



# Ambedkar Times

Weekly

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## AMBEDKARTIMES.COM CONGRATULATES PROFESSOR RONKI RAM



Ambedkartimes.com congratulates Professor Ronki Ram for being elected Dean, Faculty of Arts with maximum votes (73 vs. 26) in the recently conducted faculty elections of Panjab University Senate. Elections of the Syndicate body and Deans of various faculties of the Panjab University (PU) were held on December 18 and 19, 2015. Professor Ronki Ram got elected Dean, Faculty of Arts continuously for the third term. He was also elected member of the PU Syndicate for the term January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. Prof. Ronki Ram is a regular contributor to 'Ambedkar Times' and 'Desh Doaba'.

- Prem Kumar Chumber

## NEW BEGINNING IN A NEW YEAR

Prem Kumar Chumber  
Editor-In-Chief: Ambedkar Times

We live in a time that can be called modern/post-modern. All the 'isms' of hope, advancement and prosperity have lost their sheen in the contemporary world. If somehow, we still find an 'ism' floating somewhere around us that is of Neo-Liberalism. All 'isms' were formed at different intervals of the long history of mankind civilization.

What runs common in all the 'isms' is the emancipation of humanity from scarcity of resources and development of enough infrastructures for providing the basic necessities of mankind. Fabianism, Socialism, Liberalism, Capitalism, Communism all failed to keep the promise! Now Neo-liberalism is darting the shots. It hardly bothers about what is called equality and fraternity. It only aimed at 'sterling' liberty, which aimed at pursuing profit without fear of consequences for the fellow travelers. It defines wealth in terms of possessions and friendship in terms of capacity to further its

interests.

But how this ultra-modern 'ism' will serve the cause of humanity is a common concern for all of us. Twenty first century is fast approaching its first 20th year shortly. Nano-technology, cyber-networking and finance-capital have been the hall marks of our contemporary times.

We know that what we achieved in terms of science, technology and mastery over the nature in the last fifty years is beyond comparison with what we gained over the centuries. But one thing which we need not to forget is that what we have

achieved over the centuries is not only to be measured in terms of technological advancements but also morality, liberty, equality, fraternity and humanity.

If we have survived over all these centuries, it is not only due to strides in technological advancements but also human values. Let us begin our New Year with a resolve that the blind pursuit for profit should not leave behind human values - the savior of mankind!



## COMMISSIONER LAHORI RAM'S SEVENTH BARSII

"Time is not measured by the years that you live but by the deeds that you do and the joy that you give."

On January 31, 2016 the Ram Family hosted a religious function celebrating the life of Late Commissioner Lahori Ram. The Ram family hosted an Akhand Path at the Shri Guru Ravidass Temple in Pittsburg, CA. The function commemorated the Seventh Anniversary of the passing of Mr. Lahori Ram. Over 1000 friends, family and well-wishers attended the memorial. People travelled from all over the United States to attend the function. Many people traveled internationally to pay homage to their dear friend and give support to the family to continue the annual memorial to keep Mr. Ram's memory alive.

Many dignitaries attended on Sunday and praised the work Mr. Ram accomplished in his lifetime. The elected officials included: Congressman Mark DeSaulnier from the 11th Congressional District, Mayor of the city of Pittsburg Ben Johnson, City Council of Pittsburg Merl Craft, and from the Indian Consulate Vice Consul VenkataRamana.

Kirtan was performed by Shri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg head

priest Prakash Singh, Om Pal Singh's Jatha, Baljit Singh's Jatha from San Jose, Baldev Singh's Jatha, Famous Singer from India Ranjit Kaur, and Asha Sharma.

Most of the local Bay Area Sikh Temples sent their representatives to attend the memorial. Committee members from Fremont, Yuba City, Sacramento, Rio Linda, Fresno, Bakersfield, San Jose, Hayward, Modesto, Livingston and El

Sobrante were all present.

Congressman Mark DeSaulnier spoke about Mr. Lahori Ram's contribution to the American political system. He said we need more Indian Americans to be active in US politics. He said he will include the Memorial Program in the permanent US Congressional record in Washington D.C.

Mayor Ben Johnson praised Mr. Lahori Ram for his dedication, ef-

forts, and involvement in the American and Indian political system. He stressed that Mr. Ram was a role model and inspiration to many which earned him the title of "Indian Trail-



blazer in California Politics." Mayor Johnson presented the Ram Family with a Certificate of Recognition from California State Senator, District 7, Steven Glazer. The certificate highlighted the accomplishments and legacy of Mr. Ram.

City Council Merl Craft remembered how she used to teach at the old Pittsburg City gym, which is now the new Temple in Pittsburg. She was amazed of how the building was transformed into such a beautiful Temple. Mrs. Craft said the Temple was an asset to the city of Pittsburg. Vice Consul VenkataRamana said although he never got a chance to meet Mr. Ram he has heard nothing but remarkable stories of him. He

praised Mr. and Mrs. Ram for raising such beautiful children. He said that many people have lots of money but only a few people will be remembered forever like Mr. Ram.

