



## Mango Ram: A pioneer for Dalits in Punjab

**JAI SINGH**

**Lecturer In History**

**Gsss Kalrijagir, Karnal**

Although the primary ground of Ad Dharm movement was already prepared by a handful of educated young untouchables activities notably Vasant Rai, Thakur Chand and Swami Shudranand but it was Mango Ram who literally took the movement to the doorsteps of the untouchables in the East Punjab. He was born at Mugowal, a village in the district of Hoshiarpur, on 14 jan 1886. His father, HarnamDassalready had abandoned the traditional cast-based occupation of tanning and preparing hides and taken to trading in tanned leather.<sup>1</sup> Since the leather trade required knowledge of English to read the sale orders, he was eager that the forced labour which he had to do in lieu of English order read for him by the upper-caste literates. Initially, Mango Ram was taught by the a village 'Sadhu' (Saint). Being a *chamar* he had to sit separately from the other upper caste students, outside the classroom on a gunny bag brought from his home. He was forced to stay outside the building and listen to the classes through the windows. Once when he came inside

---

during a heavy hailstorm, the Brahman teacher beat him and put all the classroom furniture which he had "polluted" by his presence, outside in the rain to be literally and ritually washed clean. In 1905 Mangoo Ram left the high School to help his father in the leather trade, which developed into a thriving business. However, in 1909 he followed the footsteps of his peer group in the Doaba region and left for America. However, even in America Mangoo Ram too had to work on the farms of a Punjab *Zamindar* who had settled in California.<sup>2</sup>

Mangoo Ram in America came in close contact with the Ghadart Movement- a radical organization which aimed at liberating India from British rule through armed insurrection. In fact, he participated in the weapon smuggling mission of the organization. He was arrested and awarded capital punishment, but was saved from the death sentence by chance.<sup>3</sup>The news of his supposed death reached his village. According to the tradition of his community, his widow named Piari, married his elder brother. Mangoo Ram remarried on his return to India 16 years later and had four sons from his second wife named Bishno.<sup>4</sup>

Mangoo Ram was shell-shocked to see that nothing had changed in Indian society even after his 16 years abroad. He recalled, "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. I wrote about all this to my leader LataHardyal Ji, saying that until and unless this disease is cured,

---

Hindustan could not be liberated"<sup>5</sup>, In accordance with his orders, a programme was formulated in 1926 for the awakening and upliftment of the Achhutqaum (Untouchables Community) of India.<sup>6</sup>

Settling in his native village, he opened a school for the lower caste children in the village. The school was temporarily housed in the garden of Risaldar Dhanpat Rai, a landlord of his village, and a half acre of land was later donated for the purpose. It was in that school that the first official meeting of the Ad Dharm movement was held on 11-12 June, 1926. In another version, the school traced its origin to the support provided by the Arya Samaj. However, given his close association with the Ghadar movement in California, Mangoo Ram's relationship with the Arya Samaj was not as close as were those of Vasant Rai., Thakur Chand and Swami Sbhudranand. Moreover, his personal experience of being treated as an equal in America, particularly by his fellow Ghadarities, inculcated in him an intense desire and inspiration for equality and social justice. Soon Mangoo Ram emerged as a folk hero of the untouchables who started rallying around him particularly in the heavily untouchables areas of the Doaba region. However, in 1929 the AD Dharm organization split into two factions, the Ad Dharm Manual, headed by Mangoo Ram: And the all India Ad Dharm Mandal, headed by Vasant Rai.<sup>7</sup>

The final tally of Ad Dharmis reported in the 1931 Punjab Census was 4,18,789.. Mangoo Ram observed that Christianity had been trying to convert untouchables in Punjab for over fifty years and the Ad Dharm had succeeded as well in only five years<sup>8</sup>.

Mangoo Ram played an active part in the politics of Punjab for a period of more than two decades. When Gandhi sat on his fast unto death at Poona against the separate electorate for untouchables, Mangoo Ram followed suit declaring, “Gandhi if you are prepared to die for your Hindus, then I am prepared to die for these untouchables.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar compromised with Gandhi and the Poona Pact was signed, Mangoo Ram rang up to Ambedkar in an angry mood to tell him that he had committed a blunder. That is why Mangoo Ram continued his fast even after the pact was signed and broke it only after the declaration by the government that eight seats would be reserved for the untouchables in Punjab. The fast undertaken by him continued for 28 days from 20 Sept to 17 October 1932, until the pact was received at salandhar.<sup>10</sup>

The Ad Dharm’s relationship with the unionists began to develop during the 1930. After the Government of India Act in 1935, when the Unionist Party began to organize for the elections in Lahore, they invited Mangoo Ram to be present. The friendship bore fruit, as the Ad Dharm candidates in the 1936 elections received help from the unionists, and partly for the reasons were victorious.<sup>11</sup> Seth Kishan Das was the victorious candidate of ad Dharm.

In the crucial elections of 1945-46 on the eve of independence, the Punjab Legislation Assembly results Mangoo Ram as a victorious candidate.<sup>1</sup> In June, 1946, he closed the Jalandhar office of the Ad Dharm. The Ad Dharm leaders told Dr. Ambedkar that the Ad Dharm Mandal had decided to change its name to Ravi Das Mandal and to leave the politics to Dr. Ambedkar and his

All-Indian Scheduled Caste Federation. Ambedkar's organization thanked Mangoo Ram for his decision to "confine the activities of the Ad DharmMandl to social and religious matters" and to "entrust" the Ambedkar organization with the political work.

Therefore it can be said that Mangoo Ram provided wings to the Ad Dharm movement. He acted as a medium making religious ideas and thoughts accessible to the ordinary people by using his expatriate experience. In this way he rose to leadership stature and directed this movement to its logical direction.

## References:-

1. Chanan Lal Manik, "Ad Dharm Bare" RavudasPatrika, jullundur, Vol.2, No.9,6 April, 1971.
2. Ronki Ram, "Untouchability DalitdConsciorsnwss and Ad DharmMkovement in punjab."India Sociology, N.S. 38, Dec. 2004, p.328.
3. D.C.Ahir,Dr.Ambedkar and Punjab,Delhi, 1992, p.2.
4. Ronki Ram, Op.cit, p.328.
5. Mark Juergensmeyer, Religion a social vision: The Movement against untouchables in 20th Century, Punjab, 1782, p. 23
6. Ibid.
7. Ronki Ram, Op.cit, p.328.
8. Census Report, 1931
9. Mark Juergensmeyer, Op.cit, P. 283.
10. Ibid
11. Ronki Ram, Op.cit, p.328.