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Editor-in-Chief: Prem Kumar Chumber

Contact: 001-916-947-8920

Fax: 916-238-1393

E-mail: chumbermedia@yahoo.com, editor@ambedkartimes.com

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Dalit Space, Assertion and Social Inclusion

Territory plays an important role in the critical understanding of the phenomenon of Dalit assertion in India. The word territory is derived from *territorium* (generally referring to land comprising a village, town, city, or district), which in turn is linked with two main etymological hypotheses about its origin. The first, traces its lineage to the Latin word *terra* (dry land) + *-orium* (place), thereby assigning a geographical/sedentary meaning to territory. The second hypothesis linked *territorium* to word *terrere* (to frighten) that describes territory as a 'subjective product, which cannot be inferred from mere characteristics of any objective physical environment' and 'a place from which people are warned off'. It resembles Deleuzian and Guttarian 'functional component' of territoriality, which gives birth to territories. Since territory is not merely a geographical/physical product, its existence can be revealed only practically through a socially experienced interaction, often leading to encounters. It is the very social interaction that is eventually 'stretched out' as territory/space. While conceptualizing 'space' in tandem with 'time', Massey recognizes that they are 'inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism'. She further adds that 'the spatial is an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification'.

Territory is passive, stasis, recalcitrant, and non-political, bereft of social interaction. The conceptual divorce between social interaction and spatial structures hides the crucial underlying dimensions of territoriality. The basic concept, thus like in ethology, is not territory but territoriality. Territoriality can be defined as 'a habitus of action and, above all, of reaction'. It does not reveal itself on its own, nor does it transmit a 'constantly visible behaviour.' Its existence remained hidden 'until a cospecific (a member of the same species) displaying a type of behaviour that is considered intrusive, makes its appearance. In short, territoriality is [can also be] *virtual*: it is a disposition to act – or better, react – according to given patterns (generally, aggressive/defensive patterns) under given circumstances'. In the present study, territoriality refers to all sorts of actions/reactions that take place between the inhabitants of the mainstream upper/dominant castes neighbourhoods (*Pinds*) and the segregated ghettoized Dalit localities/territories. The territoriality of a Pind and periphery remains invisible until encounters, both ideational and material, occur between the inhabitants of these two habitus spaces – Pind and Dalit territory.

Dalit territory personifies the

existence of two diametrically opposite social-spatio reasonings and realities of protest and resistance. The continuous simmering of social protest within segregated Dalit territory against the structures of domination, on the one hand, and the stubborn resistance unleashed by the upper castes against the social protest by Dalits, on the other, has once again catapulted caste into centre stage: a kind of anti-counter-territoriality. 'Anti' in the sense of questioning/resisting creeping spatial apartheid by the upper castes, and 'counter' in the sense of offering alternative visions of space-place which are embedded in Dalit sense of territoriality. The rise of Dalit social protest and the consequent upper caste resistance to it set the pace for the emergence of new Dalit territoriality objectified in the form of a radical Dalit movement against social

empower themselves while confronting their tormentors. The third part problematises the challenge faced in progressing to social mobility by the Dalits. What distinguishes Dalit struggle in their segregated territories from that of the mainstream civil society and the state affirmative action, on the one hand, and from that of other Dalit endeavours particularly rooted in religious conversion and cultural assimilation, on the other, is critically explored in the fourth section

II

Dalit territory has often been perceived as devoid of social mobility. It is also considered as a submissive site of despair, dependence and helplessness. Such view points are based on the assumption that '(t)erritory has been traditionally imagined as almost the opposite of mobility'. But territory is not an object and can not

property (such as a signature, a specific way of marking), there would be no territory'.

In the case of Dalit territory(ies), the graded caste hierarchy/relations

(functional component of territoriality) segregate the lowest castes within separate living space: 'expressive component of territoriality'. Within the asymmetrical structures of

the rural agrarian economy, the segregated Dalit territory stands nowhere near the privileged mainstream village spaces dominated by upper/dominant castes. All public utility centres like schools, colleges, post-offices, banks, health centres, *anganwadis* (child day-care centres), ration-depots, *panchayat ghars* (offices of the elected village governing bodies), offices of the co-operative societies etc were/are established within the well-guarded spatial boundaries of the mainstream villages. Since territories are established 'as a semiotic device and as part of a plan to control resources,' Dalit territories are severely deprived of all such essential public utility facilities. For all these facilities, Dalits had to visit mainstream villages where they were/are hardly welcomed. What makes these two segments of mainstream and segregated territories distinct and antagonistic, is their 'specific territorial endeavour'. Dalit territoriality is the product of intersecting social relations that takes place amidst highly exploitative social structures embedded in the agricultural economy of Punjab. It is not the territory/space on which social interactions take place, rather the very social relations itself that produce territory underlined with distinct space, place and time ingredients. The uneven and generally exploitative plinth of Dalit-Upper/dominant castes interactions, at the cross-roads of interface/encounters between landless Dalits and landowning farming communities, led to the emergence of bruised Dalit territoriality.

Dalits were historically deprived of land ownership rights in Punjab (The Land Alienation Act of 1900) – functional component of territorialization process. Under the informal local customary law, popularly known as *razat-namas*, even the plots in the Dalit territories, where they



Ronki Ram
Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chair Professor of Political Science
Panjab University, Chandigarh
ronkiram@yahoo.co.in
Visiting Professor, Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies,
University of Wolverhampton, UK

Prof. (Dr.) Ronki Ram's research article

This is an invited short version of Prof. Ronki Ram's research article published recently in *Contemporary Voice of Dalit (sage)*, July 16, 2021. DOI:10.1177/2455328X211022194.

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Prem Kumar Chumber

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exclusion. Dalit counter-culture and native religious heritage provided the source material for this new Dalit territoriality. How a Dalit sense of territoriality generatessocio-spatial consciousness and empowers the socially excluded to challenge the oppressive social structures has not been studied so far in the fast expanding field of critical Dalit studies. The present paper attempts to fill such gaps in the relevant Dalit literature while exploring the emerging patterns of Dalit assertion within the segregated Dalit territories in the contemporary state of Indian Punjab.

The article is divided into four parts. The first problematises the phenomenon of Dalit territory/territoriality. The second part weaves a narrative of how Dalit territories are being transformed from a condemned sedentary space of poverty, disease and filth into rousing sites of Dalit contestation and social mobility. It is based on the premise that inmates of Dalit territories, while drawing inspiration from their native heroes and spiritual mentors not only challenge the traditional structures of social domination but also found ways to

be defined simply in terms of space. On the contrary, it 'defines spaces through patterns of relations. Every type of social tie can be imagined and constructed as territorial'. Spatial structures characterised by social interactions, with multiple and mutually antagonistic dimensions, can be equated with territory. The concept of territory, argued Mubi Brighenti, needs to be investigated, 'not simply as a specific historical and political construct, but more radically, as a general analytical tool to describe the social sphere and, ultimately, as a social process in itself.' Territory is, thus, social in numerous ways. Some territorial settings of community living are socially considered as cursed and segregated. While others are paraded as blessed and guarded against the inhabitants of the segregated ones. It is in this critical context that territory is being considered having 'both expressive and functional components. Expression marks the emergence of a territory, given that a territory appears when some qualities and properties emerge from an environment. Without quality and property, or better without quality as

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were allowed to built only *kachcha* (mud) houses, were legally registered in the name of the local dominant peasant castes. The land of Dalit territories was declared as the ancestral property of the dominant peasant castes (based on field notes). The village land was mostly divided among the agricultural castes. Since Dalits were confined within segregated territories, they were not considered part of the mainstream village areas at all. Though *razat-namas* and the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 were declared null and void through the concerted efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the constitution of independent India and the 'messiah of the downtrodden,' Dalits remain landless and continue to live in their segregated territories.

