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RAVIDAS COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN THE  
WEST MIDLANDS AND NORTHERN INDIA

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West Midlands and Northern India

Summary

This present work traces the life and influence of one man in 15th Century India. His name was Ravidas. The dissertation examines his teachings and shows how his influence in Northern India created a group of followers. They remained within the Hindu caste-system but attained a separate identity.

A further goal of the research was to examine in the context of contemporary Northern India some of the problems which beset the followers of Ravidas. The community was surveyed also in its 20th Century setting in a Western culture (in West Midlands) making reference to its problems. The dissertation makes brief mention of some of the mechanisms that exist within the Ravidas community for finding solutions to these problems.

A description of the research methodology is contained in the first chapter. The methods on which the study is based consisted principally of historical/documentary research supplemented by personally administered questionnaires, structured interviews with male members of the Ravidas community living in the West Midlands and personal visits by the author to India. The present author is aware that the influences that have had a bearing on the emergence of the Ravidas community span 5,000 years, and that these involve two world religions (Hinduism and Islam). The influences are compounded by the effect of transplanting an Eastern sub-culture within a Western culture several thousand miles removed. In view of the span of time, distance and culture, it was thought wise to devote the first chapter to exploring some historical details to describe the methodology and to make brief mention of the conclusions which are stated formally in Chapter XI.

The conclusions deal with the religious structures of Ravidasias, their social and political aspirations as an identifiable and separate cultural group and the implications of past and present trends for the future.

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Guru Ravidas, for the message contained in his teachings, which have survived the passage of time and are alive today in the Ravidas community.

INDEX TO CHAPTERS

	<u>PAGE(S)</u>
<u>CHAPTER I</u>	
- <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	
History	1 - 3
Orthography	3 - 4
Methodology	5 - 8
A note on the Conclusions	8 - 10
<u>CHAPTER II</u>	
- <u>HINDUISM EMERGES</u>	
The Indus Valley Civilisation	11 - 17
Aryan Invasion	17 - 19
Caste	20 - 24
Divisions within Caste	24 - 27
Chamars	27 - 31
<u>CHAPTER III</u>	
- <u>ISLAM ENTERS INDIA</u>	
The Eve of Islam	32 - 33
Islam	33 - 35
Islam enters India	35 - 41
The Sayyid Dynasty	41 - 43
The Lodi Dynasty	43 - 46

INDEX TO CHAPTERS

	<u>PAGE(S)</u>
<u>CHAPTER IV</u> - <u>HINDUISM AND ISLAM - THE INTERACTION</u>	
Religious Intractability	48 - 51
Religious Formalism	51 - 52
Hinduism-Muslim Situation	52 - 53
The Role of the Sufi and Bhakti Masters	53 - 54
<u>CHAPTER V</u> - <u>THE MYSTICAL DIMENSION</u>	
Religious Liberalism	55
Sufism	55 - 57
The Chishti Masters	57 - 61
Bhakti	62 - 73
<u>CHAPTER VI</u> - <u>A JOURNEY INTO MYSTICAL LIBERATION:</u> <u>RAVIDAS</u>	
Ravidas - His Life	74 - 84
Ravidas - What he left	84 - 87
<u>CHAPTER VII</u> - <u>THE INDIAN PROFILE</u>	
Freedom Movements	88 - 96
Ad-Dharmi Movement	96 -102
Abolition of Untouchability	103
Contemporary India	104 -108

INDEX TO CHAPTERS

	<u>PAGE(S)</u>
<u>CHAPTER VIII</u>	
- <u>THE UNITED KINGDOM PROFILE</u>	
The Indian Immigrants	109 - 118
The Ravidas Settlement in the United Kingdom	119 - 146
Ravidas - a Bygone Vision or lasting message?	147 - 172
<u>CHAPTER IX</u>	
- <u>THE PROBLEM - IN INDIA</u>	
Ravidasias - Northern India	173 - 178
Caste Problems	178 - 181
<u>CHAPTER X</u>	
- <u>THE PROBLEM - IN WEST MIDLANDS</u>	
Ravidasias - West Midlands	182 - 194
The Asian Dimension	195 - 196
Resolution of Problems	197 - 198
<u>CHAPTER XI</u>	
- <u>CONCLUSIONS</u>	
The Ravidasias have emerged as a distinct Religious Movement	199 - 202
Ravidasias believe in equality: Conflict between theory and practice over caste	202 - 204
The emergence in Britain of Political/ Community pressure groups based on Ravidas teaching	204 - 205
The Future	206 - 207

INDEX TO CHARTS AND TABLES

<u>NUMBER</u>		<u>PAGE(S)</u>
	An Artists Impression of Guru Ravidas - C 1600 AD	Title Page
1	Table of Chishti and Bhakti Masters	72
2	Table showing distribution by District of the inaugural members of the Ad-Dharmi Movement	101
3	Table of Statistics concerning Northern India States	107
4	Census 1981 Estimate of Ravidasia population in the West Midlands County	115
5	Census 1981 and Community Estimates of Ravidasia population in the West Midlands County	116
6	Results of Survey of 100 Ravidasia Subjects of their Religious perceptions	123
7	Results of Survey of 90 Asians of their perceptions of the Ravidas community	125
8	Results of Questionnaire into background detail of the Ravidas community	134



INDEX TO CHARTS AND TABLES

<u>NUMBER</u>		<u>PAGE(S)</u>
9	Results of interviews with Ravidasias giving details about the religious background of the Ravidas community	135 - 145
10	Results of interviews with Ravidasias designed to elicit the effects of the teachings of Guru Ravidas	149 - 166
11	Histogram showing Ravidasia perceptions of the teachings of Guru Ravidas	172

INDEX TO MAPS

<u>NUMBER</u>			<u>PAGE(S)</u>
1	<u>Map of India</u>	Illustrating the military and political conquest by Islam	47
2	<u>Map of India</u>	Tracing the path of the Chishti Masters	61
3	<u>Map of India</u>	Tracing the path of the Bhakti Masters	73
4	<u>Map of India</u>	Showing the Ad-Dharmi influence	102
5	<u>Map of Northern India</u>	Showing the States	108
6	<u>Map of the West Midlands County</u>	Showing areas of Ravidas Population	117
7	<u>Map of the United Kingdom</u>	Showing main centres of Ravidas Population	118
8	<u>Map of India</u>	Showing areas of the Ravidasia emmigration to the United Kingdom	146

INDEX TO APPENDICES

	<u>PAGE(S)</u>
APPENDIX 'A' Questionnaire	208 - 211
APPENDIX 'B' List of Questions	212 - 213

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### HISTORY

There were, in the 15th Century in India, and still are today many religious Guru-Worshipping-Sects and followers of particular Gurus or religious leaders. This present work attempts to examine one such group of followers, the Ravidasias of Northern India; to trace their development, and examine some of the problems that confront them in Northern India, and in the West Midlands in England.

