

Historical Analysis of Dalit Assertion in Punjab: A Study of Ad Dharm Mandal Report

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The literary meaning of the term Ad Dharm is the original or ancient religion. The followers of this religion considered themselves the original inhabitants of Indian subcontinent and they were popularly known as Ad Dharmis. The Ad Dharm movement was backed by the ideas of the Gurus, Rishi-Munis, Saints and Bhakats. The most significant influence on this movement was that of Guru Ravidas who belonged to the protestant Sant tradition. His mysticism is not based on the blind faith but is the byproduct of first hand and immediate encounter of truth and reality. The Ad Dharmis used his picture as their emblem and his sayings as their sacred texts. The memory of Guru Ravidas had been kept alive by a loose network of shrines and pilgrimage centers called *Deras* dedicated to his devotion.² The Ad Dharm followed a pattern like that of Sikhism. There were readings from the scriptures of the Ad Dharmi Gurus, a few hymns, poetry, a homely and a silent meditation. They used the special mantra '*Soham*'³ means "I am that". They also use the term Guru for the holy men from their own caste as well as the legendary ones. The Ad Dharmis adopted the phrase 'Jai Guru Dev'⁴ to greet the person of their community and in response the other person is expected to greet with the phrase 'Dhan Guru Dev'⁵.

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² Mark Juergensmeyer, **Religious Rebels in the Punjab**, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988, pp. 83.

³ It is founded in the Upanishads implying the basic unity and equality of the world.

⁴ Lit. means, Victory of the Divine Guru.

⁵ Lit. means, Blessed by the Divine Guru.

The Ad Dharm Mandal was founded on 11th -12th June 1926 A.D at village Muggowal of District Hoshiarpur in Punjab. It was founded by Babu Mangoo Ram of village Muggowal along with other conscious men from his caste. In that big gathering following resolutions were passed:⁶

1. Ad Dharm untouchable society to be formed and to form organization of untouchable castes for *Qaum's* upliftment by over-coming bad rituals.
2. To set apart from evil spirit apparition, and follow the teachings of Rishi Balmiki Ji, Guru Ravidas Ji, Satguru Namdev Ji and Guru Kabir Ji.
3. To celebrate birthdays of our Guru with pomp and show and request the present Government to declare gazetted holidays on the birthdays of these Gurus.
4. To force the government to abolish untouchability.

⁶ Baldish Lal, **The Role of Ad-Dharm Movement for the Socio-Economic Development of Ad- Dharmis of Punjab** (Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation), Shimla: Department of Sociology, H. P. U, 1993. pp. 29-30

5. To send boys and girls to get education in schools, to demand fee-concession and scholarships. To stop too much expenditure and develop habits like cleanliness.
6. To achieve Mazlisi (organizational) and political rights.
7. To stop the exploitation of forced labour.
8. To stop Rayat-Nama⁷ and menial occupation for the permanent ownership of the residing houses.
9. To amend Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900 A.D to provide equal status to labourers and farmers.
10. To separate Achhut Panth from Hindus in the census for different *Qaum* spirit.
11. To get membership in various departments such as District Board, Panchayats, Municipal Committees and councils.
12. To make Achhut Panth aware of the politics.

⁷ **Rayat-Nama** was a customary law under which the untouchable agreed upon all the laws and regulations of the upper caste people.

Some other Resolutions passed at village Muggowal while the foundation of Ad Dharm Mandal was:⁸

1. (a) We declare to the government and all the untouchables that the Ad Dharm Mandal has been formed.
(b) Our greeting is “*Jai Guru Dev.*”
(c) Our faith follows the teaching of the *Adi Prakash Granth*.
(d) Our sacred word is ‘*Soham*’ which means “I am it”
2. The founder of our religion are Maharishi Balmiki Ji, Guru Ravidas Ji, Satguru Namdev Ji and Bhagat Kabir Ji. Their scriptures have been established as *Adi Parkash Granth*.
3. This conference represents all districts of Punjab and it appeals to all untouchables in the Punjab to call themselves as Ad Dharmis.
4. All the Ad Dharmis should live all together without any sort of quarrels amongst one another. On the other hand they should start eating together and start social relations with each other.