Since ownership of land in Punjab is being considered as an index of social status, landlessness among Dalits severely affects their status. In the absence of the ownership of agricultural land, Dalits are left with no alternative but to augment their social status through the potent agency of counter-religious formation. Given the Sikh religion dominated culture and the thick concentration of Dalits in the state, the strategy of counter-religious formation assumed a critical importance. It has led to the formation of a separate Dalit religion (Ravidassia Dharm), which in turn led to sacralisation of Dalit territories. The embellishment of Dalit territories, dotted with impressive structures of Ravidass Deras, represent the emerging contours of rising Dalit assertion in the form of counter-culture and alternative Dalit heritage; what Deleuze and Guattari have called de/re-territorialization continuum of the territorialization process.

The rise of new Dalit assertion in the form of counter-culture and alternative Dalit religious heritage has not only reterritorialized Dalit 'territoriality' into 'social' but also challenged the 'political' of Dalit social inclusion as well. This paper intends to articulate how Dalit segregated colonies have been coming up as new sites of Dalit assertion while challenging and negotiating at the same time with the agency of social inclusion in India. Under the neo-liberal regime, government jobs, till recently the mainstay of some sections of the Dalit population, are shrinking very fast. Moreover, this truncated Dalit space has turned into an arena of both caste contestations and political patronage. The shrinking number of vacancies in the public sectors and the resultant frequent inter-caste clashes have convinced the historically marginalised sections of the society that the only viable way left to them is to seek their emancipation and empowerment, in their own terms. This awareness in turn also acts as a catalyst for the articulation of an alternative sense of territoriality anchored in what some critical geographers have described as a 'progressive sense of place,' or the

'contemporaneous co-existence of others'. In a society where 'religion' and 'social' are intricately intertwined, the former often takes precedence over the latter. It is in this context that Dalits are busy in converting their segregated territories into stronghold of 'Dalit counter-public' to generate rich tangible and intangible sources for their upward social mobility. Territory does not only 'guarantee access to resources, it can also become a resource in itself – most notably, a resource for identity formation.' This critical process of identity-based Dalit social mobility in turn re-territorializes Dalit territoriality into a 'progressive sense of place.'

III

Dalit territory refers to segregated Dalit space/place often situated on the South-western margins of the rural settlements in India, towards which the wind blows and the sewage of the villages flows. The villages in contemporary Punjab are invariably divided into two segments: upper caste neighbourhoods, popularly known as Pinds, and the lower castes neighbourhoods, contemptuously called *chamarlees*, *thathees* or *vehras* (hereafter Dalit territory). In Tamilnadu (South India), they are known as *ceris* and Pinds are called *uurs*. Dalit territories are also known as *jati muhallas*, *bastis* or *vastis*, *Apne-Apne Pinjare* - spatially marked prisons of caste identity, *Dalitwaadas*, *'sudra' waadas*, *hulgeris*, *maharwaadas*, *chamar tolas* and *harijanwaadas*. Gopal Guru also called them *bahishkrut* while comparing and contrasting them with *puruskrut* *bharat*-privileged Hindu middle-class neighbourhood. Pinds and Dalit territory are two spatially distinct social domains with their respective world-views and discourses. Occupations, water sources (wells and handpumps), shrines, pilgrimage centres, cremation grounds, *chaupals* (community halls) and popular narratives/discourses separatethem from each other. Their communicative languages, festivals, songs, satires, heroes, Gods and Goddesses, parameters of morality and immorality, eating habits, beliefs and faiths are also dissimilar. Dissimilarities between them have more to do with the distinct nature of their respective space, which in turn also determine its territoriality.

Pinds, the basic unit of the Indian social life and often characterised by some as 'self-sustaining' 'little republic' or 'complete republic' known for communally integrated life, have been and continue to be what Ambedkar perceptively called "a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism." For Ambedkar, it was 'the working plant of the Hindu social order, where one could see the Hindu social order in operation in full swing.' While arguing differences between Pinds and territories, he emphasised that the latter 'is not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of social intercourse for a temporary period. It is a

case of territorial segregation and of a cordon sanitaire putting the impure people inside the barbed wire into a sort of a cage'. For Dalits, Pinds constitute the dominant/oppressive 'other'. The inhabitants of Pinds were/are known as 'the major community,' irrespective of their numerical strength. Whereas the inhabitants of Dalit territories despite their being in large numbers would always be treated as a 'minor community.' The inhabitants of the Pinds revered their elders as wise men/women as per the moral tradition of rural life. But this moral norm did not apply on the elders of the Dalit territories. The latter were/are not treated equally at par with the elders of the Pind. Even the children of the landowners of the Pinds call the elders of the Dalit territories by their nick names (based on field notes). Taking a clue from *Joothan*, an autobiography of Om Prakash Valmiki, Valerian Rodrigues writes "Names were clearly distorted such as kiran became kinno, Radha Devi became radhiya".

The inhabitants of Pinds will never want that the 'minor communities' of the Dalit territory to compete them in terms of status and prestige. The 'major community' of Pinds laid down the social code of conduct for the 'minor community' of Dalit territories – what to eat and wear; the physical distance to maintain from the upper/dominant castes, the kind of houses they should have, the language they should converse in, and the names they should adopt. The social code of conduct was so severe that even after seventy years of India's independence common social bonds between Pinds and Dalit territories still seem to be a distance dream. It is in this context that Pind and Dalit territory emerged as two distinct and mutually antagonistic social domains separated by exclusive caste relations.

Pind personifies possession of land, wealth and pride. It belongs to those who own land within its territorial domain. In the rural community life of Pinds, possession of land and social status are co-terminus. Anyone not owning land cannot claim to be a Pindwala (the one who belongs to Pind). Although Dalit territories are situated within the legal jurisdiction of the mainstream villages, their inmates, deprived of land ownership rights, were not considered the real Pindwalas. Thus the Pind belonged exclusively to the landowning castes. Though some non-land owning castes were allowed to live within the well-guarded spatial boundaries of the Pinds, they happened to be only ancillary castes, traditionally attached with the land owning castes. These artisan castes (carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, barbers, water carriers, and tailors), contemptuously known as *nikki-minni* jat (lower castes) or *kami-kammin* (ancillary working castes) historically used to draw their fixed share from the periodic crop yields grown in the land of the Pind and were considered as second class citizen. The traditional justice system

based on gram panchayats was highly discriminatory. The gram panchayats were dominated by the influential families of Pinds. Dalits in the territories were invariably denied justice by such upper castes dominated grassroots bodies.

Thus for all practical purposes the inhabitants of Dalit territory and to a large extent the artisans castes used to depend on the landowning communities of their respective Pinds. Though both the artisan and Dalit castes depended on the landowning communities, the state-of-affairs of Dalits was worst of its kind. Dalits were historically excluded from the Pinds and continued to be so even today. Their relationship with the inhabitants of Pinds was that of a manual workers sans any social interpersonal relationship with them. Even the Pind children did not mix with that of the Dalit territories. While articulating difference between 'Brahmin waadas' (mainstream villages) and 'Sudra waadas' (Dalit territories), Kanha Ilaiah writes that friendship between the children of Dalitbahujans and Brahmins is censured. The only interaction that Dalits could have with the inhabitants of the Pinds was through their manual wage labour. Moreover, Dalits were not allowed to have any say in determining the rates of their fixed wages. They had to accept the arbitrarily determined wages by the landowning castes. It is in this context that Pind and periphery come face to face in open confrontation when Dalits raise voice for better wages and equal share in the local structures of power. The current spate of social boycotts of the Dalits by the dominant land owning castes in various villages of contemporary Punjab is a case in point.

In fact, what makes Dalit territories dependent on Pinds was total control exercised by the latter on the economic, religious and cultural lives of the former. Dalits of a periphery were never allowed to possess any amount of land whatsoever small it may be and were forced to perform hard labour within their hereditary low-paid occupational divisions for the comforts of the Pindwalas. They were condemned to perform all sorts of jobs like disposing of the carcasses of dead animals, skinning and preparing the hides for leather works, sweeping the floors of the streets of the upper castes neighbourhoods, removing the animal and human excreta, cutting the umbilical cords of the newborns, make preparation for funerals, beat drums at different occasions, make brooms, weave and wash clothes, pick cottons, and perform various heavy manual jobs on the farms/agricultural fields of the dominant castes of Pinds.

