



Ambedkar Times *Weekly*

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DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Prem Kumar Chumber (Editor-in-Chief)
Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

Democracy and social justice are interrelated social processes. The one is incomplete in the absence of the other. Democracy offers freedom space to realize equality and experience fraternity. Equality and fraternity are the two essential ingredients of social justice, which achieves its true form with the addition of liberty. Thus the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity constitutes the essence of social justice and the institution of democracy provides the requisite realm for its realization. Though many scholars' boasts of ancient origins of democracy in India but it would be prudent to argue that democracy achieves its roots in the real sense of the term with the adoption of the constitution in independent India. Bodhisattva Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Chairman of Constitutional Drafting Committee, worked very hard to incorporate various provisions for the realization of social justice in the Indian society. He was of the firm views that if social and economic parity remains an elusive to the multitude of poor and historically socially excluded people in the country, then the very purpose of having parliamentary democracy would not be served efficiently. He reiterated the seminal point during his engaging discussions at various important forums within and outside the Indian parliament that for social justice to prevail in the country, India needs effective participation of the downtrodden in all the different spheres of the society.

The demand for social justice was also raised at various platforms during the freedom struggle movement in colonial India. Ad-Movements in North and South India, Justice Party in South India, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia from Punjab, Swami Achhuta Nand Ji from Uttar Pradesh, Baba Ghasi Das Ji from Madhya Pradesh, Sri Narayana Guru from Kerala raised a consistent campaign for the prevalence of social justice in the Indian society. Babu Mangu Ram Muggowalia presented a number of resolutions to the British Government for the removal of untouchability and special provisions for the inclusion of socially excluded sections of the society in the public realm of power and social domain. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia joined hands with Bodhisattva Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar in his struggle for equal rights for the socially excluded people of India. When Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar spreaded its movement into the political agile lands of Punjab with the formation of Punjab chapter of Scheduled Castes Federation, there was a tremendous response from the grassroots. That was precisely the contributions of Ad Dharm movement which laid the foundation stone of social justice campaign in the state in the mid-1920s. But the irony of the matter is that even after more than six decades of India's independence, Dalits in the country are still subjected to various types of atrocities and social discriminations. Though the Indian state, while making the optimum use of various anti untouchability clauses of the constitution, is doing its best to bridle the monster of caste, but still is more needed to be done at the social level where the people should come forward to internalize the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in order to realize the true sense of democracy and social justice.

STANDARDISED TESTS AND THE PATHOLOGY OF THE EDUCATION INDUSTRY

Alternatives to exams like NEET and NET can evolve only if we are honest and bold enough to realise that what prevails is wrong, academically as well as ethically.

ENOUGH has already been said and written about the scams related to standardised tests like NEET (National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test) and NET (National Eligibility Test) that shape the life trajectory of the young. The anguish of students and their parents and the political protest against the functioning of the National Testing Agency (NTA) indicate the way these tests have occupied central space in the educational landscape of the country. Yet, amid the uproar, what seems to be missing is the courage to

many of great teachers and pedagogues, standardised tests require coaching strategists. Think of, for instance, an exam like NEET. Can it really evaluate whether a young aspirant has the aptitude or inclination to pursue a career in medical sciences and become a doctor? Possibly, a doctor needs the following faculties: the intense power of observation, the delicate art of relating to the patient — not just his/her bodily symptoms, but psychic and existential states of being — and above all, the patience to ex-

Avijit Pathak
Sociologist



question the very rationale of such tests and reflect on the damage that the simultaneous growth of the coaching industry has caused to the mental/aesthetic/cultural development of the young mind. Never forget that this gigantic money-making enterprise continues to tempt the anxiety-ridden parents through its promise of transforming their children into one-dimensional 'exam warriors' gifted with the appropriate 'strategy' needed for 'cracking' these tests and eventually achieving what this neurotically competitive society regards as 'success' — a doctor/engineer with a lucrative 'package'.

It is high time we accepted the fact that the multiple-choice question (MCQ)-centric standardised tests cannot evaluate a student's academic depth, critical thinking and creative imagination. Any sensible academic who has engaged with teaching and research would agree that there need not necessarily be any correlation between one's academic interest and one's ability to identify the 'correct answer' from a set of four/five options and tick it quickly on the OMR sheet. While academic knowledge or creatively nuanced critical thinking requires the time to reflect and go deeper into an issue or entertain ambiguities and pose new questions, MCQ-centric standardised tests demand rote learning or internalisation of some sort of strategy to instantly identify the 'correct answer' without much thought. In fact, it needs endless drilling or a highly mechanised routine of solving an endless series of MCQs through all sorts of mock tests. While academic knowledge or creative thinking demands the com-

plere new frontiers of knowledge in medical sciences. But then, a standardised test like NEET — a set of 180 questions in physics, chemistry and biology to be answered in 200 minutes — has nothing to do with the qualities that a potential doctor needs. In a way, it is like a lottery — a device to eliminate lakhs of young aspirants instantly rather than a serious attempt to choose those who are really inclined to the call of the medical vocation.