Asha Sharma said that Mr. Lahori Ram was a shining star that can never be replaced. Karmdeep Singh Bains from Yuba City attested that Mr. Ram's contributions will never be forgotten and will live on forever. Dashwinder Pal spoke about Lahori Ram's sacrifice in establishing the Pittsburg Temple.

He said that without the Ram Family's contribution the Temple would not be in existence. Mrs. Gina Bhatia, Kashmir Bhatia, Dashvinder Paul, Prem Kumar Chumber (Editor-In-Chief of Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba) and Dr. Harmesh Kumar also commended the Ram Family and declared his candidacy for State Assembly.

Jagdev, Ajaipaul and Jagdish Kaur Ram thanked everyone for helping out in the three-day service and especially thanked the community and elected officials for their encouragement and support. They appreciated the great things said about their Father and hope to continue the work their Father started.



# COMMISSIONER LAHORI RAM'S SEVENTH BARSIS



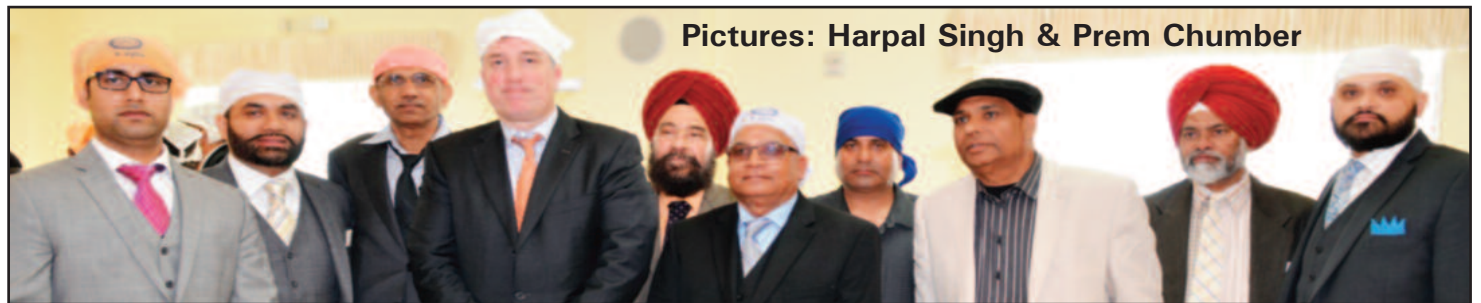
Pictures: Harpal Singh & Prem Chumber



# COMMISSIONER LAHORI RAM'S SEVENTH BARSII



Prem Kumar Chumber presented books "Kaum Da Sitara Shaheed Babu Harnam Singh Sahri" to the Commissioner Lahori Ram Family & Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Pittsburg (California)



Pictures: Harpal Singh & Prem Chumber



# Making Sense of Rohith Chakravarthi Vemula's Suicide

**Rohith** Chakravarthi Vemula, a research scholar of University of Hyderabad (UoH), committed suicide on January 17, 2016 in the room of his friend, Uma Maheshwar, in the New Research Scholar's hostel of the university by hanging himself from the ceiling fan with the blue banner of Ambedkar Students Association (ASA), a student outfit which has been fighting for Dalit rights on the campus. The suicide was committed after 15 days of his expulsion along with four other fellow researchers from the hostel, the cafeteria and other common areas following a scuffle between Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and ASA that took place on August 3, 2015. The scuffle was over a protest organised under the banner of ASA by Rohith and his friends against capital punishment and the attack in Delhi on the screening of a documentary called Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai. The ABVP unit of the HoD opposed the protest. The protest and its opposition appeared on the virtual space of Facebook, where an ABVP leader, Nandanam Susheel Kumar, called the members of ASA "goons". Forced to apologise, he alleged beaten up by some activists of ASA and the ABVP insisted for action against the accused.

The UoH in-house dispute between two student bodies was allowed to exacerbate while roping in the local MP and the Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Bandaru Dattatreya, who in turn involved the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The involvement of the MHRD is evident from the fact that it did just not write to the university but sent many reminders. Consequently, the university constituted a committee to look into the imbroglio and banned five students including Rohith, who sat on protest, from the hostel and almost all public spaces on the campus. The other four banned students were Sunkanna Velpula, Dontha Prashant, Seshaiyah Chemudagunta and Vijay Kumar. All of them belonged to Dalit communities and were/are members of ASA.

The Vice-Chancellor revoked the suspension temporarily and constituted another committee to examine the case afresh. In the meantime the current Vice-Chancellor, P. Appa Rao, took over. He scrapped the earlier enquiry committee and ordered a fresh inquiry by a sub-committee of the Executive Council, which upheld the suspension leading to the expulsion of the students including the Rohith Vemula, the one who committed suicide.