The above-mentioned intensive manual labour jobs were performed by Dalits under the patron-client relationship, popularly known as *jajmani* system. Under the *jajmani* system, Dalit women had to clean the cowsheds and turn cattle dung into *pathians* (dung fuel cakes)

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for the hearth of their *jajmans* (landlords). In return, they were given a few chapattis (a sort of bread), buttermilk and some fodder for their cattle in the form of a meager wage in kind. What further made them most vulnerable was their total immobility from their territorial *jajmani* limit as far as employment opportunities were concerned. Under such an oppressive system of rural political economy, Dalits were not allowed to work for landlord(s) belonging to another Pind, which deprived them of the advantage of bargaining a better wage deal. Even within their territorial *jajmani* limits, Dalits were not allowed to work for those landlords with whom they were not tied under this labour system.

Yet another interesting feature of Pind-periphery matrix is that a thin geographical line separates these two exclusive territories. Dalit territories begin where the houses of the upper/dominant castes cease to exist. In fact, what matters most is not the physical distance, but the social distance that separates. The upper/dominant castes did not share their rituals, ceremonies and various other community festivities with Dalits, nor they invite Dalits to marriages and other social gatherings in the Pinds. Dalits and their territories were/are also derided and mocked at in the popular discourses and songs of upper/dominant castes. The songs and discourses of the Pinds were often couched in a language, which was aggressive and taunting. The patronising and non-cognitive categories of Dalit names and adjectives used in the language of the narratives of upper/dominant caste neighbourhoods often present Dalits as good for nothing. Dalit neighbourhoods too have their distinct discourses. Woven around painful memories of historical discriminations, Dalit discourses were rarely articulated in written form. They were circulated only through word of mouth. Though circulated in a limited form due to the severe scarcity of writers among Dalits, the discourses of Dalit territories, stashed in the memories of the ex-untouchables, argued Ilaiah, keep Dalits spellbound. Dalit discourses reveal the usual antagonistic relationship between Pinds and territories, which is now being captured graphically in popular Dalit songs and graffiti in contemporary Punjab.

Dalit territories complement *Varna* (fourfold hierarchical division of Hindu social order) ideology, which facilitated the perpetuation of Brahminical social order of caste hegemony over hapless Dalits. The social code of conduct of *varna* ideology did not allow Dalits to put any claim for a share in the local structures of power. It is only recently that some of the Dalits have started converting their territories into radical sites of Dalit assertion. Many Dalits, who have been able to escape from the oppressive *jajmani* system of agricultural manual labour, got diversified in various non-agricultural professions. Their entry into governments jobs,

state and central legislature, and in some cases even corporate business have transformed the texture of Dalit neighbourhoods. Dalit territories are now no longer ghettos of mud houses and thatched huts littered with dirt and filth. Instead, impressive and sprawling houses decorate them. Liberal remittance by the Dalit diasporas have improved living conditions in the peripheries tremendously. The surroundings of the territories are no longer buried under the heaps of waste and dirt; streets are made of concrete; many homes have in-house toilets, sewage and water facilities. Public and private transport system connects them with the towns and cities.

The historical dependence of Dalit territories on Pinds and the current emerging radical assertion within the former, on the one hand, and the consequent strong resistance shown by the latter, on the other, is what bring these two distinct asymmetrical rural settings into direct confrontation. The mushrooming of Ravidass Deras within segregated Dalit territories testify the Deleuzian and Guattarian episteme of 'three movements/vectors in the territorial process: deterritorialization, reterritorialization and territorialization'. The 'three movementsepisteme' of territorial process identify any territory as an act or a mode of processual, evental and directional entities against the object-subject ontic of territory. 'A territory,' argued Mubi Brighenti 'is something one makes vis-à-vis others as an inscription upon a specific material.' In other words, territorial formation processes move uninterruptedly. Demolition of a territory leads to the creation, at the same time somewhere else, of another one. Deleuze and Guattari argue that '[o]ne cannot deterritorialize from some relations without concurrently reterritorializing on some others. It is this double movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that evokes the primitive movement of territorialization, which otherwise tends to be taken for granted, perceived as a degree zero of territory, as non-movement. These three territorial movements proceed together precisely as movements, or directional vectors'.

Given the above mentioned Deleuzian and Guattarian episteme of 'three movements'; Pinds and Dalit territories appear as entering into 'an epochal struggle' in contemporary times. What makes this struggle different and novel is the non-violent nature of the Dalit movement. Ad Dharm movement of the early 1920s, Ambedkar movement beginning in early 1940s, and later on Bahujan Samaj Party in the 1980s all played an important role in peacefully politicizing the Dalit territories to ask for their due share in the local structures of powers. Apart from a few violent incidents, by and large Dalit movement in Punjab remained peaceful. Throughout the hundred years of its existence Dalit movement in the state preferred constitutional measures over violent means and stood as a

guard for the continuity of the Indian constitution, which provided them opportunities to get rid of their historically degraded social existence. The following section explores the genesis of non-violent nature of the Dalit movement in the state and the critical role it played in the emergence of radical Dalit assertion in the territories.

IV

The emergence of Dalit Deras within segregated Dalit territories, what Deleuze and Guattari called 'refrain' i.e. coming together of rhythms and melodies into a territory, has not only emancipated Dalits from their forced social opprobrium of defiled territoriality but also reterritorialized them into sacralised space of Dalit self-respect and dignity. Dalit Deras, in fact, can be presented as structural forms of counter culture and Dalit heritage (acts of imagination) that performs the role of what Mubi Brighenti called territorializing through 'myths and narratives'. Such structural manifestation of Dalits acts of imagination makes them obvious and visible working entities. Dalits are territorial entities. Since 'territorial practice is an imaginative mechanism whereby someone is initially recognized as an intruder or insider (or other equivalent qualification) in relation to one's territory'. Dalits considered themselves natives/sons of the soil and the upper castes/Aryans as the intruder. According to Mubi Brighenti, 'it is imagination that enables classification, distinction and recognition. Rather, recognition and separation of two basic types of co-specifics (members of the same species) is what the territory is all about. Selective inclusion and exclusion combines into series to form an ordering mechanism that becomes the basis for the formation of social groups'. In the case of Indian caste system, Dalits are bracketed within socially excluded section of the society and the upper castes distanced themselves from the former while denying them access into their mainstream neighbourhoods.

It is in the above-mentioned context that Dalit Deras have not merely come up as centers of spiritual gatherings for Dalits, but also expanded into epicenters of non-violent Dalit social protest while reterritorializing and sacralising hitherto condemned separate Dalit territories into sacred space. They, in fact, present a clear manifestation of the rising distinct Dalit identity within the segregated Dalit space. In the background of 'expressive component' mode of territorialization process, Ravidass Deras have formulated their own sacred scriptures, religious symbols, ceremonies, prayers, rituals and messages of social protest what Deleuze and Guattari innovatively called 'rhythmic characters' and 'melodic landscapes' against the oppressive structures of caste domination in the agrarian society of Punjab. Their distinctiveness also lies in the fact that they neither take refuge in any of the established theology (conversion) nor do they imitate the dominant socio-

cultural ethos of upper caste society (sanskritisation). On the contrary, they proudly distinguish themselves from the mainstream religious systems and contest the hegemony of the upper dominant/caste neighbourhoods over the Dalits territories. Fabulous architecture of some of the Dalit Deras provided immense prestige to Dalit neighbourhoods where until recently poverty, squalor and filth used to be a common sight.