The followers take their name from the spiritual leader, Ravidas who lived during the 15th Century and was born into the prevailing rigid unequal caste-system. Belonging to a menial degraded caste, he found religious inspiration and expression in a devotional religious movement, Bhakti which disregarded caste barriers, but still enabled followers to remain within the Hindu religion.

In order to examine the influence which inspired and motivated Ravidas, it is necessary to attempt to trace a path through the emergence of Hinduism itself, the caste system and the later subdivisions which appeared in the caste system. It is necessary briefly to examine the Turko-Afghan invasion and conquest of the Indian Sub-Continent, bringing with it Islam.

A significant factor contributing to the development of the mission of Ravidas was a vacuum of religious inadequacy created by the religious interaction between Hinduism and Islam. This present work suggests that the vacuum was filled on the one hand by Sufism, spearheaded by the Chishti-Masters and on the other by Bhakti, the movement to which Ravidas belonged.

The present author is mindful that any one of the numerous developments leading up to the climate of religious liberalism during the 15th Century justifies a separate study on its own. Indeed, it has been a matter of delicate judgement to make those references to pre-Aryan India, Hinduism, Caste, the military, political and religious impact of Islam, and the devotional movements which, in the opinion of the present author, have some relevance to the life and times of Guru Ravidas.

The works quoted are not exhaustive. Those referred to reflect the opinion of the present author that they represent a balance of non-coincident views which at the best are open to debate. Readily available material relating directly to Ravidas is sparse, it is also occasionally contradictory, and this makes assessment difficult.

This present work has three chronological phases. The first phase is the historical background to Ravidas which spans almost 4,000 years. The second and third phase are journeys into mystical liberalism . One concerns the teachings of Ravidas while the other concerns his influence on his followers in 20th Century Northern India, and in a Western society; the West Midlands County of England.

#### ORTHOGRAPHY

In the preparation of this present work, the forms of spelling Indian names and places are the ones in most common use. For example K.Sen has been followed by the spelling of 'Brahmin' which, although not strictly accurate is more common than 'Braman', similarly, 'Koran' is used in preference to 'Qoran', and 'Chamar' instead of 'Camar' etc. (Sen.K. 1961 p7,19). The term 'Asian' is used to describe collectively people from the Sub-Continent of India, and although this is geographically imprecise, the term has become accepted as a descriptive term.

The present author has, for several years, worked in the field of community relations in the West Midlands and during this time he has met a group of people from the Sub-Continent of India, who described themselves in the first instance as being 'Ravidasias'. They claimed this name was derived from that of their spiritual leader, Guru Ravidas. From comments made by some of the Ravidas members, and other

people from the Sub-Continent of India known, it became apparent that the Ravidasias occupied a low-caste position in the hierarchical Hindu caste system: an indication that they were clearly of the Hindu religion.

However, visits to a Ravidas Temple revealed that the focal point of common worship in the Temple was the Sikh Holy Book, the Adi Granth. Other evidence in the Temple, including the pictures on the walls depicting members of the Hindu pantheon, indicated a strong Hindu influence.

Following a visit to a Ravidas Temple in another part of the West Midlands, the present author was honoured by the presentation of a sword, a device used by Sikhs to confer respect on the recipient, and a further indication that the Ravidasia followed Sikh tradition. It appeared to the present author that the Ravidas community, while occupying a curiously limbonic position between Hinduism and Sikhism experienced a pull towards Sikhism. The question thus arose; were they members of a distinct religion? were they a separate caste? did they have particular problems common to them and distinct from those of other groups and members of religious communities that had emigrated from the Indian Sub-Continent to the West Midlands? Attempts were made to devise a research technique that would answer the questions.

## METHODOLOGY

The present author was mindful of the sensitivity essential to enquiries by him about religious belief and practice, personal family relationships and caste. There was a risk of causing offence. Additionally, there was the possibility that (concerning these delicate issues) the subjects might be evasive or untruthful; particularly about matters concerning caste. Language was also a problem, for although the present author had knowledge of the Punjabi language, it was not sufficient to permit full explanation of the purpose of the research or to allay fears about confidentiality. To have used an interpreter would have introduced a further hurdle by involving discussion of matters that the subjects would have preferred not to discuss in front of one of their peers (i.e. the translator). It was decided to exclude Ravidasia females from a survey on the following grounds -

(a) Women, (particularly first generation immigrants) have less facility with English than males.

(b) If the survey was to have any value, interviews had to be conducted on a one to one basis. This would have introduced additional difficulties, because it is not easy to visit females on their own without the risk of misunderstanding.

(c) The present author had already noted from previous contact with the Ravidas community that the males tended to make the family decisions albeit after discussion in some cases with the females.



The present author was therefore persuaded that (by interviewing males only) a corporate view would be expressed.

It was decided that if a questionnaire was used, it would be inappropriate to send it to the subject and request it to be completed and returned. A larger sample could thereby be taken, but the risk of not explaining the questionnaire properly, with illiteracy on the one hand, and the chance of discussion with subjects, argued for personal visits.

A questionnaire was designed (a copy is contained at Appendix 'A') which covered such questions as religion, caste, place of birth, occupation of father, whether any problems had been encountered in India and the UK etc. A pilot sample of ten subjects was interviewed. At the conclusion of this sampling the present author felt that although the information obtained was of value to establish a framework for the Ravidas community, their own perception of caste and religion had not been revealed. It was apparent that not all the right questions had been asked. The results of this preliminary survey are contained in Chapter VIII.

