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Sri Ravidas



Guru Ravidass (also Raidas, Rohidas and Ruhidas in eastern India) was a North Indian Sant mystic of the bhakti movement who was active in the 15th century. Venerated in the region of Uttar Pradesh as well as the Indian state of Maharashtra, his devotional songs and verses made a lasting impact upon the bhakti movement. He is often given the honorific Bhagat or Sant. He was a socio-religious reformer, a thinker, a theosophist, a humanist, a poet, a traveler, a pacifist and a spiritual figure before whom even head-priests of Benaras lay prostrate to pay homage.

He was a shoemaker of the KutbandhlaChamar caste. His devotional songs were included in the Sikh holy book, the AdiGranth, by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. There is also a larger body of hymns passed on independently that is claimed and attributed to Ravidas by some. Ravidas was subversive in that his devotion implied a leveling of the social divisions of caste and gender, yet ecumenical in that it tended to promote crossing of sectarian divides in the name of a higher spiritual unity. He taught that one is distinguished not by one's caste (j'ti) but by one's actions (karma) and that every person has the right to worship God and read holy texts. He opened a frontal attack against the system of untouchability. He rejected the tradition of Brahmin mediator to reach the Supreme Being. He also said that one need not hide his caste or leave his low profession to reach God. He became a model for his fellow beings to overcome the hierarchical barriers of Brahminical social order and to establish Begumpura - a state without fear and sorrows. Guru Ravidass elevated the status of the labour by emphasizing on the fact that honest labour is empowering.

According to history he was born in a village named Seer Govardhanpur, near Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, India. His father Baba Santokh Das was a Chamar leather merchant and Mata Kalsa Devi was his mother. His father married Ravidass to Mata Lona Devi at early age and according to the RavidasPurana he had a son named Vijaydas. A region between Allahabad and Benares is named after him.

It is said that the conservative Brahmins of Kashi could not stand the popularity of this "untouchable saint". A complaint was made to the king that he was working against age-old norms of social order (varnashrama dharma) - a cobbler was not supposed to talk of God or do work of advising or teaching. The ruler arranged for an assembly of learned men. Ravidas was also invited and was felicitated publicly. A procession was arranged (shobhayatra) and the king himself participated.

BegumpuraShehr

Begumpura ("land without sorrow") is a term coined in a poem by Guru Ravidass. Begumpura is the name of an idealized city where there is no suffering or fear, and all are equal. The verse is seen as reflecting both a sense of poverty and caste humiliation, and a desire to find a utopia without suffering:

The regal realm with the sorrowless name
 they call it Begumpura, a place with no pain,
 no taxes or cares, none owns property there,
 no wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture.
 Oh my brother, I've come to take it as my own,
 my distant home, where everything is right...
 They do this or that, they walk where they wish,
 they stroll through fabled palaces unchallenged.
 Oh, says Ravidas, a tanner now set free,
 those who walk beside me are my friends.

Guru Ravidass and MeeraBai

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MeeraBai considered Guru Ravidass as her spiritual Guru. MeeraBai was a queen of Chittor and a daughter of the king of Rajasthan and she used to follow the teachings of Guru Ravidass which teaches about that one's fate of the future lies on his karmas (doings) rather than on his caste or creed's. There is a small chhatri (umbrella) in front of Meera's temple in Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. It has guru Ravidass' engraved foot print also. As a respect to her guru, MeeraBai once wrote:

"Guru MilyaaRaidasji .."
Guru Ravidass and Kabir

Kabir and Guru Ravidass are Disciples of same guru Ramananda. Guru Ravidass is also associated with other North Indian saints. And one among them is Sant Kabir. Both of them sung poems relating to elimination of caste and in a great story where a great debate between them is represented as a saguna versus nirguna (without any Good and Bad qualities) devotion debate. The Dohas and Bhakti songs written by Guru Ravidass have always taught to spread love and care among the people's hearts. Also tried to bring the Hindus and Muslims together and this is evident from his thoughts which have been expressed in his songs. Guru Ravidass uttered his belief saying that:

"Ka Mathura, KaDwarika, KaKashiHaridwar, RaidasKhojaDilAapna, TehMiliyaDildar", That is one can meet God in his own heart even if he does not go on any pilgrimage.

Guru Nanak Dev fulfilled Guru Ravidass's request by accepting a collection of Guru Ravidass' verses and poems. The earliest collection of these poems is available in the Sikh scriptures, Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy book). It was compiled by ArjanDev, the fifth guru of the Sikhs. It contains 41 verses by Guru Ravidass.

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