

SACH

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Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was the greatest son of Afghanistan. His popularity in the whole region has remained unmatched. The great pakhtun leader was a symbol of non-violence. Such was his influence on the masses in general and activists of Khudai Khidmatgar movement in particular, that when on April 23 1930 Britishers arrested him and people took to streets, they faced the bullets of British Raj unarmed. Despite 250 odd Khudai Khidmatgars being killed, they did not leave the path of non-violence.

The Pakhtun wished to be buried in his beloved homeland. He loved Kabul. Once he said, "I want to show the world how beautiful they are, these people from the hills, and then I want to proclaim: "Show me, if you can, any gentler, more courteous, more cultured people than these." When he died in 1988 under house arrest in Pakistan, he was buried in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Today the same region is soaked in the blood. Kabul bleeds every moment. How he would have coped with the situation had he been alive today, is hard to imagine. Today Talibans are ruining the same land in the name of Islam. The Khan, also known as Badshah Khan had said "It is my inmost conviction. Badshah Khan said, "that Islam is amal, yakeen, muhabat" – selfless service, faith, and love. Let us hope that better sense prevails and selfless service, faith, and love wins against hatred and violence.

This issue of SACH presents poems on Kabul and wishes peace in war torn land.

Kabul

Mirza Muhammad Ali Sa'ib

Ah! How beautiful is Kabul encircled by her arid mountains
And Rose, of the trails of thorns she envies
Her gusts of powdered soil, slightly sting my eyes
But I love her, for knowing and loving are born of this same dust

My song exhorts her dazzling tulips
And at the beauty of her trees, I blush
How sparkling the water flows from Pul-I-Mastaan!
May Allah protect such beauty from the evil eye of man!

Khizr chose the path to Kabul in order to reach Paradise
For her mountains brought him close to the delights of heaven
From the fort with sprawling walls, A Dragon of protection
Each stone is there more precious than the treasure of Shayagan

Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye
Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass
One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs
And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls

Her laughter of mornings has the gaiety of flowers
Her nights of darkness, the reflections of lustrous hair
Her melodious nightingales, with passion sing their songs
Ardent tunes, as leaves enflamed, cascading from their throats

And I, I sing in the gardens of Jahanara, of Sharbara
And even the trumpets of heaven envy their green pastures

Kabul

Latif Pedram

Of something that is like the wind,
Of something that is like the sea,
Of something that is like the moon,
Of something that is like bread,
of the thirst of a poem sad and alive
I must write.

The crash of thousands explosions
- throughout the day,
through the night -
Of the outstretched hand of thousands of beggars
in the wounded streets
of this new city -
I must write.

Of the impatient laments of the rain
Of the death of nature,
Of the death of joy,
Of drinking throughout the night
Of the dark cuts of sadness,
The machine guns, the bombs and the blood,
I must write.

So many wind,
burnt faces by the sun,
So many men dishonoured, desperate
Who come home with bundles of hunger,
With a burden of scars,
Of something which is like tears,
Of something which is like blood,
Of something which is like Kabul
I must write.

The Brief Origins of May Day

By Eric Chase

Most people living in the United States know little about the International Worker's Day of May Day. For many others there is an assumption that is a holiday celebrated in state communist countries like Cuba or the former Soviet Union. Most Americans don't realize that May Day has its origins here in this country and is as "American" as baseball and apple pie, and stemmed from the pre-Christian holiday of Beltane, a celebration of re birth and fertility.

In the late nineteenth century, the working class was in constant struggle to gain the 8-hour work day. Working conditions were severe and it was quite common to work 10 to 16 hour days in unsafe conditions. Death and injury were not very uncommon at many work places and inspired such books as Upton Sinclair's The Jungle and Jack London's The Iron Heel. As early as the 1860's, working people agitated to shorten the workday without a cut in pay, but it wasn't until the late 1880's that organized labor was able to garner enough strength to declare the 8-hour workday. This proclamation was without consent of employers, yet demanded by many of the working class.

At this time, socialism was a new and attractive idea to working people, many of whom were drawn to its ideology of working class control over the production and distribution of all goods and services. Workers had seen first-hand that Capitalism benefited only their bosses, trading workers' lives for profit. Thousands of men, women and children were dying needlessly every year in the workplace, with life expectancy as low as their early twenties in some industries, and little hope but death of rising out of their destitution. Socialism offered another option.

A variety of socialist organizations sprung

up throughout the later half of the 19th century, ranging from political parties to choir groups. In fact, many socialists were elected into governmental office by their constituency. But again, many of these socialists were ham-strung by the political process which was so evidently controlled by big business and the bi-partisan political machine. Tens of thousands of socialists broke ranks from their parties, rebuffed the entire political process, which was seen as nothing more than protection for the wealthy, and created anarchist groups throughout the country. Literally thousands of working people embraced the ideals of anarchism, which sought to put an end to all hierarchical structures (including government), emphasized worker controlled industry, and valued direct action over the bureaucratic political process. It is inaccurate to say that labor unions were "taken over" by anarchists and socialists, but rather anarchists and socialist made up the labor unions.

At its national convention in Chicago, held in 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (which later became the American Federation of Labor), proclaimed that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886." The following year, the FOTLU, backed by many Knights of Labor locals, reiterated their proclamation stating that it would be supported by strikes and demonstrations. At first, most radicals and anarchists regarded this demand as too reformist, failing to strike "at the root of the evil." A year before the Haymarket Massacre, Samuel Fielden pointed out in the anarchist newspaper, *The Alarm*, that "whether a man works eight hours a day or ten hours a day, he is still a slave."

Despite the misgivings of many of the anarchists, an estimated quarter million workers in the Chicago area became directly involved in

the crusade to implement the eight hour work day, including the Trades and Labor Assembly, the Socialistic Labor Party and local Knights of Labor. As more and more of the workforce mobilized against the employers, these radicals conceded to fight for the 8-hour day, realizing that “the tide of opinion and determination of most wage-workers was set in this direction.” With the involvement of the anarchists, there seemed to be an infusion of greater issues than the 8-hour day. There grew a sense of a greater social revolution beyond the more immediate gains of shortened hours, but a drastic change in the economic structure of capitalism.

In a proclamation printed just before May 1, 1886, one publisher appealed to working people with this plea:

- Workingmen to Arms!
- War to the Palace, Peace to the Cottage, and Death to LUXURIOUS IDLENESS.
- The wage system is the only cause of the World’s misery. It is supported by the rich classes, and to destroy it, they must be either made to work or DIE.
- One pound of DYNAMITE is better than a bushel of BALLOTS!
- MAKE YOUR DEMAND FOR EIGHT HOURS with weapons in your hands to meet the capitalistic bloodhounds, police, and militia in proper manner.

Not surprisingly the entire city was prepared for mass bloodshed, reminiscent of the railroad strike a decade earlier when police and soldiers gunned down hundreds of striking workers. On May 1, 1886, more than 300,000 workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs in the first May Day celebration in history. In Chicago, the epicenter for the 8-hour day agitators, 40,000 went out on strike with the anarchists in the forefront of the public’s eye. With their fiery speeches and revolutionary ideology of direct action, anarchists and anarchism became respected and embraced by the working people and despised by the capitalists.

The names of many - Albert Parsons,

Johann Most, August Spies and Louis Lingg - became household words in Chicago and throughout the country. Parades, bands and tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets exemplified the workers’ strength and unity, yet didn’t become violent as the newspapers and authorities predicted.

More and more workers continued to walk off their jobs until the numbers swelled to nearly 100,000, yet peace prevailed. It was not until two days later, May 3, 1886, that violence broke out at the McCormick Reaper Works between police and strikers.

For six months, armed Pinkerton agents and the police harassed and beat locked-out steelworkers as they picketed. Most of these workers belonged to the “anarchist-dominated” Metal Workers’ Union. During a speech near the McCormick plant, some two hundred demonstrators joined the steelworkers on the picket line. Beatings with police clubs escalated into rock throwing by the strikers which the police responded to with gunfire. At least two strikers were killed and an unknown number were wounded.

Full of rage, a public meeting was called by some of the anarchists for the following day in Haymarket Square to discuss the police brutality. Due to bad weather and short notice, only about 3000 of the tens of thousands of people showed up from the day before. This affair included families with children and the mayor of Chicago himself. Later, the mayor would testify that the crowd remained calm and orderly and that speaker August Spies made “no suggestion... for immediate use of force or violence toward any person...”

As the speech wound down, two detectives rushed to the main body of police, reporting that a speaker was using inflammatory language, inciting the police to march on the speakers’ wagon. As the police began to disperse the already thinning crowd, a bomb was thrown into the police ranks. No one knows who threw the bomb, but speculations varied from blaming any one of the anarchists, to an agent

provocateur working for the police.

Enraged, the police fired into the crowd. The exact number of civilians killed or wounded was never determined, but an estimated seven or eight civilians died, and up to forty were wounded. One officer died immediately and another seven died in the following weeks. Later evidence indicated that only one of the police deaths could be attributed to the bomb and that all the other police fatalities had or could have had been due to their own indiscriminate gun fire. Aside from the bomb thrower, who was never identified, it was the police, not the anarchists, who perpetrated the violence.