The present author then selected four subjects who were known to him to be deeply involved in the organisation of a Ravidas Temple. Each was interviewed in depth. The results of those interviews are contained in Chapter VIII. The present author, however, was still not satisfied that a distinct pattern of religious perception had been revealed; one that

would account for the cohesive quality of the Ravidas community and their attraction to the person and teachings of Guru Ravidas. It appeared that such perceptions were locked in their own sub-conscious and had become so deep rooted as to create an involuntary response incapable of articulation, even to themselves.

Two further subjects were selected who were known to the present author to have read widely on Hindu religious principles, and the relationship of those principles to the Chamar Caste. Each were given six questions concerning religion and problems of the Ravidas community in India and the United Kingdom. These written replies are discussed in Chapter VIII. In order to test other Asian religious perceptions of the Ravidas community, a survey was taken of 30 Muslims, 30 Hindus, and 30 Sikhs. Each subject was asked - 'who are the Ravidasias'. The results are discussed in Chapter VIII.

In order to establish the religious perception of the Ravidas community with the co-operation of the Temple Secretary, 100 slips of paper were marked by male members of the Ravidas community, one tick to signify what they accepted as their religion out of the following options:

Hindu: Ravidasia: Radha Swami: Ad-Dharmi: and Sikh

The results are discussed in Chapter VIII.

In order to establish the extent of the influence the teachings of Ravidas had on the Ravidas community in the United Kingdom, twenty members of the

community were interviewed. The results are discussed in Chapter VIII.

A survey of the Ravidas population, which is accepted is an estimate, was provided by members of the National Ravidas Organisation, and is referred to in Chapter VIII. This estimate is compared with an estimate derived from the 1981 Census.

This present work has entailed a historical and literary search, questionnaire and interviews and direct ethnographic work on Ravidasias; the uneducated position of many members of the Ravidas community and the folk-lore and myth which has been handed down, has required delicate assessment and judgement to abstract any patterns or attitudes.

#### A NOTE ON THE CONCLUSIONS

The members of the Ravidas community are not Sikhs, they do not identify with Sikhs, nor do Sikhs recognise the Ravidasias as Sikhs. Little is known of them by Muslims; Hindus and Sikhs consider them low caste people. The Sikh Holy Book (Adi-Granth) figures prominently in the religious practices of the Ravidasias of Northern India, not, it is suggested because they are attracted to Sikhism (a separate religion from Hinduism), but more from expediency. The Sikh Holy Book contains many of the poems and couplets composed by Ravidas, hence the appeal of that particular religious work. The presentation of turbans and swords (Sikh devices to confer respect on the recipient) and the Langha

(the provision of free food in Sikh Temples) are also practised by the Ravidasias of Northern India. These practices suggest Sikh influence. The Ravidasias practise them to enhance their own identity alongside a powerful religion (Sikhism), but at the same time recognising they are separate from Sikhism. The Ravidasias are Hindus occupying a degraded position within the hierarchical caste system. The influence of their spiritual mentor Ravidas enabled them to remain within the caste system but at the same time have a separate identity as a group. Ravidas, through his teachings 'held them together' as a group and gave them pride and hope in their degraded position. Above all, Ravidas enabled them to find God and to worship separately as a group (they were prohibited from worship in high caste Hindu Temples).

The cohesive quality of the Ravidas community means that they have a separate religious identity to Hindus generally, but remain members of the Chamar caste. This separate identity has assisted them to articulate the problems encountered by the low castes generally, and the religious cohesion has developed into political cohesion. Political cohesion has not reached its full potential, however.

The problems that beset the Ravidas community are bound up with the problems of Indians generally. In Northern India these problems are identified with the problems of the low-castes and outcastes. The Ravidas community identify and articulate these problems not as

Ravidasia problems, but as problems of all the degraded masses. The difficulties low-caste people in India encounter can be seen in stark relief against a background of poverty and social disadvantage. The problems encountered by the Ravidas community in the West Midlands County of England, again, are shared with all Asians. They are not problems of Caste alone. When indeed caste divisions are referred to, it is usually in the context of personal disagreement, in which reference to caste is intended to be derogatory. Caste divisions are not usually crossed with respect to arranged marriages. (This is because of the attitudes of the other Asians, not the Ravidasias). Contention is caused between parents and children when the latter refuse to conform to such arrangements, preferring on occasions to choose their own partners. These domestic disagreements tend to assume a further dimension of concern when caste divisions are also involved.

A study of the problems of the Ravidas community in the West Midlands County and Northern India is a study of the emergence of the Ravidas community out of the Chamar caste, the influence of Islam and the teachings of Ravidas. Furthermore, there is the development and politicisation of the community before and subsequent to Independence and the emigration from India and settlement of the Ravidas community in the United Kingdom.

## CHAPTER II

### HINDUISM EMERGES

#### THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION

There was no one founder of Hinduism unlike some other world religions such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism; indeed the religion emerged by a gradual process over a period of five thousand years. There was no one book like the Bible or Koran that could be referred to for resolution of controversies (Sen.K. 1961 P7). Unlike the Greeks and Chinese, the Hindus seem to have had little regard for history, and it was as late as the 12th Century, following the Muslim conquest of India before a regular series of chronicles was maintained. A history of India as full as that of Europe was not produced until the 18th Century with British influence (Zinkin. T. 1964 P18). It is no surprise, therefore, that the origins of Hinduism are still shrouded in mystery.

The first known accounts of any historical writing are contained in the Vedic hymns or Vedas (Edwardes. M. 1961 Revised 1967. P21). Following the Vedas the Upanishads, the Gita, The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and the songs of the Bhakti movements and of the mystics are all regarded as authoritative but none exclusively so (Sen.K.1961 P7).

The Vedic hymns would appear to be a collection of history, mythology and religious folk-lore. It was natural, therefore, that historical detail became obscured with the passage of time, and was progressively more integrated into myth. Zinkin points out that the oldest of the four Vedas was the Rigveda containing 1028 hymns (Zinkin.T.1964 P20), and Piggott dates its composition somewhere about 1400-1500 BC. (Piggott.S. 1950: Penguin 1952 P255). He points out that the Rigveda stands alone in that other works presuppose its existence, and in the main are commentaries based upon it (Piggott.S.1950: Penguin 1952 P.254).

