




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Life of a Dalit magistrate: Ideologies and politics in Dalit life in North India, 1920–1954

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Abstract

This article discusses Chaudhari Mulkiram (April 1910–August 1954) and the contesting ideologies, memories, histories, and socio-political conditions surrounding his career from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. Mulkiram belonged to the Dhangar, a sub-caste of the Khatik caste in Meerut. He was the first Dalit of the United Provinces (UP) who qualified for the Public Service Commission in 1939. This article shows his socio-religious and socio-political relations and responses to the Arya Samaj, Congress, and Scheduled Caste Federation. It reveals how the representatives of these agencies portrayed his life and work. This article also discusses how his relations and responses helped and influenced his caste members in the western UP. It argues that the Arya Samaj, Harijan Sevak Sangh, and Congress used the first generation of Dalit civil servants like Mulkiram to cultivate local leaders and to mobilize local Dalits, peasants, labourers, and villagers to act in their political interests against Ambedkar's movement. Hence, in the 1940s and early 1950s, Mulkiram presented himself as a Gandhi *bhakt*, *Jan Neta* (public leader), and *Sanyasi* (household monk and socio-religious reformer).

Keywords: Dalits; Khatiks; Arya Samaj; Congress; Scheduled Caste Federation

Introduction

This article discusses Chaudhari Mulkiram and the contesting ideologies, memories, histories, and socio-political conditions surrounding his life and career from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. He was the first Dalit (*Achhut* or Untouchable) from the Dalit castes of the United Provinces (hereafter UP) who qualified for the Public Service Commission (PSC) in 1939. He belonged to the Dhangar, a sub-caste of the Khatik caste in Meerut. He was born on 11 April 1910 in Meerut and died on 21 August 1954 at the age of 44 in Fatehpur. From the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, Mulkiram served as the superintendent of the Agra Rural Development Department (1937–39), deputy collector (1939), sub-division magistrate (SDM), additional district magistrate (ADM), regional transport officer (RTO), hakim pargana (head of an administrative unit of some villages within a district), and head of the UP Harijan Sahayak (Harijan and Social Welfare) Department. Among Dalits of the western UP and for the contributors to

his commemoration volume, Mulkiram was a high-ranking colonial Dalit officer, Dalit Chaudhari, and educated Dalit intellectual, considered to be an open-minded, liberal thinker as well as an orator, Hindi poet (*kavi* and *shayar*), singer, and saint. He was also interested in education, literature, cultural activities, social work, and Dalit upliftment. He followed the ideologies of Swami Dayanand, Mahatma Gandhi, and nationalism. In his short life, he met and worked with many people, from Dalits to Brahmans, poor to rich, powerful to powerless, labourers and peasants to zamindars, sadhus to big politicians. He also met Gandhi and Ambedkar. Through his social, political, and religious ideologies, he directly or indirectly connected to caste-communal and local politics from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. The article argues that the first generation of Dalit civil servants was very important in caste-communal and local politics. They were caste thinkers, messengers, guides, influential people, and ideal icons at the local level. They could be used and introduced as good electoral candidates, local representatives, and caste leaders for any political party and movement. Therefore, the Arya Samaj, Harijan Sevak Sangh (hereafter HSS), and Congress used the first generation of Dalit civil servants like Mulkiram to cultivate local leaders and to mobilize local Dalits, peasants, labourers, and villagers to act in their political interest against Ambedkar's movement. Hence, Mulkiram presented himself as a Gandhi *bhakt*, *Jan Neta* (public leader), and *Sanyasi* (household monk and socio-religious reformer).

A few scholars have written briefly about Chaudhari Mulkiram. For instance, Badri Narayan says that Mulkiram was an Arya Samaji, Dalit intellectual, and a Chamar by caste. Ramchandra Kamaji Kshirsagar notes that Mulkiram accepted the Arya Samaj 'as a protest against orthodox Hinduism'.¹ But their writings do not help us to understand the contesting ideologies, memories, and histories surrounding this first Dalit magistrate.

Fifteen years after Chaudhari Mulkiram's death, three memorial committees were formed and named after him: the Chaudhari Mulkiram Vichar Manch, Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth Committee, and Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth Publication Advisory Committee.² The head of the last two committees was Jagannath Pahariya, a Khatik by caste and the vice-finance minister of the Indian Government in the 1960s. In September 1968, the first committee published *Hridyodgaar*, a collection of Mulkiram's 68 poems, in a Hindi booklet edited by Tarachand Pal Bekal, a nationalist Hindi writer and a Khatik by caste. They had been recovered and compiled by Ramdas Sonkar, the elder son-in-law of Mulkiram and director of the Harijan and Social Welfare Department (1968), from two notebooks and one diary belonging to Mulkiram. He had collected them from Mulkiram's wife, Nattho Devi, and good friend, Sandal Singh Sandal. Unfortunately, Mulkiram's personal notebooks and diaries were neither published nor survived. Also, Mulkiram's speeches are untraceable, and his poems in the booklet are not dated. While it is difficult to judge the actual time of evolution and change in Mulkiram's life, his poems do give us a rough

¹Badri Narayan, *The Making of the Dalit Public in North India. Uttar Pradesh, 1950-Present* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 81. R. K. Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders, 1857-1956* (New Delhi: M. D. Publications, 1994), pp. 198-199.

²In Hindi, the *Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth Prakashan Paramarshdatri Smiti*.

idea. They help us to understand Mulikram's ideas about the nation, Swami Dayanand, Mahatma Gandhi, God, and social reforms.³

The following year, on Gandhi's birthday in October 1969, the last two committees published *Chaudhari Mulikram Smriti Granth* (a commemoration volume of Chaudhari Mulikram's works) also edited by Tarachand Pal Bekal. This *Smriti Granth* includes some photos of Mulikram, his family members, friends, and well-wishers, 54 in total, who contributed memoirs, notes, and poems. Many of them were highly educated people, high-ranking civil servants, members of parliament (MP), the Legislative Council (MLC), and the Legislative Assembly (hereafter MLA), and ministers of the Indian Government and the UP Government. They were from the Khatik, Dalit, and non-Dalit castes and belonged to different socio-religious agencies and political parties. In their notes, they comment on the life and work of Mulikram. Almost all of the contributors narrate a positive picture of his life.⁴ Thus, this article critically examines Mulikram's representations as an Arya Samaji, a Gandhi *bhakt*, a Dalit intellectual, a liberal, and a social activist. It focuses on his relations with the Arya Samaj, Congress, and Scheduled Caste Federation (hereafter SCF) in the western UP.

The contributors' written notes and Mulikram's poems give us an insight into local, caste-communal, Dalit, intellectual, and family histories. Therefore, this article uses *Chaudhari Mulikram Smriti Granth* and *Hridayodgaar* as the primary sources to write these histories. Here, the *Smriti Granth* as a source of Dalit history is very important because it does not appear in the mainstream Dalit historiography of the Hindi belt. In other words, while writing the Dalit history of the Hindi belt, mainstream historians do not usually use sources such as a *Smriti Granth*.⁵ But the article does not limit itself to these two sources. It also uses police records, census reports, Hindi and English newspapers, Hindi literature, caste history books, and available history writing to understand, write, and contextualize Mulikram's life within the social and political conditions of colonial UP.

Caste-communal and local politics from the 1920s to 1940s

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Arya Samaj and its Vedic ritualism attracted Jats and Jatavs of the western UP. Under the umbrella of the Arya Samaj, Arya Samaji Jat landowners (Rais and zamindars) formed the All India Jat Mahasabha

³Chaudhari Mulikram, *Hridayodgaar*, (ed.) Tarachand Pal Bekal, 2nd edn (Meerut and Saharanpur: Chaudhari Mulikram Vichar Manch and Shanti Prakashan, 1983, 1968), pp. 1–24. Tarachand Pal Bekal (ed.), *Chaudhari Mulikram Smriti Granth*, 1st edn (Saharanpur: Shanti Prakashan, 1969), pp. 7–8.

⁴Bekal, *Chaudhari*.

⁵Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community 1780–1950* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications and State University of New York, 1998). Badri Narayan, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics* (Delhi: Sage Publication, 2006). Narayan, *The Making of the Dalit Public*. Charu Gupta, *The Gender of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016). Charu Gupta, 'Speaking Self, Writing Caste: Recovering the Life of Santram BA', *Biography* 40, no. 1 (2017), pp. 16–43. For *Smarika* (a commemoration volume or a detailed book with pictures to preserve the memories of a great personality) on the Manik Chand Century Celebration, see Ramnarayan S. Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2012), p. 253.

in Muzaffarnagar (1905), Bulandshahr, and Aligarh, which was supported by the Jat rulers and leaders of Agra, Aligarh, Meerut, Muttra, and Bharatpur.⁶ On the other hand, Arya Samaji Jatav elites formed the Jatav Vir Mahasabha (1917) and the Jatav Youth League (Jatav Yuvak Mandal, 1930). Chamars attended the Arya Samaj meetings and programmes and became Arya Samajis in Agra, Saharanpur, Meerut, and Bulandshahr. Arya Samajis helped Jats and Jatavs to claim Kshatriya and Yadav identities, although Sanatanis and orthodox upper castes rejected their claims. Arya Samajis prepared them for caste-communal politics in the western UP against Sanatanis, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Dalits.⁷

After the Arya Samaj, local zamindars (landlords) were big players in this politics. Very high numbers of Agra zamindars stood in the elections for the Legislative Council in 1920, 1923, 1926, 1930, and the Legislative Assembly in 1937. Also, the numbers of landholders were in lakhs in the Meerut, Agra, and Rohilkhand divisions. Along with Jats, non-Jat zamindars (Muslims and Hindus) were represented in the different zamindars' associations of the western UP. They formed the National Agriculturist Party in Agra (NAPA) in 1934. The NAPA was the chief rival to the Congress in the general election of 1937.⁸ The Congress's weekly newspaper and mouthpiece *Sainik* called it 'Nawab Muslim Dal', a party of local Muslim nawabs and zamindars who supported Jinnah and his Muslim League.⁹

After the introduction of the Poona Pact (1932) and the Constitution of 1935, according to Peter Reeves, a total of 20 seats (four urban and 16 rural seats) were reserved for Dalits out of the entire UP's 140 general constituencies (joint electorate) for membership of the Legislative Assembly. These 20 seats were double-member seats (thus 40 members, comprising half Hindus and half Dalits). In the 123 general rural constituencies (1937), there were 15 double-member seats in the general election of 1937. Among

⁶For Jats, Arya Samajis, and anti-Muslim activities, see Nonica Datta, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 50–86, 146, 149–150, 166–173, 184–188.

⁷For Jatavs and Arya Samajis, see Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Changes in a City of India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 30, 67–71, 74, 77–83. For the Dalits' origin theories (produced by the Arya Samajis in UP), see Joel Lee, *Deceptive Majority: Dalits, Hinduism, and Underground Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 101–103. Lee notes that the Arya Samajis produced and spread the *Patitoddhar* from the late 1910s. Shri Ram Sharma's book *Patitoddhar* ('Upliftment of the Fallen'/Untouchables, 1918) represents Dalits as 'the forgotten descendants of the Kshatriyas'. His book blames Muslim rule for the invention of Untouchability in India. His book 'itself asserts that "Vedic dharma, Arya dharma, Brahmin dharma and Hindu dharma: these words are equivalent"'. Government of United Provinces, *United Provinces Police Abstract of Intelligence* (hereafter *PAI*) (Allahabad: The Government Press, 30 Sep 1922, 17 Feb 1923, 30 June 1923, 10 Nov 1923, 23 Feb 1924, 21 June 1924, 23 April 1927, 6 Aug 1927, 10 Oct 1941). 'Agra Chamars have resolved to boycott those of their brethren who mixed with sweepers during the recent Achhut Uddhar Week.' See *PAI*, 21 April 1928. In rural Aligarh, caste tension was reported between Jats and Chamars because Chamars 'wished to sprinkle water on the idols in a Jat temple during the Sheoratri fair'. See *PAI*, 4 March 1939. The Kahars of Saharanpur and Meerut claimed to be Kashap Rajputs and had a Mahasabha. See *PAI*, 10 Jan 1925, 3 July 1926. It is important to note that the United Provinces police department renamed the *PAI* report the *United Provinces Secret Abstract* in the late 1920s and subsequently as *Appreciation of the Political Situation* in Aug 1941. But this article will use the old name only.

⁸Peter Dennis Reeves, 'The Landlords' Response to Political Change in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, India, 1921–1937', PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1963, pp. 93–94.

⁹*Sainik* (a Hindi weekly newspaper from Agra), 9 and 16 June 1936.

them, Dalits had five seats in rural western UP¹⁰ and two seats (urban and rural) in Agra. Besides, 'The voters were defined on a property franchise.' Later 'the Residence qualification [linked to rental values for SC urban voters] was set at half the normal annual rental value, Rs 12 rather than Rs 24'. Consequently, the number of Dalit 'voters began to grow'.¹¹ Thus, the importance of Dalit candidates and voters increased in UP politics between the 1930s and 1940s, and Arya Samajis and local zamindars worked for each other's interests in local politics. For instance, they mobilized Jats against the Congress, Hindu Nationalist Party, and Hindu Mahasabha. Under an alliance with Fazl-i-Husain's National Unionist Party (1923), Arya Samaj Jat leaders like Chhotu Ram (1881–January 1945) formed a Zamindar League (1925), a political party comprising mainly Jat landholders, peasants with land, students, and Arya Samajis in the rural areas of Haryana, Delhi, and the western UP. With Chhotu Ram's support, 'the Unionists [...] won seven out of eight seats in southeast Punjab (Haryana) in [the] 1937' election.¹² Similarly, Arya Samajis and zamindars mobilized Jatavs against the Adi-Hindu movement and Ambedkar. But in some cases, Arya Samajis and some Dalit elites used each other for their local interests in social upliftment, municipal politics, and elections. For instance, the Arya Samaj Jatav leader Manik Chand Jatav 'Veer' was a zamindar party candidate and won a reserved seat from the Agra District (Northeast) in the general election of 1937. He was financially supported by the zamindar party and local landlords of Agra.¹³ Saharanpur was another significant Arya Samaj centre where Arya Samaj Chamars, Kahars, Khatiks, and so on claimed to be Rajputs, and a few Chamar candidates stood in the local board election with the help of Arya Samaj in 1928.¹⁴ It is essential to note that the Congress party failed to mobilize low castes (Shudras) and

¹⁰The 'candidate with the largest vote filled the General seat, and the Scheduled Caste candidate with the highest total filled the Scheduled Caste seat. [...] In double-member seats, each voter had two votes, but he could use them to vote for two General candidates, or for two Scheduled Caste candidates, or for one of each, whichever he chose to do'. See Peter D. Reeves, 'Changing Patterns of Political Alignment in the General Elections to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly, 1937 and 1946', *Modern Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (1971), pp. 113, 116, 124–125. We shall discuss Rawat's view on double-member seats below.