Eight anarchists - Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwab, George Engel, Adolph Fischer and Louis Lingg - were arrested and convicted of murder, though only three were even present at Haymarket and those three were in full view of all when the bombing occurred. The jury in their trial was comprised of business leaders in a gross mockery of justice similar to the Sacco-Vanzetti case thirty years later, or the trials of AIM and Black Panther members in the seventies. The entire world watched as these eight organizers were convicted, not for their actions, of which all of were innocent, but for their political and social beliefs. On November 11, 1887, after many failed appeals, Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fisher were hung to death. Louis Lingg, in his final protest of the state's claim of authority and punishment, took his own life the night before with an explosive device in his mouth.

The remaining organizers, Fielden, Neebe and Schwab, were pardoned six years later by Governor Altgeld, who publicly lambasted the judge on a travesty of justice. Immediately after the Haymarket Massacre, big business and government conducted what some say was the very first "Red Scare" in this country. Spun by mainstream media, anarchism became synonymous with bomb throwing and socialism became un-American. The common image of an anarchist became a bearded, eastern European immigrant with a bomb in one hand and a

dagger in the other.

Today we see tens of thousands of activists embracing the ideals of the Haymarket Martyrs and those who established May Day as an International Workers' Day. Ironically, May Day is an official holiday in 66 countries and unofficially celebrated in many more, but rarely is it recognized in this country where it began.

Over one hundred years have passed since that first May Day. In the earlier part of the 20th century, the US government tried to curb the celebration and further wipe it from the public's memory by establishing "Law and Order Day" on May 1. We can draw many parallels between the events of 1886 and today. We still have locked out steelworkers struggling for justice. We still have voices of freedom behind bars as in the cases of Mumia Abu Jamal and Leonard Peltier. We still had the ability to mobilize tens of thousands of people in the streets of a major city to proclaim "THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE!" at the WTO and FTAA demonstrations.

Words stronger than any I could write are engraved on the Haymarket Monument:

THE DAY WILL COME WHEN OUR SILENCE WILL BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE VOICES YOU ARE THROTTLING TODAY.

Truly, history has a lot to teach us about the roots of our radicalism. When we remember that people were shot so we could have the 8-hour day; if we acknowledge that homes with families in them were burned to the ground so we could have Saturday as part of the weekend; when we recall 8-year old victims of industrial accidents who marched in the streets protesting working conditions and child labor only to be beat down by the police and company thugs, we understand that our current condition cannot be taken for granted - people fought for the rights and dignities we enjoy today, and there is still a lot more to fight for. The sacrifices of so many people can not be forgotten or we'll end up fighting for those same gains all over again. This is why we celebrate May Day.

Courtesy : <http://www.iww.org/projects/mayday/origins.shtml>

Excerpts from autobiography of Baby Kamble.

Baby Kamble

I am a product of the Ambedkar movement. I came in contact with the movement when I was a child of hardly seven or eight years of age. Our hut was right in front of the chawdi and both shared a courtyard. Activists like my father Pandharinath Kakade, Nana Ahiwale, Laxman Kakade were all educated. They used to bring two newspapers-Daily Kesari and Daily Sakal-to the chawdi and read them aloud to the people sitting in the courtyard. Babasaheb Ambedkar published a newspaper called Bahishkrut in which his speeches were reproduced. These were also read out aloud. Men from both the Mahar lanes gathered to listen to them. There would be complete silence. The readers explained the issues to the people. The entire community was beginning to be aware. I grew up in that charged atmosphere. Ambedkar taught us that character is the foundation of this edifice called the human society. When compassion and morality follow character, society achieves its real strength. He wanted to transform society in the light of this philosophy.

My young mind absorbed a few drops from that ocean of knowledge. I have already stated how a teacher called Bhadkamkar had provided hostel facilities to the young boys of our community. Gradually, the number of students in this hostel increased to thirty to thirty-five students. They came from Mangalwar Peth as well as from the surrounding villages. My brother, the eldest student among them, became their leader. He used to compose radical songs, many of which used to be sung in the cultural programmes held during the Ganeshotsav. I too participated in them.

Messages would be circulated about the programmes being organized. Once, Baba sent a telegram asking us to exert our rights as the sons of the soil, by forcibly seeking entry into temples and hotels. The hostel students discussed this all through the night. They made a plan for the campaign. They planned as to who would enter

which temple. They choose the Vitthal temple in the Shimpi lane, which was next to the Brahmin lane. The Brahmins came to know of this plan. With fire in their blood, the young activists from the Harijan boarding set off to forcibly enter the Vitthal temple. They were shouting slogans of Ambedkar's victory. Some young girls like me, of about ten to twelve years of age, ran by their side. In the temple, the Brahmins had surrounded the idol of Vitthal to protect it from the polluting touch of the Mahars. Many wielded lathis. They wanted to stop the Mahar boys from entering the temple at any cost. The fiery young soldiers of Ambedkar were equally adamant. The tallest among them was a boy called Anand Ahiwale who was the son of a wrestler. He dashed through the ring of the Brahmins and managed to touch the idol. This caused a furor. There was great commotion everywhere. The Brahmins scattered and started chasing the Mahar boys with lathis. But the boys were too smart for them. They somehow managed to escape and reached the chawdi in Mangalwar Peth. We, too, dashed into the house of a fish-vendor woman whom we knew. We used to buy fish from her. Her house was exactly in front of the temple.

The Brahmin priests in the temple announced that the Mahars had polluted the temple. They also declared that god Vitthal's face had become contorted and that tears were flowing from goddess Rukmayi's eyes. Soon the news of the Mahars having polluted the divine couple Vitthal and Rukmayi spread all over Phaltran. In fact, it reached all the eighty-four villages in the state of Phaltran. Priests organized the chanting of scriptures and purificatory rituals to wash away the pollution with milk and gomutra. Finally, after one and a half months of incessant chanting, ceaseless worship, and of course, substantial grants from the king, the Brahmin priests managed to cleanse the gods of the pollution, restored the original expression on lord Vitthal's face and stemmed the flow of tears from Rukmayi's eyes.

Baba's word has become law for me since then. Social work became an alternative source

of sustenance. A new fire began to burn in my heart. Meanwhile, the movement marched ahead. A new wind had started to blow all over the country. A new sun was rising on the horizon.

I still remember the celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary in 1938. I was just nine years old then. The activists in Mangalwar Peth got together to celebrate Baba's birth anniversary. They declared that they would not celebrate Gudhi Padva, the traditional Hindu new year, but instead they resolved to celebrate 14th April as the day of their new year. They decided that on this day they would do everything that high caste people did on the occasion of Gudhi Padva. They would raise gudhis, buy new clothes, clear their houses, decorate their courtyards with rangoli, cook puran poli and invite people from all the eighty-four villages for a festive lunch. The day symbolized the celebration of the spirit of Bhim. Thus, the people of Phaltan started the tradition of celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti.

All houses in Mangalwar Peth were cleaned. Gudhis were raised in front of each house, people bought new clothes. Women got busy. Children got up early, bathed and gathered in front of the chawdi, parading their new clothes, singing and dancing. The activists erected a huge pandal in front of the chawdi. I was so excited that I kept running back and forth, from the chawdi to our hut. I could not sleep at all. The men had worked through the night, making preparations. Nobody had had even a moment's rest. Each one bathed and returned to the pandal in snow-white dhoti and kameej, and a blue turban with some shiny powder sprinkled on it. Some men even wore coats. The boys from the boarding, thirty to thirty-five in number, were immaculately dressed in white. My brother was also among them. They put Dr. Ambedkar's photograph on a chair, draped a garland around it and sang their radical songs. The atmosphere was simply electric. This was certainly the first moment in my life when I experienced pure, unadulterated happiness. I felt as though I was bursting with life. Everybody was deliriously happy.

Dadu, our aaja, was an extremely cheerful, fun-loving man who had acquired the nickname of Doctor because he pretended to check the pulse of young children and made them cry. His complexion was virtually coal black. On this occasion, he was dressed in khaki half-shirt and

khaki shorts, with white canvas shoes and white socks. He also wore a hat on his head and a tie around his neck like an Englishman. And like all other soldiers of Bhim, he had also shaved off his moustache. He was in his element that day. He caught hold of some child to check his pulse and made him cry; he praised the new clothes of another; and then he teased yet another, saying that his clothes were not new at all and that his parents had cheated him.

From ten O'clock in the morning, people from the neighbouring villages started arriving. The visiting villagers were also in brand new clothes. They had come in bullock carts that were nicely painted and decorated with bells. They camped in the chawdi. The activists had made arrangements for their meals. Every house was to invite five people as guests and feed them.

Around three O'clock in the afternoon, the boys started decorating the bullock cart in which Babasaheb's photograph would be placed and taken in procession. They tied the tender trunks of plantain around the cart. They had invited a band as well, the Chand Tara Band. The band began to play and the procession started. Slogans such as 'Babasaheb Zindabad' 'Schedule Caste Party Zindabad', 'Down with Capitalism', 'Long live Ambedkar', reverberated through the streets. Nobody minded the burning sun. The sweat running down the bodies felt like the first drops of rain. The spirit of rebellion was in the air. We wanted to trample the high caste villagers under our feet. Finally, the procession reached the chawdi around five in the evening. Women came forward with the ceremonial plate of tiny, lighted lamps and performed an aarti. Guests sat down to rest. Volunteers brought drinking water from each house. A chulha was ignited outside the chawdi to make tea.