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STANDARDISED TESTS AND THE PATHOLOGY OF THE EDUCATION INDUSTRY

(Continue from page 1)

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through all sorts of mock tests. While academic knowledge or creative thinking demands the company of great teachers and pedagogues, standardised tests require coaching strategists. Think of, for instance, an exam like NEET. Can it really evaluate whether a young aspirant has the aptitude or inclination to pursue a career in medical sciences and become a doctor? Possibly, a doctor needs the following faculties: the intense power of observation, the delicate art of relating to the patient — not just his/her bodily symptoms, but psychic and existential states of being — and above all, the patience to explore new frontiers of knowledge in medical sciences. But then, a standardised test like NEET — a set of 180 questions in physics, chemistry and biology to be answered in 200 minutes — has nothing to do with the qualities that a potential doctor needs. In a way, it is like a lottery — a device to eliminate lakhs of young aspirants instantly rather than a seri-

ous attempt to choose those who are really inclined to the call of the medical vocation.

Moreover, with the normalisation and sanctification of such standardised tests, we are creating a restless, anxiety-ridden and unhappy generation. For them, there is no joy in learning and no creative experimentation. Instead, as a significant part of their formative years is spent in shopping around coaching centres and learning the war strategy for cracking these tests, everything loses its academic/philosophic depth. Physics is what the Kota factory regards as 'worth learning'; or, for that matter, history is what the fancy IAS coaching centre regards as valuable. It is doubtful whether this sort of orientation to education can really produce good doctors, brilliant engineers or great teachers/researchers. Yes, these tests manufacture tales of failure. But then, the 'success stories' are by no means promising. In a way, corruption and

malpractices are deeply ingrained in the coaching industry, which is worth Rs 1 lakh crore.

Quite often, a question is asked: Is there any alternative, particularly when lakhs of students want to become doctors/engineers/IAS officers/university teachers? Or, is there any other way of eliminating people? Alternatives to exams like NEET and NET can evolve only if we are honest and bold enough to realise that what prevails is wrong, academically as well as ethically. Only then can we acquire the courage to question the idea of 'one nation, one exam' and think of a largely decentralised process of selection or giving relative autonomy to colleges/universities/academic institutions to evolve their own ways of designing thoughtful/imaginative/research-oriented exams or entrance tests. And this alone can make coaching centres irrelevant and bring some sanity to the culture of learning.

Courtesy: The Tribune Chandigarh (India)

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Pleasant Reversals

When you notice a traffic constable
Hold an old woman's finger
And help her cross the busy road...
When you find a noted doctor
Prescribe for you a generic drug...
When you see a cat
Softly patting a young parrot...
When a judge imposes a fine on you
And finding you unable to pay
Offers to pay it from his pocket...
It is a pleasant surprise...
A Reversal of expectations!

When a poor rustic travelling ticketless
Trembling with fear
Is not only exempted by the TTE
But also offered food...
When the stern Headmaster
Instead of pulling up a naughty brat
Admires his qualities in the morning assembly...
When in stead of amassing wealth
A leader gives away even his own estate
To run charity institutions...
When a bus rolling down a gorge
Gets soft-entangled in a tree
And hangs in safety...
It is a sight of relief
And of faith in the scheme of things...
It is a pleasant reversal of expectations !

Poems in Colour

Flowers are God's poems in colour
That entice and fill life's tenor
With a kind of buoyancy...
Even the crudest of us
Get goose bumps in thankfulness !

They always look so inviting,
They thrill and with joy fill,
A feeling of surrender they instill ,
As the scents and hues we imbibe,
With a sense of joy and wonder !

Their right place is
The branch they grow on,
Or the Altar in a Temple.
But followers of Machiavelli
Throw them at their mundane heroes
Reducing Nature's poetry to trash !

The path of the mundane hero
Is paved with petals,
Or his neck is hidden behind
Needled Poems-in -colour,
Hurling gross disregard to Lord's plan.

They are there to spread
The message of smiling
In spite of all things ,
The message of bringing
Brightness and cheer into the world !

These poems never compete
Nor decry the attending thorns.
They offer themselves
To the admiring insects
And butterflies that hover
And hum their love song
In their rainbow-coloured ears!

Kill not these poems
To waste them on humans!
Let them stay as planned
Or let them meet the Lord...
That alone matches their majesty and grace!



