

ADI Dharam Movement in Punjab

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Abstract – The seeds of Dalit Movements were sown in the Indian sub-continent with the arrival of those Arayans who frequently shifted places, the wanderers and shepherds in this region in about 1800 BC. They entered Punjab (the land of five rivers, the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and the Jhelum) from Central Asia in the North of undivided India through the Khaibar Pass. Even though those white complexioned, grey and brown eyed and grey and black haired Aryans were far less in numbers but they were strong willed with self-determination and a well-built body.

Keywords: Adi, Dharam, Movement

INTRODUCTION

It was quite natural that the sons of the soil, the aboriginals violently resisted the Aryan invaders, plunderers and domineers in their expansionist and land grabbing tendencies in greater Punjab, Sind, some regions in the Himalayas, Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh etc. As a result those Aryans struggled to their hilt, to destroy the World's richest and the most ancient (2500 BC) Sindhu Valley civilization and the Harappan culture and civilization.

They destroyed the aboriginals most developed Harappa and Mohenjodaro cities who had laid the foundation of growth of civilization in the world. They tried to shatter the economy and destroy natural resources in the region. For example, river Saraswati, is abundantly mentioned in many of the ancient scriptures, including the Rigveda.

The Sudras were ridiculed by giving them the names of Naga, Raksh, Asur, Dravid, Danav, Nishad, Kinner etc. They propagated that the women folk, who formed half of the population, were immoral of the lowest rung in social status.

There was no end to bullying and coercion. The Aryan groups started the practice of human sacrifice and the women sacrificing themselves at the pyre of their husbands to terrorise and intimidate the locals and to give a proof of brutality and being fierce. They used to sacrifice hundreds and thousands of animals and birds in the name of Yajna. Its resistance was quite natural by the aboriginals as animal husbandry was the main source of their subsistence.

Ad Dharm Movement started in 1925 perceived its first aim to be the creation of a new religion. The basic

ideological theme which spurred the movement was to build a system of religious ideals and symbols. In fact it was not the creation but the realization that their religion and their community existed since times immemorial. Now the emphasis was upon distinctiveness from Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.

At the time of the Movement's inception, Master Gurbanta Singh, belonging to a village in Jalandhar District, was just eighteen years old. Mangoo Ram who was the main inspirational force came from a village in Hoshiarpur District. Under his guidance, the basic manifesto of the Movement was prepared.

The Ad Dharm leaders had hoped that these powers could be fostered and sheltered through force of ideology. They endeavored to convince their followers that they were part of a great qaum, and not simply village Chamars, by projecting a mythical past. In so doing they borrowed from other "Adi" movements of the early 1920s the idea that untouchables were the original people of India.

It was heartening to note that the persons who gave leadership to the Ad Dharm Movement were all literate. Though they were not highly educated, yet most of them were teachers in the schools, hence honourable figures. Master Gurbanta Singh was one them who started his career as a school master in an Arya School at Jalandhar. He came into contact with Mangoo Ram quite early and joined the hand wagon of Ad Dharm is not as a follower but as a leader which his education warranted.

The educated leaders of the movement studied and analysed the existing situation and carefully charted the independent course of action. Two documents—Memorandum submitted in 1929 to the Lt. Governor

of Punja Province and the Ad Dharm Report prepared in 1931– give a graphic picture of ideological components of the Movement.

As has already been referred to in the introductory chapter, the Memorandum which was submitted by the Ad Dharm leadership which included Master Gurbanta Singh who was the general secretary of the Ad Dharm Mandal at that time, became the Magna Carta of the Movement. The Memorandum is divided into three Parts – ideological by stated position of the community, statement of the present situation and the demands which may ensure the distinct identity of the Dalits.

ADI DHARAM MOVEMENT IN PUNJAB

The memorandum states that the members of the Ad-Dharm Mandal Punjab Jullundur City were the representatives of downtrodden community comprising three million soles in the Punjab, and seventy millions in the whole of India, who were disgracefully called the “Sudras” or untouchable. It was known to the British authorities that Sudras belong to an ancient race which ruled India about 5,000 years ago, prior to the invasion of India by the Aryans.

These bands of outsiders from Central Asia reigned India, and defeated Sudras’ forefathers, the latter were ruthlessly treated, they were foreign cruel masters in a way which spoke volumes of the barbarous mentality of the so called “Civilized Aryans”. The rest of the conquered race, who due to their self respect, refused to be enslaved were driven away to take shelter in the jungles.

It was further stated in the memorandum that the Aryans whose present descendants were called high class Hindus, had all along been treating them with the most inhuman brutality so that their unlucky community numerically large as it was, was now little mere name.

The deplorable condition of the mute millions of the oppressed community was due to harsh treatment meted out to them by the High class Hindus in consequence of the ‘August’ pronouncement of the ancient Aryans which were embodied in the Manu Smriti and lot of other Hindu scriptures of that type.

Further it was stated: “Your Excellency will be amazed to learn that scriptures of the so called religion are replete with the sayings such as that we the Ad Dharmies have been created to serve the high class Hindus, that we have no right to hold any property, that even our wanton murder by a high class Hindu involves him in no difficulty, etc. All our demands have been willfully suppressed by the High class Hindus, and all our attempts at ameliorating our condition have been deliberately trampled upon.

Coming to the question of untouchability, it was stated that owing to the predominance of the Muslims there was less untouchability in this province, as compared

with other provinces but as regards political condition, the Suras were not a bit better than the most untouchables of other provinces. They were in the worst condition from the political point of view.