¹¹Ian Duncan, 'Dalits and the Raj: The Persistence of the Jatavs in the United Provinces', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 56, no. 2 (2019), p. 141.

¹²Datta, *Forming an Identity*, pp. 114, 117, 123–127, 134.

¹³Duncan, 'Dalits and the Raj', pp. 123–124, 126–133. In 1938, the Jatav Mahasabha secretary Ramprasad Soni mentioned that the Hindu Mahasabha accepted Jatavs as a depressed class of Hindus. 'The Jatavs have no caste connections, including dining and marriage, with the caste known as Chamar and therefore, to say that "Chamar include Jatavas" is a grave misrepresentation of fact.' Jatavs claimed to be the 'descendants of Yadu dynasty' (Kshatriyas) and demanded a 'separate column' for Jatavs from Chamars in the Scheduled Caste list, census and revenue registers, for electorate purposes, and so on. See File No. Progs Nos. 8 Feb, Dept. Reforms, Branch Federation, 1939, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI). File No. Progs Nos. 44-Fed, Dept. Reforms, Branch Federation, 1938, NAI. File No. Progs Nos. D631-F, Dept. Reforms, Branch Franchise, 1936, NAI. File No. 78(3)/1938, Box No. 595, List no. 25, General Administration Department (hereafter GAD), Uttar Pradesh State Archive, Lucknow (hereafter UPSA).

¹⁴At the Saharanpur district, 'a meeting of the Arya Achhut Uddhar Sabha [was held, and] resolutions were passed demanding seats for untouchables on the municipal and district boards, appointments in the police, army and other services and establishment of schools for untouchables'. Consequently, 'five chamars' contested 'the election' of 1928 for the 'local boards', most probably with the support of different agencies, including the Arya Samaj. See PAI, 13 Oct 1928. In rural Muzaffarnagar, the Arya Samaj opened schools, preached to raise Hindu consciousness, and converted lower Muslims into Hindus. See *Aaj* (a Hindi daily newspaper), 8 March 1930. In Muzaffarnagar, Purushottam Das Tandon, a Congressman,

Dalits against zamindars, moneylenders, and rich peasants. Caste-communal and local politics played a dominant role in the western UP.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Congress did not have local support in the rural areas. Therefore, in the context of the Rohilkhand division (Moradabad, Bijnor, Budaun, Bareilly, Pilibhit, and Shahjahanpur), Lance Brennan writes, the Congress party recruited the young sons of local Hindu zamindars, traders, and moneylenders who had a local influence on small zamindars and rent-paying tenants (Jats, Ahirs, Kurmis, and so on) in the 1930s. Due to internal groupism or 'factional groups' within the Congress between 1934 and 1937, urban-based Congress leaders offered them rural seats and tickets to contest the election of 1937, to make local links, and to empower their camps within the Congress party. Urban Congress leaders also appointed them as the chairmen of the district rural development associations. After the general election of 1937 and the formation of the first Congress government under Govind Ballabh Pant's ministry, provincial Congress leaders started limiting the power of local Congress leaders. Indeed, local Congress leaders used the Congress government to weed out local non-Congress leaders (like a Jat zamindar of Moradabad who was imprisoned in 1936 and 1937). They remained in power in the rural areas and local boards by mobilizing their caste-community members.¹⁵ Therefore, the Congress government maintained a balance between the leaders until the resignation of Pant's Congress government in 1939. After that, young local leaders also lost power.¹⁶

In the 1940s, the socio-political scenario differed from that of the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, not all Jatavs and Dalits of the western UP supported the Kshatriya claim and the Arya Samaj because the Jatia Chamars of Meerut blamed the Arya Samajis for creating tension between rural and urban Chamars.¹⁷ Sikh missionaries and Akalis attracted some Jats, Chamars, Kahars, Khatiks, and other Dalits from Meerut, Hapur, Saharanpur, Aligarh, and so on between the 1920s and 1940s.¹⁸ In Agra, Aligarh, Eta, and Meerut, there were local quarrels between zamindars and Dalits. The Adi Hindu Mahasabha's leader Swami Achhutanand and church missionaries spread their ideas in the Agra region.¹⁹ In April 1926, Achhutanand compared Sikhs with Dalits, and

attended a Dalit meeting and urged Dalits to work for their betterment and to avoid political manipulators. He also demanded scholarships and admission for Dalits into schools and Dalit entry at the public water wells. See *Aaj*, 12 March 1930. In Hapur, local Hindus set up a Harijan Sangh for *Achhutodhar* (upliftment of Dalits). See *Vertman* (a Hindi daily newspaper from Kanpur), 3 Nov 1932.

¹⁵Lance Brennan, 'From One Raj to Another: Congress Politics in Rohilkhand, 1930–50', in *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917–47*, (ed.) D. A. Low (London: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977), pp. 473–487.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 486–487.

¹⁷*PAI*, 9 June 1923.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 30 April 1941, 10 Oct 1941, 17 Oct 1941. A. C. Turner, *Census of India, 1931: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*. Imperial Table, Vol. XVIII, Part 2 (Allahabad: The Government Press, 1933, 1987), pp. 503, 534. For Khatiks and Sikhs, see Digital File No. 112-IV, Home Dept., Branch Political, 1926, Identifier PR_000005014500, NAI.

¹⁹*PAI*, 2 Sep 1922, 6 May 1922, 30 Sep 1922. At Agra, Achhutanand demanded a separate representation for Dalits and criticized 'Chandra Dhar Johri and Sri Krishna Paliwal to induce the achhuts to boycott the [Simon] commission'. *PAI*, 28 April 1928. For anti-zamindari and anti-begari activities of Kahars, see *PAI*, 5 May 1928, 16 June 1928. In Sep 1932 the local newspaper *Vertman* reported that on the celebration of Lord Krishna's birthday, Achhuts of Meerut planned to enter a temple, but Brahman pandits and local people blocked their way and beat them. But after the Poona Pact, some Sanatanis of Meerut started the *Achhutodhar* for a short period and allowed Dalit entry in temples, holy water ponds, and so on. See

demanded separate representation for Dalits, just like the Sikhs enjoyed.²⁰ Some Agra elite Jatavs sent a telegram to London in support of Ambedkar during the Round Table Conference. In the early 1940s, along with these Jatavs and Dalits, old Arya Samaji Jatavs like Manik Chand and Congressmen Karan Singh Kaen, another Dalit MLA from Agra, joined Ambedkar's SCF for the political representation and power it offered Dalits. It split the Agra Jatavs into two groups: Congressi Jatavs and SCF Jatavs. Unfortunately, due to electoral manipulation, the former defeated the latter in the election of 1946. However, in the 1940s–1950s, Arya Samaji Jatavs abandoned the Kshatriya identity in favour of Untouchable identity and Buddhism.²¹ On the other hand, in the election of 1946, due to the Congress's anti-zamindar propaganda, 'the NAPAs had disappeared, and no special landlord party had appeared to take their place'.²²

Meanwhile, between 1946 and 1950, Brennan notes the continuation of local Congressmen's assertion of local power, and factional politics between Congress socialists and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai's supporters/Rafians with Tandon's pro-Hindus. Due to the post-war economic crisis, local businessmen tried to find support. The Pant government interfered in the civil administration for the dismissal and appointment of district civil officials, while local Congressmen started claiming their share in local power politics. Thus, they were working against the district magistrates, civil officials, and local zamindars 'to overthrow the British Rule', to increase their 'influence' in local politics, and to control the distribution of resources, permits, and licences for goods such as cloth, sugar, and kerosene. However, 'ambitious officers could afford to look elsewhere for preferment and patronage'.²³ After the 1946 election, Pant, the chief minister of the second Congress government, tried to establish his own local recruits, with a balance between Congress socialists and Rafians in the factional conflict. For instance, he appointed Chaudhari Charan Singh (1902–1987) and Chaudhari Girdhari Lal (1912–1985) as parliamentary secretaries. Singh was a Jat leader and lawyer from Meerut, and Girdhari Lal was an educated Dalit leader from Bijnor.²⁴

Vertman, 1 Sep and 6 Oct 1932. In Sep 1932, St John's College at Agra converted 17 Hindu students, mainly Dalits. See Shrikrishan Mishra Gautam, *Hinduo Ka Hars* (Banda and Chindawara: Gautam Pustakalay, n.d.), pp. 74–85. At Bachrauna village in Hapur, in the protest against local zamindars, about 250 Chamars converted to Christianity in Oct 1932. However, after a few days, the local Chaudhari of 250 Chamars declared that they would reconvert to Hinduism if the zamindars promised to stop exploiting them. See *Vartman*, 22 Oct and 3 Nov 1932. A Jatav Harijan reported that in Isauli village in Eta, local zamindars prevented Jatav students from entering the zamindars' schools. Therefore, he asked district boards and Harijan *Premis* (lovers) to look into the matter. See *Sainik*, 15 Sep 1936. In 1944, the *Vertman* reported 25,000 Achhuts were converted to Christianity in Meerut and Muzaffarnagar. After hearing this news, the HSS rushed to Meerut to reconvert Achhuts to Hinduism and urged local zamindars to maintain good behaviour with them. See *Vartman*, 17 Jan 1944. For the anti-zamindari and anti-begari activities of Mulkiram and Khatiks, see Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 22–23.

²⁰Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 148–149.

²¹Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, pp. 74–76, 81, 86–89, 137–138. Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power: A New Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh 1946–48', *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003), pp. 585–612, 602. 'Meerut region in general was a prominent centre of achhut radicalism and activism and acknowledged as such by Dalits and the Congress.'

²²Reeves, 'Changing Patterns', pp. 122–123, 127, 131.

²³Brennan, 'From one Raj to another', pp. 489–493, 498.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 494–495.

It is essential to add here that Congress not only recruited the young sons of big zamindars and moneylenders, it also used Chaudhari culture in UP to mobilize Dalits and low castes. This was a culture of the elites in both caste and village. The Chaudharis were usually the heads of caste panchayats or village panchayats (council and governing body). They were more powerful than the ordinary members of their caste and village. Similarly, among Dalits, the Chaudharis of the Dalit caste panchayats were dominant, elite, and influential within the caste power structure. They maintained their power through the power relations within the socio-religious and socio-political agencies (the Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Hindu Mahasabha, Congress, HSS, Adi-Hindu Mahasabha, and SCF) in the first half of the twentieth century. In return, with the help of the Chaudharis, these agencies were mobilizing Dalits for their interests. It is also true that the rights, power, and social status of Dalit Chaudharis were not higher than the rights, social status, and power of upper caste Hindus.²⁵

Against this background, we will try to understand the life of Chaudhari Mulkiram, who had relations with the Congress, Arya Samaj, Jats, Jatavs, and Khatiks in the western UP. Mulkiram was the first Khatik and Dalit district magistrate in colonial UP. In his caste, many Khatiks also felt the impact of the above-mentioned socio-political waves.²⁶ There were a good number of Khatiks in the western UP in the census of 1931: in Saharanpur 2,905; Muzaffarnagar 3,574; Meerut 8,912; Bulandshahr 17,505; Aligarh 22,545; Muttra 5,446; Agra 6,603; Mainpuri 3,139; Etah 3,843; Fatehpur 8,126; Budaun 3,808; and Bareilly 2,854.²⁷ In later censuses, the population had increased further. According to ethnographer H. N. Singh, many Khatiks of the western UP worked as cultivators, shepherds, *bakra kasab* (goat-sheep butchers), *ghora charoa* (grooms, horse keepers, horse traders, and horse-cart drivers), Khallu Khatiks (tanners), Rangiya Khatiks (leather dyers and leather workers), and so on.²⁸ In February 1936, a Dhangar Rajput Sabha of Saharanpur requested the Meerut commissioner to register them as Dhangar Rajputs, not as Khatiks, in the Patwari Records.²⁹ Similarly, the 'Dhankar [Dhangar] Khatiks of western UP claim[ed] to be Dhankar [Dhangar] Rajputs,' said Mohindar Singh in 1947.³⁰ In the Gomat village of Aligarh and other parts of rural western UP, zamindars and 'Rajput masters' employed Khatiks as grooms, domestic servants, and agrarian labourers in caste Hindus' houses and cultivable lands.

²⁵Vijay Kumar, 'An Untouchable Caste: Social and Political Histories of Khatiks in United Provinces, 1881-1956', PhD thesis, University of Delhi, 2021. Sri Krishnadatt Paliwal, *Sevadharm: Sevamarg* (New Delhi: Sarvodaya Sahitya Mala, 1941), p. 212.

²⁶To understand the socio-political waves, please see this section from pp. 3 to 8.

²⁷Turner, *Census of India* (Table), p. 512.

²⁸For Khatiks and the Khatik population of the western UP in the census of 1961, see H. N. Singh, 'Khatiks of Uttar Pradesh', in *Census of India 1961*, Vol. 1. Monograph Series: Ethnographic Study, No. 9, Part V-B-iv (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1971), pp. 1-50.

²⁹Ramsharan Varma (b. 1935) was an Arya Samaji Khatik in Deoband and Dehradun and served as the secretary of Arya Kumar Sabha in 1954-1955. He was also the founder and secretary of the Dhangar Parishad Sanstha and a member of the Dhangar Navyuvak Sabha and Pal Kshatriya Sabha. In addition, he served as a member of the editorial board of the Chaudhari Mulkiram Vichar Manch. See Ramsharan Varma, *Bharat Ke Pashupalak Kshetriya: Khatik, Gadoria avam Gurger Vansh* (Dehradun: Krishna Prakashan Dhampur, 2000), pp. xix-xxi; for the Dhangars' claim, see pp. 121-122.

³⁰Mohinder Singh, *The Depressed Classes: Their Economic and Social Condition* (Bombay: Hind Kitab Ltd, 1947), p. 175.

