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Sant Ravidas

India is a land of saints. From time to time, this land has been blessed with personalities who swayed and enlightened the masses with their teachings and prevented them from deviating from their path of sanctity. Among such saints, Sant Ravidas is one such personality. Ravidas belonged to the bhakti tradition of medieval India, which sprang up as an answer to Sufiism.

Sant Ravidas was born in the holy city of Varanasi. His date of birth is a matter of debate. Some scholars believe that he was born in 1377 and died in 1528. His father's name was Santokh Dass ji, and his mother's name was Kalsa. He belonged to the cobbler caste, mainly involved in leather work—chamars among those castes considered untouchables. Sant Ravidas was married to Lona devi at the mere age of twelve. Sant Ravidas completed his early education under the guidance of pandit sharadanand. Pt. Sharadanand used to consider Ravidas as a divine personality.



Sant Ravidas arose on the social horizons of India when India was going through repeated invasions from Islamic rulers. They constantly targeted the Hindu religion. It was a much-needed task to unite this religion's followers under one umbrella. To take the first step, he opposed the restrictions put on Dalits and untouchables by the upper caste. He was in favour of their entry into the temple. He believed that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity. He was strictly against caste-based discrimination. He used to say that it's the work or karma of that person who decides his Varna, not his caste.

Begampura is the city pioneered by San Ravidas as it is a city without any sorrow and full of peace and humanity. Begampura city idealized him while writing his poem. He described a town with no suffering, pain, or fear and a land where all

people are equal without discrimination, poverty, and caste humiliation. A place where nobody pays any tax, no one is worried, no terror or torture.

Sant Guru Ravidas is considered a spiritual Guru of Meera Bai, the queen of Chittoor, and the daughter of one of the famous kings in Rajasthan named Rao Dudaji. She was very impressed by the teachings of Guru Ravidas and became a great follower of him. Meera Bai has written some lines in respect of his Guru.

गुरु मिलीया रविदास जी दीनी ज्ञान की गुटकी।

चोट लगी निजनाम हरी की महारे हिवरे खटकी।।

Meerabai says, I am (Meerabai) blessed to find a guru like Ravidas ji who is showering his wisdom on me. My people did not accept my devotion to Sant Ravidas. Day by day, she was attracted to meditation, and she started living with saints. After the death of her husband, her brother-in-law and in-laws came to see her, but she did not become anxious and soft in front of them.

Medieval-era texts, such as the *Bhaktamal*, suggest that Guru Ravidas was the disciple of the *bhakt poet* Ramananda. He is traditionally considered Kabir's younger contemporary. However, the medieval text titled *Ratnavali* says Guru Ravidas gained his spiritual knowledge from Ramananda and was a follower of the Ramananda Sampradaya tradition.

His ideas and fame grew over his lifetime, and texts suggest Brahmins (members of the priestly upper caste) used to bow before him. He travelled extensively, visiting Hindu pilgrimage sites in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and the Himalayas. He abandoned *saguna* (with attributes, image) forms of supreme beings and focussed on the *nirguna* (without attributes, abstract) form of supreme beings. As his poetic hymns in regional languages inspired others, people from various backgrounds sought his teachings and guidance.

The aura of Sant Ravidas's personality is so vast that it cannot be summed up in a few lines. Most scholars believe that Guru Ravidas met Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh sampradaya. He is revered in the Sikh scripture, and 41 Guru Ravidas' poems are included in the Adi Granthi. These poems are one of the oldest attested sources of his ideas and literary works. Another substantial source of legends and stories about the life of Ravidas is the hagiography in the Sikh tradition, named *Premambodha*. This text, composed over 170 years after

Guru Ravidas' death in 1693, includes him as one of the seventeen saints of Indian religious tradition. The 17th-century Nabhadas's bhakta mal and the *Parvais* of Anantadas contain chapters on Guru Ravidas. Other than these, the scriptures and texts of Sikh tradition and the Hindu Dadupanthi traditions, most other written sources about the life of Ravidas, including by the Ravidasi (followers of Guru Ravidas), were composed in the early 20th century, or about 400 years after his death.

Reference

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