

SAINT RAVIDAS

Guru Ravidas is hailed as the liberator of the common people, representing the voice of revolt of the suppressed and non-privileged humanity. He was a cobbler, one among the untouchables. The family occupation was making leather items like bridles for the horses of the rich and the aristocrats. He was born in the village Mandoor- Garh, on the outskirts of Kashi (Banaras), the citadel of orthodoxy and obscurantism sometime between 1376 and 1377 AD. He was born on a Sunday (Ravivar) and hence his name Ravidas. He is also called Raidas. At that time, untouchability was practised with full rigour. When Ravidas began to worship God (Shaligram), the Pandits of Kashi rose in opposition. However, in the face of adverse circumstances, Ravidas, by dint of piety, virtue, spiritual attainments, exemplary conduct and character and force of personality, rose not only to be a great religious guru of the people, but also came to have among his disciples poetess Mirabai and other notable men and women. Rani Jhali took, 'deeksha' from him. To this day, a temple and a monument for Ravidas stand in the courtyard of Prayag Kumbh Mandir in the palace of Chittoor.

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Caparisoned elephants, uniformed soldiers, members of the royal family, expensive presents and variety of fruits - all went in an impressive procession to Banaras from Chittoor. They were sent by Queen Jhali of Chittoor. They were to meet not a King or an emperor; nor a potentate or a prince, but a pauper who was the saint of saints, the very embodiment of virtue and piety. The procession wended its way to a small hut and stopped at its door. They went there to honour and revere the saint there. This small hut was the sacred abode of the godly Ravidas, the saint who preached and practised for over hundred years to reform society, to eradicate caste distinctions, ignorance and prejudices. This

was in the later half of the fourteenth and the early part of the fifteenth centuries in north India.

This was a period of darkness, foreign oppression, humiliation and devastation for India. There was a succession of invaders, the Ghaznis, Ghoris, Slave dynasty and the Khiljis. Local culture, religion and practices were sought to be destroyed. The native citizens had no sense of security and their morale was very low. During this period of gloom, there appeared on the national scene Swami Ramanand and his disciples like Ravidas and Kabir, Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. They revived and revamped the spirits of the people, by their teachings, exhortations and struggles.

Ravidas's central teaching was that he who worships God becomes a man of God. High and low castes are meaningless and absurd. He brought self-respect and prestige to the humblest, lowliest and the lost - the untouchables and the weak. All are equal and there is only universal man enjoying the fruits of equality, fraternity and spiritual attainments.

He waged a relentless war on caste and casteism. He suffered but did not give up. Till his last days, Ravidas spread the message of equality of men and women and castigated the evils of untouchability. He strove for the uplift of the depressed classes and the backward sections of society through his sermons and preachings.

Ravidas's greatness lies in the fact that he was found worthy enough to have forty of his verses, included in **Guru Granth Sahib**, the sacred book of the Sikhs.

Even today, after a lapse of about 600 years, saint Ravidas is revered and worshipped, not only by his followers but also by people at large and occupies a prominent place in the religious hierarchy.

Guru Ravidas, his ideology and teachings have greater relevance today than ever before. Saint Ravidas's war on caste should be our inspiration. Ravidas was a great unifier. He stood for universal brotherhood.

Today money-power and muscle-power have the upper hand. Ravidas showed utter disregard for money. It is said that Ravidas knew the alchemy given to him by a devotee of his which could change any

metal into gold. Ravidas said that his alchemy was, 'Ram Nam' and the goodness of man high or low. He never touched it and it was returned to the devotee.

Whatever his disciples and devotees contributed, he spent on sadhus and temples, for the poor and the starving. He lived and died for mankind and it was his mission and it was his mission to make society free from casteism, orthodoxy and ignorance through godliness and passive assertions and preachings.

No wonder even today, Ravidas shines and is adored and worshiped by millions in the country even after over six centuries.

EXERCISES

A. Let's Answer

1. Describe in your words the procession to Banaras from Chitoor.
2. Why did the pandits of Kashi oppose Ravidas?
3. How did Ravidas become a great religious Guru? Who were his disciples?
4. What was the teaching of saint Ravidas about untouchables? Was he satisfied by their condition?
5. Mention the incident from the text which proves that Ravidas did not prefer money?
6. Describe the contributions of Saint Ravidas to the society.

B. Let's Discuss

- a. Sincerity and commitment have their own rewards.
- b. Untouchability is a social curse.

C. Let's Do

- a. Do a project work on the social condition in the medieval age.