The Khatik cultivators and vegetable sellers claimed 'to be Suryabansi Kshatriya' and 'Suryabansi Rajput', and they adopted Rajput surnames to show their higher social status than Khallu Khatiks and Rangiya Khatiks. However, the Khallu Khatiks, Rangiya Khatiks, Bakra Kasab, as well as many Khatik cultivators-vegetable sellers lived on the outskirts of villages 'in separate *tola* (hamlet), near the hamlets of other Scheduled Castes'. Only a few Rajputizing³¹ Khatik cultivators lived near caste Hindus' houses. Singh also writes, 'a Khatik [domestic servant] can milk the cow or buffalo for a caste Hindu. But in such a case, the milk should always be collected in a metallic vessel and not in an earthen pitcher, as the latter carries pollution if touched by a Khatik or other castes of low status.'³²

Mulkiram, his socio-religious life, and the Arya Samaj

While narrating Mulkiram's life, Tarachand Pal Bekal included a few lines of Manusmriti to prove that a Shudra can be a Brahman by virtue of his quality, deeds, and nature.³³ Mulkiram's mother, Bhuri Devi, was a religious person whose devotion had inspired him.³⁴ While pursuing high school education at Hapur, Mulkiram studied and collected religious books. According to Bekal, he was a vegetarian and often participated in the religious, cultural, and literary activities, celebrations, and festivals organized by the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma. Swami Dayanand's ideology influenced him.³⁵ Arya Samajis were spreading their ideas and books in the religious fairs at Hardoi, Agra, Saharanpur, Haridwar, Meerut, and other places. And they organized *Achhutoddhar* (upliftment of Dalits), *Shuddhi* (religious conversion), *Sahbhaj* (inter-caste public feast), *Ved-Prachar* (Veda Publicity) Week, and Dayanand Week.³⁶ During Mulkiram's graduation in Meerut, Advocate Yadram introduced him to the Arya Samaj and raised his socio-political consciousness. After that, Mulkiram read religious texts

³¹The term 'Rajputizing' refers to those Dalits who were claiming to be Rajput and Hindu Kshatriyas.

³²Singh, 'Khatiks of Uttar Pradesh', pp. 2–4, 13, 40. File No. 45/4/44, Repository-2, Public Branch, Home Dept., 1944, NAI. For Khatiks in colonial UP, see Vijay Kumar, 'Locating Dalit Bastis: The Sites of Everyday Silent Resistance and Works from the Late 19th-Century to the Mid-20th Century United Provinces', in *Neighbourhoods in the Urban India: In Between Home and the City*, (eds) Sadan Jha, Dev Nath Pathak and Amiya Kumar Das (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 119–143. Vijay Kumar, 'The Etymological Origin of Caste, Communication and Khatik in the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries UP', in *Caste, Communication and Power*, (eds) Biswjit Das and Debendra Prasad Majhi (New Delhi and London: Sage Publication and Spectrum, 2021), pp. 92–97.

³³Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 5–8, 9.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 12, 23–26. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 5–6. Before Mulkiram's birth, the Arya Samaj had spread its ideologies and centres in the western UP in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Meerut, Agra, and Hapur were the three main centres of the Arya Samaj. See Satyketu Vidhalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas*, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Arya Swadhyay Kendra, 1984), pp. 214–292. Also, see Vidhalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas* (Vol. 1) for the history and activities of the Arya Samaj. Deshbandu, the secretary of the UP Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, called for young volunteers, men and women, to join and participate in the Arya Vir Seva Dal's movement for Dalitoddhar and village upliftment. Dal's organizers (like Babu Shiva Chandra, its secretary) worked on the personality development of young members. See *Sainik*, 1 Sep 1936. Consequently, many Khatiks became Arya Samaji. But they did not get rid of Untouchability. See Rajnath Sonkar Shastri, *Khatik Jaati ki Utpatti aur Vikas*, 3rd edn (Varanasi: Kushal Publication and Distributers, 1978, 2005), pp. 184–185.

³⁶Vidhalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas* (Vol. 2), pp. 255–256; for *Achhutoddhar*, see pp. 262–268.

and sought knowledge from religious people. These things changed his student life.³⁷ Mulkiram followed the path of Yadram who was both his *guru* (teacher) and *dharma pita* (religious father), and, according to Bekal, Yadram and his wife considered Mulkiram to be their son.

Advocate Yadram was a Jat who had become an Arya Samaji and a *Vedic Dharmi* (a follower of the Vedic Dharma and Arya Samaj) in the 1910s. He finished high school in Delhi, where he became a complete *bhakt* of Swami Shraddhanand (1856–1926). Later in Agra, Yadram invited Shraddhanand to become involved in the Shuddhi programme and the conversion of Mughal Rajputs of Rayma village.³⁸ It is important to note here that Shraddhanand's book *Hindu Sangathan* spread both anti-Muslim and anti-Christian ideas. It called for the Hinduization and Aryanization of Dalits and Indian society to tackle religious conversion. He promoted the Shuddhi movement, the cow protection movement, and the Hindu Sangathan (Hindu Organisation). He was elected vice-president of the Hindu Mahasabha and was also a Congressman (1888–mid-1920s). Initially, he was head of the first Congress committee (1922) for Dalit upliftment.³⁹

Mulkiram's meetings with Arya Samajis brought changes in his life as he started following the rules and regulations of the Arya Samaj in his everyday life. For instance, Vidhya Sonkar, Mulkiram's elder daughter, says that from the beginning, her father was a follower of the doctrines of Maharishi Dayanand and the Arya Samaj, and took part in the Arya Samaj procession. He regularly spent his time practising *havan* (yajna—rituals around a holy fire) and reading Vedas, Upanishad, Gita, and Ramayana in the morning and evening. He would regularly meditate on his *chauki* (a small stool) in his room. In his poem (*Padd*), Mulkiram presented *Om* as his god, *Veda prem* (love for Vedas) as his religion, love as his yoga, and yajna as his karma. He upheld truth, meditation,

³⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 14–15. Mamchand Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan* (Delhi: Rivariya Sahitya Prakashan, 2009), p. 20.

³⁸Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 61–63, 93–94. Since his childhood, according to Bekal, Yadram often participated in the procession of the Arya Samaj in Meerut. His family members were followers of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha. But he introduced the Arya Samaj to his family. At Chandni Chauk in Delhi, he often sang Arya Samaj's songs to promote the Vedic Dharma and Arya Samaj's ideology, along with his friends (Pandit Ramchandra Dehalvi and Chaudhari Lahari, who became a minister in the Punjab Government later). His songs called people back to the Vedic teaching (*Koi Aao Loot Le Jao, Dharm Dhan Khade Lootate Hai*). In Delhi's college, Principal Gilbertson and the superintendent of the boarding house, a retired Muslim army officer, were against their activities. Thus, they punished Yadram and his friends. But Yadram never stopped attending the Arya Samaj programme. He organized the *yajna* in the boarding house and often took advice and knowledge from Swami Shraddhanand. In the 1910s, during the First World War, he became a bodyguard of Swami Shraddhanand because the colonial state used force and repression. He was under surveillance by the CID and the superintendent of the boarding house. Later in Agra, he attended St John's College to pursue a BA degree. He continued his activities promoting the Arya Samaj. At the same time, Rameshwar Singh and Baljit Singh were promoting the Hindi Pracharni Sabha with the help of Parmeshwari Das Gupta. Thakur Balwant Singh was a member of the Anti-Government Revolutionary Party. With his help, Yadram invited Swami Shraddhanand for a Shuddhi programme and conversion of the Mughal Rajputs at Rayma village. Every Sunday, Swami Shraddhanand visited the village to reconvert Mughal Rajputs. See *ibid.*, pp. 61–63. The Mughal Rajputs were probably the Malkhan Rajputs. See J. T. F. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda: His Life and Causes* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 131–134.

³⁹Swami Shraddhanand, *Hindu Sangathan* (Delhi: Vijay Pustak Bhandar, 1924), pp. 1–56, 67–77, 81–85, 119–120. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda*, pp. 130–167. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 82–99, 124–125.

and fasting. In addition, he ate neither onions, garlic, nor meat,⁴⁰ and started wearing a *janeu* (a holy thread).⁴¹ He also did not like cigarettes and *paan* (betel leaf).⁴² Bekal says Mulkiram was a vegetarian and teetotaler. He believed that wine drinking was dangerous for both the *jati* (caste) and nation. Therefore, he never served non-vegetarian food or alcohol to his guests.⁴³ Sandal Singh Sandal, a Dhargar Khatik from Saharanpur and Mulkiram's good friend, notes that Mulkiram had become a *bhakt* of Maharishi Dayanand and read the *Satyarth Prakash* (a book of Dayanand) and Vedic literature.⁴⁴ Bhojilal Titauriya, a family member and Mulkiram's student, mentions that Mulkiram had a *gath bandhi choti* (hair braid). Once Mulkiram participated in an Arya Samaj session with Bhojilal and Mulkiram's mother. Mulkiram addressed the audience and talked about the ideas of the Arya Samaj, Maharishi Dayanand, and Swami Shraddhanand, and called for audience members to spread awareness of them.⁴⁵ Mulkiram was both a good orator and poet. One of his poems (*Dayanand Tum Nar Mahan The*) is dedicated to Swami Dayanand Saraswati:

Arya Sabhyata ke udghoshak, Dayanand tum nar mahan the!!
 Bhat ke Manav ko tumne, nav rah batai sat jivan ki,
 Nai vidhayen di bhash ko, ek nay hi aakarshan ki,
 Janoddhar ka diya mantra nav, sota desh jagaya tumne,
 Satya, Shiv, Sunder ka bhav me, pag-pag deep jalaya tumne,
 Ved prachar garimao se, nishprano me bhare pran the!
 Arya Sabhyata ke udghoshak, Dayanand tum nar mahan the!!

Dharm, sanskriti ke gun gaurav, tumne manav ko batlay,
 Karm pratishtha ka vishleshan karke unnat bhav jagay,
 Vidhya ke prati jaga jyoti di, shuddhi marg siddhant banay,

⁴⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 94–95. Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan*, p. 20. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 45–48, 76.

⁴¹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 67. Due to the impact of the Arya Samaj, many Dalits and low caste members started wearing *janeu*, performing yajnas, giving up alcohol, and becoming vegetarian to upgrade their social status. See PAI, 16 Jan, 22 May 1926, 05 March 1927. Chhakauri Lal, *Lodhi Kshatriya Itihas* (Labalpur: Lodhi Kshatriya Prantiya Sabha, 1929), pp. 67–84. The Jats adopted *janeu*, *havan*, prayers, chanting of Vedic hymns, cow worship, singing, and readings of Arya Samajis' books and songs. See Datta, *Forming an Identity*, pp. 50–86, 168, 181–182, 184–188. An orthodox upper caste Hindi-educated Hindu (hereafter Hindi-Hindu) writer noted that nowadays, the Brahman has forgotten to put *tilak* (a sacred coloured mark on the forehead of religious persons) and to wear *janeu*, but the Untouchable wears *janeu* and put a *tilak* of sandalwood. The Kshatriyas do not have a long moustache, but the Bhangi has one. Gautam, *Hinduo Ka Hars*, pp. 91–92. Therefore, wearing *janeu*, performing yajnas, and having moustaches were the reasons for caste-communal tension between Dalits and Hindus. For example, in the Raipur district, local Brahmans and Rajputs murdered a Chamar because he wore a *janeu*. See *Chand* (a Hindi monthly magazine from Allahabad), May 1927, pp. 188–189.

⁴²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 217. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 6.

⁴³Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 34. Shraddhanand followed strict vegetarianism and set up a Gurukul at Kangri and the All India (Sarvadeshik) Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 83–84.

⁴⁴Sandal Singh Sandal was a poet, teacher, and social activist. In a photo, he is shown in a Gandhian cap, Nehruvian jacket, and Khadi kurta like a Gandhian or Congressman. See Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 80–81. For Sandal, see Shastri, *Khatik Jaati ki Utpatti*, p. 221.

⁴⁵Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 105, 122–123. Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan*, p. 20.

Bharat mahima ko samjhakar, ved mantra se man mahkay,
 Desh-bhakti ke mahamantra se, rache bahut se jyoti-maan the!
 Arya Sabhyata ke udghoshak, Dayanand tum nar mahan the!!⁴⁶

Mulkiram had two young brothers—Tejram and Layakram. His nephew Rampal Chaudhari was perhaps the son of Tejram. In his note, Rampal reiterates that his uncle did not like non-vegetarian food, meat, or alcohol, and he often advised his family members to stay away from them. Once when Rampal's father was ill, Mulkiram came to see him in Rampal's house. While discussing each other's lives, Mulkiram suddenly asked who ate meat in the house. Tejram refused to answer and said, 'Brother! who does have meat?' After hearing that, Mulkiram became very angry and said, 'In our house, we have milk, curd, butter, etc. Why do you need meat?' His brother always regretted his answer.⁴⁷ It is important to add that Gandhi also promoted vegetarianism and the purification of the body through his *Achhutoddhar* movement. One of the responsibilities of his Harijan volunteers (Sevak) was to convert Harijans to vegetarianism and to prevent them from eating beef and drinking alcohol.⁴⁸ Therefore, Mulkiram's social, religious, and dietary ideas were based not only on the rules and duties of the Arya Samaj but also on those of Gandhi and the HSS.

Mulkiram also appreciated traditional Hindu education and knowledge, and wanted to give it to his children. For example, he wished to admit his son Satya in the Gurukul to study Sanskrit, writes Mahadev Prasad Arya, a friend of Mulkiram and a Vaidh by profession in the Arya dispensary (*Aushadhalay*) in Hardoi. According to Mahadev, Mulkiram had a high regard for Gurukul, and often helped students and Brahmacharis of Gurukuls.⁴⁹ He also had respect for *Sadhus-Sanyasis* (monks) and participated in the public events of the Arya Samaj.⁵⁰ For instance, Mohanlal Sharma, a childhood friend and a retired *tahsildar* (revenue officer), met Mulkiram in the Junior High School at Gulaothi near Hapur in 1922. According to him, Mulkiram maintained *brahmacharya* (celibacy) during his student life. Arya Samajis organized *yajna* and other religious-cultural programmes in villages, towns, and public places, and also in schools and colleges. Mulkiram successfully organized such programmes in his school and knew

⁴⁶Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 42.

⁴⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 209.

⁴⁸*Vertman*, 17 Nov 1932. *Harijan* (a Hindi weekly newspaper of HSS), 15 April 1933. Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijan Sevako Ke Liye*, (ed.) Bharatan Kumarppa (Ahmadabad: Navjivan Prakashan Mandir, 1955). For the idea of Gandhi's vegetarianism and the Arya Samaj's pure food among Dalits, see Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 131, 135–137, 141, 144. For 'un-Hindu' food practices prevented by Gandhi and HSS in the 'soft Hinduization' sense, see Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 154–156.

⁴⁹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 219, 237. The Arya Samaj established many gurukuls, schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, widow houses, and so on, to mitigate the impact of Christian missionaries and the Muslim institutions. See Matran Dwivedi, *Hamara Bhishan Hars avat Hindo Savdhan!* (Kanpur: Pratap Press, 1917/1918), pp. 18–20. In 1931, there were nine gurukuls for boys, and two for girls. Prominent were those at Vrindavan (Muttra) and Kangri (Saharanpur). And 497 Arya libraries were set up in various centres. In 1901, the gurukul started teaching ancient Indian history to refute European writers. See Richard Burn, *Census of India, 1901: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Vol. XVI, Part 1, Report (Allahabad: The Government Press, 1902), p. 91. A. C. Turner, *Census of India, 1931: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Vol. XVIII, Part 1, Report (Allahabad: The Government Press, 1933), pp. 505–508.