As a source of information, the historical accuracy of these accounts is a matter for delicate and difficult assessment; also the mixing of fact and mythology is a major problem. Piggott summarises these difficulties in his description of the Rigveda. He adds that as a source book it is full of limitations and difficulties.

"The Rigveda is a curious document. In length, it is approximately equal to the Iliad and the Odyssey together and consists of over a thousand poems or hymns. These vary from more or less epic chants, hymns of praise, and prayers to the Gods, to magic spells and fragments of popular songs, all of very varying standard - sometimes true, genuine and even sublime, but frequently childish vulgar and obscure, as Max Muller remarked - the language is elaborate, and self-consciously literary, and the metrical composition, based on syllabic verse forms, is often complicated. In a word, however barbarous and archaic may be the life and thought reflected in the

Rigveda, it is a laborious and sophisticated anthology put together with conscious artifice by professional hymnologists at a relatively late stage of the culture of those people who in it are called the Aryan (Arya) and who figure as Conquerors in a newly won land" (Piggott.S. 1950: Penguin 1952 P256-257)

Sen describes Hinduism as being more

"Like a tree that has grown gradually than like a building that has been erected by some great architect at some definite point in time. It contains within it as we shall see, the influence of many cultures, and the body of Hindu thought, thus offers as much variety as the Indian nation itself. It is not surprising therefore, that A.C.Bouquet writing on Comparative Religion - (Comparative Religion: Penguin Books, Fifth Edition, 1956. P112) found that 'India in particular furnishes within its limits examples of every conceivable type of attempt at the solution of the religious problem'. The cultures of the Dravidian and the non-Dravidian peoples before the so called Aryan invasion, the actual Sanskritized Aryan culture, the culture of the later invaders, the influences of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism (to which Hinduism gave birth) and of Islam and Christianity (which came from outside) can be traced at various stages of evolution of Hindu thought" (Sen.K. 1961 P14-15)

If it is accepted that Hinduism is a process of gradual emergence, attempts must be made to examine the relevant factors, which (in the opinion of the present author) form a historical back-drop to the life and times of Guru Ravidas.

Two discoveries, in what is now Pakistan, of the remains of cities at Harappa in the Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro in the Sind, together with excavations at other sites, have revealed the existence of a civilisation that flourished in the Northern part of India approximately 5000 years



ago (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967 P19).

From information that is available from these excavations the cities indicate an advanced civilisation. Zinkin makes reference to this matter as follows -

"These excavations revealed the existence of two great capital cities dating back to 2500 BC. The people of the Indus Valley were, from what has been found, the most advanced people in the whole world of their day. They built planned cities. As in New York, their streets crossed at right angles, and the blocks between the streets were of equal size". (Zinkin.T. 1964. P19)

Piggott describes in detail the results of these excavations (Piggott S. 1950: Penguin 1962). However, for the purpose of this present work the brief resumé of the excavations supplied by Edwardes is sufficient to describe the cities and their inhabitants.

"No written records exist and though a number of seals have been found with letters engraved on them, they have not yet been deciphered. A great many theories have been put forward concerning the political and social organisation of the Indus Valley people, but all remain theories and, therefore, have no place in the present work.

A brief resumé, however, of the facts that can safely be deduced from the finds is necessary. Mohenjo-daro and Harappa though some four hundred miles apart are remarkably similar in ground plan and architecture, and it will be convenient to take the former as an example of both.

**THE CITY** The area of the City is quite large. Dwelling-houses range from palaces with frontages of over eighty five feet to small buildings of two rooms. They are made of brick and the larger buildings have two or more storeys with paved floors, narrow stairways and courtyards. Some larger structures with pillared halls are assumed to have been Temples or Administrative offices of some sort.

In the centre of the city is a great bath. 180 feet long by 108 feet wide with walls 8 feet thick. The wide streets of the city have elaborate drainage systems. All this is indicative of a large and flourishing population living in considerable luxury and comfort.

**THE PEOPLE** The essential features of the social, economic and religious life of the inhabitants can be built up from the remains.

**DRESS** Cotton fabrics were in common use with wool for warm clothing. Both men and women of all classes wore ornaments, girdles, nose studs, ear-rings and anklets by the women and necklaces, armllets, finger-rings and bangles by both sexes. There is a great variety in the design of these objects and the material used include gold, silver, ivory, copper, jade agate, carnelian and lapis lazuli.

**FOOD** The principal diet was wheat, also pork, mutton, fish and eggs.

**EVERYDAY ARTICLES** Earthenware vessels, made on the wheel plain and painted. Copper, bronze and silver vessels were known, but apparently little used. No iron has been found. Spindles of baked earth, porcelain and shell have been found. Needles and combs of ivory, and axes, chisels, knives and razors of copper and bronze. Children's toys include small wheeled carts and chairs, implying that such articles were in use in ordinary life. Dice pieces indicate a love of gaming.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS    Skeletons prove that buffalo, elephant sheep the humped-bull and the camel were domesticated. Children's toys include - dogs. There is some doubt about the horse.

SEALS AND SCULPTURE    Hundreds of terracotta seals have been discovered, some have representations of real and mythical animals. Most of all the seals bear inscriptions in a pictographic script which has not yet been deciphered and would, in any case, probably submit little information if it was, as there are no long inscriptions of any sort, and no bi-lingual seals. It has been suggested that the Indus peoples used palm-leaves for their records, and naturally these would not survive the fall of the cities. These and such sculpture as has been found display a fine finish and a high degree of artistic development.

TRADE    It seems probable that the seals were used in trade and there is evidence that wide commercial transactions with other parts of India were commonplace. Tin, copper and precious metals must have been obtained by trade with countries outside India.

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY    Large scale cultivation must have played an important part in the life of the common people - wheat barley and cotton were grown. Crafts included those of the potter weaver, mason and blacksmith, and of the jeweller, ivory worker and stone-cutter. Technically the Indus people were well advanced, having the potter's wheel, kiln-burnt bricks, and knowledge of the casting and alloy of metals.

