

Babu Mangu Ram

An unsung freedom fighter, who got lost in the chapters of our nation's history of struggles, a social reformer who worked effortlessly to give right to live equally to the suffering sections of society who did not have any right. A leader who become the voice of under privileged communities at the time when even the presence of individuals belonging to those communities were considered polluting. The leader who had lead movement such as Ad Dharam with the aim of breaking free from the unbearable chains tied by society or to gain freedom from the ages old system of class in simpler words, Babu Mangu Ram, was born in 1886 in village Mugowal of Hoshiarpur district.



Being born into a marginalized community, he himself faced a lot of discrimination and inequalities since an early age. for example, when he joined high school at Bhajawan, there he had to sit separate from other students, outside the class on gunny bag also known as a burlap or hessian sack as his presence was considered polluting for being the only student in the class from so-called 'untouchable'.

Later he quit school to help his father in their leather trade. However, in 1909 he left for America, there he worked in fields of Punjabi zamindar who settled there in California. While living there Babu Mangu Ram got associated with the Ghadar movement which aimed at liberating India from British rule. While working with them he was arrested and spent years in imprisonment. 16 years later after returning back to India he realized that the treatment towards the people was still the same therefore he in his own words wrote to his leader Lala

Hardyal Ji, “While living abroad I had forgotten about the hierarchy of high and low, and untouchability; and under this delusion returned home in December 1925. The same disease from which I had escaped started tormenting me again”

During his time abroad he had noticed that there was no hierarchical based behaviour and everyone were treated the same which led to an intense desire and inspiration for equality and social justice. He believed that, “**Education can lead us to Sachkhand (the realm of truth)**”. He knew the importance of education and wanted the children belonging under privileged classes give their right to study. Which is why he opened a school for the lower-caste children in his village after returning.

The movement of Ad Dharam was emerged in the 1920s under the under the leadership of Babu Mangu Ram in Punjab, aimed at carving out a distinct identity and securing a separate and respectable space for the so-called untouchables with the intention that they could live a peaceful life with dignity through cultural transformation, spiritual regeneration and political assertion. This movement in Punjab draws its inspiration from saint Valmiki and the Bhakti movement, especially from Sant Ravidass, Sant Kabir and Sant Namdev.

The Ad-Dharmi’s wanted to remove the stigma of untouchability from their community as it not only stripped opportunities from them but also led to psychological slavery and it was important to secure equal rights and respect for lower caste groups.

the Ad Dharm movement suffered severe hardships in attempting to pursue its goals for its people but, despite that, the Ad-Dharmi’s succeeded in carving out Ad Dharma as a separate religion for the lower castes in Punjab in the 1931 Census. It wouldn’t have been possible without igniting a flame of emancipation and creating awareness amongst themselves about social equality. This movement led foundations for future struggles of against caste-based discriminations.

Remembering Babu Mangu Ram’s contributions are not just events of history rather, it was a starting of building a society where every individual has their rights without restrictions. So, on the occasion of birth anniversary of our country’s forgotten hero, who not only crushed the chains of hierarchy which existed since centuries but let us also reflect on his selfless efforts for millions who were once denied of respect, equality, and most important of all humane treatment. Through his courage and strong determination, he inspired many to recognize their worth, he fought for them to able to be something.

-Sayali Kamble (ksayali@05gmail.com)

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