Not even a single member of their community had ever been nominated to the local legislative or to any local body although in other provinces such nominations, had been made by the Government to the extent of seats ranging between 1 to 11 in legislatures. The present system of electorate could not be of any use to them because the high class Hindus were steeped with caste prejudices. Therefore the only method open to them should be separate electorate where in their political social and even moral salvation lay”

The factual status of the community was briefly put as that community consisted of about three millions in the Punjab, and about seventy millions in whole of India. That comparatively speaking they were the most backward people in the Punjab as regard education, public service, social position etc.

They did not believe in the Hindu religion, nor did they hold it in high esteem, therefore they did not wish to call themselves Hindus. Untouchables of different classes being the ancient population of India wished to be called “Ad dharmies” and in the next coming census they should be enumerated as “Ad-dharmis”. They did not desire to keep any close social or political contact with the high caste Hindus, who thought that they were polluted by mere touch or even by casting off the shadow on them by the untouchables.

They tried to count the latter with demographically them so that they might enjoy greater rights at their expense.⁷ Remedies were suggested in the form of these demands: Necessary arrangement for better education of Ad dharmies (untouchables) boys and girls and national scholarship should be separately given to them and introduction of free primary education; separate representation, in all public bodies and legislatures, selected by the communities of their mandal; a minister in the Punjab province; equal rights of ownership of any property of dwelling houses and common fields as enjoyed by other communities; equal rights of using all District Board public wells, as enjoyed by other communities; proscription of Manu Smriti and all like Hindu scriptures in which contemptuous mentions have been made of their race and community; any mention of them by name of shudra should be strictly forbidden; share in all public services including police, civil, military, railway, education, and medical department etc’ 60% of the untouchables did the work of agriculture with the agriculturists but they gave very meagre share to the poor untouchables.

DISCUSSION

It was noticed that there were large chunks of uncultivated land in the hands of the Punjab Government. Therefore land in the colonies should be reserved for them in the same way as it had been done, for other communities. The Punjab Alienation Act had made them so weak that the people of other communities forcibly made them do their services in return of living in the houses built on their land, because they could not buy any land, even for houses under the Punjab Alienation Act of 1908.

Therefore this Act should be repealed; although there were two Acts passed by the Government to prevent the forced labour (Baigar) yet the officials did not care for these Acts and they forcibly made them serve without any payment.

The Government should proclaim the forbidding of all sorts of forced labour (Baigar); There had been criminal blame upon their community, while they were free from every crime. Therefore this blame should be wiped off. The natural presumption of innocence should attach to ad-dharmies as well; The leadership also demanded permission to go to the foreign countries, as their condition was very poor; They wanted to call themselves Ad dharmies while the other communities especially Hindus did not like it and they did their best to prevent the Ad Dharmis from doing so, and made them call themselves by the same hateful word (Shudra) by troubling them in every possible way. Therefore a committee should be appointed by the Government from our community to settle these matters. Whether was stated in the Memorandum, the Report, apart from restating the ideology of the Adi Dharm, sketched the activities performed in that direction by the Ad Dharm leadership.

The activities showed that the Movement had spread very fast. It had ignited the minds of the Dalits. It was stated in the Report that in India one-quarter of the population is that of the Untouchables: people who were enslaved by the high caste Hindus for the last 5,000 years. These poor people were dethroned from their political and religious status.

Fact of the matter was that before the British, all other groups ruling India mistreated. The preset plight of the Untouchables was due to the way these invaders treated them. "The Untouchables were the descendants of the original people. They were the original children of paradise (dharm-khand) and were living a peaceful and spiritual life in their own land when they were attacked and slaughtered. Untouchability was so deeply entrenched that it seemed no power in the world could shake it "Untouchables communal pride (qaumiat), religion (mazhab), and organization (majlis).

The Ad Dharm Mandal, which was founded in 1925 as a collective organization of all Untouchables in he Punjab, became the protector and defender of these

traits with a concrete programme. These high caste Untouchable organizations, which shed crocodile tears over the Untouchables, have tried to destroy the Ad Dharm Mandal but to no avail. A society based on truth could be shaken.

That truth was presented in 1928 to John Simon, Royal Commissioner. One deputation met Governor of Punjab, Lahore, in Jullundur on 12 October 1929. This day should be marked as the birthday of Untouchables as a people, for they were then recognized as human beings. They received rights they never had before: They got an 8 percent quota for legislative seats in the legislative assembly of India, and in many provincial assemblies a well.

The local government also recommended 10 percent. The Round Table Conference in London also mentioned the need for the rights of the Untouchables. The Education Department also provided many facilities.

In addition to the political aspect of Ad Dharm Mandal, there had been greater emphasis on social reform. The religious and organizational status of the Untouchables had been raised. The founding of the AD Dharm Mandal had been for humanitarian purposes and to fulfill their duty to humanity. It carried the banner of the downtrodden people, and devoted their entire lives to the cause, so that future generations might follow in their footsteps and follow the cause, a cause which had long been neglected.

This report had been prepared for the sole reason of explaining their purposes. So if people ask, "Who are these people? Where did they come from? What are they doing?" they will be able to know." After detailing about the emergence and programme of the Ad Dharm Mandal, the Report ideologically explained the rise and fall of the Adi people. It stated that Nature created human beings from the original source (adi) at the time that it created all being on the earth. Nature made humans superior to animal, but among humans all were equal.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, there was no discrimination. There were no differences and no quarrels. There were no such concepts as high or low caste. Everyone believed in one dharm which Nature had given them through intellect and knowledge; this dharm was Ad Dharm. Nature gave birth to these original people in the valleys of the original mountains – the Himalayas. Later on, the original (adi) people spread out. Some migrated to mountains, others to plains.

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