V

Distinct Dalit territories gained sudden notice after the murder of one of the top priests of the Ravidassia community at a Ravidass temple in Vienna on 24 May 2009. After this incidence, Ravidass Deras, primarily led by Dera Sachkhand Ballan, publicly announced Ravidass Dharm as a separate Dalit religion on 30 January 2010. The declaration of a separate Dalit religion has led to confrontation between the Sikh Panth (community) and Dera Ballan led Ravidass Deras. The root cause of the confrontation lies in the emergence of a separate Dalit identity in the aftermath of Vienna episode, which enhanced the importance of Dalit Deras among their followers of the lower castes. At a still deeper level, Dalit Deras strike sharply at the political economy of the religion in Punjab. Since Dalits constitute almost one third of the total population of the state, their sheer numbers make a big difference. As some of them have improved their economic conditions at home and also carved a niche for themselves abroad, their large numerical strength definitely matters in the political economy of the religion. This is evident in the vast amount of offerings being received at various Ravidass Deras in Punjab and abroad. It is in this context that the landless Dalit, who were historically deprived of land, can be seen building their unique sacred territory in competition with the long-established religious territory of the landed communities as a vehicle for their upward social mobility.

Within the Dalits, the Vienna episode also generated confrontation between two groups of Ravidass Deras: the one consists of Sri Guru Ravidass Sadhu Sampardai Society, All India Adi-dharm Sadhu Samaj and All-India Adi-dharm Mission; and the other led by Dera Ballan and its various affiliated Ravidass Deras. The intra Dalit Deras' confrontation revolves around the contention of Ravidassia Dharm versus Adi-dharm – as the sole religion of Dalits across their varied sub-caste variations. Sants of Adi-dharmi/Ravidassia community led by Sri Guru Ravidass Sadhu Sampardai Society urged their followers to mention 'Adi-dharmi' as their community religion in the 2021 census. Whereas Sants of Dera Ballan, Sri Guru Ravidass Janam Asthaan Public Charitable Trust and Akhil Bhartiya Ravidassia Dharm Sangathan emphasised on declaring 'Ravidassia Dharm' as a distinct religion of Dalit community in the Census 2021.

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The large followings of Ravidass Deras may also have serious political implications for the religion-dominated electoral politics in Punjab. Thus the mushrooming of Ravidass Deras in the segregated Dalit territories does not only symbolise assertion of a separate Dalit identity, it also sharpens the underlying contradictions between the landed/dominant communities residing in Pinds and the landless/lower castes living in Dalit neighbourhoods. It is in this volatile context that the bhakti based method of non-violent social protest as devised by Guru Ravidass assumed critical importance. The peace appeal made by the priests of Dera Sachkhand Ballan after the Vienna episode to its enraged followers is a case in point. Since the entire socio-spiritual activities within Ravidass Deras revolves round the teachings of Guru Ravidass, deeply soaked in universal love and peace, it inculcates a sense of permanent faith in the minds of a large number of Ravidassias about the non-violent social protest for the emancipation and empowerment of their lives within segregated territories. Though Dalit struggle remained non-violent throughout its long history of social protest against social exclusion, it has nothing to do with the Gandhian struggle of Satyagraha nor it has been swayed over by flat promises of sanskritisation – another non-violent way of upward Dalit social mobility. Non-violent Dalit struggle has its roots in the sacralizing process of the segregated Dalit territories on the bases of social protest-Bhakti teachings of Guru Ravidass.

VI

Dalit emancipation process has so far gone through many phases involving varied state and civil society interventions. The civil society interventions can be further bifurcated into initiatives from within the Dalit territories and by the upper caste social reformers. As far as the latter are concerned, the main focus of such measures has been primarily on helping Dalits to improve their material conditions to some extent without decimating the oppressive social structures of caste hierarchy and the territorialised segregated Dalit space. However, the initiatives from within the ghettoized Dalit territories were always aimed at seeking self-respect and dignity and to build an egalitarian social realm free from the fetters of oppressive caste boundaries of low and high scales. Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890), C. Jyodhee Thass Pandithar (1845-1914), Ayyankali (1863-1941), Erode Venkata Ramasamy, popularly known as Periyar or E.V. R. (1879-1973), Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), Swami Achhutanand Harihar (1869-1933), and Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia (1886-1980) were among the most prominent radical leaders who emerged from the socially excluded sections of the Indian society. Along with the material uplift of the downtrodden, they strongly emphasised on the urgency of social emancipation and empowerment of

Dalits. Their main concern was to liberate Dalits not only from the scarcities of economic resources to lead materially comfortable lives, but also to emancipate them from their territorially demarcated social existence while simultaneously empowering them to make their segregated neighbourhoods upwardly social mobile. In other words, their central objective was to generate Dalit consciousness through the articulation of counter culture based on alternative Dalit discourse and heritage to eventually help the socially excluded sections of the highly segmented society to stand up against their tormentors and to reclaim their long lost rich native heritage and socio-religious space.

Phule in his seminal work *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) emphasised the need of developing a counter narrative to fix the hegemonic supremacy of the minority upper/dominant castes on the vast but segmented majority of lower (Shudra) and lowest (*Ati-Shudra*) castes in India. He scathingly attacked the oppressive social structures of caste hierarchy 'as both mischievous and wicked and something engineered by the Aryan invaders to consolidate their preeminence'. He also rejected the *varnashramadharma*-based principle of purity-impurity and sacred office of priesthood as a necessary mediator between God and man/woman. Influenced by Thomas Paine's doctrine of 'Natural Rights,' Phule strongly advocated that all lower castes people, just like upper/dominant castes, have inalienable rights to enjoy the bounty of 'Natural Rights.' He categorically rejected and ridiculed all those sacred and legal books, popularly referred to in religious discourses in Hinduism, which categorised society into Aryan and non-Aryan and deny Natural and Human Rights to the latter for no other reason but for their alleged low caste birth. In his alternative Dalit narrative, Phule projected lower castes as indigenous/native people who had their own distinct cultural heritage – ethos, ceremonies, prayers, *kathas* (stories), heroes, gurus, rules, traditions, auspicious dates, festivals, symbols, folklores and religion – chiseled over centuries before the invasions of marauding Aryans. The narrative further reiterates that the invading Aryans 'conquered the indigenous people through force, treachery and use of religious propaganda. The nine avatars of Vishnu were seen as different stages of the Aryan conquest. The very formulation of an alternative Dalit Discourse can be problematized as a strategic move towards the reterritorialisation of segregated Dalit territories. In order to liberate (deterritorialize) Dalits from the fetters of social exclusion, they need to be territorialized afresh (reterritorialize) on the bases of their native religion and long discarded cultural heritage. What counts here most is not the segregated territorialised Dalit space per se, but the relationship between Dalits and upper castes that were built through such segregated territories.

Phule's alternative Dalit discourse aimed at afresh territorialisa-

tion of Dalit space was rooted in cultural and ethnic traditions/symbols of native people, who were incarcerated within the territorially segregated boundaries, superimposed by the *varnashramadharma*, caste structures and sacred books. The enslaved natives continued to be segregated by Brahman elites 'whose dominant position in the caste system and religiously justified monopoly of knowledge underlay their power'. For Phule '[t]he masses, from peasants through untouchables and tribals, were the original inhabitants of India, "sons of the soil," the elite and particularly the Brahmans, the irani-aryabhats, were seen as aliens ...'. The main objective of such innovative and highly critical anti-Brahmin narrative was to empower the socially and territorially segregated natives and to establish their sovereignty under the egalitarian rule of Bali-Raja, a mythical king of the natives, who ruled over the land before the arrival of the invading Aryans. The narrative further reiterates that Dalits should not be afraid of their so-called forced low-caste social status; rather, they should turn it into an identity catalyst and deploy the same to contest the hegemony of dominant castes. The central thesis of this narrative depicts the natives of the region as the rulers of the land who were stripped of their rich cultural heritage by the alien Aryans. The Aryans, goes the narrative, forcibly snatched from the natives almost everything worth possessing and reduced them to slaves/untouchables. They erased their geographies while wiping out the tangible cultural heritage of the natives, deprived them of their history, and consequently pushed them into oblivion, thus, ultimately detaching them from their religion, culture, heroes, gurus and glory.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, a revolutionary of Ghadar movement fame and founder of the Ad Dharm movement, took this alternative Dalit narrative to the doorsteps of the Dalits in Punjab. He exhorted them to establish their own distinct *Dharmik* (religious) identity based on a separate Dalit religion. The narrative stirred and inspired them, particularly the Chamars, to rebuild their mythically rich and long-lost Dalit cultural heritage through the establishment of a separate Dalit religion – Ravidassia Dharm. Phule-Mangu Ram alternative Dalit narrative distinguished itself from the mainstream civil society and the state affirmative action, on the one hand, and the lower castes endeavours particularly rooted in religious conversion and cultural assimilation, on the other. It neither aimed at helping the lower castes through state affirmative action nor motivating them to follow into the footsteps of the upper castes' cultural traditions and sacred books-based rituals and ceremonies. It also guarded them against common practices of religious conversion for escaping the drudgery of caste-laden life. On the contrary, it aimed at restoring the lost pristine glory of the native religion of the lower castes. This unique Dalit social mobility model led