WEAPONS    No swords have been found and very few bows and arrows, but many axes, daggers, spears, maces, and slings. No shields or body armour have been discovered. The weapons were usually of copper or bronze, but occasionally of stone.

RELIGION    Figurines of a mother goddess have been found as well as of a male god which may have been a proto-Siva. This latter belief is supported by the discovery of phallus-like-objects the lingam in which Siva was later to be worshipped. There was also

a primitive animism - the belief in the existence of spirits of good and evil in inanimate objects such as stone and tree.

DECLINE AND FALL It seems probable that the Indus civilisation went through a long period of decadence. Groups of skeletons found in unnatural and distorted positions indicate a violent end. This is vaguely supported by evidence in the Rigveda, and it seems likely that the Indus cities were destroyed about 1500 BC by non-urban barbarians who had no use for a city civilisation. If, however, the supposed religious relics of the Indus people are correctly interpreted, it seems that certain elements, and in particular the phallic worship of Siva, passed by way of the Aryan invaders into Brahminism". (Edwardes.M. 1961: Revised 1967. P19-21)

#### ARYAN INVASION

A theory that the Aryan invader came from Iran to India is supported by Edwardes (Edwardes.M. 1961: Revised 1967. P21) he further theorises that the first move took place about the beginning of the second millennium BC, these settlers being followed by others who brought conflict and engendered a desire for expansion. He describes how the Aryans,

"of the first invasion remained a nomadic people"

and remarks that,

"administration in the tent rather than a city can be assumed from the Rigveda. The high god of the Vedas Indra is known as the 'breaker of cities' (Parumdara) but no mention is made of a builder or possessor of cities" (Edwardes.M.1961: Revised 1967. P21-22)

It appears that conflict was not confined to struggles between the original inhabitants and the Aryan invader. Zinkin believes that clan war was perpetual. (Zinkin.T. 1964. P21) and Edwardes supports this theory as follows,

"The Aryans were continually fighting among themselves, and the vedic hymns record great battles fought by infantry armed with bow and arrows, spears, swords and battle axes and nobles dressed in armour, fighting from chariots - all to the sound of music and drums.

It would seem from the Rigveda that many of the battles were fought for the control of water, an essential factor in nomadic agriculture".(Edwardes.M. 1961.: Revised 1967 P22)

Zinkin describes a cattle owning community ruled by warriors and dependent on priests for the ritual to ensure the growth of crops, health of cattle and victory in war. (Zinkin.T. 1964. P21). Edwardes further supports Zinkin's theory by indicating that family units existed, which shared their wealth and responsibilities. The tribe consisted of a number of these family units which absorbed members of the conquered population making them slaves (Edwardes.M.1961: Revised 1967 P22-24). Piggott quotes from the Rigveda to illustrate the likelihood of battles between themselves or other people.

"The warriors look is like a thunderous rain cloud when  
armed with mail he seeks the lap of battle:  
Be thou victorious with unwounded body; so let the  
thickness of thy mail protect thee:  
Whoso would kill us, whether he be a strange foe or  
one of us.  
May all the gods discomfit him, my nearest, closest  
mail in prayer" Rigveda VI. 75  
(Piggott.S. 1950: Penguin 1952. P244)

The present author is persuaded that, in the time of the Aryan conquest and the inter tribal wars following the settlement, defeated groups had two choices. They could allow themselves to be taken prisoner by the victors, used as slaves and employed on the most menial tasks; or they could escape into hiding, so becoming outcastes of the conquering community, fending for themselves in jungles and deserts. Edwardes indicates an even further integration in the Aryan community,

"But later the Aryan conquerors intermarried with female slaves they captured and in time produced a mixed race adopting many of the customs of their mothers"  
(Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967. P22)

It may well have been that the Aryan community comprised a series of autonomous tribes relying on an extended family system for stability. Support is given to this theory by the present structure of the Indian family system which has clearly changed little, but has evolved slowly over many centuries.

## CASTE

If the previous description of society is accepted (of a people who had gradually changed from a nomadic life, conquering and absorbing city-dwellers into their society, and becoming less mobile and static themselves), certain divisions in the labour force must have emerged in the interests of economic prosperity. Again teaching of religious and philosophical principles and the maintenance of religious standards of behaviour would have assumed some importance. Equally a military capability would have become important to protect the community. The previous reference to Zinkin, on page 18, mentioned a cattle owning community ruled by warriors who were dependent for success on the Priests (Zinkin.T. 1964. P21) and the reference to the Rigveda (by Piggott page 19 ) reinforces the importance of the warriors.

For a community to prosper, trade was necessary, and one can see why the priests, soldiers and merchants achieved prominence. Moreover, the extended family system (possessing the machinery to perpetuate hereditary occupations) would have tended to perpetuate also the class and caste divisions.

Possibly a mixture of reasons (religious, strategic and economic) created caste divisions on the pattern of priest, warrior and merchant. However, the need for the 'priest group' to discharge its function adequately may have required them to embrace and to be seen to live out a concept

of 'purity'. Parry refers to this concept of 'purity' in a paper 'Egalitarian Values in a Hierarchical Society' in discussing Dumont and his work Homo Hierarchicus: (Parry.J. 1974)

"In this the Brahman transmits purity down the ladder through the performance of his priestly duties; and the low castes transmit purity up the ladder by removing pollution"  
(Parry. J. 1974. P97)

This concept of the preoccupation by the priests with the maintenance of purity is further reinforced (according to Littlejohn) in 'Social Stratification' in relation to the Brahmin and his food.

"He becomes what he eats and almost all organic substances are in varying degrees, impure for him, consequently eating is a time of danger and even if his food has been prepared according to ritual and no accidents occur, usually he rises from the table less pure than when he sat down"  
(Littlejohn. J. 1972. P71)

If the Brahmin is at so much risk at meal times, the risk must be even greater from contact with persons who perform menial but necessary tasks for him.

Ambedkar argues that, once the Brahmin formed a mechanism to avoid pollution by contact, other occupations similarly created barriers to prevent contamination from other occupational groups (Ambedkar. B. 1968. P150-157).



It is possible that three main occupational groupings emerged which were required to enrich the community in specialised ways, (the priests the warriors and merchants) while the fourth group was required to provide services necessary for the functioning of the three main groups.