Preparations began for the public meeting in the evening. Several prestigious people from the village came for the meeting. Including Dr. Bhadkamkar and Sachin Godbole, the king's secretary. Dadu knew that I could sing a little. My brother had prepared a jalsa for this programme that tried to educate people on the futility of worship and urged them to give up stupid old customs. Theocrats- Bhanudas Kakade, Anna Mama, Shankar Ahiwale and Virththal ahiwale-were about to begin the jalsa when suddenly my aaja got a brainwave. He called for

me loudly, 'Hey you, Pandharinath's brat, start singing the Ithuba song! We will start the programme after your song.' Catching hold of my hand, he just dragged me on to the stage in front of all the people. I felt terribly confused. My throat went dry and my heart started to race. But I gathered all the courage in my heart and started to sing. People clapped, there was thunderous applause. Dadu placed me on his shoulders and started dancing. Then the programme began.

This was how we celebrated the first birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. Since then, Baba has been enshrined in our hearts. The programme set me thinking. What was the purpose of Baba's life? For whom was Baba born? I realized that the purpose of his life was to empower the oppressed and to restore to them their human rights. Once I realized this, I understood that even my life was meant for the service of the society. I realized I had to be one with my people.

We, the daughters of the activists in the movement, were enrolled in School no. 5 for girls. It was basically a school for Brahmin girls, with a few girls from other high castes. There were some ten twelve Mahar girls spread over in various classes. So each class had only a sprinkling of the polluting Mahars. All the girls in the class had benches to sit except us Mahar girls. We had to sit on the floor in one corner of the classroom like diseased puppies. The school was located in Shankar Market, in front of the Ram temple. During the short recess, Brahmin girls used to visit the temple. Dressed in nice long skirt and blouses, with flowers in their hair and their fair skins glowing, to us they looked very beautiful, flitting around like colorful butterflies. We were like fiery gadflies burning for vengeance.

Behind Ram's temple, there was a big tree, with a round platform built around it. We used to park ourselves on this platform, each lost in her own thoughts. My friend Begum would say, 'How come these Brahmin and Maratha girls are able to go and see the god's idol? We should see him at least once.' Then another friend, Gulbakawali, would vehemently object, 'No! never! How can you pollute god? If we do, the god will set monsters after us. Monsters are ferocious creatures, you know. Huge and terrible! They will simply devour us. Do you know that? If the god doesn't set monsters after us, he is sure to send a cobra with five hoods, or, even huge

drones. He will simply do anything to punish us. His wrath is terrible. Let me tell you, my brother is a bhagat of the spirit Dhawji Patil that often possesses him. You don't know how that spirit hates things that pollute. Even women are polluting for this spirit god. And he often warns people not to challenge gods.'

Then yet another girl, Ulka, would retort, 'Stop it! That's rubbish. Had these gods been real, do you think our Ambedkar would have challenged them?' Ulka was the daughter of Shankar Kakade who had thrown away all his gods.

Another girl, Bagad, would assert, 'Come what may, we must see what this god Ram looks like.' I supported her enthusiastically, 'Yes, let's face whatever happens. Let's pollute Ram at least once. Even, at the cost of death.' Satu exclaimed, 'Yes, let us do it. Baby is right!'

Two years passed in such talk. Finally, we decided to carry out our plan on a particular day. We systematically planned our strategy to enter the Ram temple. We divided ourselves into two groups of six girls each. The group of elder girls was to enter the temple and the other group was to keep vigil outside. At nine O'clock, the recess bell rang. This was our time of action. We all ran towards the Ram temple. We reached our usual place under the umber tree in the courtyard and sat there. We decided to enter the temple once the Brahmin girls had returned to school. Our minds were thrilled that finally we were going to see Ram, but at the same time, we were also scared that the god would punish us for our transgression. Slowly, the high caste girls arrived, put the black bukka mark between their eyebrows, went into the temple, came out and returned to the school, laughing merrily.

Now was the time for us to make our move. We stealthily walked to the front of the temple. We senior girls warned our juniors, 'Be vigilant. If a Brahmin couple comes, sound a warning by calling out "Ram Ram". We will run out.' Having said this valiantly entered the temple to pollute Ram.

Our eyes constantly flitting back and forth, our hearts beating against our ribs, hands tightly held together, we crossed the first hall. The second hall was dark and unfamiliar, like a cave inside a rock. There was no electricity in those days. Groping around in the dark, we stumbled

forward. Our hearts thundering and mouths dry, we forgot even to breath. Finally, we reached the end of the hall. We huddled together, wondering how far away we were from the god. Then we looked up, glancing at both sides. Suddenly we saw white eyes, like large wood-apples, and huge bodies towering above us. Scared to the innermost core of our beings, we began to yell, all six in one voice. Our legs buckled and we fell at the feet of those demons. The huge white eyes, giant noses with big holes, hands as big as the legs of an elephant holding colossal clubs, jumbo bellies-the six of us would have easily fitted there like cockroaches in a corner. These were the god's guards. We lay screaming at their feet. Meanwhile, our guards outside took to their heels. Howling loudly for dear life, they waited for us at a distance. Then they thought that Ram must have sent the five-hooded cobra after us because we had polluted him. Or he must have set demons on us. They gave up all hope of our return. In the meanwhile, we kept screaming at the top of our voice.

The priest in the neighbouring Radha Krishna temple heard us and got quite perplexed. He had never heard such a racket before. He came into the sanctum sanctorum to find out who was screaming and why. We told him, 'We are Mahar girls and the god has sent demons after us because we have polluted him.'

On hearing this, the priest threw us out and abused us but we felt as if the Brahmin was a god who had come to save us. How we ran to Shankar Market! Our juniors were waiting for us there, worried to death about what had happened to us. We threw ourselves into their arms and holding each other tightly, began to sob. Finally, the tears stopped. 'Why did you scream like that?' they asked. 'You know, it was only because of the Brahmin that we were saved,' we told them. 'Otherwise the two monsters would have devoured us!'

Immediately, Gulbakawali ticked us off. 'I warned you, didn't I? Never challenge the gods.' Begum supported her, 'Yes, you did. But this Baby is mad! She wanted to see the god for herself! Are you satisfied now, Baby? You have seen what gods can do, haven't you?'

I replied, 'Yes, I will never ever think of that god again in my life. Nor will I ever climb the steps of a temple again. I can very well do without

gods thank you very much!' Satu said, 'We went to the temple for the bukka. That we never got! And on top of that those monsters were going to eat us!' I became angry, 'Forget all that-the bukka, the gods and everything else! We don't want that god any more. No haldi, no kumkum and none of that bukka. Let him keep all those things for himself. We'll have nothing to do with them.'

Bagad exclaimed, 'And don't talk about this at home. Our mothers will beat us to a pulp because we polluted god.'

Then I said, 'Come on, why bother about the haldi and kumkum? Remember those Christian women who come to teach us every Sunday? They never wear any kumkum and haldi! Are they widows? No, their husbands are alive. I will die but never again will I think about this horrid god. I will stay away from him forever. I swear. Otherwise, I will change my name. I won't be called Baby any more!'

That was my first active participation in Baba's movement. This was followed by many other such incidents. Rani Lakshmbai had established the first women's club, Mahila Mandal, in Phaltan. She was very young then. It was only Brahmin women who occupied all the positions in this mandal. The rani sahiba decided to allow Mahar women into this mandal. She called Shrirang Appa, Nana Member and my father for a meeting. After the meeting, all these male activists enrolled women from our locality as members in this mandal. Invitations for all the meetings conducted by the rani sahib would be sent to our women in Mangalwar Peth. Women leaders like Thakubai Kakade, Mathubai More, Fatabai Kakade and Virthabai Kakade used to take women from all the houses to these meetings. All these leaders were impressive young women, sturdy and well-built, with deep resonant voices. They were excellent speakers. They would wear white saris, nine yards long, with Dr. Ambedkar's photograph pinned in front. They were revolutionary women, indeed.

Since my aai had never ever crossed the threshold of our house, I would go in her place to the meetings. I remember a very interesting episode. This must have been my second meeting. The meeting was organized in the dining hall. All the Brahmin and Maratha women had occupied the chairs. They would not allow the Mahar women to sit on the chairs. Helpless, our women

stood on one side. At the same time, the rani sahib started to move towards the stage, accompanied by her other followers Godbole, Velankar and Bhadkamkar. Our Thakubai rushed forward. She shook the rani by her shoulder and told her, 'Young women are not allowing our women to sit on the chairs. Our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights. I am going to forcefully remove your women from the chairs and seat my women there.' The rani sahib was taken aback for a moment. But she immediately arranged chairs in the front for all of us.

Attending meetings was a new activity for our women. By now they had become more aware because of Babasaheb Ambedkar. With such meetings their knowledge began to increase. They began to take firm steps ahead. I used to poke my nose into everything that was happening. I was married at the age of thirteen. My in-laws were also from Phaltan, so I was closely involved in the politics there. Ulka got married too. However, she stayed in Phaltan at her parent's house because of some problems with her in-laws. My uncle built a room in front of the chawdi and we set up a shop there.