DESH BIR
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Born in 1951 and brought up and schooled in Kangra district of erstwhile Punjab (now Himachal Pradesh), Desh Bir did his M.A. in English from DAV College, Jalandhar and topped the GND University, Amritsar. Taught at DAV College, Jalandhar for three years before joining Punjab Govt. Education Service in 1976 as a Lecturer at Govt. College Hoshiarpur. He was selected in Central Services based on combined UPSC exam for IAS etc in 1978, but chose to stay in Education. He was promoted as Principal, Govt. College, Hoshiarpur, in July, 2006 and retired in October, 2009. After retirement, he was appointed as Ombudsman, NREGA for five districts of Punjab for four years. Has nearly 170 creative articles published in English Newspapers like Daily Post, Deccan Herald, The Tribune, Daily World, Punjab Advance and Kashmir Vision. Lately, he has taken to poetry for pouring out his intensely felt perceptions

Transformation

He was meant for higher things !
Ever since childhood,
He would avidly devour books,
He read the classics,
And exuded wisdom
In every word he spoke!

He studied scriptures,
Not only of his own church,
But of all Faiths , big or small.
His thoughts inspired reverence,
His actions reflected divine bliss,
And people reposed much faith in him!

For best counsel they would flock to him
So... he was learned and holy !
In essence , he was larger than life
In almost everything !
He was invited to speak
From international forums !

It was all so good and ethereal
Till one day Mammon embraced him
And goaded him
To do something big for the nation.
And he chose to be a Parliamentarian ..
His past made it a cake-walk for him !

Now his skills and learning
Came to pay for a speedy harvest !
He amassed money,
Won massive public support,
Spun impossible dreams for the nation,
And made people lobby for his elevation!

Finally, the classics and scriptures
Received a hasty burial !
Untruth became his favoured tool,
Deceit became the best ladder,
And , once again he proved
That he was meant for higher things !

Liberator becomes Fetters

I am given to understand

That Faith in God
Is the only religion .
But which God ?
Mine or thine?

That is the question
Which has fanned
So much fire
Of hatred and violence,
Of death and destruction.

There are so many religions though,
Their own one is the best, people say.
Yet this very knowledge has the seeds
Of all rancor and all carnage
That wraps the world today .

Conversions are a mission,
Breathing out venom,
Against other faiths is an agenda!
All that goes in the name...
Of service to one's own God!

Makers and sellers of weapons,
Buyers and users of lethal tools,
All claim to be serving the Lord
Of their own conception .
Yet this is their public image of God.

The actual God they serve
And idolize is Mammon !
It is Satan !
Nor the One Master !
Nor the Son of God !

Religion , the Liberator.....
The great Torch-bearer.....
Is twisted and disfigured
And made a means
To put men in fetters !

Midas is Sad today !

Every body longs to gain the Midas touch
But, when I met Midas some years ago
In his new corporeal frame,
He was disenchanted with Gold.

He said: "Days of kings are gone now,
Leaders have voters as their cash-cow,
It is what they call the age of democracy
Where leaders lap up people as a delicacy"

He told that in this age of remote impact
He was longing for a new boon !
His gaze should send people into a swoon
So he wins their hearts by a visual spell !

Soon I learnt that he had won his boon
From the Granter of all human wishes !
He was blessed again and wooed by one and all
Held every citizen in his thrall !

He was everything, he was everywhere !
He was in every heart, his image on every wall!
All obstacles humbled , all adversaries flattened !
He was President Midas..a Happy Midas after all!

Today I met him again after years,
As I saw Him , I hid my fears,
He was again in tears, as he said :
"No challenges left..it doesn't please any more!"
A Midas shall never be happy for long!

International Day of Yoga – Flagship of India’s Soft Diplomacy

On the initiative of the GOI under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi in 2014, UN declared June 21 as International Day of Yoga for ‘Promotion of global health, harmony and peace. It was an appreciable initiative which was rightly endorsed by the international community under the aegis of the world body, United Nations Organisation (UNO). Yoga, an ancient Indian exercise, is a good idea of holistic wellness of body and mind. International Day of Yoga gave further strength and impetus to the India’s cultural and soft diplomacy after GOI’s successful action in getting declared October 2, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi as International Day of Non-violence in 2007 under the stewardship of PM Manmohan Singh. The day aimed to spread the message of non-violence through education and public awareness, around the world. It reflected universal respect for Gandhi and his philosophy India being one of the largest countries in the world and also the biggest democracy with sound credentials of civilizational back-up is much to contribute and offer many more props to the world and rightly so.