⁵⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 219, 237.

many mantras and *shlokas* (verses).⁵¹ Hukam Singh Pal, a guard in the northern railway, wrote that once Mulkiram visited an Arya Samaj temple at Pathanpura in Saharanpur while serving in Muzaffarnagar. Local people were very excited and went to take Mulkiram's *darshan* (a devotional meeting or glimpse of a saint, ideal, or leader). And, they met him like he is a member of their houses. Without any official protocol (*afsari*), Mulkiram greeted everyone as if he knew them, and performed the *yajna* with loud chanting of Vedic mantras in the Arya Samaj temple. He asked the people, both Arya Samajis and locals, to chant mantras and to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs), and the people praised his dedication, *Bhagwat prem* (love of God), and *Panditai* (wisdom).⁵² In Mulkiram's mansion at Muzaffarnagar, according to Moolraj Arya, a preacher and ex-secretary of the Arya Samaj in Saharanpur, the Arya Samajis and Arya monks often visited for religious discussions. Sometimes Mulkiram visited Saharanpur to address public meetings where he encouraged participants to support *Janotthan* (upliftment of people), to awaken society, and to help Dalits. For him, it was a step towards fulfilling the dream of Maharishi Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi.⁵³ It is important to note that, in Mulkiram's ideas, the terms *Janotthan* and *Janoddhar* appear interchangeably and are used for Dalit (*Achhutoddhar*) and public welfare (which will be discussed later). In 1952, Mulkiram attended a wedding of Moolraj's niece, organized according to the Vedic practice. He blessed the bride by chanting the Vedic mantras, noting that it was the first Vedic wedding in their caste (*varg*).⁵⁴ Mulkiram bought many books at the processions and sessions of the Arya Samaj. His reading room in his house included books and autobiographies of different people whose ideologies contested with each other, such as 'Sant Ramkrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekanand, Swami Ramtirth, Yogi Shreshth Arvind Ghosh, Swami Dayanand, Mahatma Gandhi, Veer Savarkar, Professor Hardayal, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, etc'.⁵⁵

After his graduation in 1935, his friends encouraged Mulkiram to stand for election for the MLA from the Hapur Tahsil because of his interest in politics and social issues. Thus, he started working on mass mobilization. But soon, according to Bekal, some local politicians and zamindars saw him as a threat in local politics and pressed him to withdraw his candidature. He subsequently accepted their demand without any objection. Bekal did not detail this episode in Mulkiram's life.⁵⁶ However, during the

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 253–254. In the western UP, Arya Samajis, Hindu Mahasabhis, and Sanatanis often organized religious activities to attract and mobilize Dalits and the Hindu public for their religious and political interests. For instance, in Meerut, the Sanatan Dharma Sabha organized a Hari Kirtan (a musical religious) gathering, discussions, and bhajans, and invited the people to participate. See Vertman, 6 Dec 1932. In addition, all branches of the Arya Samaj celebrated Dayanand Sarsawati's birthday annually. One such event was celebrated on the centenary of his birthday in Mathura in 1925, where thousands of volunteers, members, preachers, and students from the Arya sabhas, widow houses, orphanages, *nagar kirtan bhajan mandalis* (singing groups), gurukuls, schools, and colleges participated. See Turner, *Census of India* (Report), pp. 505–508.

⁵²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 221–222. For his saintly image among people, see Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 1–2.

⁵³Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 235. The Dalit Arya Samajis (converted by Shuddhi) started using the title 'Arya' with their names. See Vidhalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas* (Vol. 2), p. 263.

⁵⁴Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 235.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 159.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 15–16.

1937 election, local Arya Samaji Jats, who had relations with members of the Legislative Council and Jat zamindars of the Zamindar League, pressured local 'prominent contestants to withdraw his candidature from the elections' in favour of their candidates.⁵⁷ As mentioned already, the Indian Franchise Committee (1932) sanctioned two seats for Agra Dalits. In 1937, two Jatav leaders, Karan Singh Kaen (a Congress candidate) and Manik Chand (a Zamindar Party candidate), were elected in Agra.⁵⁸ Before this, in February 1936, the Dhangar Rajput Sabha of Saharanpur had demanded that their caste name be registered as Dhangar Rajputs instead of Khatiks, as mentioned previously.⁵⁹ Perhaps the Dhangar Rajput Sabha raised such a demand to influence the voters and candidates, and to garner the support of and for their political allies before the election.

Moreover, Chandrabhan Singh, a cousin brother, writes that since his childhood, Mulkiram had often visited Garhmukteshwar (a Hindu holy place on the banks of the holy river Ganga) for *Ganga Snaan* (bathing in the holy Ganga River 'to commemorate Shiva's victory over demon Tripurasura' according to the Hindu beliefs). Near Meerut and Hapur, Garhmukteshwar was also a centre of Arya Samajis⁶⁰ who annually attended the Garhmukteshwar, Pir Sahab, and Bura Babu fairs in the Meerut district to spread their ideas.⁶¹ Along with his family, Vidhya says, Mulkiram often visited Sukratal (another Hindu holy place at the bank of the holy Ganga River) in Muzaffarnagar to meet with sadhus and mahatmas and to learn their teachings. He often stood on the banks of the Ganga River, befriending visitors there and spreading his religious views.⁶² According to Titauriya, Mulkiram often met Sadhu saints while attending activities arranged by Sanatan Dharma, Krishna Leela, and Sadhu Sangat. Mulkiram claimed that the credit for the defence of the Hindu Samaj went to Swami Dayanand Saraswati.⁶³ But it is important to mention here that the mainstream Arya

⁵⁷Datta, *Forming an Identity*, p. 184. In another case in Firozabad, a local candidate was threatened to withdraw his candidature. In addition, it was said that he would be evicted from the village. See Sainik, 7 July 1936.

⁵⁸After Ambedkar had rejected Edward Blunt's class-based proposal (to remove political safeguards for urban Depressed Classes) in the Franchise Committee meetings, Duncan writes that urban Jatavs benefitted in the western UP. See Duncan, 'Dalits and the Raj', pp. 128, 139–142.

⁵⁹Varma, *Bharat Ke Pashupalak Kshetriya*, pp. 121–122.

⁶⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 145, 161. With Arya Samaji Jats and Banias, the Jat Kshatriya Mahasabha was also active at Garhmukteshwar. See Datta, *Forming an Identity*, pp. 63, 149. Garhmukteshwar was a centre of anti-Dalit activities of Sanatanis and orthodox caste Hindus. PAI, 10 Nov 1923. Therefore, the local HSS often organized Harijanodhar activities here. For instance, the Meerut District Board and HSS invited M. C. Rajah, a Dalit leader from the Madras presidency, for the opening ceremony of the Garhmukteshwar fair and swadeshi exhibition. Rajah urged Hindus to care for their 85 lakh Dalit brothers-sisters and to respect Gandhi's effort. See Vertman, 13 Nov 1932. Garhmukteshwar was also 'a metaphor for atrocities of Partition' and 'the site of a massacre of Muslims' during the Kartik Purnima Mela in Nov 1946. Along with local Muslims-Hindus, Jats, RSS volunteers, and Congressmen were accused of rioting at Garhmukteshwar, Hapur, Meerut, Shahjahanpur, and so on. See Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 92–120.

⁶¹Vidhalankar, *Arya Samaj ka Itihas* (Vol. 2), pp. 255–256.

⁶²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 103.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 109. Many Hindi-Hindu writers considered the Arya Samaj to be a defender and saviour of the Hindu race. See Dwivedi, *Hamara Bishan Hars*, pp. 18–20.

Samajis rejected the idea of *tirath* (pilgrimage). However, Arya Samaji Jats had assimilated the idea of asserting high social status⁶⁴ and so Mulkiram adopted the *tirath* idea. Interestingly, many Arya Samajis and Hindus did not distinguish between Hindus and Arya Samajis. Therefore, they believed that ‘not all Hindus were Arya Samajists, but Arya Samajists were Hindus’.⁶⁵

In 1950, Mulkiram transferred to Muzaffarnagar as the sub-division magistrate (SDM, Judicial).⁶⁶ Here, Vidhya writes, Mulkiram’s neighbour was a *bhakt* (devotee) of Maharishi Arvind (Aurobindo Ghosh, 1872–1950). Mulkiram often visited his house, where he became attracted to Maharishi Arvind’s philosophy. He bought Arvind’s books to read and followed his path of *yog-sadhana* (yoga and meditation). From then on, he also started spending hours discussing Arvind’s philosophy in the neighbourhood. This change in Mulkiram’s life sometimes created tensions in his family. But Mulkiram was firm in his views, and his family had to accept his passion in the end.⁶⁷ For instance, Vidhya adds that her father became almost a *sanyasi* (house renouncer) after the birth of his second daughter. Mulkiram loved his mother, Bhuri Devi, and often said that he would stay in the home for as long as his mother was alive, after which he would surely become a *sadhu* (non-house ascetic). But due to his mother’s last wishes, he never renounced his family and material life. Nevertheless, his wife Nattho Devi always worried for Mulkiram and often requested him to stay in the family and do his meditation in the home.⁶⁸ Consequently, in his poems *Sadh Ka Har Phool Mehka* and *Prabhu Ka Prem Mahan Hai*, Mulkiram wrote he (*sadh* means devotee) had found his identity and God’s path. Some other poems—*Prabhu-Pad Ki Hai Mahima Nyari*, *Madhur Milan Kab Hoga*, *Sapne Jag Darshan Me Pal Pal*, *Kahan Nahi Bhagwan?*—also show the influence of different monks on his religious views and his passion for God, sainthood, and asceticism.⁶⁹

In 1953, Mulkiram transferred to Shahjahanpur from Lucknow as the hakim (head of) Pargana Tilhar. In those days in Shahjahanpur, Bekal writes, every officer organized a weekly *kirtan* (musical-visual religious gathering) and religious discussion. It was a common and everyday practice by the officer class of this district. In these gatherings, the officers, their *naukars* (servants), and devotees of Lord Krishna used to participate. According to Bekal and Vidhya, one such religious gathering changed Mulkiram’s life. Mulkiram was a *kattar* (fanatic) Arya Samaji who followed the Nirgun form of God worship by the *yajna* practice. However, on the occasion of the first religious gathering in his house, Mulkiram allowed his children to organize *kirtan* according to the Sagun bhakti. In other words, he gave his family permission to use Krishna’s picture and to perform religious rituals in his house. After that, he became involved in the worship of Krishna through popular rituals like bhajan, worship, *yajna*, and so on. He participated in the *kirtan*, sang bhajan, and became a Krishna *bhakt*. He started keeping a

⁶⁴Datta, *Forming an Identity*, pp. 52, 164.

⁶⁵Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, p. 88.

⁶⁶Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 87–88.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 101–102, 104.

⁶⁹Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 25–27, 31, 33, 89. A stanza of his poem (*Sapne Jag...*) says, ‘Sadhu, sant ya siddh mahatma, tyagi aur sanyasi! Vah banta hai jiska man hai satya marg abhilashi.’

picture or a statue of Krishna wherever he went and started writing poems on Krishna (*Hari Geet Likhun Tulsi Ban ke* and *Bahe Desh Me Dugdha Sarit Nit*), the cow (*Gomata*), and cow protection (*Goraksha*).⁷⁰ Mulkiram often visited Mathura and Vrindavan to learn from the religious gathering (*sangat*) of sadhu-saints.⁷¹ However, it is essential to note that Krishna worship was already popular among Dalits, including Arya Samaji Dalits in Agra, Meerut, Aligarh, and parts of the western UP.⁷²

Mulkiram, Gandhi bhakti, and Congress

In the 1920s–1930s, the Congressmen and the Hindi press installed Gandhi as a mahatma of peasants, labourers, the poor, and Dalits.⁷³ To tackle caste-communal politics and to answer Ambedkar's questions and critiques, Gandhi started working for Harijans (a Gandhian name for Achhuts/Dalits to 'hinduize' them).⁷⁴ After the Poona Pact, Bekal writes, he launched an *Achhutoddhar* (Dalitoddhar or Harijanoddhar) movement to mobilize Harijans.⁷⁵ He set up village industry and the Sevagram Ashram (Harijan and Village Service Ashram), a place of pilgrimage as well as the Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS). Soon the works of the HSS also began to influence the young Dalits of

⁷⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 41–43, 104. Mulkiram, *Hridayogaar*, pp. 9, 28, 60.

⁷¹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 124–126.

⁷²For instance, the Jatavs celebrated Lord Krishna Jayanti on 11 Aug, organized a rally (religious procession), played the games of akharas, and so on. City Hindus in Agra welcomed the procession with milk, flowers, *arati* (a religious ritual), and *sharbat* (sweet water). After that, under the presidentship of Dr Manik Chand, a Jatav meeting was held in Naubasta. The Jatav meeting passed a resolution favouring the Hindu religion and condemned those who closed the door of the *piyau* (water tank) at Belanganj during the Harijans' religious procession. See *Sainik*, 18 Aug 1936. As already mentioned, Manik Chand and many Jatavs were Arya Samaji Dalits, with the Jatavs claiming to be the *Yaduvanshi* (the clan of Lord Krishna). Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 126–127.

⁷³Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District Eastern UP, 1921–2', in *Subaltern Studies III*, (ed.) Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 1–61.

⁷⁴The HSS adopted and spread the Hindu rituals and practices to 'hinduize' Dalits. For Gandhi's response to Ambedkar's rejection of Hindu religion and temple entry, see *Harijan*, 11 Feb 1933, 31 Oct 1936. M. K. Gandhi, *Views on Hindu Dharma*, (ed.) Neerja Arun Gupta (Delhi: Manohar, 2017), pp. 342–344, 366–369. For Gandhi's efforts to claim and represent Achhuts as Hindus with 'no mind, no intelligence' like animals (cows), see Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 124–134, 137–138, 140–141, 152–154.