to the establishment of various Ravidass Deras in Punjab, which attracted a large number of lower castes into their fold. In Ravidass Deras, with their own sacred scriptures, religious symbols, ceremonies, prayers, rituals and messages of social protest (re-territorialization processes), provide Dalits exclusive social and cultural space. It has generated a sense of confidence in them and provided them with an opportunity to exhibit their hitherto eclipsed Dalit identity. They distinguish themselves from the mainstream religious systems and contest the hegemony of the upper-caste neighbourhoods over the Dalit territories. They lend the most sought after recognition to Dalit territories.

Though affirmative action helped some Dalits to acquire upward social mobility, it has also led to social protests among the middle class sections of upper caste people who allegedly feel discriminated in the merit-based competitive system. Affirmative action got routinized despite opposition from the mainstream civil society for no other reasons but, perhaps, of political expediency. Since Scheduled Castes (SCs also known as Dalits) constitute 16.2 percent of total population of India (2011 Census of India), no political party can dare ignore them. It was perhaps for the electoral value that the government policy of reservation for them continues to exist even after many years of India's independence. As mentioned above, though the reservation policy did help some of them, but it failed to bring structural changes in the discriminatory social structures at the grassroots. Dalits continue to live in segregated territories in the vicinities of mainstream villages in the vast rural settings of the country across the regions. It is in this crucial context, that Dalit territoriality assumes the form of 'social' in contradistinction to the mainstream-inhabited space dominated by the upper/dominant castes across the length and breadth of India. The 'social' of the Dalit territorialities started getting organised under the cliché of alternative narrative articulated by the intermittent Dalit movement from Phule onwards. In contemporary India, the alternative Dalit narrative of territoriality has become the most appropriate agency of upward social mobility for Dalits. It is aimed at revamping (re-territorialization) of the hitherto condemned segregated Dalit neighbourhoods while exhorting Dalits to generously invest in their monumental heritage and architectural infrastructure projects for separate Dalit religion. The revamping of Dalit territories does not merely mean the physical renovation of the segregated Dalit space. It is, in fact, all about assigning a new and empowered meaning to Dalit sites of contestation.

[For further details refer to: Ronki Ram "Can 'Territoriality' be Social? Interrogating the 'Political' of Dalit Social Inclusion in India," *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* (sage), July 16, 2021. DOI: 10.1177/2455328X211022194].

It is Time to Remind – International Day of Equality

Over the years, since June, 2015 when the proposal to declare April 14, birth anniversary of Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar as International Day of Equality was made to the Government of India, much water has flown in the Yamuna in Delhi and Hudson in New York. It is surprising and not understandable why the Government of India (MEA and PMO) is sitting tight and not responding to our several submissions in this regard. We have been writing to EAM, PM and other Ministers and stakeholders and reminding them rather religiously but to no avail. We have no other option but to remind the Government with the hope someday that they would wake up and listen to the voice of the masses, we the people of India. Babasaheb Ambedkar's name and legacy is a potent force which may not be ignored for long. It has been repeatedly proved not only in India but abroad too. All the political outfits are only too eager to own Ambedkar and cannot afford to do without him.

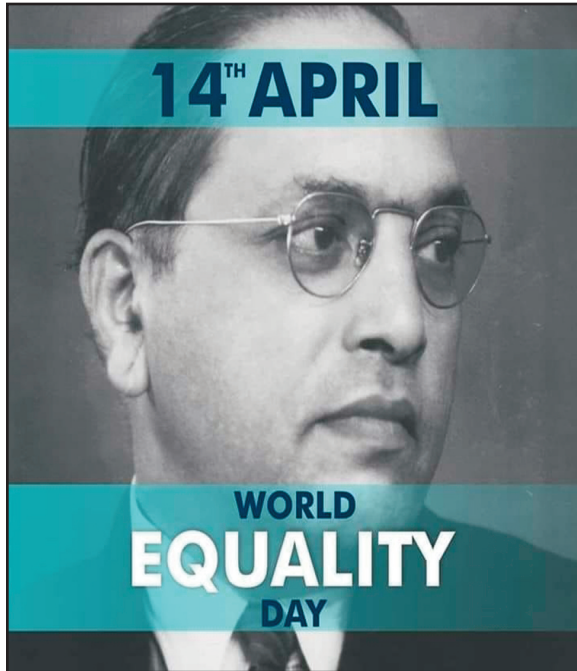
gratification to note that taking cue from the proposal on International Day of Equality our interlocutors abroad pursued with their local counterparts the idea of honouring Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in one way or the other. Chetna Association of Canada succeeded in convincing the State of British Columbia of Canada and they proclaimed April 14 as 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality' in April, 2021. Earlier the City of Burnaby of Canada had done so in April, 2020. Now in July,

the Indian origin and the very second jurist in the world to have a room dedicated to him at the Gray's Inn. The Inn, previously had a room dedicated to Rose Heilbronn, England's first woman queen counsel and judge' as reported by the Tribune – Jalandhar Edition of July 22, 2021. With this background, I thought of reminding our own Indian Government of the subject and again wrote a letter to EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar on July 25, 2021 under intimation to PM

make a demarche by the Government of India to the UN well before the UNGA – 76 scheduled in September, 2021. With an explicit support of India, Foreign Minister of our close friend Maldives Abdullah Shahid will preside over the UNGA – 76 in New York on one hand and on the other India herself will sit at the main Chair at the Horse Shoe Table of the UNSC beginning August, 2021. We are confident that GOI would not let the opportunity pass and take the proposal to the UN immediately to add to its international



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



Over the recent decades, it has been noticed that Ambedkar, one of the greatest sons of India in the contemporary times, is much recognized and felicitated personality with his statues, memorials and other insignia not only in India but throughout the globe. Not that successive Governments of India particularly the current government of PM Narendra Modi have not done their bit in this regard but still Ambedkar deserved much more. And moreover, it will not go in vain but will help in strengthening the democratic edifice, secular credentials and democratic socialism based on the lofty ideals of Equality, Liberty, Justice and Fraternity as enshrined in the letter and spirit of our Constitution by no other but Babasaheb Ambedkar himself as the Chief Architect of the Constitution of India. It is a matter of

Appendix:-



Ramesh Chander
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)

July 25, 2021

Dear Sir,

Ever since you have taken over as the EAM in May/June, 2019, I have been writing to you about the International Day of Equality, my last letter dated April 1, 2021 (copy enclosed for ready reference) refers. The proposal to declare April 14, birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as International Day of Equality was first made in June, 2015 to your predecessor EAM Sushma Swaraj ever since the proposal is resting with the esteemed MEA.

