

BHAKTA RAVI DAS AND HIS STRUGGLE WITH MANUVAD

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Manuvad, a dehumanized and dehumanizing philosophy was introduced into India after the arrival of Aryans. Broadly speaking, Brahmins, after declaring themselves elite and elects, divided the rest of the population into categories. It was a political exercise of hierarchy construction, pigeon-holing and stigmatizing. The concept of individual differences by caste was introduced by the experts of "Indian philosophy". So, if you are born Chamar, because of your previous life *karmas*, you are bound to be defective, disabled, retarded, impaired and disadvantaged. To put it bluntly, under Manuvad, Indian Society "started suffering from a reactionary disease caused by the hardening of the categories".

By generating various caste labels, the Manuvadists were successful in defining standards and attaching labels. Once labelled, the individual got stigmatized and the significant others either acquired a distance from him or put him/her in a "surplus population" pool to be used for menial jobs.

Stigma has some serious psychological implications on the mental health of the person. His behaviour may become "pain avoidance behaviour" guarded, remote, defensive or resentful. He may become demanding, indignant, confrontative or rebellious. He may start challenging the status quo. In Ravi Das's writings, we find all of the above.

Ravi Das was born on *Ravivar* (Sunday) into a family whose members were declared untouchable by the Manuvad philosophy of India. Though exact date of his birth cannot be confirmed, it can safely be said that he was born in a cobbler caste in Varanasi around 1414 A.D.

It must be pointed out that the other contemporary *Bhaktas*, such as Ramananda, Kabir, Dhanna, were born in the same period. Guru Nanak Dev, as we all know, lived from 1469-1539 A.D. Some significant writings of Bhakta Ravi Das in Guru Granth Sahib are :

"Low is my caste, Low my birth

But Ravi Das, the cobbler, seeks Thy refuge O Ram, the King of Kings.
I know not how to cobble the shoes but people come to get their footwear mended by me. I have neither the awl to thread the shoes, nor the scraper to scrape. The people have wasted their lives mending others' cuts."
(p. 659)

"Everybody laughs at my poverty for such is my state, and now, the eighteen *Siddhis* are under my sway: Such is Thy mercy O God." (p. 858)

"The epics *and puranas* and *shastras* are but mere words." (p. 1106)

"O, Fellow men, I am reported to belong to the caste of cobblers.

But within my heart, I cherish the virtue of God.

The *tar* tree is considered impure, but when it is turned into paper and on

it is written phrases of God, men bow down and pay respect to it. The men of my caste still cart the dead animals to the outskirts of Banaras.

But, I am being bowed to even by the Brahmins, for I have sought the refuge of the Lord's Name." (p. 1293)

"Thou are the fragrant of *Chandan*. I am but a mere castor tree (*lind*) but I live close to Thee. From worthless tree, I have become worthy of Thee, for Thy fragrance now saturates every bone of me." (p. 486)

Guru Ram Das about Ravi Das in Guru Granth Sahib : "Ravi Das, the cobbler, praised his Lord for a brief time and from a low caste wretch was purified and all the four castes fell at his feet." (p. 733)

Guru Arjun Dev about Ravi Das in Guru Granth Sahib : "Ravi Das, the cobbler, who carted dead animals abandoned the love of *Maya* and he became renowned through the companionship of saints and saw the vision of the Lord." (p. 487)

Psychologically speaking, it can be asserted that:

- A. At the time of Ravi Das, the Manuvad philosophy was clearly entrenched in India,
- B. Ravi Das was painfully aware of the stigma which he carried all his life, because he was born in a cobbler caste,
- C. Ravi Das was convinced that his liberalisation has taken place because he has evolved to a higher state of cosmic consciousness.
- D. Guru Arjun Dev and Bhai Gurdas included Ravi Das's *shabads* in Guru Granth Sahib, because they were congruent with the various themes running in the holy scripture of the Sikhs.

Ravi Das's anger is a subjective state. He is consumed by it, but uses it to purify himself. Through his de-automatization stages, he changes the negative emotions into spiritual evolution. His anger gets directed towards narcissistic, arrogant, vindictive power-oriented, closed-minded Manuvadis, and eventually he starts taking pride in his "psychic spiritual condition", which make saints like Mira Bai and others seek his refuge.

He reminds Brahmins of their hatred towards humanity and the "straight jacketing 'should' philosophy". He reminds them of the neurosis which their caste ridden mind creates and allows them to underrate others. It is the opinion of the present authors that Guru Nanak Dev *ji*, during his intensive travels in India, gained access to Ravi Das's *shabads*. It goes to the creative imagination of Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun Dev to make sure to include Ravi Das's *shabads* in Guru Granth Sahib, to show to the Manuvadis the uniqueness and holistic nature of *Guru Granth Sahib* as *Dhur ki Bani*, challenging the status quo and demeaning, linear, myopic, convergent and self-serving "cancer" like the Manuvad philosophy.