5. The Ad Dharmis should defend themselves collectively if some other community attacks on them.

6. All the members of the community should attain compulsory education.

7. The scriptures which show the untouchables as slaves should be boycotted.

8. The Minister of Education of the Punjab Government, Lahore should give special scholarships and education for the Ad Dharmis, because they are very poor and are not in the position to bear the expenses of the education.

9. For the upliftment of the Ad Dharmis, some special schools should be opened, as the upper caste people are not willing to give education to our children.

10. We are the agriculturists, but we are not paid enough agricultural wages. We are under paid which is not even sufficient for our family, so the vacant land should be restored to us.

11. The untouchables should be made able to own the land where they live. The Government should

⁸ AD Dharm Mandal Report, 1926-31, pp. 11-15

work to eliminate the inhuman laws like provision of *Rayat-Nama*.

12. We are not Hindus. We strongly request the government not to enlist us as such. Our faith is not in Hinduism whereas our religion is Ad Dharm. The Hindus are not our part and even we are also not the part of Hinduism.

13. Our Ad Dharma should be listed separately in the census, and in other ways, be-given equal rights to as the Hindus.

14. We want appropriate representation in Municipal councils, district councils and legislative assemblies as per our population percentage.

15. It would be a disgrace to the British rule if they gave India independence without providing the Ad Dharmis their equal rights.

16. Many organizations such as Dayanand Dalit Uddhar Mandal (Hoshiarpur), Antaj Uddhar Mandal, Acchut Uddhar Mandal and Lahore Achhut Uddhar Mandal are not representing the dalits whereas these are well used by the upper castes to increase their own power and

dominance amongst the dalit. The government should not consider them as our representatives.

17. We, the dalits had considered 'Red Color' for the symbol of Ad Dharm, as it is the color of the original inhabitants of India.

18. The text like '*Manu Samriti*' which considers the dalit as slaves should be banned by the government as these are the obstacles in our progress.

19. Our headquarter has been established at Jalandhar City so we notify it to the government that all important documents, announcements and correspondence regarding the dalit should be send to us at Ad Dharm Mandal Jalandhar City.

20. In this conference we assure the British government that we the untouchables (Dalit) are the true supporters of the British and also the true patriots. We have been, are, and will in future remain loyal well wisher of the British government.

21. It is the utmost duty of all the Ad Dharmi to act on these principles

and also to ask their Ad Dharmi brothers to follow them also.

22. It is our humble submission to the British government that they should issue strict instructions to all the branches of the Punjab government that no one has the right to compel the untouchables to work without paying appropriate wages.

The Main Principles of Ad Dharm Movement are also well described which are as follow:⁹

1. No one can change the basic teachings of the Ad Dharm.
2. Any man or woman who belongs to Ad Dharm but do not know about its principles, is leading a sinful life.
3. To live without a Guru is a sinful act. A Guru should be someone who truly and rightly knows the teachings of the previous masters. He should have the ability to distinguish between falsehood and truth.
4. Every Ad Dharmi should follow the teachings of the previous

Gurus which leads them towards progress. So the practices of the previous Gurus should not be abandoned.

5. Eating with the other castes should not be discriminated.
6. The Ad Dharmi should abstain themselves from theft, fraud, dishonesty, lies, using anything which brings intoxication, gambling and capturing others property or belongings.
7. It is the duty of every Ad Dharmi to arrange for the education of his children and also instruct them to obey the present King.
8. The foremost duty of every Ad Dharmi is to read the Adi Prakash Granth and follow it.
9. Ad Dharm has no faith in caste system or any racial discrimination.
10. To get knowledge and seek progress is compulsory for every Ad Dharmi.

Organizational structure and Leadership of Ad Dharm Mandal was as follow:

The fulfillment of desired objectives of any movement is based on its systematic

⁹ Ad Dharm Mandal Report, 1926-31 pp. 31.

structure. The leaders of Ad Dharm movement well analyzed this necessity and planned for a well established structure at the national, state, district and even micro level. The important office-bearers of the organizing Committee of Ad Dharm Mandal are as follow:

1. **President:** He is the hub of any organization. All the activities of the organization are initiated with his permission. He usually presides over all the activities of the Organization. The first president of the organizing committee of Ad Dharm Mandal was Seth Labhu Ram of village Succhi Pind, district Jalandhar.
2. **Vice President:** He act as president and even presides over all the activities pertaining to the organization in the absence of the president. Bhagat Gulab Mall of village Musahibpur of district Hoshairpur was the Vice President of this movement.
3. **General Secretary:** General Secretary is the main explorer of the organization. He is the coordinator of all the activities pertaining to the organization. He

has assigned various activities under the stewardship of President. Lachhu Mall Shah was the first General Secretary of the Ad Dharm Movement. He belonged to village Bhatoli, district Hoshiarpur.