I thought of reminding you on the subject in the run up to the forthcoming UNGA in September, 2021. You would appreciate, Sir, Babasaheb Ambedkar is increasingly getting international recognition. It is surprising that our own government, which has taken many initiatives to honour one of the greatest sons of India otherwise, is taking time to consider the proposal and take a decision to make an appropriate demarche to the UN in this regard. I may inform, which you may already be aware, that the State of British Columbia in Canada proclaimed to declare April 14 as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality in April, 2021. Some days ago in July, 2021 itself the Gray's Inn in London has named and opened Ambedkar Room and unveiled his portrait to recognize Babasaheb. You may know that 'Dr BR Ambedkar is the first person of the Indian origin and the very second jurist in the world to have a room dedicated to him at the Gray's Inn. The Inn, previously had a room dedicated to Rose Heilbronn, England's first woman queen counsel and judge' as reported by the Tribune of July 22, 2021.

I don't feel any need to say much, Sir, as you very well know and understand how to go about and what to do to get declared April 14 as International day of Equality. There may not be more opportune time when India will occupy the Head

Address:- SHARNAM – Kothi No. 49/7, Near Park, Dool Nagar, Nahodar Road, JALANDHAR – 144003
(Punjab) Tele: +919988510940 E-mail: rc2345@yahoo.com



Ramesh Chander
Ambassador - I.F.S. (Retired)

Chair at the UNSC and UNGA -76 in September, 2021 will be presided over by Foreign Minister of our friend Maldives, Abdullah Shahid

I am confident that my submissions would find an urgent consideration and a favourable decision is taken to see that the proposal is sent and taken up at the UN appropriately. It would send a very positive political signal within the country and to the international community in under-pinning the 'Soft Diplomacy of India' to move towards establishing a just and equitable world order.

With personal regards,

Yours truly,
(Ramesh Chander)

Dr. S. Jaishankar,
Minister of External Affairs,
South Block, New Delhi

Copy to:

1. Shri Narendra Modi, PM of India, PMO, South Block, New Delhi
2. Dr. Varinder Kumar, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, New Delhi
3. Shri Ramdas Athawale, MOS, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, New Delhi
4. Shri Som Parkash, MOS, Ministry of Industry and Trade, New Delhi
5. Ms. Meenakshi Lekhi, MOS, MEA, New Delhi
6. Shri Vijay Sampla, Chairman, National SC Commission, New Delhi
7. Shri Dushyant Gautam, MP, New Delhi

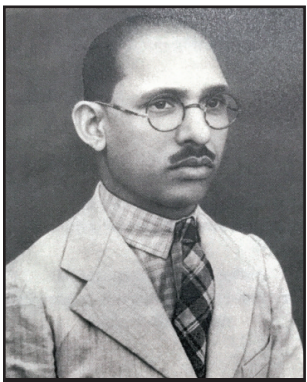
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(Punjab) Tele: +919988510940 E-mail: rc2345@yahoo.com

standing under the soft diplomacy endeavors. It goes without saying that Ambedkar's name and his legacy would dictate the political course of India in the days and years to come. The proposed International Day of Equality would tend to send a positive message to the Indian masses particularly the followers of Babasaheb and the weaker sections of the society. The ruling outfits, having the mandate to take a decision, would stand to gain by honouring one of the greatest sons of India and an international icon, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

2021 itself, the Gray's Inn in London named and opened Ambedkar Room and unveiled his portrait to recognize Babasaheb. You may know that 'Dr BR Ambedkar is the first person of

Narendra Modi and his concerned Ministers and other important functionaries belonging to the ruling BJP which is appended to this piece. It is the time to act and take a decision to

**Ik Tarze Tagafil Hai;
So woh Unko Mubarak,
Ik Arze Tamanna Hai;
Woh Hum Karte Rehange.**



Ishwar Das Pawar
District and Sessions Judge (Retd.)

My Struggle in Life

The Problem of the Valmikis

The problem of the *Valmikis* (low caste people, janitors) is a formidable and the most important of the problems that confront society and the country. It calls for urgent and effective steps and efforts to solve it. Nobody seems to have grasped its importance and gone into the root cause of the malaise. The small and marginal benefits given to these people have made their economic condition a bit better, but it is still deplorable. They continue to stand at the lowest rung of the hierarchical social ladder. In fact, the few concessions given to them in the matter of the terms and conditions of their service have actually served as opiates because the same have induced in them a false sense of satisfaction and complacency. As a corollary, it gives rise to the vicious tendency to hug and cling to the traditional profession which has downgraded and degraded them.

Let us have just a look at a few events of the past. It was in the early thirties that a deputation of the representatives of the untouchables led by the late Babu Mangu Ram had gone to Simla to wait on the acting-governor, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan. I was also a member of the deputation. During our stay there, the local *Valmikis* invited us for a lunch in their colony. In those days, the *Ad-Dharm* movement was at its peak. The *Valmikis* made very good arrangements for the lunch. In addition, they showered on us all the love and affection of which they had plenty.

On that occasion, a young boy with a budding face was introduced to us. The peculiar thing about Lachhman Singh Salhotra was that he was the first *Valmiki* boy to have passed the matriculation examination. He could be seen as the harbinger of a rare ray of hope for his brotherhood for which education had been a taboo. We expressed our great pleasure and appreciation over this remarkable achievement. As a gesture of good will toward its sweepers, the Simla Municipal Committee had appointed the boy as a clerk in its office. It was considered to be quite a satisfying and gainful employment.

After that, Lachhman Singh Salhotra met me in 1954 in my office at Simla-Elerslie secretariat when I was an under secretary. In that capacity, I was also in charge of the passport work. It was a pleasure to meet him after a fairly long time.

We talked about stray matters. He told me that he was going on well with his clerical job. Being asked about the purpose of his visit to me, he said that he proposed to go to the United Kingdom, and for that purpose, he needed a passport. In those days it was a very difficult job, especially for the *Harijans* (people from low caste), to get a passport for that country. I assured him that it would not be difficult

for him to get a passport. Incidentally, I asked him about the purpose of his going abroad. He said his purpose was to study the methods and techniques of sweeping and scavenging there and the working and service conditions of those engaged in the profession. On hearing this, I was really taken aback. I said to him, courteously, of course, "You are an educated young man with gull and guts. If you are to go abroad, you should have some better aim. Why should you bother about the methods and techniques of this dirty job, which profession had been dogging you from generation to generation? People go to UK for various purposes, among them being higher education and earning of money." He promised to keep my advice in view. I did not pursue the matter further as he had caught my point. He applied for a passport and got one in due course. Thus he was enabled to go abroad for a purpose of his own liking and choice.

Babu Jagjivan Ram visited Simla in 1954 when he was a minister in the central government. Chaudhri Sunder Singh was then a minister in the Sachar ministry. Babu Jagjivan Ram was good enough to accept my invitation for a lunch at my residence. Several officials and political and social workers were also present in this occasion. It afforded a good opportunity for the exchange of views on various matters concerning the scheduled castes. Taking advantage of Babuji's presence in Simla, the local Congress committee organized a public meeting. Chaudhri Sunder Singh was the first to speak. He was all eloquence, and we heard him speaking so fluently and passionately only on very rare occasions. Then Babuji spoke for about an hour. As usual, his speech was captivating and was heard by the big audience in pin-drop silence. One of the significant points made by him was that, in the ultimate analysis, the salvation of the *Valmikis* lies in their totally giving up their wretched traditional profession of sweeping and scavenging, which had condemned them to a life of abject poverty, ignorance, indignity, and humiliation. The point struck at the very root of the problem.