Baba would exhort us in public meetings. 'We should learn to do business. The high caste in the village will not buy milk from us. In fact, they will not buy anything from us. Undeterred, we should practice business in our own locality. We should now allow the village to earn at our expense.'

Therefore, my husband and I started this grocery store. It started doing good business and earning money for us, and we felt more and more enthused. We became determined to work harder. I used to get up at three in the morning. After I finished the cooking and other household chores, I would work in the shop till ten o'clock in the night. At least once a month, the leaders would visit our locality. They would come to meet us first, as our shop was in front of the chawdi. We organized their tea and meals and also made arrangements for the public meeting. We also had to see the guests off. At the time of elections, we canvassed for our party candidates. We also participated wholeheartedly in the demonstrations.

We are never out of Ambedkar's movement. I had devoted myself totally to the movement. As long as Baba lived, the community at Phaltan remained united. He was our sole protector.

Without him, the world was nothing, a big zero. Nobody in the community was big or small. All were children of Bhimaai. There was no tug of war to occupy a high position. Even in municipal elections, nobody would volunteer their candidature. The whole community would propose the name of a candidate and the word of the panch committee would be final. Nobody would dare to cross the Bhimrekha set by them.

Inspired by Ambedkar's thoughts, I sent my children to school. In his public meetings, Baba used to tell us, 'Educate your children. They, in turn, should spend one percent of their salary in improving the lot of poor children. Only then will their education benefit the community and the generation next to theirs will be educated. Once they are educated, they can organize themselves and find out various ways of directing the struggle. And I am sure my sisters and mothers will carry out this task with an iron resolve.'

Baba's words showed me the way. I decided to begin my struggle through my writing. I followed Baba's advice verbatim, to the best of my ability. When Shashikant Daithankar was secretary in the Maharashtra government, he granted me permission to start an ashram shala for orphans from the backward castes. Today, I am the president of Mahatma Phule Dnyan Vikas Prasarak Sanstha and I serve the community in this capacity. Two hundred children study in this school. I ask my children to donate money whenever the school is under financial strain. We have classes up to the seventh standard. Children are happy to learn in this school. The secretary Bapu Jagtap is a hardworking person and has been a strong source of support. He calls me mawshi. Even Shashikant Daithankar calls me mawshi. He has given me a great opportunity to serve the community by giving me permission to start this school. The vice president of the school, Ramesh Adhav, has also been very supportive. All of these people have been a great help to me in my old age as well as in my social work. Sheel, prandnya and karuna have been the founding principles of my life. What else does this humble servant of Bhim want when she has these three jewels in her possession? When one has this wealth, what does the ordinary world matter?

Courtesy : The Prisons We Broke : The Autobiography of the Dalit Community

Khudai Khidmatgar or “Servants of God”.

Tariq Zaman

From last four decades a question that keeps popping up in discussions on violence, terrorism, Mujahideen and the Taliban is the following: is the use of force and violence inherent to Pakhtun culture? Superficially it seems that it must be so because the Pakhtuns, known as Pathans in the rest of the South Asian subcontinent, have been bearing firearms since a long time. The gun culture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (NWFP) is linked to the "twin pillars of Pathan tribal society," (Palin, 2005) *melmastia*—hospitality and *badla*—revenge. Many invasions of India and other super powers including the recent War on Terror and US backed Afghanistan and Russia war were launched from the north-western mountain passes by the Afghans belonging to Pakhtun tribes and clans. Therefore, in popular memory a proclivity towards violence has been associated with the Pakhtuns. This, however, is a myth derived from an essentialist understanding of any culture.

Against such ‘evidence’ and when we search history of South Asia, we see the fact that the Pakhtun leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988) and his Khudai Khidmatgars or Red Shirts movement is one of the most organized movements of peaceful resistance to colonial rule. Before initiating this movement Ghaffar Khan founded several reform movements, the Anjumen-e Islah ul-Afghan in 1921, the farmers' organisation Anjuman-e Zamidaran and the youth movement Pakhtun Jirga in 1927. Trying to further spread awareness on Pakhtun issues Abdul Ghaffar Khan founded the magazine *Pakhtun* in May 1928. Finally in November 1929, almost on the eve of the Qissa Khwani bazaar massacre the Khudai Khidmatgar were formed.

IDEA OF THE MOVEMENT.

For Abdul Ghaffar Khan, violent confrontation with the British was counterproductive because the colonial state always succeeded in defeating armed resistance. Therefore, peaceful resistance was the only effective method to protest colonial domination. He said that “violence needs less courage than nonviolence,” and “violence will always breed

hatred. Nonviolence breeds love.” (Pal, 2001). The Khudai Khidmatgar movement started initially as a social reform initiative, more equitable land distribution, and religious harmony, promote modern education and opposed tribal vendettas among the various tribes and clans. The most significant feature of the Khudai Khidmatgars was their adoption of the non-violence and strict adherence to it. The volunteers were taught not to resort to violence and also not to carry weapons. More emphasis was given upon the forbearance and tolerance.

Eknath Easwaran wrote that, “Their motto was freedom, their aim, service. Since God himself needed no service, they would serve his people. The Khudai Khidmatgars, under the leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, became history’s first professional nonviolent army. Any Pathan could join, provided he took the army’s oath:

I am a Khudai Khidmatgar; and as God needs no service, but serving his creation is serving him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God.

I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge.

I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.

I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity.

I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend.

I promise to refrain from antisocial customs and practices.

I promise to live a simple life, to practice virtue and to refrain from evil.

I promise to practice good manners and good behavior and not to lead a life of idleness. I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.

For a Pathan, an oath is not a small matter. He does not enter into a vow easily because once given, a Pathan’s word cannot be broken. Even his enemy can count on him to keep his word at the risk of his own life. Nonviolence was the heart of the oath and of the organization. It was directed not only against the violence of British rule but against the pervasive violence of Pathan life. With it they could win their freedom and much more: prosperity, dignity, self-respect” (Easwaran, 2002).

Ghaffar Khan's main emphasis was on the prevention of blood feuds, particularly amongst the first cousins (tarburs). The Pakhtuns really were violent exhausted by the blood feuds, after having heavy losses both physically and materially. They also wanted a remedy to these feuds. Moreover, they were told that by adopting non-violence the Pakhtun would never be defeated, as although violence could be countered by more violence. This sense of pride in registering victories over the colonial government gave the Khudai Khidmatgars more popularity and people started registering themselves in the Khudai Khidmatgar organisation in large numbers.

"There is nothing surprising in a Muslim or a Pathan like me subscribing to the creed of nonviolence," Ghaffar Khan is quoted in Easwaran's biography. "It is not a new creed. It was followed 1,400 years ago by the Prophet all the time when he was in Mecca." For Khan, Islam meant muhabbat (love), amal (service), and yakeen (faith). But the movement was nonsectarian. When Hindus and Sikhs were attacked in Peshawar, 10,000 Khidmatgar members helped protect their lives and property. And when riots broke out in the state of Bihar in 1946 and 1947, Khan toured with Gandhi to bring about peace (Pal, 2001).

Many authors observed and acknowledged that although the character of the movement was intensely Islamic but one of the objectives of the organization was the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity.

In the early 1990s, Banerjee, a lecturer of anthropology at University College London, spent months in the frontier region with Khan's family and interviewed seventy surviving Khidmatgar members. She says that while people initially joined the organization due to Khan's charisma and persuasiveness, later on it was due to the excitement of becoming part of something larger than themselves. And their commitment to nonviolence was stronger than their allegiance to Khan. When Gandhi asked some of them in 1938 if they would take up violence if Ghaffar Khan told them to, they replied with an emphatic no.

Volunteers went to the villages and opened schools, helped on work projects, and maintained order at public gatherings. From time to time they drilled in work camps and took long military-style marches into the hills.

THE STRUCTURE

As majority of the volunteers were poor,

and thus could not afford any special kind of uniform. They were advised to dip their ordinary clothes in brown or chocolate colour, which was cheap and easily available. It was this distinctive colour that earned the Khudai Khidmatgar movement activists the name "the Red shirts" or *surkh posh*.

Shri Kanhiya Lal Khattak was a red shirt volunteer in this movement. He states that, "This is the uniform of Khudai Khidmatgars who fought with non-violence with the British. We used to wear a red shirt, red trousers, and red turban. It mean that we'd exchange our blood for freedom. Inquilab Zindabad! (Long live the revolution!), Hindustan Azad! (Freedom for all!) This was the slogan of Badshah Khan. We used to walk with him wearing red. Red was our uniform" (McLuhan, 2008).

From the beginning, the Khudai Khidmatgar leaders had put great emphasis on discipline. The volunteers were organised and drilled in military fashion. They were also given military ranks i.e. generals, colonels, captains etc. The volunteers had their own flags: red in the beginning, later tri-colour. The men wore red uniforms and the women black. Khan set up a network of committees called Jirgas, named and modeled after the traditional tribal councils. Villages were grouped into larger groups, responsible to district-wide committees. The Provincial Jirga was the ultimate authority. Officers in the ranks were not elected, since Khan wanted to avoid infighting. He appointed a *salar-e-azam* or commander-in-chief, who in turn appointed officers to serve under him. Other ranks included Jarnails (Generals). The army was completely voluntary; even the officers gave their services free. Women were recruited too, and played an important role in the struggles to come.