⁷⁵In the 1930s–1940s, Gandhi urged his Harijan volunteers to encourage the spread of hygiene, self-purification, and cleanliness among Harijans and their neighbourhoods; to convert Harijans into vegetarians; to prevent Harijans from eating beef and drinking alcohol; to find new ways of making leather and cleaning toilets; to prepare Harijan parents for night school and to send their children to day school; to provide them with water; to construct wells, primary schools, hostels, new public temples (like Bharat Mata Mandir, BHU Mandir, and Birla Mandir), rest houses (*dharmshalas*), and prayer centres (*satsang ka sathan*) for Untouchables; to change the opinions (heart) of upper castes and Sanatani Hindus; to work towards temple entry for Harijans; to organize public meetings and conferences for the Harijanoddhar; to work for the removal of Untouchability among Hindus and the HSS volunteers; to publish these ideas and to spread the message of the Harijanoddhar; to celebrate Harijan Day (a special day) by donations, charities, public feasts, conferences, tours, book distribution among and for Untouchables; and to organize a public gathering and public oaths for the Harijanoddhar. See *Young India* (Gandhi's English newspaper), 27 Nov 1929. *Harijan*, 15 April 1933. *Harijan Sevak* (HSS's Hindi weekly newspaper), 16 March, 4 May 1934. Gandhi, *Harijan Sevako Ke Liye*, pp. 6–7, 11–15, 39–41, 43. Also see Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijan Bandhu*, (ed.) Pt. Ramdahan Mishra (Bankipur: Bal Education Smiti and Hindustani Press, [n.d.]), pp. 41–52.

the western UP.⁷⁶ Consequently, young Mulkiram completed his BA in 1935, and soon became attracted by the Gandhian philosophy. Mulkiram adopted the new Gandhian consciousness and spread it in rural western UP, and he remained a Gandhi *bhakt* until his death.⁷⁷ His poem (*Mahan Atma Gyanvan Ho*), written before independence, glorified his Bapu.

Bapu tum kitne mahan ho!
 Manav seva ka vrat lekar, tyag diya apna sukh sara,
 Man me bapu sada tumhare, bahti hit ki dhara!
 Sabka rakhte sada dhyan ho!
 Bapu tum kitne mahan ho!!
 Satya-ahinsa ka vrat lekar, nayi shakti ko janam diya hai!
 Tumne apni amar sadh se, mahabhakti ko janam diya hai!!
 Poojneey tum pranvar ho!
 Bapu tum kitne mahan ho!!
 Azadi ke lie sada tum, yatn sheel ho, mahajyoti ho!
 Tyag, sadhna, mahashakti se, rahe nirantar otprot ho!!
 Mahan atma gyanvan ho!
 Bapu tum kitne mahan ho!!⁷⁸

In November 1940, Mulkiram was appointed a deputy collector at Hardoi. After that, Bekal writes, Mulkiram maintained the Swadeshi lifestyle, dress code, and ideas. His personality attracted the people of Hardoi. Instead of a colonial civil officer, they took the darshan of an Indianness (Indian cultured man) in Mulkiram's personality. To the people of Hardoi, Mulkiram introduced ideas of justice, reforms, patriotism, and religious revolution, as a result of which the people and his caste members in the western UP praised and respected him. At the trials of political prisoners in his court, according to Bekal, Mulkiram had sympathy for them.⁷⁹ As a self-claimed Sanatani Hindu

⁷⁶The secretary of the HSS in Agra, Chhoturam, reported on the activities of the HSS for the Harijanoddhar in the western UP. In Atmadpur tahsil of Agra, the district HSS opened schools and dispensaries to cater for Harijans' health, and moral and religious education. Day and night classes were held in Harijans' *bastis* (residential clusters, settlements, and the unorganised workspaces of everyday jobs and resistance). In the same tahsil, church missionaries were also working for Dalits. He reported similar activities by the HSS in Bainai (Agra), Muzaffarnagar, Kalpi (Jalaun), Meerut, Baroro, Mathura, Bulandshahr, and so on. Under the guidance of the HSS, 50 Harijans took an oath against drinking alcohol. The HSS also organized *bhajan-kirtan* (singing devotional hymns and songs with musical rhythm and dance) in a joint religious gathering for Harijans and high castes. At Basoro, the HSS distributed soap among Harijan boys. A Harijan meeting was held in support of M. C. Rajah's bill. In Meerut, separately from the ashram, the HSS set up a weaver workshop. The HSS also sent job applications (*darkhvaste*) from middle-passed (6-8 standard passed students) Harijans to the municipalities and district boards. In Bulandshahr, the HSS dug four wells for Harijans. In Mathura, a handpump was repaired in Harijan basti. Also, under the auspices of the HSS, Swami Jayantiprasad would visit the villages in the Agra district to investigate Harijans' conditions and to prevent discrimination and exploitation against them by high castes (*savarno*). See Sainik, 4 Aug 1936. Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 15-17.

⁷⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 15-17. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 7.

⁷⁸Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 56.

⁷⁹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 18. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 7-8. Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan*, p. 21. Shastri, *Khatik Jaati ki Utpatti*, p. 219.

and Harijan (Bhangi) by choice, Gandhi was an admirer of the ideas of Vedas, Gita, and *Ramrajya* (*Ramraj*).⁸⁰ Hence, Bekal writes, Mulkiram often gave speeches in seminars on Gandhian philosophy and chanted the Vedic verses to achieve the dream of Bapu's *Ramrajya*.⁸¹ His poem *Mahasatya Ka Roop Prabal Tum*, written after independence, describes Gandhi as a great soul and leader of the poor, weak, and Dalits ('Dalit jano'). In another poem, *Hinsa Se Mat Karna Pyar*, Mulkiram promoted the Gandhian idea of *Ahinsa* (non-violence).⁸² In his note, Mahadev recalled that Mulkiram had a copy of *Bhagavad Gita* translated by Mahatma Gandhi and before independence liked to discuss Gandhi's views on Gita.⁸³ According to Mahadev, Mulkiram spoke often and openly about Gandhi's works and sacrifices. Therefore, the city collector banned him from writing the Indian Civil Service examination and spied on his activities.⁸⁴ However, Mulkiram did not stop Gandhi's bhakti,⁸⁵ so it might be possible that Gandhi's views on Vedas, Gita, and *Ramrajya* would also have contributed to Mulkiram's Krishna (Sagun) worship. Since 1935, Mulkiram's direct and indirect interaction—with Gandhians, HSS officers, Congressmen, and their newspapers—would have contributed to his bhajan-kirtan, poetry, yajna, *katha-path*, personality, and a shift in his life towards Gandhi's bhakti.⁸⁶ However, the people commemorating Mulkiram's life do not mention his break with the Arya Samaj until his death. Perhaps, Mulkiram absorbed the ideas of the Arya Samaj and Gandhi without question.

In the 1930s, in Meerut, Mulkiram met many lawyers, urban elites, and Congress leaders, including Pandit Sri Krishnadatt Paliwal⁸⁷ (1898–1968) and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai

⁸⁰By mentioning Untouchability as a device of Satan, Gandhi wrote, 'I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the Vedas are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me, the Vedas are divine and unwritten. [...] The] spirit of the Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.' See *Harijan*, 18 Feb 1933. *Young India*, 6 Oct 1921. Gandhi, *Views on Hindu Dharma*, pp. 37–40, 344. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 138, 150–151.

⁸¹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 35. The Chaudhari Mulkiram Vichar Manch Committee remembered Gandhi's *Ramrajya* and compared Mulkiram's poems with Ram's exile (*vanvas*) because his poems were published 14 years after his death. See a note of the Committee in Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 3–4.

⁸²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 23–26. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 62, 78.

⁸³Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 216. For Gandhi's views on Gita, see Gandhi, *Views on Hindu Dharma*, pp. 103–136.

⁸⁴Perhaps Mulkiram wanted to be a higher officer and therefore wanted to sit the Civil Service examination. Or perhaps this was a pre-1939 episode.

⁸⁵Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 216.

⁸⁶The *Sainik* reported that the Agra HSS celebrated Harijan Week from 24 Sep to 2 Oct. Its centres in Aharan, Khanda, Chawali, Shahdara, Bainai, and so on worked as dispensaries for both Dalits and the upper castes. They also organized *katha-paths* (reading the Hindu Puranic stories), yajnas (*havan*), sports games, classes, sanitary activities, and public meetings in the villages and HSS centres. In addition, the HSS distributed *prasad* (sweets), soap, and Gandhian *topis* (caps) among students and the Khadi cloth among girls for *baniyan* (inner cloth). See *Sainik*, 13 Oct 1936. See Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 152–154.

⁸⁷Sri Krishnadatt Paliwal (1898–1968) received a postgraduate degree from Allahabad University. He was the editor of *Pratap* (a daily Hindi newspaper, Kanpur) and the founder-editor of *Sainik*. He was a Gandhian Congressman and served as the president and general secretary of the UP Congress. Along with Hindi literature on socio-political issues, Paliwal was also interested in religious literature. In 1946, he was elected as a member of the Central Legislative Council and later the State Cabinet. He was appointed as the finance minister in Pant's government. After independence, Jawaharlal Nehru and Pant isolated him when he was accused of stealing from the party's fund and after his marriage to a Muslim widow.

(1894–1954). Mulkiram was also in contact with a local Congressman and social activist, Chaudhari Karan Singh. Karan Singh liked Mulkiram and knew his circumstances. Therefore, he helped Mulkiram by offering him a job as a tutor for his children.⁸⁸ Vidhya Sonkar says that when he was in high school in Hapur, Mulkiram had taught his juniors and Karan Singh's three children for the tuition fees. Karan Singh considered Mulkiram as a son and he often spent his holidays in Chaudhari Karan Singh's village.⁸⁹ It is not clear in Mulkiram's *Smriti Granth* that Chaudhari Karan Singh was Karan Singh Kaen, a Jatav Congress candidate in the general election of 1937.⁹⁰ In 1937, the first Congress government (1937–1939) appointed Mulkiram as superintendent in the Rural Development Department under the Agra commissioner. Bekal says that, along with the help of Congress leader Pandit Paliwal of Agra, Mulkiram secured this position because he was a rural man and knew the poor conditions of the village and villagers. Thus, according to Bekal, Mulkiram tried to bring the villagers together and spread Gandhian ideas among them.⁹¹ In August 1936, the secretary of the Agra HSS,

Paliwal left the State Cabinet and Congress in 1951 to oppose Jawaharlal Nehru's domination of Congress and state politics. But he sat in the UP Assembly with a group of independent assembly members (the Independent Progressive Legislature Party). He also started a Gram Raj Party to mobilize the rural masses. Later, with his party members, he joined the Swatantra Party and became its vice-president. In 1963, he resigned from the party. In 1967–68, he was nominated as a member of parliament. See Howard L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 129–130. Lila Dhar Sharma, *Bharatiya Charit Kosh* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2009), pp. 865–866. Paliwal was a leading Congressman during the Civil Disobedience Movement (no-tax and anti-zamindari satyagraha, 1930–1931) in Agra. His newspaper *Sainik* was the Congress's mouthpiece in the early 1930s to spread its message in the rural areas. Consequently, he won the 1934 election. See Gyanendra Pandey, *Ascendancy of Congress in Uttar Pradesh: Class, Community and Nation in North India, 1920–40* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 35, 145–151. For Achhutoddhar in the UP, see Paliwal, *Sevadharm*, pp. 194–212, mainly pp. 196–197, 203–208. For Paliwal's contribution to Hindu nationalism, community, and collaboration with Arya Samajis, see William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 30–31, 62, 70, 163, 180–181, 271.

⁸⁸Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 195–196.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

⁹⁰In a list of Congress candidates for the election of 1937, Karan Singh Kaen was named as Karan Singh Jatav BA. See *Sainik*, 14 July 1936. The *Sainik* reported a big meeting of Agra Jatavs on 27 Sep 1936 in Chaudhari Khamani Ram's house at Saiyyad Budan (Nakhasa/Nakhale). Babu Karan Singh Kaen (BA) gave a speech at the Jatav meeting. He was a big party worker of the Agra City Congress Committee. He declared that Congress would win more than half of the 228 seats of the UP Assembly. He maintained that as the Congress party was the representative body of Dalits, they should vote for the Congress candidates. Also, he made it clear that all the upper caste voters would vote for Congress only. Thus, none of the Dalit candidates would win without Congress's help. Later, Sardar Patel campaigned for Kaen in Agra City. See *Sainik*, 13 and 20 Oct 1936.

⁹¹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 17. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 7. Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan*, p. 21. In a meeting, Paliwal's wife addressed Achhut women on education and cleanliness. See *PAI*, 21 April 1928. Paliwal considered Chamars, Jatavs, and Bhangi to be Achhuts. But he mainly needed non-Jatav leaders and 'Panch-Chaudharis' to mobilize Achhuts in Agra. Thus, he invited 'Harijan Sevaks' to work for Harijans. He was also aware of municipal board activities for Harijan welfare. See Paliwal, *Sevadharm*, pp. 196–197, 205, 210–212. In addition, in a chapter on the village service, he mentioned the responsibilities of public servants (Congressmen) and promoted Congress propaganda, including on the ashram, charkha, Kisan-Gram Sangh, and so on. With the help of a public servant, he wanted to set his agents, alongside poor peasants and labourers, against zamindars, big peasants, *patwaris* (accountants), *bauhras* (moneylenders), *ahalkars* (court officers/clerks), and so on. He advised forming ward-mohalla committees and Kisan-Gram Sanghas to mobilize voters. He instructed voters to not elect caste-community members to the rural district and

Chhoturam, reported on the activities of HSS for Harijanoddhar in the western UP. One activity was that the HSS sent job applications of middle-passed Harijans to municipality and district boards in Meerut. It is important to mention that in the western UP, the Jatavs and Jats had strong socio-political representative bodies to help with their demands for jobs and electoral seats. For instance, by mentioning the loyalty and services of Jats to the British government and army, the All India Jat Mahasabha demanded the nomination of a Jat candidate for the Indian Civil Service in 1930–1931.⁹² But Khatiks did not have such a strong representative body in the 1920s and mid-1930s. Like the Dhangar Rajput Sabha of Saharanpur, a Khatik Suryavanshi Mahasabha of Aligarh was working exclusively to register the Khatik caste as the Suryavanshi Rajput in the government records.⁹³ Therefore, Mulakiram maintained his relations with Gandhians, Congressmen, and Arya Samajis, and supported their national-level agencies.⁹⁴

For Paliwal, Mulakiram was a Harijan, Harijan sevak, village sevak, lok sevak (public servant), true patriotic-administrator, and saintly man.⁹⁵ Therefore, before the election of 1946, UP Congress Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant, with the help of Finance Minister Paliwal, offered him a ticket for the membership of the Legislative Assembly and promised him a ministry in his cabinet. But Mulakiram rejected the offer, saying

municipal boards. See Paliwal, *Sevadharma*, pp. 37–97, 72–74, 82, 181–188. Before the 1946 election, Paliwal started spreading Congress propaganda in rural UP. He asserted the Congress Raj and 'Purna Swaraj' would be the 'Kisan Raj'. In other words, he meant that the Congress government would work for the Indian peasantry. It would be peasant rule and complete self-rule or self-government. See Sri Krishnadatt Paliwal, *Kisan Raj: Panchvarshiy Yojana* (Agra: Sahitya Ratn Bhandar, 1945), pp. 110–112, 116–117, 132.