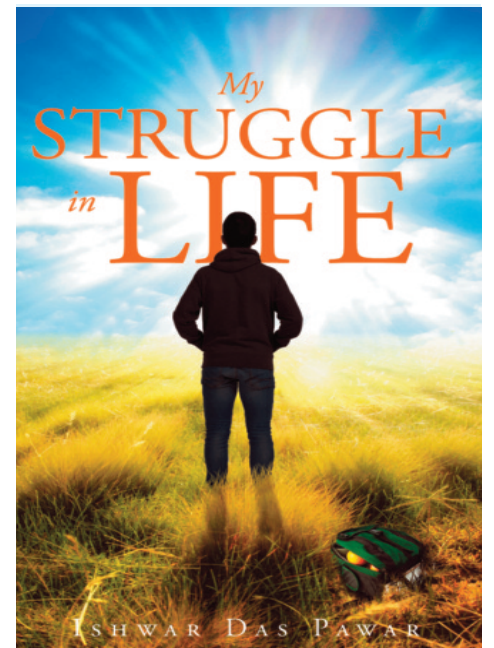
But it was not palatable to many and, in particular, to the administration of the town. "Who else will do this job," they murmured? The president of the municipal committee was heard to remark that Babu Jagjivan Ram had tried to incite and instigate the sweepers to revolt. He posed the question, "What will happen to the sanitation of the town if the sweepers were to accept Babuji's ill-advised call to them to give up their job and take to any other avocation?" The question "who will do this job if not the *Valmikis*?" is not for them to answer. It concerns the general public, and it is for them to evolve an alternative. *Valmikis* must be liberated from the bonds of the ignoble life they had been forced to lead by society. Come what may, they must occupy a posi-

tion in society, which is one of equality, honor and respect.

There is, however, a hopeful change in the thinking and attitude of *Valmikis* themselves as a small incident will show. About a year back, two *Valmiki* girls, Jamna and Maya, who appeared to be in their early twenties, used to do the work of cleaning our house. They were good-looking girls, quite healthy and fair in complexion and well-dressed. Only a broom in their hands could indicate that they were *Valmikis*. One day, while they were working in the verandah, I said to one of them, "Jamadarni (cleaning lady or janitor), clean this place also." To this came a quick and spontaneous but polite retort, "Pitaji (father), do not address us as *Jamadarni*, call us by name. We also have our honor though we know we are only *Valmikis*." On hearing the girl speak in that strain, I felt both happy and unhappy. Happy because the girls who can be said to represent the changing outlook of their community were well on their way to realize that they too had honor in society. I was unhappy because of the wrong notion they were still hugging that they were "only *Valmikis*." I called both of them near me and had a word of appreciation and advice for them.

I told them in an affectionate tenor that though the awakening that was coming over them was really commendable, yet their idea that they were born as *Valmikis* and would therefore remain as such was utterly wrong. I then explained to them that they were as good and honorable members of society as anybody else. The caste system was a cleverly man-made trap laid to exploit the poor and downtrodden sections of the nation. The girls heard me very attentively, and I could discern signs of gladness and hope on their beaming faces. I was doubly glad that I was able to bring home to them a very important point.

The times have changed, and this problem is forcing its way to the people but not as seriously and strongly as it ought to. Small concessions, such as providing of wheeled barrows for carrying the night soil and garbage instead of carrying it on heads; periodical, cheaply priced uniforms; long-handled brooms; and a small raise in emoluments here and there, do not serve any useful and meaningful purpose except serving as an opiate to send these exploited people to insensibility and sleep. In effect, these so-called concessions are the stumbling blocks in the way of their awakening and liberation. Of late, some useful things have been proposed and devised for helping them in the right direction on a governmental level, and for this, credit must go to Giani Zail Singh, former Chief Minister of Panjab. In the matter of education, special consideration is given to *Valmiki* students. More importantly, the government has issued instructions that 50 percent vacancies of the quota reserved for the scheduled



castes in direct recruitment should be offered to *Valmikis* and *Mazhabi Sikhs* (converted as Sikhs from low castes), if available, as a first preference from amongst the scheduled caste candidates. This decision of the government is very wise and laudable. The urgency of the *Valmiki* problem has been recognized. This welcome decision can benefit the intended beneficiaries in the real sense.

But in this context the question is as to what extent the *Valmikis* and *Mazhabi Sikhs* will be benefited by these concessions. The entire question revolves on the availability of qualified and eligible candidates for various categories of services. It is common knowledge that there is an acute shortage of such candidates. In order to give a concrete shape to these concessions, the government should take necessary steps as a follow-up action. Special attention should be paid to the basic factor, namely, education of these castes. The parents should be persuaded and, if necessary, compelled to send their children to schools. Special training centers should be started for them, and all the necessary facilities provided to the trainees. They need help in every way. Their condition and status are the real yardstick to measure the progress and development of the country. *Valmikis* and *Mazhabi Sikhs* are the most backward section.

They are the poorest of the poor and the weakest of the weak. Their problem is difficult, complex, and of vast magnitude. It needs matching efforts to solve it. Half-hearted measures cannot yield the desired results. And unfortunately, there is no leader of stature to espouse their cause. Truly speaking, no such leader will come from outside.

Their messiah has to come from amongst them, who will devote and dedicate his life for the noble cause, and who will completely identify himself with them with a solemn vow to swim or sink with them. Only such an inspired soul can pull them out of the quagmire of ignorance, misery, and ignominy in which they have been pushed and submerged neck deep and lead them to the goal of their emancipation.

No other person can do this great job. The plight of the *Valmikis* represents the most heinous crime committed by the society. This shocking aggression and injustice has been committed by the Hindus who glory in their claim to be the



Sue Frost

Sacramento County Supervisor. District 4



Sue Frost

Enforcing Illegal Firework Ban

There are some issues that never seem to go away despite the best efforts of Sacramento County and the agencies we work with. This time of year, an issue that comes to the forefront of discussion is fireworks. It is a heated topic with valid concerns on both sides and every year, my colleagues and I hear all of them. One of the requests we most often get is to ban fireworks throughout the county. This would, of course, not only include the fireworks that are already illegal, but the permitted fireworks referred to as "safe and sane." That is not an action I am prepared to take and I wanted to use this article as a



chance to discuss some of the reasons why.

First, I think we can all agree that illegal fireworks are a problem. When we are talking about illegal fireworks, we are talking about the large rockets exploding in the sky or the ones you cannot see but can certainly hear from across town. The complaints my office gets about fireworks are almost always referencing these types of fireworks, and that is understandable. These fireworks are dangerous and disruptive. Unfortunately, there is nothing the County can do to make these any more illegal than they already are. Nor is the County in a position to cut these fireworks off at the source. Illegal fireworks are brought in from outside the state, mostly from Nevada. The state does not provide the checkpoints and enforcement that are necessary to stop people from buying fireworks in Nevada and driving them home to set off in our communities.

Ultimately, that is what it comes down to – enforcement. The County cannot be the authority at the state border for obvious reasons. At the same time, whether it is the use of illegal fireworks or abuse of safe and sane fireworks around the 4th of July, the Sheriff's Department does not have the resources to find and cite every violator. The Sheriff also cannot shift resources to focus solely on fireworks when they have to prioritize more serious crimes which increase during this time of year. Our best option, and my highest priority,

is working with state legislators to get solutions to what is truly a state-level issue. Meanwhile, I do not anticipate safe and sane fireworks leaving the County any time soon either.

Some of the loudest voices of concern I hear call for the banning of safe and sane fireworks in addition to those that are already illegal. But safe and sane fireworks are not the bulk of the problem. Additionally, every year, Sacramento County nonprofit organizations raise thousands of dollars to support their causes from the sale of safe and sane fireworks. With illegal fireworks being the more prominent problem, banning safe and sane would do little more than deprive local nonprofits a significant fundraising opportunity. The same scenarios with illegal fireworks could play out with safe and sane if they were to be banned as well. Driving to a neighboring county to purchase illegal fireworks is a lot easier than driving to Nevada. My preference would be to maintain the fundraising opportunity for Sacra-

mento County organizations, rather than drive local dollars outside the county just to have a minimal impact.

The fact is there is no easy solution. Other counties with bans on all firework sales face similar problems to Sacramento County. We will not truly see relief from the major firework issues until the state can take control of the illegal fireworks flooding into the state. And while I understand the concern of those who think a full ban is the answer, I do not believe that to be the sentiment of most. For now, we are better served to focus our efforts on the illegal fireworks that pose the biggest threat to safety and sanity.