The khan toured incessantly, traveling twenty-five miles in a day, going from village to village, speaking about social reform and having his movement members stage dramas depicting the value of nonviolence. Within a short span of time, they established a network of the organisation in the province, particularly the rural areas, hitherto neglected by other political organisations. No accurate figures are available regarding the exact number of the Khudai Khidmatgar members and the branches. However, a careful study reveals that the membership reached twelve to fifteen hundred. Many factors contributed to the popularity of the Khudai Khidmatgars. Different sections of the

Pakhtun society interpreted its programme in their own way. 'To the Pakhtun intelligentsia, it was a movement for the revival of Pakhtun culture with its distinct identity. To the smaller Khans, it was a movement that demanded political reforms for the province that would enfranchise them and give them a greater role in the governance. Its anti-colonial stand suited the majority of the anti-establishment Ulema, who always regarded British rule in the sub-continent as a 'curse'. For the peasants and other poor classes it was against their economic oppressors, British imperialism and its agents the pro-British Nawabs, Khan Bahadurs and the big Khans' (Shah, 2007).

SUFFERINGS

The British treated Ghaffar Khan and his movement with a barbarity that they did not often inflict on other adherents of nonviolence in India. "The brutes must be ruled brutally and by brutes," stated a 1930 British report on the Pakhtuns. The British thought of Ghaffar Khan's movement as a ruse. To them, A nonviolent Pathan was unthinkable, a fraud that masked something cunning and darkly treacherous (Easwaran, 2002). The British thus reacted with a singular ferocity to the Khidmatgar desire for independence from British rule, subjecting Khidmatgar members throughout the 1930s and early 1940s to mass killings, torture, and destruction of their homes and fields. Khan himself spent fifteen of these years in prison, often in solitary confinement. But these Pakhtuns refused to give up their adherence to nonviolence even in the face of such severe repression.

In the single worst incident, the British killed at least 200 Khidmatgar members in the Qissa Khwani bazaar, Peshawar on April 23, 1930. Gene. Sharp, who has written a study of nonviolent resistance, describes the scene on that day: "When those in front fell down wounded by the shots, those behind came forward with their breasts bared and exposed themselves to the fire, so much so that some people got as many as twenty-one bullet wounds in their bodies, and all the people stood their ground without getting into a panic. . . . The Anglo-Indian paper of Lahore, which represents the official view, itself wrote to the effect that the people came forward one after another to face the firing and when they fell wounded they were dragged back and others came forward to be shot at. This state of things continued from 11 till 5 O'clock in the evening. When the number of corpses became too many, the ambulance cars of the government

took them away." (Easwaran, 2002). The carnage stopped only because a regiment of Indian soldiers finally refused to continue firing on the unarmed protesters, an impertinence for which they were severely punished.

The Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre was followed by a second firing incident at Peshawar on 31st May, killing twelve persons. On 16th May, Utmanzai was devastated by troops. On 25th May, the army ransacked Takkar, a village in Mardan; worst kinds of atrocities over the Khudai Khidmatgars were committed. On 24th August, a peaceful mob at Hathi Khel (Bannu) was fired upon, killing seventy persons at the spot. A ban was immediately put on the Khudai Khidmatgars, Zalmo Jirga, FPCC and Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Frontier Branch). On 16th August, Martial Law was declared and for the time being the Province was cut off from the rest of the sub-continent; visits to and from the province were not allowed and all sorts of communication were strictly censored.

In June [one month], 500 tons of bombs were dropped over the Pathans but their spirit remained uncrushed. The number of Red Shirts increased from a couple of hundreds to 80,000 (Tendulkar, 1960).

On previous occasions, when the Khudai Khidmatgars had not yet pledged themselves to non-violence, all such acts of provocations were avenged by the Pakhtuns, whenever, they got an opportunity. However, now they were told to bear all these atrocities and insults with forbearance and courage, and not to retaliate. The Khudai Khidmatgars simply followed Ghaffar Khan and offered no resistance to the government. Ironically, appalled at the attitude of the government oppression and as a reaction to the government atrocities over the non-violent Khudai Khidmatgars, a large number of the Frontier inhabitants enrolled themselves in the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, thus providing a boost to the Khudai Khidmatgars. Before 23rd April 1930, the Khudai Khidmatgars were about twelve hundred, but, after the government repression, within a couple of months, their number exceeded twenty-five thousand.

On 3rd September, 1939, World War II broke out. Britain declared war on Germany and asked her Dominions to follow suit. The colonies endorsed the decision. The Congress Poona Offer (September 1939) of conditional support to the British war efforts had created confusion within the Congress. Ghaffar Khan, a member of the

Congress Working Committee (CWC), was unhappy over Congress's decision. He had pledged to non-violence and one of the main purposes of the Khudai Khidmatgars was to serve all humanity alike. 'We have been condemning war and their horrors', Ghaffar Khan remarked, 'and now is the time to prove our sincerity and resist all attempts to be dragged into any wicked combination for that purpose' (Khan, 1940). He decided to resign from the CWC. Informing Gandhi of his resignation from the Working Committee, he wrote:

"Some recent resolutions of the Congress working Committee indicate that they are restricting the use of non-violence to the fight for India's freedom against constituted authority. How far and in what manner this will have to be applied in the future I cannot say. The near future will perhaps throw light on this. Meanwhile it is difficult for me to continue in the Congress Working Committee, and I am resigning from it. I should like to make it clear that the non-violence I have believed in and preached to my brethren of the Khudai Khidmatgars is much wider. It affects all our life, and only this has permanent value. Unless we learn this lesson of non-violence fully we shall never do away with the deadly feuds which have been the curse of the people of the Frontier. Since we took to non-violence and the Khudai Khidmatgars pledged them to it, we have largely succeeded in ending these feuds. Non-violence has added greatly to the courage of the Pathans. Because they were previously addicted to violence far more than others, they have profited by non-violence much more. We shall never really and effectively defend ourselves except through non-violence. Khudai Khidmatgars must, therefore, be what our names imply pure servants of God and humanity by laying down our own lives and never taking any life" (Shah W. A., 2010).

Ghaffar Khan also informed the Congress high command of his resignation from the Working Committee. By his resignation, Ghaffar Khan proved himself to be a firm believer in non-violence. Moreover, this also proved that being a man of strict principles, in no way he was ready even to follow Gandhi blindly. On occasions like this he proved that their organisation, i.e., the Khudai Khidmatgar, was a separate organisation, only collaborating with Congress in their joint struggle to get independence from the British yoke. The rest of

the Khudai Khidmatgars and other like-minded people in the NWFP endorsed Ghaffar Khan's decision. After the AICC resolution at Ramgarh, making it clear that in no way the Congress would endorse the British war aims, Ghaffar Khan rejoined the Congress. He was instantly authorised by the Central Organisation to provide guidance and to direct the Congress Satyagraha movement in the NWFP.

In August 1947 Pakistan and India got freedom in result of the movements like Khudai Khidmatgars but the Pakhtuns, against their wishes were forced to join a state against which till recent past they were struggling. Under the changed circumstances, on September 3-4, 1947, the Khudai Khidmatgars and their affiliated bodies met at Sardaryab (Peshawar) and pledged loyalty to the new country. The provincial authorities, with Abdul Qaiyum, as the new Frontier Chief Minister, who was notorious for his anti-Khudai Khidmatgars attitude, started a campaign of intimidation and torture against the Khudai Khidmatgars. So the Khudai Khidmatgars and Pakhtun only got a new master instead of freedom. In age of ninety three Badshah Khan was sent to jail by Pakistani Government as he continued his struggle for provincial autonomy and identity to this land of Pakhtuns so as a leader he suffered more pain than his followers Khudai Khidmatgars.

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Kisanin Activism

*“Zamindars and talukdars... were butchers! Butchers, I tell you! ... They would take away young women from homes. She could be of any caste – Brahmani, Thakurain, Kurmi, Harijan... Nobody could say anything....
“It is because of our fight that we are all free today. Now the police is ours, the platoon is ours. The roads are ours. Sit on the bed! – Now we do not need to sit on the ground....”*

-Jaggi Devi

Deepti Priya Mehrotra

“Jaggi devi’s story is a story of courage that blossomed in the midst of famine, epidemic, penury, deprivation and oppression that stalked her and her fellow travellers, and darkened their thresholds. She played a leading role in the peasant movement in Avadh against the draconian exactions and rack-renting by landlords, and, by their British patrons. She led women of Kisanin Sabhas into satyagraha and steeled them to conquer fear of torture.”

Travelling and Mobilising

Jaggi recalled, “I went with Baba to Kanhapur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Unnao.... We walked through the fifty-two-districts-barefoot! We would go together, our whole group would walk for miles on end. We were in one village one day, in another the next. We would tell the villagers about freedom. They would wait for us and gather in large numbers... They were longing for freedom; a fire was burning in their hearts!”

The core team of peasant activists urged people to fight to end exploitation at the hands of zamindars, talukdars and the government. They popularized the message of swaraj that the Congress had sent out. To them, swaraj meant primarily a transformation in land relations. The worldwide Depression of 1928 had left its mark on the countryside, and poor peasants, in a heightened state of distress, responded to the call for Civil Disobedience. The Congress struck roots in U.P., and the Avadh peasant movement took up the call for non-payment of taxes and illegal cesses.