⁹²See File No. Progs Nos. 121 (v), Dept. Home, Branch Establishment, 1930, NAI. For HSS and job applications, see *Sainik*, 4 Aug 1936.

⁹³See File No. 45/4/44, Repository-2, Public Branch, Home Dept., 1944, NAI. Lee notes the sanitation labour castes did not have a strong organization, except for the Valmiki Sabhas in colonial urban Punjab. Arya Samajis and pro-Congressmen supported and sponsored them. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, p. 98.

⁹⁴Interestingly, Gandhi considered Bhangi as Achhut only. Recently, Lee notes that Bhangi was a representative metaphor (or 'synecdoche') for all Achhuts in Gandhi's sociology and writings. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 122–123. But Congressmen (like Paliwal) believed only Chamars, Jatavs, and Bhangi were Achhuts in UP. Therefore, the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha, local HSS volunteers, and Congressmen in UP were all working against the political interests of Dalits. Rights were given to all Dalits after the Poona Pact, Indian Government Act of 1935, and the Government of India (Scheduled Caste) Order and List of 1936. As a result, local HSS and Congressmen spread confusion among Dalits and provoked their feelings against the Scheduled Caste status, Adi-Hindu Mahasabha, and Ambedkar's movement. Therefore, many Dalit associations demanded exclusion from the Scheduled Caste list and claimed Hindu Rajput and Kshatriya identities. See File No. Progs Nos. 44-Fed, Dept. Reforms, Branch Federation, 1938, NAI. File No. Progs Nos. 29-F, Dept. Reforms, Branch Franchise, 1936, NAI. Ghanshyamdas Birla was the president of the HSS (1932–1959), an industrialist Congressman, and a contributor of funds to the Shuddhi movement of Arya Samaj. 'Birla was a favorite of Hindu nationalists': Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Shradhdhanand. Birla supported Shuddhi. However, according to Lee, Gandhi did not favour Shradhdhanand and Arya Samaj's Shuddhi idea and 'dialogical persuasion'. Instead, he wished to prevent Dalit conversion to Islam and Christianity with the help of Hindu reforms. Therefore, by claiming a Harijan by choice (Gandhi considered himself a Bhangi by choice to make emotional and socio-political relations with Harijans), 'Gandhi offered monological nomination'. Also, Lee notes similarities between Shradhdhanand and Gandhi on the issues of Dalit inclusion in the Hindu fold, Dalit-Muslim alliance, and Dalit conversion to Islam and Christianity. And both supported 'reformist rhetoric toward fellow Hindus'. Interestingly, Lee notes a collaboration between soft and hard Hinduization. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 131–133, 148–150, 156–158.

⁹⁵See the back cover of Mulakiram, *Hridayodgaar*.

that he was happy as a magistrate and to serve the people.⁹⁶ For the Congress party, Mulkiram was a strong Dalit candidate with a Gandhian and Arya Samaji profile to stand against the SCF candidates in the western UP, mainly in Agra. Between 1944 and 1948–1949, he served in Agra as the sub-district magistrate and Regional Transport Department head.⁹⁷ In June 1949, during a meeting with Paliwal, Mulkiram proposed the name of another Dhangar Khatik social activist, Sandal Singh Sandal, for membership of the Legislative Assembly and editorship of Paliwal's Hindi weekly newspaper *Sainik*.⁹⁸ As aforementioned, with the help of local Dalit leaders and Chaudharis, Pant's Congress government tried to forge rural links with villagers (Jats and Dalits). And the big Congress leaders empowered their camps during the factional conflicts within the UP Congress party in the 1930s and 1940s.⁹⁹

As a Gandhi *bhakt*, Mulkiram often participated in Gandhi's Prarthana Sabha (prayer meeting). For instance, Sunderlal, the secretary of the UP HSS and an admirer of Mulkiram, writes that a Gandhian prayer meeting was once held at Valmiki Basti (Delhi), which was attended by Mulkiram and Sunderlal. Here Mulkiram started singing '*Bhakti bhav se shish jhukane ka sabko adhikar barabar hai. Shraddha se shish jhukane ka sabko adhikar barabar hai.*' After that, Gandhi came into the meeting and started preaching and praying.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, according to Ram Bharose Lal Shivhare (Mulkiram's friend in Agra), Mulkiram was in Birla House on 29 and 30 January 1948 when Gandhi was assassinated while attending the Prarthana Sabha. On 29 January, Mahatma Gandhi had said he (Gandhi) wanted to live 100 years, but now the time had come, and God must call him. In reply, Mulkiram told Gandhi that the nation needed him (Gandhi): 'After you, our country would be in crisis.' But on the evening of 30 January, Nathuram Godse shot Gandhi.¹⁰¹ While narrating the same episode, Bekal called Mulkiram a Gandhi *bhakt* because he often visited the Birla Bhavan in Delhi to listen to the mahatma's teaching and to take darshan. After Gandhi's death, he touched the foot of Gandhi's deceased body and returned to Agra. When narrating the episode to his family members and friends, Mulkiram was in tears. His wife remembered that in those days he locked himself in a separate room, remained silent, and often cried while remembering his Bapu. For about 13 days (a mourning period in the Hindu religion), he took leave from his office, fasted, and participated in religious discussions. Bekal writes he mourned and performed all the responsibilities of a son for his father.¹⁰² Subsequently, Mulkiram wrote his first poem on Gandhi.¹⁰³ One (*Tum Bapu Jan-Jan Ke Pyare*) of his undated poems is another excellent example of his Gandhi bhakti.

⁹⁶Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 148, 254.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 23–26.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁹Brennan, 'From one Raj to another'. When Pandit Sri Krishnadatt Paliwal took an oath to remarry Maqsud Jahan Begam, Mulkiram suggested not getting married. Although, according to Vidhya, Mulkiram was like a son to Paliwal, when Paliwal remarried Begum Saheba of Aligarh, Mulkiram was very upset and rejected his invitation to the *baraat* (wedding procession). See Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 98–99, 134, 213–214.

¹⁰⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 141.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 212–213.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 185–187.

Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!
 Ram naam hriday man bhaya, satya-ahinsa marg dikhaya!
 Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!!
 Khadi ki sadi garima se, shanti pracharo ki mahima se!
 Bhay ka timiravaran hataya!
 Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!!
 Ahankar par vijay prapt kar aur dasta yug samapt kar!
 Savtranta ka deep jalaya!
 Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!!
 Jagmag, jagmag jyoti bari hai, azadi ki baat bari hai!
 Sota Bharatvarsh Jagaya!
 Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!!
 Tum bapu jan-jan ke pyare, saral savbhav vichar tumhare!
 Tum hi jano apni maya!
 Bapu kaisa desh sajaya!!¹⁰⁴

According to one of Mulkiram's letters, when he became magistrate (Judicial) in Muzaffarnagar (1950), he wished to be as a servant of people, as advised by Mahatma Gandhi.¹⁰⁵ For example, in his poems *Jai Loktantra* and *Nutan Bharatvarsh Banave*, Mulkiram welcomed the idea of democracy which, according to him, came after many sacrifices. Hence, he hoped for the end of casteism, discrimination, regionalism, selfishness, greed, and so on, and he hoped for the construction of new India and Swadesh.¹⁰⁶ But he was also aware of the contemporary political crisis in the country and the gap that appeared in Indian politics after Gandhi's death. Thus, according to Bekal, although he was unhappy and restless, as a magistrate and justice lover, Mulkiram never hesitated to speak the truth.¹⁰⁷ His poems *Antstal Ke Udgaro Ko*, *Bolo Kaise Kholun Main?*, and *Gahri Chhaya Bari Dvand Ki* deal with discrimination against and exploitation of the weak, increasing corruption, misconduct, immorality, depravity, sinfulness, darkness, the burden borne by the country, and the failure of Gandhi's dream of freedom.¹⁰⁸ In his verses (*dohes*) and poem *Man Ke Bhram Ko Karo Door Ab*, he criticized leaders who had failed to work for *swaraj* (self-governance), society, and public service after independence. For him, those who work only for a position do not work for social welfare. They were not leaders of the people (*jan neta*).¹⁰⁹ Also, under Gandhi's influence, Mulkiram presented the term *Janoddhar* in the sense of upliftment and social services for Dalits, non-Dalits, the poor, villagers, peasants, labourers, workers, and so on, and his poems focus on their issues. For instance, his poems *Jago Aur Jago Jag Ko*; *Main Diwali Nahi Kahunga*, and *Nar Cheto! Cheto! Utho Sabhay* criticized

¹⁰⁴Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 28–29.

¹⁰⁶Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁰⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 29–30.

¹⁰⁸Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 34, 39

¹⁰⁹For instance, his verses say, 'Neta vah hai jo rakhe jan-seva ka bhav! Bina tyag bhatka kare yah swarajya ki nav!! Pad-lipsa ki chah me ydi neta ka dhyani! Fir to usse ho chuka, jan-jivan kalyan!!' Similarly, a stanza of his poem says, 'Han me han jo mila raha hai, Vah kya jan neta kahlave! Svam bhatkta hai jo, vah kya— janta ko raah dikhlave!!' *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 55.

casteism, discrimination, inequality, exploitation, and poverty. Another poem *Manavta Ka Pirit Aangan* criticized zamindars and capitalists who exploited the poor people and Dalits. It warned of a people's revolution that would bring equality in society.¹¹⁰ As promised, Pant's Congress government introduced the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act of 1950 to reform the condition of the peasants. However, as Mulkiram's poems suggest, the reforms were on paper only.

In 1952, Mulkiram was transferred to Lucknow and appointed head of the Harijan Sahayak Department (Harijan and Social Welfare Department).¹¹¹ According to Bekal, Mulkiram had to deal with the province's backwardness and rural life issues for nation-building. In this department, Mulkiram started working for the welfare of the Harijans and low castes, and inspired his staff and colleagues in public service to follow the truth, not any party or government. Therefore, Bekal says, Mulkiram was a true nationalist because Gandhi paid attention to the upliftment of Harijans and low castes. For his staff and colleagues, Bekal writers, Mulkiram was a god and they were his devotees (*bhakt*s).¹¹²

His poems *Rahi Sadh Par Satya Na Saadha*; *Antardvandon Ka Bhishan Ran*; *Lipsa Svarth, Vishay Sab Tyage*; and *Socho Kuch Kalyan Manuj Ka* suggest that Mulkiram wanted to work for humanity, equality, and a casteless society. He believed that service for humans (social service) is the service of god.¹¹³ In his poem *Socho Kuch Kalyan Manuj Ka*, Mulkiram wrote,

Karo naya nirman manuj [Manush/human] ka!
 Ubharo mahagart se, ubharo! Bita diya yug sote-sote,
 Sat jivan ke kshan anek hi, sandeho me khote-khote,
 Varna sanskriti bhed bhav ruchi vishwasho par chot karari,
 Rudi, reetiyon ke pramad me manavta hai ghiri tumhari,
 Dekh dekhi hai pran manuj ka!
 Karo naya nirman manuj ka!!
 Tor bandhano ko uth gaao, sat jivan ka geet gunja do,
 Durbhavo ka karo nash tum, rach samaj nav jyoti jaga do,
 Arth samjh samarth bane ve, udaseen jinke prati jag hai,
 Jatiwad hai svarth sarjna, jisse ab tak dushit jag hai,
 Socho kuch kalyan manuj ka!
 Karo naya nirman manuj ka!!¹¹⁴

In April 1952, his friend Sandal Singh Sandal received a letter from Mulkiram from Sitapur, stating that he intended to form a 'Manav Mandal' (Human Association) to spread education, national consciousness, and social service, and awaken youngsters.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 35, 79, 93–94.

¹¹¹In the Saharanpur district of the early 1950s, the HSS granted 400 acres of land to Harijans for the Harijan bastis. Under the Land Utilization Law, the district officers were told to give land primarily to Harijans. See File No. 328 (8)/1955, Box No. 936, List no. 98b, GAD, UPSC. Harijan Sevak Sangh, *Uttar Pradesh Me Harijan Utthan* (Lucknow: UP Harijan Sahayak Department, [n.d.]).

¹¹²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 38–39.

¹¹³Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 43–44, 85, 95; for his verses on social service, p. 51.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 95.

Bekal writes that Mulkiram wished for the development of the entire Indian society.¹¹⁵ In another letter to Sandal dated July 1953, Mulkiram said that they had to spread the messages of Maharshi Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi in every home. The message of truth must be circulated to every part of the country. As no *kaum* (caste or community) could not bear torture for a long time, there was a need to form an organization and to generate understanding. According to Bekal, Mulkiram was worried for the nation and society at that time and was trying to follow the ideal path of Mahatma Gandhi to achieve Gandhi's dream for India (*Gandhi ke sapno ka Bharat*).¹¹⁶ His poem *Pyara Bharat Desh Hamara* glorified the idea of India as a nation connecting to divinity, truth, meditation, the Ganga River, culture, religion, Ramayana, Gita, and Gandhi (*Jan Neta*, a leader of people).¹¹⁷ Another poem, *Manav Jaag*, called people to awaken and mobilize for truth, struggle, and reform. Therefore, these poems suggest that Mulkiram wanted to be a *Jan Neta*, not a Khatik, Dalit, and religious leader.

Before his death, according to a local Depressed Classes leader Deep Narayan Singh, Mulkiram wanted to work on a *Janoddhar* mission (*Achhutoddhar* and social services for others) with MLA Banshi Dhar Dhangar and Pandit Paliwal in Fatehpur where Mulkiram was an additional district magistrate and saint to Fatehpur's people.¹¹⁸ It is important to note that Paliwal had lost his political position in the Congress party and Pant's government in the early 1950s. In the internal Congress politicking between Paliwal and Nehru (including Pant), Mulkiram sided with his old mentor, Paliwal. Therefore, Mulkiram and Paliwal wished to work together for mass mobilization and a new political change.¹¹⁹ As mentioned above, Mulkiram suggested that his staff and colleagues follow the truth, not a party and government.