4. **Joint Secretary:** He is the co guide to the General Secretary. He also assists him in various organizational activities. Atma Ram of Rasta Mohalla, Jalandhar city was appointed for this post.
5. **Treasurer:** He is to look after the financial activities of the organization. As we are aware of the fact that without the finance no organization can reach its destination. Chaudahry Suba Mall of village Tajpur, district Jalandhar was the first treasurer of the Ad Dharm Movement.
6. **Other Members:** Baba Sultani Ram village Beas Pind, district Jalandhar, Babu Ganda Ram, village Quadian, district Jalandhar, Babu Chanda Ram Kartarpur, Babu Ghina Mall, village Pandori Lammin, district Hoshiarpur, Babu Mahatma Faqir

Dass Jalandhar, Babu Essa Ram village Soffi Pind, district Jalandhar, Babu Dhhilku Mall, Fulati Ram, Babu Lakku Mall, Babu Vadhva Mall all from Kangra (Himachal Pradesh), Babu Sant Ram district Gurdaspur, Babu Rakha Ram Garhshankar, district Hoshiarpur, Babu Saien Dass village Chak Hakim (Kapurthala Province), Babu Partap Chand village Narur (Kapurthala Province), Babu Harnam Dass Rai Kot district Ludhiana, Babu Sunder Ram Hakim district Lyallpur, Babu Gonda Ram Nankana Sahib district Shiekhupura, Babu Vazira Ram Chak No. 129, district Multan, Babu Rala Singh Chak No. 96, district Montgomery, Babu Bhallu Mall district Ferozpur, Babu Ganpat Rai of Sirsa, district Hissar, Bhag Ram Chak No. 15, district Sargodha, Babu Shambu Ram district Chamba (Himachal Pradesh) and Babu Hardyal Mall of Dalhousie Cantonment.¹⁰

7. **Executive and Advisory Committee:** Babu Mangoo Ram of village Muggowal tehsil Garhshankar, district Hoshiarpur was appointed as the President of this Executive and Advisory Committee. Pandit Hari Ram of village Pandori Bibi, district Hoshiarpur was appointed its Vice-President. Babu Hazara Ram of village Piplanwala, district Hoshiarpur was its General Secretary. Its Joint Secretary was Chaudahry Shadi Lal of Ali Mohalla, district Jalandhar. Ram Chand Khera of village Khera, district Hoshiarpur was appointed its Treasurer and Organizer. He was also the editor of the weekly published magazine *Adi-Danka* (Drum of Adi People) which was published in Gurmukhi, Urdu and Hindi. Mehian Mall of village Maudial, district Hoshiarpur was appointed the Clerk. Bantoo Ram of village Kotwal, district

¹⁰ Baldish Lal, **The Role of Ad-Dharm**

Movement for the Socio-Economic Development of Ad-Dharmis of Punjab (Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation), Shimla: Department of Sociology, H. P. U, 1993. pp. 39

Lyallpur and Bakhtavar Singh of village Kaplan, district Malerkotla were appointed as Clerks without Pay. Chaudhary Bhagu Mall of Hoshiarpur was appointed as the cock.¹¹

8. **Propagators of Ad Dharm:** The propagators of any organization are very significant to achieve the desired objectives. Their important duty is to enlighten the commoners with the teachings of the organization. Similarly, the Ad Dharm movement also appointed some propagators in the different parts of the country to flourish the ideology of the organization. Sant Ram Azad of Chak No. 272, district Lyallpur was appointed to propagate the principles of Ad Dharm in the area of Punjab which became a part and parcel of Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 A.D. Mahatma Ganesh Dass Bharamtoor of village Haripur was appointed to propagate in the

region of Jalandhar. Pandit Bakshi Ram Shastri of village Bundala was also appointed in Jalandhar. Babu Gangu Ram Gargaj of village Mustapur, district Hoshiarpur was responsible to propagate in hilly areas. Babu Hamir Chand of village Banghal was appointed in district Ludhiana. Babu Puran Chand of village Thattri Bhaiki was also appointed in district Ludhiana. Babu Mehtab Shah of village Basial was appointed to propagate the principles of Ad Dharm Movement in the region of Patiala Province. In the Ad Dharm Mandal report it is mentioned that more than five hundred members were nominated from various parts of the world especially from Punjab. Hoshiarpur had the largest number of active members, 176 the next highest number of members came from Jalandhar, 120. The region of Lyallpur had the third largest concentration of members, 90. But the other towns of Punjab