Later Jaggi recalled, “When Jawaharlal’s mother died, we took our little son with us and went to Allahabad. Jawaharlal told Jhinguri Singh, ‘Devi ji has gone but she has left the nation’s work in our hands-yours and mine!... In Kanpur, I heard Sarojini Naidu speak.”

Women Activists

During the 1930s a number of women were active in the Avadh peasant movement. Apart from Jaggi, these included Sampaati, Lali, Abhilakhi, Amraji Devi and Sundara Devi. They moved about with activist men’s groups, sometimes in groups of women, and often alone. Years later Abhilakhi’s daughter-in-law Uttara Devi related, “My mother-in-law would sling her bag over her shoulder, hold aloft the Congress flag, and go out from village to village to spread the message of Swaraj. The family lived in Atraura village. She would wander about all day, like this. She was well known.” Sampaati’s grandson, Ram Samujh said, “My Nani was a freedom fighter. We got a pension while she was alive, but nothing after her death.”

Budhni Devi-active since the early ‘20s-remarked, “I had a mind of my own. I didn’t come under the sway of Baba Ram Chandra. Jaggi came under his control. If one thinks for oneself, one cannot be controlled”. Obviously, Budhni had some differences with other movement leaders, though she wouldn’t tell us what these differences were.

Jaggi told us of Amraji Devi of Bisar, “She was a Thakurain. She went for meetings and sabhas. She would protest at the Rai Saheb’s gates in Haripur. She died at Haripur court. Her son Kuldip went mad and was sent to the asylum

in Agra; he there died. Her daughter was married in Rewa. She was a sadhuain, she would eat here and there, live in the sangat."

In Bisar village, Dhanraji, daughter-in-law of Gayadin, wife of Gopal Lal, recalled, "We had many movement meetings in our house. My mother-in-law would cook and serve. She did a lot for the movement in this way. I helped her in this. She did not sit in the meetings. Women were too shy to do so".

Said Jaggi regarding such behind-the-scenes participation by women, "Baba would sit and eat at everybody's house, and the women would serve him and other activists. He sat at Chamar, Pasi and Musalman homes, and ate food, drank water.... Once we were walking, it was cold weather. We sat where we'd reached, at a Harijan's house. They gave us a warm quilt, and fresh hot food. We would see the intention, the sentiment—that was the important thing."

Jagannath Pradhan of Behta village related, "We would go to meetings. My father would go. We went really far. My mother wouldn't go. She served at home. If Baba came, she would serve him milk."

Exploitation of Women Agricultural Workers

Women activists raised some issues specific to women. A pamphlet entitled 'Anath Abalaon ki Pukar' (A Call from Abandoned, Powerless Women'), laid bare the conditions of women agricultural labourers:

- 1) We are beaten with lathis and dandas.
- 2) We are made to stand on handis (earthen pots) in the harsh sun.
- 3) We are crushed under the burden of begar. If we do not do begar we are beaten with lathis. Our heads are smashed open. (Hamara sar phora jaata hai)
- 4) Upon the death of the husband we are ejected from the house, land, orchard, grove, well and pond; we are unable to repay debts and the family has no means of survival...'

The pamphlet ends on a poignant note:

'How can we challenge all these insults? What shall we, unhappy and powerless women, do? It is signed by 'the abalas (helpless, powerless women) of an unhappy praja (populace)'.

This pamphlet is the handiwork of women who are explicitly angry and rebellious. The points are made with striking clarity, and pose a profound challenge. Although no program of action is defined, the very fact of having so

coherently articulated their suffering and the injustices heaped upon them, is remarkable.

Jaggi was caught up with such issues. As her exposure intensified, she became adroit as an adviser and strategist.

Women and Sexual Assault

Landlords claimed a customary right to sexual favours from women landless labourers and non-occupancy tenants. There was little escape for a girl or woman who caught their eye. Some landlords considered it their birthright to spend the 'first night' with any girl or woman whose family worked for them. Loyalty, obligation and helplessness forced many women to live with such intense exploitation.

Jaggi recalled, 'Zamindars and talukdars were very exploitative. They were butchers! Butchers, I tell you! They would pick up women from homes—daughters, daughters-in-law. How do I tell you, beti! They would take away young women from homes. She could be of any caste – Brahmani, Thakurain, Kurmi, Harijan... Nobody could say anything.'

Every woman felt vulnerable. So did Jaggi: she too was vulnerable, she too lived in fear. She mused, "We lived in fear. But they never picked me. Nobody could ever say anything to me!" The movement provided her a protection ordinary families were unable to provide. Of course, her participation in the movement could also work against her. As everybody knew, sexual assault could be deliberately used as a weapon to repress agrarian struggle.

Jaggi was well aware that sexual assault had been an undercurrent throughout the peasant movement. In 1931, a Congress Enquiry Committee noted that women and children too were beaten and tortured by agents of talukdars and armed policemen. For instance, in Khureti village, Rae Bareli, zamindars and their henchmen dragged women out of their homes, snatched away their ornaments and further violated them. In Pipra village, Bahraich, a constable and two other men abducted Rammulan Lohar's wife, gang-raped her, and stole all her ornaments, cash and clothes. In Rae Bareli, a pregnant woman was beaten until she fell unconscious. In district Sultanpur, those who refused to perform begar were beaten; these included Ramdas Kurmi and his old mother. The Deputy Collector, zamindars and armed guards descended upon village Pipri, Unnao, raided all the houses and beat the men, women and children. Women were ordered to

take off their clothes, and beaten; one testified that was she was beaten and an attempt made to thrust a rod into her private parts. The same party went to an adjoining village, Sada Sukh Khera. Zamindar Shiva Sundar abused a woman and kicked her on the breast so that she and her child fell on the ground. Insensate beating and filthy abuses continued in Dandanapur village. A blind seventy-year old woman was beaten with her own lathi, then Shiva Sundar kicked her to the ground and made vulgar demands, pulling her dhoti and leaving her naked. Another woman was dragged, mauled and mercilessly beaten until she fell unconscious. Sukhadiya, wife of Anganu Chamar, was raped by four of Shiva Sundar's men.

Though protected by the strength of the movement amid which she lived, Jaggi knew that such brutal reprisals were occurring in different parts of Avadh. She was enraged. It made her even more determined in the resolve to fight injustice and the reign of terror unleashed by local and national rulers.

Jaggi's Pamphlet on Marriage

As Jaggi's ideas matured, she used her position to mobilise support around social as well as political issues. She questioned deep-seated beliefs and deeply entrenched customs, including that of child marriage.

A pamphlet written by Jaggi Devi, entitled 'Mata Shatru Pita Bairi' (Mother An Enemy, Father A Foe), argued as follows:

'In this region the marriage traditions are so upside down that your daughters are married off two or even three times. Is this custom moral by any standards? Such a thing should not happen. From her birth onwards, a young girl becomes adept at sexual skills as appropriate to a prostitute. It is useless bringing such matters to court, because they are not legally punishable. A girl who has gone from one place to another is akin to a prostitute...

If you try to look carefully, with human eyes, you will see that the animals you buy for your house are not married off in childhood. Only when they mature do you take them to healthy bulls. You display wisdom with regard to animals. If you were to display the same wisdom with regard to your own young daughters, the custom of child marriage would disappear from everyone's house.'

This ingenious line of argument has a progressive ring to it. At this very time, the All

India Women's Conference and other middle-class women's organisations were raising their voices against child marriage. Such ideas were in the air and Jaggi and her fellow-activists popularised what they felt was required. Her arguments were couched in idiom close to the soil, and had a powerful appeal. Cogent and forcefully argued, the pamphlet ended on a personal note:

'This is my -Jaggi's -purpose. Knowing the custom, I left my caste and family, coming into the house and protection of Baba Ram Chandra. Sisters, beware!'

The pamphlet even claimed an element of personal choice with regard to her marriage—a radical claim indeed. Who knows that but in the delicate shadow-play of emotion and attraction, young Jaggi had played a decisive role in the matter of her marriage?

Several papers in the Baba Ram Chandra collection indicate a concern with issues surrounding marriage. A need for reduction in marriage expenses was expressed. Polygamy was criticised, and the view expressed that a man who kept more than one woman should be legally punished, as also a woman who lived with more than one man. With Ram Chandra as her life-partner, Jaggi was able to develop her skills and persona in some unusual directions. She grew in ways beyond what was permitted to most women. She was able to wrest relatively greater freedom – and use it to advantage. The opportunity proved useful not only to herself, but to others as well.

The cause of Women's Education

Jaggi became very familiar with the power of the written word, since Baba wrote a great deal. Much of it was published as pamphlets and widely distributed. She would say, "Baba fought with the pen."

In 1934 Jaggi sent a letter to the Deputy Inspector of schools, Pratapgarh, saying that if kisanins were to receive good education, their lives would improve. She said kisanins wanted to meet the DI, and sought an appointment. They were given an appointment. Between 200 and 250 kisanins reached Pratapgarh, but were kept waiting. Finally they left, since he was clearly not available to meet them. Thereafter, Jaggi sent him another letter, describing how all the women were kept waiting, and returned without meeting him. She demanded an explanation for such insulting behaviour.