Expressed in Hindu religious terms, the Brahmin (Priest) the Kshatriya (Warrior) the Vaisya (Merchant) and the Sudra (Menial Worker) made up the four caste divisions. The priests gave these divisions divine acceptance in the Rigveda, which describes how, when Purusha (the archetypal man) was sacrificed, the Brahmins rose from his head, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaisyas from his thighs, and the Sudras from his feet (Edwardes.M. 1961: Revised 1967. P24).

More emotion has been generated about the caste system than about any other aspect of Hinduism (Sen.K. 1961. P27) particularly the plight of the 'Untouchables' (Hiro.D. Report No 26. P4)

If the four convenient caste divisions are accepted, 'Untouchability' creates a group which is outside caste divisions. The hereditary-hierarchical-concept of caste ensures that the 'Untouchables' will remain 'outsiders' until death intervenes. (Zinkin.T.1964. P26).

Briggs makes reference to this fifth group by quoting Manu -

"All those tribes in this world which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet (of Brahman) are called Dasyus, whether they speak the language of the Mlecchas (Barbarians) or that of the Aryas" (Briggs.G.1920. P14)

The Dasyus was a term used at first to describe the enemy, but which later came to mean slave. (Edwardes.M.1961: Revised 1967. P24). Manu further decreed that the 'Untouchables' should live outside the village (Hiro.D. Report No 26 P6).

Zinkin describes caste as a group of families whose members can inter marry and eat together without being polluted. Each caste has a particular place on the social ladder (Zinkin.T. 1964. P26) Edwardes describes the origins of caste as follows,

"The original ideas of caste (a Portugese word meaning purity of race) comes from colour (varna) and it emerged when the conquering Aryans absorbed the conquered population into a new system of society. The name given to these peoples by the invaders was Dasyu (enemy) which later came to mean slave" (Edwardes.M. 1961: Revised 1967. P24)

It is not known with what degree of religious vigour the hereditary concept of caste was accepted, since initially, there was mobility within the caste system. Sen, referring to an English translation by Max Muller from Hindu Scriptures (Everymans Library 1938 P148-149 and other works), suggests that caste should be determined by conduct and not birth. (Sen.K. 1961. P30-31). Further weight is given to this theory of original mobility within caste by Ambedkar (Ambedkar.B 1968. P152).

The imprecise nature of caste divisions is emphasised further by the capacity to create a sub-caste division, (the Chandal), being the result of a union between a Brahmin woman and a Sudra man (Briggs.G. 1920. P15). By 'the migration of the soul' the boundary of the caste system is further blurred in so far as conduct in a previous incarnation determines position in the next. The good man returns as a Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaisya, the evil as a dog, a hog or a Chandal (Edwardes.M.1961: Revised 1967. P29).

The Brahmin, Kshatriya and the Vaisya represented the 'twice born' castes; their first birth was from the mother, the second was from the investiture with the sacred girdle, whereas the Sudra has only one birth. (Ambedkar.B. 1946. P31).

However, the four caste divisions, although they are convenient for expository purposes are over-simplifications of reality. In practice there were, and are today, many labour divisions, each being related (albeit sometimes superficially) to the basic four caste-divisions, and to Untouchability.

#### DIVISIONS WITHIN CASTE

Although the original intention in creating caste may have been to preserve purity and enrich the community, the system became rigid,

turning into a charter for practised inequality and discrimination. There has been much documentation of this issue but Ambedkar makes the main point of how caste has been used as a discriminatory device. This is contained in a published draft of a prepared speech to the Annual Conference of Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1936 (which he did not deliver) (Ambedkar.B. 1968), and is further reinforced in a report prepared by Hiro for the Minority Rights Group (Hiro.D. Report No 26). Originally, caste was related to hereditary occupation but this is not now so relevant. Indeed among some of the Hindus resident now in the United Kingdom and known personally to the present author, the occupations followed are incongruent with the sub-caste to which they belong, although in certain cases the occupational caste-group-identity remains. Banton refers to the underlying group identities (Banton.M 1973. P43).

Zinkin makes the point that originally there were four castes and the outcastes, but that with time, the castes split into smaller castes and Sub-Castes. By the time of Manu's code some 2,000 years ago, there were fifty castes and the 'Untouchables' have also worked out a caste structure resulting in 500 Untouchable sub-castes. (Zinkin.T.1964. P26-27)

Edwardes supports the theory of fragmentation of the four main castes into many sub-castes, each exclusive and dedicated to a particular

economic or religious function. He quotes the Census of tribes and castes made in 1901: 2,378 separate groups are listed. Some of those groups numbered millions and others had only a few hundred members. The largest numbers were fourteen million Brahmins and eleven million Chamars (Edwardes.M. 1961. P24-25).

One can try to construct a contemporary occupational-hierarchy using four basic caste divisions. However, in the attempt, other factors emerge that obscure what would otherwise be a sliding scale of tasks that challenge the purity of the Brahmin. Terms such as 'clean'/'unclean' tasks are understandable, but the attempt to decide on an order (as say between fishermen and barbers) becomes an attempt to apportion status. Zinkin provides a perspective to this by the following analogy,

"In Western terms, the sub-castes make about as little sense as if drivers of single-deck buses were born into a Trade Union so exclusive that the drivers of double-deck buses had to eat in a separate canteen, wear different uniforms, and be debarred from marrying into the families of single-deck bus drivers. This is precisely what happens in India where the potter who uses a small wheel to turn his pots is totally segregated from the potter who uses a big wheel to turn his pots. (Zinkin.T. 1964. P26-27)

The caste system prevailed, being sustained by the extended family system and arranged-marriages or put another way, caste may have represented the bricks which built the Hindu society. The mortar which bound the bricks together is represented by the extended-family system and the institution of the arranged-marriage.

It was into this rigid and unequal structure of society that Guru Ravidas was born; into the Chamar sub-caste which had a menial and degraded status in the caste-hierarchy.