In July 1954, he wrote to Sandal that the time had come to establish a 'Bhagwat Seva Mandal', 'Manav Seva Sangh' (Human Service Association), or 'Manav Mandal' and that he wished to take a month's leave to set up this association. But on 21 August 1954, at the age of 44, Mulkiram died before the achieving this dream. According to Ramsharan Vidyarthi, 'at Fatehpur [...] he expired suddenly after 17 days illness firstly with an attack of cholera from which he was saved but then suddenly was caught by Encephalitis popularly known as mysterious decease'.¹²⁰ Vidyarthi translated and quoted Mulkiram's words and ideas, 'Man is running ahead, and humanity is lagging behind', and 'All have equal right for...!' (a song).¹²¹ After Mulkiram's death, Paliwal remembered Mulkiram's participation in the national movement and the national service. He called Mulkiram a 'Mahatma Purush' (great man) and 'a real nation servant and administrator'.¹²²

¹¹⁵Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 35.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

¹¹⁷A stanza of his poem says, 'Dev bhoomi, avtar bhumi yah. Satya dharm aadhar bhoomi yah. Goonje yahan sada Ramayana. Gita ke mantra me darshan.' See Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, p. 57.

¹¹⁸Singh was a former MLA and a president of the UP Backward Caste, Harijan and Depressed Class Sangh. He worked to represent these castes in independent India. See Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 48, 133. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 9, 36.

¹¹⁹Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, pp. 129–130. Also, see above the footnote on Paliwal's career.

¹²⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 48–52, 170, 172. Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*, pp. 9–10.

¹²¹Ramsharan Vidyarthi was an advocate and editor of *The Light House* (English weekly) in Meerut. He was a college friend of Mulkiram and published Mulkiram's poems in his weekly newspaper. See Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 173–174. Unfortunately, I could not find Vidyarthi's English weekly during my research.

¹²²See the back cover of Mulkiram, *Hridayodgaar*.

Mulkiram, Ambedkar, and the Scheduled Caste Federation

Mangeram Chauhan, an income tax officer, was the only person who says that the ideas of 'Gautam Buddha and Ambedkar', along with those of Gandhi, Dayanand, and Nehru, could be seen in Mulkiram's views. He met Mulkiram many times to discuss Dalit upliftment, human awareness, and educational issues. In his note for *Smriti Granth*, Chauhan writes that Mulkiram was a philosopher and social reformer. According to Chauhan, once, when returning from Delhi, Mulkiram gave an inaugural speech at a Dalit meeting at Sikari village (Meerut) on Dalit upliftment, education, and their economic conditions. He suggested that political freedom alone was not enough and that social and economic freedoms are necessary for upliftment. Backwardness was a stigma on the Indian nation. Backward Class people (Dalits) would not be uplifted until they (Dalits) produced educated youngsters who were diligent and prepared to make sacrifices and take responsibility, and they had to uplift themselves. But upliftment is only a means (*sadhan*); rights and power are obtained, not demanded, as no one gives them away easily.¹²³ In his poem *Aaj Jeet Me Kyon Yah Har?*, Mulkiram questioned the government about growing inequality, discrimination, selfishness, unequal shares, and so on.¹²⁴

Mulkiram often promoted the education of young children. His poem *Nai Shakti Ho Sabke Swar Me* was written after independence. In it, Mulkiram promoted education to achieve power, rights, respect, and knowledge. Hence, he asked to open schools for men and women in the villages. Mulkiram considered learning as Gandhi's mantra.¹²⁵ Therefore, Chauhan writes, an Adarsh model institution for the promotion of education was set up in Delhi based on Mulkiram's ideas. In addition, Mulkiram emphasized rational thinking and rejected superstitions (*andhvishwas* and *adharm*) in religion. For example, he said, Dharma is that all humans accept it without any discrimination and promote love and social and religious tolerance. They must work for each other.¹²⁶

Mulkiram had some understanding of Buddhist ideas, but he was not a Buddhist in the religious sense, according to Bekal.¹²⁷ Shankaranand Shastri, a leader of the SCF in Lucknow¹²⁸ and a Dalit scholar of the Buddha Dharma, often discussed Buddhist literature with Mulkiram. In his note to the *Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth*, Shankaranand mentions a conversation between Mulkiram and Ambedkar during a short meeting on 18 February 1945.¹²⁹ It was held when Ambedkar was campaigning for the upcoming general election of 1946 and mobilizing Dalit intellectuals, leaders, and the masses to join his SCF. For instance, in the 1940s, as already

¹²³Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 188–189.

¹²⁴Mulkiram, *Hridyodgaar*, p. 52.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹²⁶Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 190. For his poems and verses on love, social service, relationships, and justice, see Mulkiram, *Hridyodgaar*, pp. 37, 41, 47–51.

¹²⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 199.

¹²⁸Shankaranand Shastri was the author of *Poona Pact aur Gandhi* (1946) and *My Memories and Experiences of Babasaheb Dr B. R. Ambedkar and His Contribution* (Ghaziabad, 1989). See Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', p. 585.

¹²⁹Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 199–201.

mentioned, big Congressi Harijans (like Karan Singh Kaen¹³⁰), Arya Samaji Jatavs (like Ramnarayan Yadvendu¹³¹ and Manik Chand¹³²), Dalit organizations' leaders (like

¹³⁰After graduating with a BA from Agra College in 1926, Karan Singh Kaen, a Jatav by caste, joined Congress and became a Jatav Congressi MLA in Agra in 1937. Later in the 1940s, he became an Ambedkar supporter and joined the SCF in 1944. He provided primary statistical materials to Ambedkar for his book *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. After independence, he was appointed a rehabilitation officer. In 1946 and 1962, he contested elections for the Legislative Assembly on the tickets of the SCF and Republic Party of India, but he did not win. See Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 235–236. After the election of 1937, Kaen 'became the Chair of the Provincial Depressed Class Education Committee'. See Duncan, 'Dalits and the Raj', p. 124.

¹³¹Yadvendu (1909–1951) was a Dalit lawyer from Agra University and a close associate of Manik Chand. He was an Arya Samaji who 'strictly observed all rules and rites of Arya Samaj' and fought against 'meat-eating, drinking, child marriage, etc'. Manik Chand and Yadvendu 'invited' Ambedkar to address a Dalit conference in Agra. Yadvendu 'was appointed as the Public officer in 1945 and second as a resettlement officer after the partition of India'. He wrote ten books in Hindi on socio-political issues and Jatav-Chamar history. See Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 374–375. While discussing Untouchability, Yadvendu praised Gandhi for his fast in Sep 1932, the *Achhutoddhar* movement, and the HSS. He also admired Swami Dayanand, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Madan Mohan Malviya for Dalit upliftment. However, he noted that until the early 1940s Congress was not a popular party among Dalits and there were few Dalit members in All India Congress committees. But he also noted an absence of the All-India Dalit Party, a strong Dalit leader, education, funding, progressive ideologies, and so on. Despite their political rights, zamindars and political parties exploited Dalits. See Ramnarayan Yadvendu, *Bharatiya Sanskriti Aur Nagrik Jivan* (New Delhi: Sasta Sahitya Mandal, 1942), pp. 166–168, 313–314. After independence, Yadvendu wrote a book *Gram Swarajya* in 1948. It is interesting to note that Paliwal wrote a preface for this book. Yadvendu praised the works of Gandhi and Nehru for zamindari abolition, swaraj, and village panchayat Raj. He called Gandhi the 'Rashtrapita' (father of the nation). He also mentioned that every person has social freedom with social and economic rights. To remove Untouchability and to ensure Dalit rights, he advised the government and gram (village) panchayats to organize a public feast, to build public wells, to reserve the seats in the village panchayats, to prevent begari and zamindars' exploitation, to employ sweepers, and to build their houses. Moreover, the gram panchayats should be freed from caste-communal feelings. Similarly, he advised the government and gram panchayats on improving the conditions of villages and villagers. See Ramnarayan Yadvendu, *Gram Swarajya* (Agra and Baroda: Popular Printing Press, 1948), pp. 4–7, 33–34, 37–38, 68–69, 71, 84, 91. For Yadvendu's writings on Jatav history, see Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 121–123, 126–127.

¹³²Dr Manik Chand (1897–1956) attended St John's College, Agra. Soon he became an Arya Samaji and a member of the Arya Mitra Sabha in 1914. He also started teaching in an Arya Samaj School for Untouchables. As an Ayurvedic doctor, he served the people during the plague in Agra in 1918 and was 'appointed as in charge of the epidemic preventive section in Municipal Hospital, Agra'. In 1937–1938, he formed the Jatav Veer Institute, school, library, hostel, and so on. He founded the UP SCF at a Dalit conference in the presence of Ambedkar. He led the SCF Satyagraha in Lucknow in 1946 and was imprisoned in Allahabad jail. He formed the Jatav Battalion during the Second World War. Due to his service and cooperation during the Second World War, the British government honoured him 'with the title Rao Saheb and membership of the UP War Committee'. After the 1952 election, he became the MP for Bharatpur. See Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 230–232. In 1917, he founded the Jatav Mahasabha. Later, during Ambedkar's visit in 1945, he established the Agra District SCF. See Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', p. 599. Duncan writes, 'In 1937, he [Manik Chand] was elected to the reserved seat of Agra District (Northeast) as the representative of the zamindar party, although this was certainly an allegiance of purely cynical convenience to secure their financial backing. The shadowy police spy Denys Pilditch reported that the landlords were busily recruiting Dalit candidates and financing their campaigns against Congress [in Oct 1936]. Manik Chand's campaign was certainly well funded; he spent nearly 10 times the amount of his unsuccessful Congress rival... After independence, he became the sole representative of N. G. Ranga's Peasant Party in the first Lok Sabha.' See Duncan, 'Dalits and the Raj', pp. 124, 127.

Gopi Chand Pipal¹³³), and Adi-Hindu Mahasabha's leaders¹³⁴ (like Chaudhari Shyamlal Dhobi,¹³⁵ Babu Ram Sahai,¹³⁶ Ramlal Sonkar, and Badluram Sonkar) joined Ambedkar's SCF. It is important to note that Ramlal and Badluram Sonkar were two Khatik leaders from Kanpur and led Khatiks in Kanpur and parts of the UP.¹³⁷ It shows that under their leadership, many UP Khatiks and Dalits had joined Ambedkar's movement for a strong national Dalit political party (SCF). For Lynch, the 1940s was a transitional period when Arya Samaji Jatavs of Agra abandoned the Arya Samaj and Kshatriya assertion and joined Ambedkar.¹³⁸ Historian Ramnarayan Rawat writes that after the Cabinet Mission award, there was a 'shift within the [Urban] Dalit intelligentsia toward a new Dalit agenda' to emphasise their achhut identity', to demand 'the proportional representation in the Constituent Assembly', to secure Dalit political rights, and to reject the 'political fraud' that was the Poona Pact (structuring 'double-member seats' and 'two votes' in the election).¹³⁹ In this historic moment, Mulkiram could also have been a good, strong Dalit candidate for Ambedkar and his new SCF leaders in the western UP

¹³³Pipal (1901–1989) was a shoe-making businessman, a member of the Jatav Mahasabha (1918), and the General Secretary of Agra District SCF (1942). He was one of the leaders of SCF Satyagraha in Agra in 1946 and was imprisoned for three months for the same. See Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 295–296. Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', p. 610.

¹³⁴'The UP Adi-Hindu Depressed classes association, [...] already a registered body has converted itself into the Scheduled Castes Federation UP since May 16, 1943.' See File No. 50/1942, Box No. 3, List No. 76, Harijan Sahayak Department, UPSA.

¹³⁵Chaudhari Shyamlal Dhobi started as a laundry worker to earn a livelihood after his father's death. In 1921, he became the secretary of the Dhobi Samaj and organized an All-India Dhobi Conference at Allahabad. By 1924, he had joined Swami Achhutanand and his Adi-Hindu Mahasabha. He was appointed as a member of the executive body of the All India-SCF. In 1945, he contested the election on the SCF ticket in Allahabad (R). In 1952, he was elected MLA in UP. See Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 372–374. After the assimilation of the Adi Hindu Mahasabha into the SCF in May 1943, he joined the SCF. In the early 1940s, the UP SCF was divided into two groups. Hari Prasad Tamta and Ram Sahai led one, and Shyamlal Dhobi led another one. See File No. 50/1942, Box No. 3, List No. 76, Harijan Sahayak Department, UPSA.

¹³⁶Babu Ram Sahai was a Pasi by caste and a leader of the UP Adi-Hindu Mahasabha. He became involved in Ambedkar's movement from the 1930s. See The Government of India, *Indian Franchise Committee*, Vol. 2 (Memoranda) (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1932), pp. 331, 432–444. B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (hereafter BAWs), (eds) Vasant Moon et al. (New Delhi: Dr Ambedkar Foundation, 2020), Vol. 17 (3), pp. 267–268, Vol. 05, pp. 239–240.

¹³⁷Ramlal Sonkar was a Khatik by caste from Kanpur and the president of Kanpur SCF in the 1940s. He was a prominent member of the Second Conference of the All India SCF in Kanpur in Jan 1944. See *Vartman*, 16 Oct, 22 Nov 1943. Kumar, 'Locating Dalit Bastis', pp. 132–133. *Jai Bhim Jai Samaj* (a Hindi weekly), Kanpur, 15 Feb 2015. Badluram Sonkar was a Khatik by caste from Kanpur and a prominent SCF leader in the 1940s. In April 1947, he was appointed 'the 2nd dictator' of the Dalit Satyagraha in Lucknow under the SCF banner against the Poona Pact, the Cabinet Mission Award, and the Congress. See Ambedkar, BAWs, Vol. 17 (2), pp. 515, 517, 519.

¹³⁸Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, pp. 86–89, 137–138.

¹³⁹Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', pp. 585–612, 598, 610. Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 230–232, 235–236, 372–374. Lee, *Deceptive Majority*, pp. 124–134. According to Rawat, 'Following the Poona Pact, twenty reserved seats were converted into double-member seats. Under this revised double-member system, each voter was allowed to cast two votes, and the candidate—either [an] achhut or a general (caste Hindu)—with the largest number of votes would be elected to fill the general seat.' Moreover, 'Since the electoral franchise was defined on the basis of property and education, the influence of caste Hindus was even more pronounced in the outcome' of the election. See Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', pp. 606–607.

for the upcoming general election. He could also have helped Ambedkar with the mass mobilization of Khatiks and Dalits in the western UP.