Courtesy : A Passion for Freedom The Story of Kisanin Jaggi Devi

Hinduism as Brahman Exploitation : Jotiba Phule

Gail Omvedt

The extreme fertility of the soil of India, its rich productions, the proverbial wealth of the people, and the other innumerable gifts which this favourable land enjoys, and which have more recently tempted the cupidity of the Western Nations, attracted the Aryans... . The original inhabitants with whom these earth-born gods, the Brahmans, fought, were not inappropriately termed Rakshasas, that is the protectors of the land. The incredible and foolish legends regarding their form and shape are no doubt mere chimeras, the fact being that these people were of superior stature and hardy make.... The cruelties which the European settlers practiced on the American Indians on their first settlement in the new world had certainly their parallel in India in the advent of the Aryans and their subjugation of the aborigines.... This, in short, is the history of Brahman domination in India. They originally settled on the banks of the Ganges whence they spread gradually over the whole of India. In order, however, to keep a better hold on the people they devised that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the code of crude and inhuman laws to which we can find no parallel among the other nations.

Phule's *Gulamgiri*, written in Marathi but with an English introduction, was published in 1885, the year of the founding of the Indian National Congress, but before the full-scale upsurge of Hindu nationalism, also before that principal proponent of radical nationalism, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, had become identified with social orthodoxy. The Brahmans whom Phule attacked so strongly were very often 'moderates,' liberals and reformers, grouped in organizations such as the Prarthana Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Sarvajanik Sabha and Congress. All of these were seen by him as elite efforts, designed to deceive the masses and establish upper-caste hegemony. Caste was to him slavery, as vicious and brutal as the enslavement of the Africans in the United States, but based in India not only on open conquest and subordination but also on deception

and religious illusion. This deception was the essence of what the high castes called "Hinduism".

Jotiba Phule (1826-1890) was himself not a dalit, but a man of what would today be described as an "affluent OBC" caste, the Malis, gardeners by traditional occupation and classed with the Maratha-Kunbis as people of middle status. While he developed a strong dalit following, his main organizational work was in fact among the middle-to-low non-Brahman castes of Maharashtra, traditionally classed as shudras and known till today as the bahun samaj. He began as a social reformer establishing schools for both girls and untouchable boys, and founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1875, which organized the non-Brahmans to propound rationality, the giving up of Brahman priests for rituals and the education of children (both boys and girls). His major writings include plays, poems and polemical works-poems attacking Brahmanism, a ballad on Shivaji, and three books: *Gulamgiri* which mainly focuses on caste; *Shetkaryaca Asud*, describing the oppression of the peasants; and *Sarvajanik Satya Dharm*, an effort to outline a new, theistic and egalitarian religion.

At the theoretical level too, Phule sought to unite the shudras (non-brahmans) and atishudras (dalits). He argued that the latter were not only more oppressed but has been downgraded because of their earlier heroism in fighting Brahman domination. More importantly, he argued that shudras and atishudras together represented an oppressed and exploited mass, and compared their subordination with that of the native Indians in the Americas and the Blacks. Phule's broadsides are, in fact, an expression of a theory not simply of religious domination and conquest, but of exploitation.

The Aryan race theory, the dominant explanation of caste and Indian society in his time, provided the framework for his theory. This had been made the centre of discourse by the European "Orientalists" who saw the Vedas as an ancient spiritual link between Europeans and Indians, by the British administrators and census takers who classified the society they ruled, and

by the Indian elite, people like Tilak who used it to justify Brahman superiority. Phule turned it on its head, in a way somewhat akin to Marx standing Hegelian dialectics on its head, to formulate a theory of contradiction and exploitation: brahmans were indeed descended from conquering Indo-Europeans, but far from being superior, they were cruel and violent invaders who had overturned an originally prosperous and egalitarian society, using every kind of deceit and violence to do so, forging a mythology which was worse than all others since it was in principle based on inequality and forbade the conquered masses from even studying its texts.

By inverting the traditional Aryan theory, Phule took his critique of Brahmanism and caste to a mass level. He used it to radically reinterpret puranic mythology, seeing the various avatars of Vishnu as stages in the conquest of India, while taking the rakshasas as heroes of the people. Central to this interpretation was the figure of Bali Raja. In Phule's refiguration of the myth, Bali Raja was the original king of Maharashtra, reigning over an ideal state of beneficence, castelessness and prosperity, with the popular gods of the regions (Khandoba, Jotiba, Naikba, etc.) depicted as his officials. The puranic myth in which the Brahman boy Waman asks three boons of Bali and then steps on his chest to send him down to hell is taken by Phule as a story of deception and conquest by the invading Aryans, this reinterpretation has a strong resonance with popular culture, for in Maharashtra (as in other parts of south India, particularly Kerala) Bali is indeed seen as a popular and "peasant" king, and is remembered with the Marathi saying, *ida pida javo, Balica rajya Yevo* ("let troubles and sorrows go and the kingdom of Bali come"). Similarly, the popular religious festivals of the rural areas are fairs centring around non-Vedic gods, all of whom (except the most widely known, Vithoba) continue to have non-brahman priests. Phule's alternative mythology woven around Bali Raja, could evoke an image of a peasant community, and his anti-Vedic, anti-Aryan and anti-caste equalitarian message with its use of poetry, dialogue, and drama, could reach beyond the literate elite to a wider audience of non-Brahmans.

Phule's was not simply a focus on ideology and culture; he stressed equally the factors of violence and conquest in history (those which

Marx had relegated to the realm of "primitive accumulation of capital") and took the peasant community as his centre. Violence and force were overriding realities in all historical processes; the "Aryan conquest" was simply the first of a series of invasions and conquests of the subcontinent, the Muslim and the British being the other major ones. It was, if anything, worse than the others not for racial reasons but for the fact that the "Irani Arya-bhats" solidified their power using a hierarchical and unequalitarian religious ideology. Brahman rule, or *bhatshahi*, was a regime that used state power and religious hegemony to maintain exploitation. The key exploited class/group was the peasantry, the key exploiters the bureaucracy which the brahmans dominated even under colonial rule. Taxes, cesses and state takeover of peasant lands were the crucial mechanisms of extracting surplus, supplemented by moneylending and extortion for religious programmes. Phule's graphic descriptions of peasant poverty, his sensitivity to issue of drought and land use and to what would today be called watershed development, and his condemnation of the forest bureaucracy make him strikingly modern in many ways.

Phule's theory can be looked at as a kind of incipient historical materialism in which economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. In contrast to a class theory, communities become the basis for contradiction (the *shudra-atishudra* peasantry versus the brahman bureaucracy and religious order); in contrast to changing property relations, conquest, force, state power and ideology are seen as driving factors.

Phule is today taken as a founding figure in Maharashtra not simply by the anti-caste but also by the farmers', women's and rural-based environmental movements. Apropos women, his personal life stands in contrast to the compromises made by almost every other social reformer and radical: he not only educated his wife, Savitribai and encouraged her to become a teacher in a school for girls, but also resolutely withstood all community pressures to take a second wife in spite of their childlessness. His writing assimilated women into his general theories of conquest and violence) seeing them as the primary victims of force and violence, emphasizing the miserable life of peasant women). However, in his later years and under the influence of the great feminist

radicals of his day such as Pandita Rambai and Tarabai Shinde, he took a stronger position describing male patriarchal power as a specific form of exploitation. The “double standard” which oppressed women was prevalent, he argued, not only as seen in the pitiable conditions of Brahman widows, but also in the patriarchy of shudra households in which the woman was expected to remain a loyal pativrata while the man was free to have as many women as he wanted.

Like all major dalits and spokesman for the low-castes, Phule felt the need to establish a religious alternative, and his last major book, *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma*, details a noble-minded equalitarian theism, which also projects a strong male-female quality. In contrast to a secularism which assumes a Hindu majority and ignores all the problems associated with it, Phule attacked Hinduism at every point, challenging its legitimacy and questioning its existence. What is striking in his works is his refusal to even recognize “Hinduism” as such: to him it is not a legitimate religion but superstition, a bag of tricks, a weapon of domination. Thus he can refer in *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* to the ideal family, in which the father becomes a Buddhist, the mother Christian, the daughter a Muslim, and the son a Satyadharmist—no scope for a “Hindu.”² He never treats brahmins as simply a racial category, group which is unalterably evil; but to be accepted they would have to give up their claim to a religion which makes them “earth-gods”:

When all the Arya-Bhat Brahmins throw away their bogus scriptures and begin to behave towards all human beings in the way of Truth, then there is no doubt that all women and men will bow down reverently before the Creator of all and pray for the welfare of the Aryas. Analysis of Phule’s thought are only beginning. He wrote almost entirely in Marathi and in his time was little known outside Maharashtra. For a long time the lack of a communication network among low castes and the revulsion for his writings felt by most of the Brahman elite made his work inaccessible. Even dalits often ignored him (“the problem with Phule is that he has no caste behind him,” as one non-Brahman radical activist commented) and although Ambedkar acknowledged him as one of his “gurus”, very little of Phule’s influence is actually seen in Ambedkar’s writings. The Phule-Ambedkar centenary year (November 1990 marked Phule’s death centenary and April 1991 Ambedkar’s birth

centenary), however, saw an upsurge of interest throughout India. Recently, the feminist scholar Uma Chakravarti has described Phule as forerunner elaborating the theory of “brahmanical patriarchy”, while in a centenary year seminar organized by the Centre for Social Studies at Surat, G.P. Deshpande argued “that Phule was the first Indian system builder” providing a “logic of history”, as Hegel did in Europe:

Phule’s thought proved that socio-political struggles of the Indian people could generate universal criterion. Phule also talked about knowledge and power much before Foucault did. In fact, Foucault’s post-modernist analysis comes at a time when Europe has literally seen the ‘end of history’ whereas Phule’s efforts were to change the world’s society with the weapon of knowledge.