#### CHAMARS

"The tanners of leather, the preparers of skins, the manufacturers of leather articles, and the makers of shoes belong to a well defined class in the Indian social order. Most of these workers in Upper India are today included under the general term Chamar. This occupational group may be traced back to very early times. Tanners (Charmamna) are mentioned in the Rigveda"  
(Briggs.G. 1920. Chap.I)

The above description of the Chamar Caste by Briggs, indicates that the main occupations followed are the preparation of skins, the tanning of leather, and shoe-making. Lewis points out (in quoting Ibbetson writing in 1883) further duties that were executed in the Karnal tract not far from 'Rampur',

"The Chamars are the coolies of the tract. They cut grass, carry wood put up tents, carry bundles, act as watchmen and the like for officials; and this work is shared by all the Chamars in the village. They also plaster the houses with mud when needed. They take the skins of all the animals which die in the village except those which die on Saturday or Sunday, or the first which die of cattle plague. They generally give one pair of boots per ox and two pairs per buffalo skin so taken to the owner"  
(Lewis.O. 1965. P72)

The preceding reference is included in order to identify the location of the area of the Karnal tract. Although the caste make-up follows

the Hindu hereditary occupational groupings, there have been members recruited from other sources. Briggs points out that many people and even whole sections of tribes have risen up from the lower levels of the society and entered the Chamar caste, and due to various reasons other people have been forced into the Chamar caste from a higher level (Briggs.G.1920. P19) There are legends in existence which ascribe to the Chamar some respectable ancestry, but do not account for the origins of the caste. These stories show how persons became degraded into the leather working group, the following three stories, supplied by Briggs illustrates this.

"For example men say that, in the beginning there was but one family of men and they were all of the highest caste. They worked in the fields and followed other callings. In this family there were four brothers. It so happened that a cow died one day and the body lay in the yard until evening. Since no one could be found to remove the carcass, the three older brothers agreed that their younger brother should carry away the body, and that afterwards when he had bathed, they would receive him on the old footing of equality. To this he agreed. After much pulling and hauling, he managed to drag the carcass to the jungle. When he returned from his bath, his brothers refused to receive him, but compelled him to live at a distance from them. He made a great fuss about it, but his complaints were of no avail. They told him that henceforth he was to do the work of a Chamar, that is, to skin the animals that died to make leather and implements of leather. The brothers promised to take care of him in return for these services. Thus the Chamar caste arose. It happened on another day that a buffalo died. This Chamar then said to his brothers 'I am not strong enough to remove this carcass'. The body lay in the yard until noon when it so happened that Siva, who had come down to look after the welfare of men, passed that way. The three brothers complained to him that the Chamar was unable to remove the body of the buffalo. Then the latter appealed to Siva for help. The great god then said to the brothers - 'It is true that your brother cannot un-assisted, remove the carcass. Let one of you step forward and help him'. The brothers all protested. Siva, then commanded the Chamar to collect a pile of refuse (kura).

When this was done, Siva directed him to urinate upon it, and as he obeyed straightway from the heap a strong man arose. From this man the Kuril sub-caste of Chamars sprang"

The second legend involved two daughters named Chamu and Bamu of a Raja, each of whom had a son.

"One day an elephant died in the Raja's ground and, as he did not wish to cut its body to pieces he inquired if there was anyone strong enough to carry the carcass away and bury it. Chamu's son performed the task, whereupon, Bamu's son declared him an out-caste"

The third legend also involves the removal of dead animals.

"According to a third legend, five brothers, Brahmans, while out walking one day, saw the carcass of a cow by the roadside. Four of the brothers passed it by, but the fifth removed the body. Thereupon he was excommunicated by his brothers. His descendants continue to remove the carcasses of cattle"  
(Briggs.G. 1920 P15-17)

These stories exemplify the folk-lore and mythology surrounding the Chamar caste, and indicate that one of the tasks ascribed to them, (the removal of dead animals) is the one which places them among the social outcastes within the Hindu caste system. The Dasyu referred to earlier, although never admitted to the Aryan community and who had to live on the outskirts of the village, were used (in virtue of their acquaintance with magical rites) in exorcism and disease-transference. With this community were grouped the tanner and leather worker (Briggs.G. 1920. P15). The degraded position of the Chamars, grouped



with the outcastes within the social and religious hierarchy, puts them in an anomalous position within the caste system. Briggs comes to the conclusion that the Chamars are Hindu, although they do not meet any of the determining tests of Hinduism. In referring to the Census Report of 1901 in which certain castes fall below the twice-born were grouped, Briggs observes that there are:

"Those from whose hands Brahmans will take water; those from whose hands some of the higher castes will take water; Those from whom the twice born cannot take water, but who are not untouchable; those whose touch defiles, but who do not eat beef; and those who eat beef and vermin and whose touch defiles. In this last class the Chamar belongs".  
(Briggs.G. 1920. P19-20)

Briggs in a forceful description of the Chamar offers a perspective on the position of the Chamar sub-caste in relation to other members of the community. When one considers that his account was written in the early 20th Century and refers to the reports of that period, it is quite feasible that the Chamar had a similar position in the 15th Century. In any case, the Chamar status was not likely to be higher: Briggs observes,

"He occupies an utterly degraded position in the village life and he is regarded with loathing and disgust by the higher castes. His quarters (chamrauti, chamarwara) abound in all kinds of abominable filth. His foul mode of living is proverbial. Except when it is absolutely necessary a clean living Hindu will not visit his part of the village. The author of Hindu castes and Sects says that the very touch of a Chamar renders it

necessary for a good Hindu to bathe with all his clothes on. The Chamar's very name connects him with the carcasses of cattle. Besides he not only removes the skins from the cattle that have died, but also he eats the flesh. The defilement and degradation resulting from these acts are insurmountable. The fact that the Chamar is habitually associated in thought with these practices may partially explain why the large non-leather-working sections of the caste are still rated as 'Untouchable'. (Briggs.G. 1920. P20)

If the suggested social and religious position of the Chamar is accepted and related to that pertaining to them in the 15th Century, the humble origins of Guru Ravidas of the Chamar caste are apparent. It would have been difficult for a person of such humble origin to have used forms of intellectual and religious expression; and even more difficult for that expression to have achieved acclaim from members of other sections of society, who by social and religious tradition, occupied positions of influence and power.