‘We the people of India’

proudly own the legacy of Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose among others. The lofty thoughts of these personalities are as



relevant today as these were before, with reference to India’s cultural ethos of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्” – the world is one family, one of the cardinal principles of India’s foreign policy. It goes without saying that India should pay little more attention to this aspect of its cultural and soft diplomacy. Let me mention about a specific case in this regard – proposal to declare April 14, birthday of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as International Day of Equality which was made and registered in June, 2015 with the then EAM

Sushma Swaraj in the run up to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, one of the greatest sons of India and an ardent proponent of socio-economic equality in India and the world at large. The pro-

posal was supported by the Forum of Scheduled Caste MPs and submitted to PM Narendra Modi in November, 2015. Since then, in spite of constant follow up, the proposal is resting with MEA/PMO. My latest blog on the subject would provide more information on the proposal and its status: <https://diplomaticitbits.blogspot.com/2024/05/an-open-letter-to-candidates-in-lok.html>

While greeting you all on the International Day of Yoga, the flagship of India’s cultural and soft diplomacy,

I take this opportunity to solicit your support for the proposal on International Day of Equality. It exactly fits in the promotional agenda in this regard, to my mind. Moreover, ‘Equality’, with a view to establish,



Ramesh Chander
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‘just and equitable world order’ is the agenda of the UN which India fully supports and rightly so. It is high time for the GOI under the new NDA dispensation to consider and take the proposal to the UN through diplomatic channels. International Day of Equality will not only honour Babasaheb Ambedkar but will also provide a much needed further impetus to the cultural and soft diplomacy of India.

With greetings and all the best for your good health on the International Day of Yoga.

Assemblyman Hoover’s Representative Report

“Poison Pills” Added to Public Safety Bills

On Wednesday, the Assembly Appropriations Committee officially



added controversial “poison pill” amendments to the (formerly) bipartisan public safety bills, which would make the legislation inoperable if a Prop 47 reform initiative passes in November. The amendments are being pushed by the Governor and Supermajority who oppose the initiative that recently qualified with over 600,000 valid signatures.

This hearing was yet another example of legislators putting politics over public safety. If we truly care about the will of the voters, we must stop these poison pill bills on the Assembly Floor. You can sign the petition to help us stop these bills by clicking here.

Limiting Smartphone Use in Schools

In response to Governor Gavin Newsom’s recent announcement advocating for the limitation of smart-



phones in California schools, I am reaffirming my commitment to ensuring a focused and productive learning

environment for students.

My legislation, AB 3216, would require all school districts in California to establish policies that limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by students during school hours. This legislative effort is designed to enhance our students’ educational experiences by reducing distractions and fostering better engagement in classroom activities.

The evidence is clear: reducing smartphone use in schools can lead to improved academic outcomes and a more positive school environment. AB 3216 would help us make significant strides toward prioritizing education and mental health for our youth.

I stand ready to collaborate with Governor Newsom and my colleagues in the Legislature on this important issue.

Question & Answer in the Podcast

In a couple weeks I will be recording a special edition of my podcast where I answer questions submitted by constituents. If you would like to ask a question, click here to go to the submission form. We will try to answer as many questions as we can, I look forward to seeing your submissions.

New Podcast Episode

In this week’s episode of the Point of Order Podcast I was joined by Assembly Minority Leader James Gallagher to discuss a number of topics including a junk fee exemption for restaurants, In-N-Out’s price hike, the recently passed state budget, a new analysis on groups that fair best at the State Capitol, the PPIC’s latest survey of Californians, and the bipartisan backlash growing over the Supermajority’s efforts to undermine retail theft reforms.

Rancho Cordova Business Expo

My office had a great time par-



ticipating in Rancho Cordova’s Business Expo & Job Fair yesterday. The Business Expo is a “Business to Community” and “Business to Business” event as they join during their workday, leverage this opportunity to get in front of potential customers, clients, and employees. It was wonderful to see hundreds of job seekers talking

to potential employers with resumes in hand, ready to interview on the spot! I also enjoyed seeing the businesses interact with each other to see how they



could work together going forward.

Ribbon Cutting in Rancho Cordova

I hope you had a wonderful Father’s Day this past Sunday. I love getting to include the kids in community events when I can. My son Austin and I got to attend the ribbon cutting for the brand new Gold Rush Park in



Assemblyman Hoover



Rancho Cordova. He’s a tough critic, but he rated it a solid 9.65, which is high praise from this guy! Thank you to Cordova Recreation & Park District Board Member Rick Sloan for the awesome photo.

Ribbon Cutting in Citrus Heights

This week, my staff was on hand to attend the ribbon cutting for The Art of Care Academy. The Art of Care Academy is committed to training and nurturing compassionate, skilled, and dedicated caregiving professionals to work in various settings, including, but not limited to, hospitals, skilled nursing homes, senior living communities, and in-home care.