

Surinder Ranga ji, President of Chetna Association, Bill Basra ji, Pres of Guru Ravidass Sabha, Param Kainth ji of Ambedkarite International Coordination Society, representatives from Sant Sarwan Das Charitable Trust

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends

It is a great honour to welcome you all to the 128<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebration of Dr B R Ambedkar, known as Ambedkar Jayanti or Bhim Jayanti.

**Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar** was born on 14 April 1891 (Died 6 December 1956) and was popularly known as **Babasaheb**. He is most well-known and remembered as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution being the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. He was independent India's first law minister, a social reformer, jurist, economist, author and a scholar of comparative religions. He campaigned for the rights of the downtrodden and the underprivileged, while also supporting the rights of women and labour. He was a scholar par excellence, a philosopher and a true nationalist.

Dr Ambedkar graduated in Political Science and Economics from Bombay University in 1913. Around the same time his father passed away. Despite the personal loss, he decided to accept the opportunity to go to USA for further studies at Columbia University for which he was awarded a scholarship by the Maharaja of Baroda. Thereafter he was awarded a doctorate in Economics from the prestigious London School of Economics. He was one of the few Indians of his time to be so highly qualified.

He was a man who believed that *“we are Indians, firstly and lastly”*. He once stated that *“I like the religion that teaches liberty, equality and fraternity”*. These are the values that he also enshrined in the Indian constitution, which while guaranteeing fundamental rights and prescribing fundamental duties, also safeguard the interests of the downtrodden and underprivileged. He worked hard to abolish untouchability but along with that was also much against the prevalence of the deep rooted caste system. One can understand his angst, due to his own childhood experiences. Although he went to school, neither was he allowed to sit with the other children of higher castes, nor could he drink water from the same vessel. It is said that he had to sit separately on a gunny sack which he had to fold and take home every day. A peon would pour water for him to drink from a height as it was sacrilege to perchance touch the vessel.

Therefore, he believed that mere abolition of untouchability by law was not enough; caste had to be annihilated. Dr Ambedkar wanted to take the entire nation along regardless of caste, creed, religion or language. He wanted the Constitution to be magnanimous. Thanks to his contributions, the Indian constitution is often referred to as a living document, one that can reflect the current day realities but retain the soul as encapsulated in the preamble.

As an economist, Dr Ambedkar also greatly contributed to the framing of the economic policy of newly independent India. He laid emphasis on industrialization and agricultural growth as the bedrock of economic growth and development. He advocated economic and social development, stressing education, public hygiene, community health, residential facilities as the basic amenities. Clearly, he was a visionary. For all his accomplishments and contribution to nation building, he was awarded posthumously India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 1990.

Today, India is at the forefront amongst the nations of the world and has achieved great strides across various fields. We are the fastest growing economy in the world today with advancements in science and technology, medicine, education and industry. Democracy is the way of life and we are at the threshold of becoming a major economic power.

While challenges still remain, we must remember the teachings of Dr Ambedkar to steer the nation on a path of social inclusion and equitable growth. As Babasaheb rightly said *"Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise both will wither and die"*.

So let us continue to nurture the towering legacy of Dr Ambedkar, today and every day.