Ever since their expulsion, the five expelled Dalit research scholars had been on a sleep-in strike in the open on the campus. On the Sunday morning of January 17, 2016, following his 15th night out, Rohith Vemula had strayed away from the protesters' camp and spent his day in a room of his friend where he was found hanging at 7.30 pm. He was a second year science research scholar turned Social Science scholar with

Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) granted by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Brilliant unfinished academic journey of Rohith speaks volumes of his success stories against all odds of caste, poverty and discriminations. One of his teachers recalled with pride Rohith's impressive Class XII score of 86 per cent. His chemistry teacher, J.V. Krishnaiah remembered him as a good student who passed with first class. He studied biology, physics and chemistry; and wanted to be a science writer like Carl Sagan as is evident from his suicide note. He wrote in the letter that he "loved Science, Stars, Nature." He was also thinking about bringing a science magazine in Telugu on campus for the popularisation of science, recalled Raviteja Donepudi a former president of the Student Federation of India unit of HoD and contemporary of Rohith. Another friend recalled his deep passion for books and social change. He wanted to use science for bringing social change to empower the down-trodden. His intimate concern for society and its betterment can be glanced from his



Facebook post of December 29, 2012 about the gang rape victim in New Delhi and her subsequent death: "A nation where 545 elected members (with 33% women candidates) failed to take a stand on the side of a girl child ... A nation where politicians behave as elected brokers, where no one does any work without a commission ... A nation where students feel shy, timid and embraced (embarrassed) of raising their voice against an odd thing ... A nation where educated intellectuals run for money like machines ... In a nation like our's death could be the only thing which can rescue us ..."

Before joining ASA, Rohith was with the SFI unit of the UoH. That also informs us about his deep concern for the social transformation. Though ASA and SFI both struggle for social redistribution and empowerment of the poor, ASA focused primarily on caste as against the class based approach of SFI, which prompted Rohith to come to ASA. Rohith's entry into ASA in 2014 brought a new life into its organisation and activism. Uma Maheshwari, in whose room Rohith committed sui-

cide and also apologised to him for the same in his suicide note, says that "the biggest thing that Rohith brought to the ASA was English. Till he joined, the ASA was largely a Telugu-based organisation. Rohith took us to a new level." His command over English and to use appropriate words for sharply hitting at the target is fondly recalled by ASA member Zameer. The scientist within Rohith remained with him till his last breath. He never accepted things as they were and always raised questions while in meetings. "He would never take anybody's words. He had to be convinced," says Shekhar. However as far as social setup of Indian society is concerned, Rohith was more comfortable with the analysis of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar recalled Sunkanna Velpula. His sharp intellect, brilliant articulation, and unflinching resolve for the emancipation and empowerment of Dalits made him one of the most influential leaders of ASA on the campus.

Survived by his mother and a younger brother, Rohith was waiting for the delayed payments of his past six months JRF funds instalments. For him, the fellowship was not only a research money grant but also a financial support for his family back home. He supported his mother with some of the fellowship money to keep the hearth burning. When his fellowship was stopped, he continued to support his mother while borrowings from his friend. In his suicide note, Rohith mentioned to return Rs. 40,000, when the university released his fellowship, to Ramji Chintagada that he borrowed from him at times to send home. His mother runs house on her meagre daily wage.

The suicide note of Rohith reveals many facets of his life, aspirations, discriminations and social oppression he faced. He wanted to be writer of science, but forced to say good bye to all of us with the only letter (suicide note) that he left for the present generation and the generations to come.

This small letter is full of wisdom, philosophy of real life and scathing criticism of the social world based on mindless caste hierarchies and low birth indignations. He wrote,



## Ronki Ram

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"I loved science, stars, nature – but then I loved people without knowing that people have long since divorced from nature. Our feelings are second handed. Our love is constructed. Our beliefs coloured. Our originality valid through artificial art. It has become truly difficult to love without getting hurt. The value of man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote. To a number. To a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind. As a glorious thing made up of star dust. In every field, in studies, in streets, in politics, and in dying and living."

Rohith 'letter though brief, tells a long narrative of sad Dalit life forced on the whole community by the cruel social system, many never tired of eulogising as an epitome of Indian culture.

He lamented that man in Indian social milieu is dissociated from his natural self and chiselled into an artificial being and instrumental agency of graded caste inequality hell bent to suck the last drop of down-trodden excluded from the mainstream in the name of varna and social segregation. His suicide note is in fact a manifesto of dreaded Dalit life, which stands tall in the face all social oppression. Despite the plethora of social exclusion and oppression, Dalit life is full of aspirations and look forward to an egalitarian world where everyone will get his due in a dignified way.

The life of Rohith Vemula was full of vision, hope and love. He personified a true human being who wanted that mankind on this earth planet realise its true potentials unhindered by caste hurdles. His man was man of mind not of an identity. He wanted every man and woman grows in harmony with nature and saved from becoming a thing, number or vote. In his death and its note he proved his words while exonerating all who tormented him. He did not name anyone responsible for his tragic end. His life and its end became an open book to write and rewrite afresh Dalit story and narrative of emancipation and empowerment.