BARC is Back at SMF

After an 18-month hiatus, the BARC team is back at Sacramento International Airport (SMF). These special pups' friendly faces and "Pet Me" vests are relieving the stress of travel for many passengers. The program was halted due to the pandemic, but as of July 7, the dogs are making a



comeback.

BARC – short for the Boarding Area Relaxation Corps – greets guests once they pass through security, with big smiles and wagging tails. Studies show spending time with dogs can reduce blood pressure and anxiety while boosting feelings of relaxation and well-being. Traveling can be stressful for some people – from a fear of flying to worrying about delays or cancellations – BARC dogs provide a furry dose of relief.

Rose Margolis and Sophie, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, have been with the program since the beginning. She was looking for a fun activity to do with her dogs and wanted something interactive that gave them both a way to meet people. She knows Sophie helps those who are nervous about flying.

"A little girl was completely terrified and wouldn't stop crying until she laid down with Sophie," Margolis said. "She was so much more relaxed, and we love being able to see that."

Jennifer Baer-Riedhart and Logan, a Great Pyrenees with soulful eyes, is a big hit with even the littlest passengers – even though he's much bigger than they are.

"When he lays down the little ones like to lay on him," Jennifer said. "He is so happy to be here with all the people. I'm so glad we're back."

Colbert, a 14-year-old black Lab, was one of the first dogs in the program and is nearing retirement. He is happy to pose for photos and get in a few snuggles with adults and kids before they head off to their gate. His handler, Jenniene Cheng says the BARC team helps create a sense of security.

"People stop to pet the dogs and then start up conversations and share stories about their dogs," she said. "It's a great way to put people at ease."

BARC dogs have been lifting spirits and calming nerves at SMF since 2015. There are now 27 BARC teams making travel a little less "ruff" in both Terminal A and B.

"The BARC teams make the airport experience less stressful and more fun," said Cindy Nichol, Director of Airports for Sacramento County. "Travel can be a hectic experience and with these friendly faces around, passengers can't help but stop, take a breath and relax before continuing their journey."

They'll be at SMF on Mondays, Wednesdays, and first and third Fridays. Each dog and its handler are part of the Lend A Heart Animals Assisted Therapy organization, a Sacramento-area non-profit, founded in 1987, provides animal-assisted therapy throughout the region. The organization also has additional teams that visit hospitals, nursing homes and libraries.

"There's nothing better than seeing all these smiling faces," said Cheng.

Hot Weather Safety Tips for Pet Owners

Every year, Sacramento County residents do their best to keep cool dur-



ing the summer heat. Failing to keep cool in extreme temperatures can cause adverse health effects for residents—both human and animal.

Unlike humans, cats and dogs cannot sweat to keep cool; they cool their bodies off through panting and the pads of their feet. As a pet owner, it's important to take measures to keep them cool during the high temperatures.

Here are some tips for keeping your pet safe from the heat:

Never leave your pet in a parked car: Even cracking a window won't protect your pets. It is against the law in California and could be punishable by a fine or imprisonment. A car can reach 120 degrees in just minutes; even if the windows are slightly open the car can still reach 102 degrees. A dog's normal temperature is 101.5 degrees; at 120 degrees your pet can suffer from heat exhaustion and die and at 107 degrees brain damage occurs. Check out this video on how hot it gets in cars.

Avoid extreme heat: When temperatures get above the 90s, take your pet inside. For outdoor pets, be sure to provide them with plenty of fresh, cold water in a tip-proof water dish and shade for them to cool down.

Don't exercise with your pets when it is too hot: Older and certain long-haired dogs can be particularly susceptible to heat, and hot asphalt can burn their paws. Exercise in the

(Contd. on next page)

(Continue from page 7)
early morning or cool evenings and make sure both of you have plenty of water.

Use sunscreen: Pets get sunburned just like people, and if your pet has light skin or fur, they can be particularly susceptible to a painful burn, and even skin cancer. Use sunscreen on sensitive areas, such as ears or nose to make sure your pets are protected.

Secure your dog during transport: Make sure your dog is secured safely in your vehicle. Cross-tethering your dog with a rope or containing them via kennel in the bed of your truck will help prevent the dog from falling or jumping from the vehicle. Also, please note that truck beds can get hot when exposed to the sun and that can severely burn dog footpads. Transporting animals on a public highway or public roadway without properly securing them could be punishable by a fine.

Be your pet's lifeguard: While swimming can help pets get exercise without overheating, always supervise pets when swimming either in a pool or in waterways. Dogs can get tired swimming, particularly in rivers where they have to fight against currents. To avoid drowning, make sure they wear life jackets and keep them out of the water when flows are high.

If pets have been exposed to high temperatures...

Be alert for signs of heat stress including heavy panting, glazed eyes, a rapid pulse, unsteadiness,

staggering gait, vomiting, or a deep red or purple tongue.

Immediately move your pet to the shade to gradually lower their temperature. Apply cool (not cold) water to the pet, and provide luke-warm or cool water to drink. Take your pet to a veterinary hospital immediately. It could save their life.

For more tips on keeping pets safe in hot weather, visit the Hot Weather Pet Tips page. For other animal issues and pet owner resources, visit the Bradshaw Animal Shelter website.

Don't have a pet? The Bradshaw Animal Shelter is now offering adoptions by appointment. To start the adoption process, visit the Adoptable Animals webpage, then call 916-875-2287 Tuesday through Sunday (except holidays) between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

For a list of available animal care services, including walk-in licensing and how to report a lost or found pet, visit animalcare.sac-county.net.

Why You Need a Building Permit, How to Get One

Do you really need a permit to

install a water heater or build a patio cover? Can you get a permit online? Is there somebody you can speak to in person?

The answers are yes, you need a permit for a water heater or patio cover; yes, you can get many permits online; and yes, you can call 916-875-5296 to speak to someone in person.

And why do you need a permit when considering a remodel or home improvement project? The bottom line is safety.

Counties and cities issue building permits because they ensure that work meets the minimum requirements of the California Building Codes. Permits provide the first line of defense against building disasters and ensure the safety of the structures in which we all live, work and play.

Without permits and inspections, you wouldn't know if the walls were properly insulated, the electrical work is safe, the plumbing pipes are the right size, or if the gas piping was tested.

Work that requires a permit but is done without one is illegal and may become a liability. Most lending institutions will not finance a house

with illegal work and most insurance policies will not cover damages caused by or to illegal work. Appraisers usually measure the square footage of a project and check it against County Assessor's records. If they do not match, correcting the issues can be expensive.

Buying a house? Make sure you research the permit history before purchasing.

The Sacramento County Division of Building Permits and Inspection has many resources to assist licensed contractors and Do-It-Yourselfers with the permitting process. Here is a quick list of resources you may find helpful.

Checklist for permits

For a list of what projects do and not need a permit visit the Getting Started page.

You can submit and obtain many permits such as reroofing, electrical panels, water heaters, additions, patio covers and new buildings online.

For information regarding service sites, including the addresses and hours of operation, please visit the Contacts, Hours and Locations page. For general questions, or to speak with an Inspector, please call 916-875-5296.

To schedule inspections for your permit, call 916-875-5296 or go online.

For questions regarding the online process, please email Ryan Rudolph at rudolphr@saccounty.net. For a contact list of all staff go to the staff directory page.



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Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD



Goodie Takhar, PhD

Change of Name

I Talwinder Singh Manan
s/o Gurnam Singh
Resident of: 10339 Windmill Cove Dr,
Stockton, CA-95209, USA

Now I have changed my name

From : Talwinder Singh Manan
To : Talwinder Singh

All concerned Kindly note it.



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PHONE: 209-855-6938

Change of Name

I Nashater Singh
s/o Baldev Singh
Resident of: 5966 E Pitt Ave,
Fresno, CA-93727, USA

Now I have changed my name

From : Given Name
Nashater Singh
To Surname: Singh
Given Name: Nashater

All concerned Kindly note it.