On 18 February 1945, Ambedkar was invited to visit Agra, says Shankaranand Shastri. At that time, he was the executive counsellor for the central government of the colonial state. Chaudhari Mulkiram, Ramnarayan Yadvendu, and Dr Manik Chand Jatav 'Veer' were in a welcome programme committee for Ambedkar. At Agra station, when Ambedkar arrived, lakhs of his followers welcomed him. His saloon was at the Agra cantonment. He marched with a long procession (*jalase-julus*) of his followers. In the evening, he was reading in a saloon room with Shankaranand Shastri when a policeman informed him that some people from Agra (like Hardev Mistri, Chaudhari Mulkiram, Ramnarayan Yadvendu, Manik Chand Jatav, and Pandit Vishwambhar) wished to meet him. Yadvendu introduced Chaudhari Mulkiram to Ambedkar as a government officer who was always ready to work for Achhut upliftment.¹⁴⁰

According to Shankaranand, the two had a conversation. Mulkiram told Ambedkar that he was delighted to take a darshan of a great guide of Dalits, and further that in September 1932, the memory of Mahatma Gandhi's epic fast often scared him. Although the Poona Pact had been implemented, the issue of Dalit upliftment was still a problem. Ambedkar replied that he had left behind the rights given by the British government to save Gandhi's life and signed the Poona Pact. All Hindu leaders assured him that they would weed out Untouchability within the next ten years and give opportunities to Dalits for upliftment in all sectors. On the other hand, the British government was disappointed due to his cooperation with Gandhi. But he believed that he would succeed in the struggle for Dalit rights and upliftment.¹⁴¹

When Mulkiram asked how Untouchability could be removed, Ambedkar replied there was only one solution. Everyone would have to accept a religion that was casteless and whose base was freedom, brotherhood, equality, and justice. After that, Mulkiram asked what Ambedkar thought about the Arya Samaj. Ambedkar answered that while it was born to reform the Hindu religion, its doctrines revealed that it aimed to defend Brahmanism only. Mulkiram further asked how, then, would Dalits' social status be improved as without religion, a human could not survive. Ambedkar replied that religious conversion would lead to their improvement: 'I (Ambedkar) believe that Buddhism is better than other religions. It does not have casteism. It is a religion of our ancestors. I will convert with my people one day. Before the religious conversion, you all must discuss your views with me (Ambedkar).' Later while leaving, Mulkiram said, 'Baba Sahab! your name should be *Ummidkar* (hope or a man of hopes) instead of Ambedkar because you are our hopes' *punj* (agglomeration/hoard).'¹⁴²

Moreover, Shankaranand Shastri writes, when Mulkiram became the Harijan welfare officer in Lucknow in 1952 he worked hard to provide scholarships to Dalit students. His idea of Dalit welfare (*Bahujan Hitay and Bahujan Sukhay*) supported the founders of many institutions for Achhuts, orphans, the disabled, women, and so on. In those days, Shastri often met Mulkiram to discuss national issues.¹⁴³ When

¹⁴⁰Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 199–201.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 199–201.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 201.

Ambedkar came to Lucknow in 1952, Mulikram met him for the second time. They discussed the issues of caste discrimination, religion, Gita, and Buddhist literature. Shastri writes that after reading Buddhist literature, Mulikram started respecting Mahatma Buddha.¹⁴⁴ But, as Bekal said, Mulikram never became a Buddhist, although in 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism with his followers. Similarly, in Agra, thousands of Jatavs and other Ambedkarist Dalits converted to Buddhism.¹⁴⁵

After Mulikram's death, a condolence meeting was held in Agra on 25 August 1954 under the presidentship of Manik Chand Jatav, a member of parliament from Bharatpur (a reserved seat) and a member of N. G. Ranga's Krishikar Lok Party.¹⁴⁶ In his speech, Manik Chand said that Mulikram never forgot the poor and Achhuts and that he was an excellent example for officers to follow. Shankaranand Shastri, in his speech, said that Mulikram was an institution in himself. He was a humanist, a scholar, an honest and respected officer, and a disciplined and religious man who wished to establish a casteless society. He believed that until all Achhut castes did not feel castelessness, they would not organize themselves against exploitation and tyranny. He had a strong belief that a man could not only work on the path of God bhajan (religious song) and chanting; rather, he must work for *Bahujans* (Dalits) and support them through their good and bad times. In addition, as a judge, Mulikram worked for reform in criminals' lives who, he believed, were the slaves of their bad situations. According to Gopi Chand Pipal, president of UP District SCF, 1949, and a member of the Republic Party of India,¹⁴⁷ Mulikram often visited Achhut localities to understand the problems the people were facing and to discuss social harmony. In his speech, Ratan Kumar, a Dalit activist, said that once he had asked Mulikram to help poor students. Mulikram provided them with books and took responsibility for helping them in the future. Another Dalit activist, Dorilal, said that Mulikram had saved him from torture and oppression by 'goons'. The Achhut Samaj had lost a well-wisher.¹⁴⁸

Shankaranand Shastri, an Ambedkarist and critic of the Poona Pact, shows the character of Mulikram through an Ambedkarist lens in the social and political context of western UP in the 1940s–1950s. However, none of Mulikram's poems mentions his views on the Poona Pact, the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha, the SCF, or Ambedkar. Mulikram neither worked under the leadership of Ambedkar nor did he appear in the Khatik movement for SC identity in the early 1950s. Indeed, his long career, ideas, and high socio-political status as a humanist Hindu, Arya Samaji, and Gandhi *bhakt* prevented him from joining Ambedkar's movement at this historic junction. Perhaps he considered Gandhi and Congress better than Ambedkar and his SCF for Khatiks and Dalits. Additionally, the Hindi-Hindu newspapers and Congress mouthpieces (like *Sainik of Paliwal*) portrayed Ambedkar and Ambedkarists as traitors, separatists, anti-nationals, anti-Gandhi, and anti-Hindus.¹⁴⁹ These newspapers often brought pressure to bear on

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁴⁵Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁶Rawat, 'Making Claims for Power', p. 599.

¹⁴⁷Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement*, pp. 295–296.

¹⁴⁸Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 202–205.

¹⁴⁹*Pratap*, 11 Dec 1932. Ambedkar's declaration for religious conversion for Dalits and his appeal to abandon the Hindu religion, festivals, rituals, gods, and so on in 1936 brought about a social and political crisis and anxiety for Hindi-Hindu nationalists and reformists, including Arya Samajis, Congressmen, and

young Dalits to prevent them from mobilizing for Ambedkar's movement. For instance, in an article on 9 June 1936, *Sainik* compared Indian youth with Russian youth, criticizing the former, mainly young men, and calling them cowards (*kayar*), impotent (*namard*), afraid (*darpok*), caste-community followers (*biradari bhakt*), and so on. For example, the article criticized a Kayasth civil servant who had forgotten about his parents, society, and nation, and was also a corrupt civil servant. A Kshatriya advocate was called a glorified leader of his caste. A third man was criticized for often changing his party and ideology, from being apolitical to a zamindari party man to a Gandhian to a communist. To *Sainik*, such people and students were career-oriented and worked against Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress, and often campaigned for votes in the college election using their caste-community names. Therefore, the article also criticized the 'Biradari bhakti'.¹⁵⁰ When the article was published, the Congress party was campaigning for the general election of 1937. Interestingly, as a Brahman, Paliwal himself promoted the Hindu community and Hindu nationalism, and worked with Arya Samajis to mobilize Hindus.¹⁵¹ Hence, it is clear why Mulkiram did not join Ambedkar's movement and his (Khatik) caste movement, even though he worked for Dalit welfare. Caste-communal and local politics prevented the mass mobilization of Khatiks for a national-level Dalit political party in the western UP.

Conclusion

Caste-communal and local politics had a primary role in the western UP, therefore all socio-political agencies of zamindars, peasants, Jats, Arya Samajis, caste Hindus, Congressmen, Gandhians, and Ambedkarists needed educated rural Dalits and Dalit Chaudhari on their side. Mulkiram had all these qualities and was a higher civil servant as well and so he was a good candidate for the election. The Arya Samaj, HSS, and Congress successfully used Mulkiram against Ambedkar's movement, even though he did not contest the election.

It is interesting to note that Vidhya Sonkar writes that her father, Mulkiram, was not devoted to any caste, class, or person. His behaviour was the same to all. He had respect for scholars, litterateurs, Dharma Acharyas, and Sadhu-Sanyasis alike.¹⁵² Similarly, a Hindi poet Shivshankar Mishra writes that Mulkiram was a saint who had neither religion nor caste: he was neither an Arya Samaji, Sanatani, Vaishnav (Vaishnavite), nor a Shaiva (Shaivite). He was not completely a devoted follower of any of these traditions, but equally he did not criticize any of them.¹⁵³ Once, when someone asked Mulkiram about politics in a social meeting, he replied that politics

Gandhians in UP. Therefore, in an article headed 'Dharma ka Nilam', Paliwal's *Sainik* defamed Ambedkar and his movement and reported that it was pushing conversion for monetary reasons. It maintained that Ambedkar was selling the Harijans' religion in the bazaar and that he was a puppet of the imperial government who wanted to upgrade his position in the government service. The *Sainik* appealed to the Harijans not to abandon the Hindu religion or join Ambedkar's movement. Instead, it appealed to Harijans to work for the national interest. It represented M. C. Rajah as the only national representative of Harijans and glorified Gandhi as a mahatma for Harijans. See *Sainik*, 9 June and 11, 18 Aug 1936.

¹⁵⁰*Sainik*, 9 June 1936.

¹⁵¹Gould, *Hindu Nationalism*, pp. 62, 70, 163, 180–181.

¹⁵²Bekal, *Chaudhari*, p. 96.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 137–140.

was not his subject.¹⁵⁴ Although Mulkiram represented himself as apolitical, he was an active member of the Arya Samaj, a socio-religious Hindu agency that was involved in political activities. He associated with prominent local Congressmen like Paliwal and Pant. His ideas connected with Gandhian philosophy. As an Arya Samaji, a Gandhi *bhakt*, a *Jan Neta*, a social activist, and a Harijan welfare officer, Mulkiram worked for the nation, Harijan issues, and *Janoddhar*. His poems and verses, describing social, political, and religious conditions, help us to understand his intellectual depth. Thus, a Khatik writer, Mamchand Rivariya, says that Mulkiram was often transferred from one place to another due to his ideas.¹⁵⁵

It is important to note that, along with his Dalit identity, Mulkiram's idea of *Janoddhar* and *Manav Seva* (human service) argued for a casteless society, upliftment, and social services for Dalits, non-Dalits, the poor, peasants, labourers, workers, men, women, and so on. Therefore, Dalit leaders found a sense of belonging with Mulkiram. Moreover, Dalit exploitation, Dalit upliftment, and Dalits' civil-human rights were some shared spaces where Gandhian Harijans and Ambedkarist Dalits often met. Also, many SCF leaders were ex-Arya Samajis and ex-Congressmen who had good relations with Mulkiram. With their help, Mulkiram worked for Dalit welfare. However, none of Mulkiram's poems and verses supported Ambedkar's ideas of religious conversion, abandonment of the Hindu religion, annihilation of caste, and separate representation. These were spaces where Gandhian Harijans and Ambedkarist Dalits did not meet. Therefore, in this respect Mulkiram differed from Ambedkar and his movement.

As a member of the Khatik caste of the western UP, Mulkiram worked for Khatiks, mainly for Dhangar Khatiks. He provided them with education, scholarships, shelter, and so on. After his death, a Chaudhari Mulkiram Smarak (Memorial) Library and Reading Room were built at Mohallah Dhangar Samaj.¹⁵⁶ His sub-caste members Sandal Singh, Gendaram Arya, Moolraj Arya, Ram Prasad, and Natthu Singh formed a Dhangar Navyuvak Sabha (Dhangar Young Men's Association) in Saharanpur that reflected Mulkiram's principles.¹⁵⁷ As mentioned above, Dhangar Khatiks claimed to be Dhangar Rajputs. Mulkiram's son-in-law Ramdas Sonkar writes that Sandal Singh Sandal, the secretary of Dhangar Navyuvak Sabha, did not like to be called a Khatik.¹⁵⁸ However, the *Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth* and *Hridayodgaar* confirmed that there was no link between Mulkiram and the Rajput-Kshatriya claim of his sub-caste members nor did they mention Mulkiram's stand against it. But it is understandable that the Rajputizing Khatiks of the western UP were an obstacle to Khatik mass mobilization for Ambedkar's movement. As a Dalit intellectual, Mulkiram's support for Ambedkar could have empowered Khatik and Dalit mobilization in the western UP.

Similarly, in early 1950s, under the influence of Hindi-Hindu agencies, the Rajputizing Khatiks of the western UP had succeeded in removing the Khatik caste from the SC list. Therefore, between 1950 and 1955, Khatiks of different ideologies—Ambedkarist, Gandhian, Socialist, and Invisible Khatiks—started a

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁵⁵Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj ke Ratan*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 21. Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 192–194.

¹⁵⁷Bekal, *Chaudhari*, pp. 87–90, 234–235.

¹⁵⁸Ramdas Sonkar (ed.), *Bharat Ki Vyadh Jatiyan: Khatik, Pasi, Bhar, Dhangar, Aarkh, Aadi* (Lucknow: Prakashan Kendra, 2007), pp. 144–145.

movement to reinclude the Khatik caste in the UP SC list and also campaigned for their civil and human rights. In their speeches and written accounts, they informed the UP Congress Government about the socially, economically, educationally, and politically backward conditions of Khatiks.¹⁵⁹ Ramdas Sonkar, who later became the first Dalit Indian Administrative Service officer in UP, participated in this movement in the 1950s. The Khatik writer Rivariya claims that Mulkiram was a member of the Khatik movement against the Rajputizing Khatiks. But Rajnath Sonkar Shastri, another Khatik writer, does not mention Mulkiram's participation in the Khatik movement.¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, the *Chaudhari Mulkiram Smriti Granth* and *Hridayodgaar* do not confirm any link between Mulkiram and this important movement of his caste. Therefore, we can tentatively state that as a Gandhian Harijan, Mulkiram's open support for this caste movement could have given a voice and leadership to the long Khatik struggle for civil and human rights.

Despite some limitations, the *Smriti Granth* and *Hridayodgaar* appear to be good sources of history writing about Dalits. As Mulkiram's speeches are untraceable, these sources have become more important in understanding his ideas and beliefs. They help us to see the many hidden connections and links of Dalit history with first-hand statements of historical actors from different fields.

Competing interests. None.

¹⁵⁹Digital File No. 74/1/54, Home Dept, Public Branch, 1954, Identifier PR_000005002766, NAI.

¹⁶⁰Rivariya claims that Mulkiram participated in the Khatik movement, but he does not give details of his role. See Mamchand Rivariya, *Khatik Samaj Ki Utapti aur Itihas: 1857 se lekar 2006*, 2nd edn (Delhi: Rivariya Sahitya Prakashan, 2000, 2006), pp. 54–56. Shastri, *Khatik Jaati ki Utptatti*, p. 219. For relations between Rajputizing Khatiks and Hindi-Hindu agencies, see Kumar, 'The Etymological Origin of Caste', pp. 92–97. For the socio-economic and political conditions of Khatiks, see Singh, 'Khatiks of Uttar Pradesh'.

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