¹¹ Baldish Lal, **The Role of Ad-Dharm Movement for the Socio-Economic Development of Ad- Dharmis of Punjab** (Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation), Shimla: Department of Sociology, H. P. U, 1993. pp. 39-40

had only a nominal presence ranging from a few tens to less than ten as 12 from Shiekhupura, 13 from Ferozepur, 14 from Ludhiana, 10 from Sargodha, 18 from Montgomery, 14 from Gurdaspur, 10 from Multan, 5 from Hissar, 1 from Karnal, 2 from Gujranwala, 1 from Sialkot, 2 from Lahore, 42 from Kangra, 2 from Ambala, 3 from Dalhousie, 1 from Patiala State, 2 from Bikaner State, 15 from Kapurthala State, 2 from Bahawalpur State, 4 from Chamba State, 2 from Malkerkotla State and 3 from Gujrat State.¹²

Besides Punjab the membership from the other parts of India and even abroad was also made. The people from different parts of India like Meerut, Lukhnow, Delhi, Allahabad, Saharanpur, Banaras, Kanpur and Calcutta became the members of Ad Dharm Movement. The membership was

¹² Ad Dharm Mandal Report, 1926-31, pp. 17.

also enlisted even from some other countries like Malaya, Manila, Fiji, Burma, Philippines, Russia, U.S.A., Canada, Africa and New Zealand.

9. Financial Support: Finance is essential for every organization. The rallies, deputations, banners, slogans, food for preachers and many other amenities need money. At the time of the beginning of this movement, the Ad Dharmis were mostly the field labourers. They were given kind and not the cash. Their other duties were to look after the domestic animals and to carry the dead animals. If at all they save some money they were not aware about the use of that money so generally they bury it under the land. The propagators of Ad Dharm collect money and mostly the food grains from each village for the movement. Another important source of the income of the movement was the rallies organized from frequently. In the rallies special *Golaks* (the pots provided to put the donations) were arranged and the Ad Dharmis consider it their religious duty to donate for the sake of the movement.

Some Punjabi Ad Dharmis had started their business of leather at Calcutta and gained profits from it. They also send handsome donations for the propagation of the movement important persons amongst them were Seth Kishan Dass and Mali Ram.¹³ On the contrary, some organization suspected that the Ad Dharm movement was also financially supported by the Muslims, the Christians and the British but it was denied by the leaders of Ad Dharm Movement.¹⁴ The leaders of this movement claimed that it was 'a blatant lie' and regarded these accusations of jealousy on the part of the upper castes. It is mentioned in Ad Dharm Mandal Report¹⁵ that the world is changing and they are also changing themselves with it due to which the upper castes are jealous to their progress. The Hindus and the Sikh wanted to keep them as their slaves. We the Ad Dharmis are clarifying

them that neither the government nor the Muslims not even the Christians have any influence on our movement. We are simply asserting ourselves.

The Ad Dharm Movement had contributed a lot to uplift the Ad Dharmis. The leaders of this movement many a times send memorandums and demand charters to the British government in favour of the *qaum*. There is no evidence that there was any direct encouragement from the British in the organizing of the Ad Dharm. The important leader of this movement namely Mangoo Ram Mugowal, was in his youth, a big enemy of the British, and even joined Gadhar Movement against them. Now he justified on the grounds that the world is changing and similarly the Ad Dharmis should have to change themselves. Another reason for the change in his attitude is that the government is also accepting some of the appeals of the lower castes. It is also significantly mentioned in the Ad Dharm Mandal Report that there is hope from the *Bhagwan* (God) and help from the *Badshah* (King). Try to send members to the councils and start the *Qaum* anew. Come together to form a better life and destroy the caste and creed barriers. We have a generous

¹³ Interview with Seth Mool Raj son of Seth Kishan Dass of Bootan Mandi.