Phule’s argument that knowledge, education and science were weapons of advance for the exploited masses, was in contrast to all elitist theories that sought to link western science and eastern morals and argue that Indians could maintain their (brahmanical) traditions while adopting science and technology from the west for material development. For Phule, rather, *vidya* or knowledge was in direct contrast with the brahmanic, ritualistic *shastra* and was a weapon for equality and human freedom as well as economic advance. He constantly stressed the need for shudras and *ati-shudras* to stand forth and think on their own, and his response to the ideological confusions of his day sounds strikingly: “post-modern”:

All ideologies have decayed,
No one views comprehensively.
What is trivial, what is great
Cannot be understood.
Philosophies fill the market,
Gods have become a cacophony;
To the enticements of desire people fall prey.
All, everywhere it has decayed;
Truth and untruth cannot be assayed;
This is how people have become one
Everywhere.
There is a cacophony of opinions,
No one needs another;
Each one thinks the opinion
He has found is great.
Pride in untruth
Dooms them to destruction –
So the wise people say,
Seek truth.

Courtesy : Dalit Visions

A Thread of Faith

Sarita Chouhan

...Continued from previous issue

PEACE

We get little hurt and it pains, we experience little suffering and there is turmoil, but imagine those who get badly wounded, imagine the children turned orphan, wives widows and old and helpless parents losing their young children, their only support- this suffering, this bloodshed, this violence- Why? Can any reason be bigger than a life itself? Does a war or violence bring end to the suffering? Doesn't it leave behind more resentment and more hatred?

There has been so much of intolerance and human violence in the name of religion all over the world. In the name of "jihad", "Dharam Yudh" or "Holy War", this blind religious zeal has been responsible for innumerable suffering and cruelty on human race. This cannot be related to God and spirituality. "Jihad" in Arabic means to strive one's utmost and this striving has to be with the self. If there has to be any battle, it has to be within oneself.

"They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." (Bible, Titus 1:16)

"As long as man considers one an enemy and another a friend, his mind will not come to rest."
(Sri Guru Granth Saheb, p. 278)

"Says Nanak, "The Egocentric knows not the word and speaks evil: "But, he who is Imbued with the Truth, alone knows Peace." (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p.941)

"Victory breeds hatred, for the defeated live in pain. Happily live the peaceful, giving up victory and defeat." (Buddhism, Dhammapada, 201)

"Better than a thousand useless verses is one single verse that gives peace." (Dhammapada 101)

Through all the religions we have seen Ram, Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, Nanak as Messiahs of Peace. They have shown to people the road that leads to peace.

"For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;

authority rests upon his
shoulders;

and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Bible, (Isaiah, 9:6)

Peace is the most sought-after in all the religions. Peace that comes from knowing the Ultimate reality brings tranquility and clarity and opens the door for higher possibilities. It is the spiritual growth where there are no anxieties, desires and wandering thoughts. In all the religions we find praise for such a state where peace and tranquility enters the soul through faith.

"It is He who sent

Down Tranquility

Into the hearts of

The Believers that they may

Add faith to their Faith." (Quran, 48:4)

"This is peace, this is the excellent, namely the calm of all the impulses, the casting out of all "basis," the extinction of craving, dispassion, stopping, Nirvana." (Buddhism, Anguttara Nikaya v.322)

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understand, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Bible, Phillipians, 4:7)

In Quran it is mentioned the Arabic root of Islam, 'Salam' means peace and it is from the same root as 'Islam', the religion of unity and harmony and God's call for higher and spiritual life is 'Home of Peace.'

“But Allah doth call
To the Home of Peace:
He doth guide whom He pleaseth
To a way that is straight.” (Quran, 10:25)

“They alone are at Peace, the True Kings, who Deal in Thy Truth. They, who are in Love with Thy Name, are Blest with the Essence of Peace and Equipoise
Nanak but Dwells on the One god, and Seeks the Dust of the Saints’ feet.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p.962)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (Bible, John, 14:27)

When one is at peace with oneself, then only one can give peace to others, and then alone one can reconcile conflicts.

“As rivers flow into the ocean but cannot make the vast ocean overflow, so flow the streams of the sense- world into the sea of peace that is the sage. (Bhagavad Gita, 2.70)

“Those of steadfast mind you
keep in peace-
in peace because they trust in you.” (Bible, Isaiah, 26:3)

To promote culture of peace and harmony is the responsibility of all. All the religious bodies with their wealth of religious texts can pay respect to them with their efforts towards peace.

“Janaka and others indeed attained to perfection by action; then having an eye to the welfare of the world also, thou shouldst perform action.” (Bhagavad Gita, 3:20)

“Whatsoever a great man doeth, that other men also do; the standard he setteth up, by that the people go.” (Bhagavad Gita, 3:21)

“I beg you with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace.” (Bible, Ephesians, 4:2,3)

In Bible Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

(Matthew, 5:9)

One looks for peace in whatever act one does. Peace of mind, peace and no conflict, peace and no doubts, peace and no fears, peace in self and peace outside- with relations, in the family, in the society, in the world and in the universe all around.

Peace is inherent in Nature itself. The Nature rests on the basis of harmony and inter-dependence. The principal of wellness and order applies as much to the Individual as to the Universe around. It is very essential not to disrupt the system set by Nature so that it can continue in the cycle set by the Almighty.

Quran tells us that God has fixed the laws for Sun and Moon and there is no clash.

“It is not permitted
To the Sun to catch up
The Moon, nor can
The Night outstrip the Day:
Each (just) swims along
In (its own) orbit
(According to law).” (Quran, 36:40)

“No mischief on the earth
After it has been set
In order: that will be best
For you, if ye have Faith.” (Quran, 7:85)

“As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.” (Bible, Genesis, 8:22)

“Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come into you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” (Bible, Genesis, 6:20,21)

Look at His Creation that includes all life on earth-so diverse in colour and form, how the Creator has painstakingly created each and single form and then composed them in such a way that everything seems right at right place. He appointed us the human beings with special powers so that we can take care of whatever He has created with so much love. So let us look at all His Creation with utmost love and do not do any harm to any for He is present in all.

He has made us all different, spread out all over with diverse cultures, life-styles, languages and customs but the humanity in all of us is single. It is the same Unknown Power, the same Energy, One God and One Truth, the very Self in all of us. Our belief in Him through whatever Name or Religion unites us all together in the same thread of Faith. It is the Faith in the same One God, faith in the humanity, faith in our own inner Self. So let there be no feeling of dislike or hatred between us and let there be peace and harmony.

“May sky be peaceful
May Earth be peaceful
May Waters be peaceful
May herbs and plants be peaceful
May God and knowledge bring us peace
May all the objects be peaceful
May peace itself be peaceful
May that peace come unto me.” (Yajur Veda 36.17)

Partner's Corner

Sirjan – Festival of Composite Heritage *16th-20th January, Maagh Mela, Allahabad (INDIA)*

Encouraged by the success of last years' initiative of participating in Maagh Mela – a fair organized every year at the confluence of rivers Ganga and Jamuna at Allahabad, ISD along with Muhim, Itihasbodh Manch, Jagrit Samaj, Shahari Gareeb Sangharsh Morcha and Vigyan Foundation organized a 5 day festival of celebration of the Compositeness in our culture.

Maagh Mela has been largely a fair of religious flavour, where Hindu Devotees come from far and near places to take a holy dip at Sangam – the meeting point of two rivers. Maagh Mela provides a kind of space to reach out to people and take the message of peace, harmony and spread awareness about a lot of issues. In order to continue the initiative taken last year, our team this year planned Sirjan festival for 5 days. In these 5 days there were performances, workshops and interactive sessions with people on Composite Heritage, workshop with children on creativity through best out of waste and interaction with school children on Composite Heritage, book stalls, display of posters and banners and screening of movies/documentaries.

The idea of organizing this event was to be

able to take the message of peace and harmony and of reminding people about the great Compositeness of culture of this region. The methods chosen were cultural performances which leave its impact on a large section of people. Performances by groups from Punjab – folk and sufi songs and from Uttar Pradesh – birha, were the show stoppers. Dastan goi (a form of story telling), Mushayra (poetry recital), musical presentations by artists from Allahabad, Lucknow added to the celebrations of this festival.

Sirjan has also been able to provide a platform to artists to present the folk, popular art of people. Its significance should be seen in the light of the crisis faced by people's art forms in the globalised world.

It was an encouraging experience, however in comparison to last year; we faced some difficulties in dealing with religious groups and their rigidity and aggression. These difficulties give us strength to continue our efforts against such anti-social elements who make business out of religion and spread hatred in the name of religion.

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