CA).



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