¹⁴ Mark Juergensmeyer, **Religious Rebels in Punjab**, Delhi: Ajanta Publishers, 1988, pp. 133.

¹⁵ **Ad Dharm Mandal Report**, 1926-31, pp. 69.

government above us and pray to the God that British rule may be eternal.¹⁶

The Ad Dharm Movement presented its demands to the government in special delegations and on the occasions of public hearings. In 1928 the British government deputed Simon Commission under the headship of Sir John Simon to inquire into the workings of the Government of India Act 1919, to see whether the patterns of diarchy, communal representations and some others are satisfactory. There was no Indian member in this commission so the Indian National Congress decided to boycott its hearings. An All Indian Depressed Classes Conference was organized at Delhi under the guidance of M.C. Rajah of Madras who was on the Indian joint committee working with Sir John Simon, to decide about the united approach the Scheduled Castes should take in regard to the hearings. It is not certain whether the Ad Dharm leaders went to those meetings but they went in late February, 1928 with a delegation of 150 members to meet the Simon Commission. At that time Simon Commission was not in India so it is possible that this delegation met M.C Rajah

¹⁶ **Ad Dharm Mandal Report**, 1926-31, pp. 14

and other Untouchable leaders at Delhi. The Ad Dharm Mandal refused to boycott the Simon Commission hearings as the Congress had urged them to do so, contrary they intended to make as much use of the event as possible.

The Ad Dharm Mandal led a procession in Lahore in November, 1928 A.D which was the biggest and the grandest procession of the Ad Dharm's history.¹⁷ They presented a list of demands to the Simon Commission under the leadership of Mangoo Ram Mugowal. They also got it printed and circulated this memorandum amongst the masses. The official record of these hearings printed in full the memoranda of those delegations that appeared and the discussion that ensued, but the Ad Dharm is not among them. This is all the more curious in light of the fact that groups similar to the Ad Dharm appeared before the commission in other parts of India but not in the Punjab.¹⁸ It is also possible that the Simon Commission may have omitted lower caste delegations in the Punjab because they, like Mahatma Gandhi, felt that in the Punjab Muslim-Sikh-Hindu communalism

¹⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, **Religious Rebels in Punjab**, Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1988, pp. 137

¹⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, **Religious Rebels in Punjab**, Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1988, pp. 138

overshadowed the problem of Untouchability.

The prominent leaders of Ad Dharm Mandal, Punjab met the then Governor of Punjab F. D. Montmorency and presented a memorandum regarding the judicious demands of the community. They explained in the memorandum that more than three million people in Punjab are disgracefully called the 'Shudras'. They had no right in the society and were treated as the slaves from the centuries ago. In spite of the fact that there are some highly educated and capable men in the community, they still got no significant place in the society. The deplorable condition of the mute millions of this oppressed community was due to harsh treatment meted out to them by the high caste Hindus under the shadow of their holy scriptures like '**Manu Smriti**'. The Ad Dharmi community was the most backward people in the Punjab as regard to the education, public service and social position. Now they had reached to the fact that they were not the Hindus and would like to be called as Ad Dharmis, even in the Census. The significant demands of the Ad Dharmis were to get appropriate arrangements for the education of the Ad Dharmis, separate representation in all the legislative and

public bodies, a minister in the provincial executive, equal rights of the ownership of any property of dwelling houses, equal rights to use the public wells, proscription of the Hindu scriptures in which contemptuous mentions have been made of our race and community, strict ban on the mention by the name of Shudra, to restore equality in all the public and private official works, reservation of the land in the colonies for the Ad Dharmis as done for the other communities, to issue strict orders against the forced labour, the national presumption of innocence should attach to the Ad Dharmis and to give permission to the Ad Dharmis to go and settle down in the foreign countries.¹⁹ These demands put forwarded by the Ad Dharmis in front of the British, highlighted their problems. It was the first attempt for the amelioration of the lot of down trodden community and has been rightly hailed as the 'Magna Carta' in the historic struggle for the eradication of untouchability and inequality. Such dialogue with the British government shows that the Dalit of Punjab had become more vigilant and clear about their demands and rights in

¹⁹ "A Document: Historic Struggle for Eradication of Untouchability and Inequality" in **Pancham No. 6**, 1st April 2001, pp. 29-31.

the beginning of 20th century which was their assertion in reality.

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