## CHAPTER III

### ISLAM ENTERS INDIA

#### THE EVE OF ISLAM

Over the centuries preceding the conquest by Islam, Hinduism had crystallized into a form which gave it strength to withstand much of the impact of Islam. However, the religious situation in India was complex. There were Jains, Buddhists, Christians, Parsees and Jews and also Animists. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967 P86).

Zinkin characterises Hinduism as follows:

"Like orthodox Judaism, Hinduism is a way of life; it provides a rule for everything from the moment of birth to the moment of death. The rules are all-embracing. They dictate when one must wash, how one must wash the people one can marry, the pilgrimages one can make, the food one can eat, the clothes one can wear. Like the rules of a very strict public school they lay down very exactly what can and cannot be done, as well as the penalties for breaking the rules. Hinduism weaves a rigid but reassuring cocoon of rules and regulations around the orthodox Hindu who goes through the whole of his life without having to make a single decision even so trivial as to whether or not he should have a haircut. It is all laid down for him". (Zinkin.T. 1964. P24)

In a further reference with particular respect to caste, Zinkin suggests that not all Hindus accepted caste and indeed that some of them rebelled against it.

"Hindus believe in caste. A man is born into his caste and cannot move out of it in this life. It is this belief in

caste which explains why observance of the taboos of caste is the overriding pre-occupation of the Orthodox Hindu. Yet there is no divine sanction for this belief in caste and many of the best Hindus, men recognised by their fellow Hindus as such, have spent their lives in revolt against caste". (Zinkin.T.1964. P26)

Zinkin's description of Hinduism suggests a formal codified approach to those religious principles containing the rigidity and inequality of caste. It follows that the lower castes and outcastes, or 'Untouchables' would have had little choice but to suffer the social and religious disabilities imposed upon them by what had become a 'divinely sanctified' caste system. (Hiro.D. Minority Rights Group Report No 26. P6).

Within the formalised structure of Hinduism, one particular devotional school emerged which initially disregarded Caste barriers, and later condemned them. It was in this movement that Guru Ravidas found inspiration and a foundation for his teachings and then religious expression. This approach was Bhakti, and will be discussed later.

### ISLAM

Islam in Arabic means 'submission to the will of God' (Iqbal.M.1981 P36) or as Picktall puts in translating from the Koran 'religion with Allah (is) the surrender (to His will and guidance)' (Pickthall.M. 1953. P64) and one who submits is known as a Muslim.

"He hath named you Muslims of old time and in this (scripture) that the messenger may be a witness against you, and that ye may be witness against mankind. So establish worship, pay poor due and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protecting Friend. A blessed Patron and a blessed Helper". 23:78 (Pickthall.M. 1953 P247)

The religion of Islam is the worship of a single all powerful God, Allah, who manifested his message through the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammed, who was born in AD 570 at Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia. The revelations to Muhammed were recorded by his followers and collected into 114 chapters (Suras) which form the Holy Book, the Koran (Iqbal.M. 1981. P36).

Even a very brief description of Islam can display its quite distinct difference from Hinduism. The acceptance of one God 112: 1-4 (Pickthall M. 1953. P454) the Prophet or Messenger commanded to reveal the word of God, 33:21, 68:4, 96: 1-5 (Pickthall.M. 1953 P303, 365, 445) one book (the Koran) and the equality of man. As Iqbal expresses the last point:

"Even in Islamic society the ideal is a classless social order in which the only criterion for preference and superiority is that of character". (Iqbal.M. 1981. P40)

Pickthall's translation of the Koran tends to show that status within the Islamic community is afforded by performance and character:

"The believers are naught else than brothers, therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy" 49:10

and

"O mankind Lo! we have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another lo! the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best in conduct lo! Allah is knower, aware"  
49:13 (Pickthall.M.1953. P369)

This is unlike that stage in Hinduism in which caste divisions became rigid and a matter of inheritance as distinct from performance.

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammed the Shiites and Sunnites emerged. There was tension amongst these religious sects which was continually inflamed by the preachers, causing profounder thinkers to escape these bickerings by contemplation. These attempts to find tranquillity were characteristic of the Sufi order that came into being during the 700's (Brockelmann.C. 1948 P148-149). Sufism will be discussed later.

#### ISLAM ENTERS INDIA

Islam entered India in AD 711, being introduced into the Sind by the Arabian General Imad-Ud-Din-Muhammad Bin Qasim. From that time the

Sind was never without Muslim influence, and became so implanted that 73% of the population became Muslims. (Titus.M. 1930. P4)

The Arabs were content not to establish political supremacy, however, and indeed appeared content not to extend their military and political activity beyond the Sind. Their resources for such ambitions were inadequate; they were not skilled naval fighters, and they placed such importance to the trade with Indians and friendly relations that such risks of attempting political supremacy were too great, nor indeed necessary (Titus.M.1930. P13).

There was a period spanning two centuries when military operations were suspended. When they were resumed it was not by an Arab but a Turk. Mahmud of Ghazni. (Titus.M.1930 P4).

Edwardes is referred to for the descriptive detail of the Turke/Afghan conquest of India in this part of the present work (Edwardes.M.1961 Revised 1967 P91-113). The conquest brought with it the influence of Islam. The Afghanistan passes, again, acting as a pivot of Indian history, proved to be the invasion route of Sabuktigin. He came to the throne in 977 AD and marched south against the Hindu Raja, Jaipal. In 986 Jaipal was defeated at Bhatinda (near modern Patiala) and in 991 a confederation of Chiefs under Jaipal was again defeated. Sabuktigin ruled until 997 when the throne passed to his son Mahmud.

Edwardes observes that although the invaders were ferocious, they were not barbarians. They were culturally sophisticated patrons of literature and science. Their form of Government had few restrictions. With respect to religion, however, the conquered were offered the choice of conversion to Islam or death. Christians and Jews, 'People of the Book' were allowed to follow their religion on payment of a tax. Later, this concession also extended to Hindus but not until the aftermath of the invasion. During battles Hindu shrines were destroyed and looted. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967 P91).

Between 1001 and 1026 Mahmud conquered and annexed the Punjab, raided Kanauj and Kathiawar, sacked Somnath and earned the name of 'Image breaker', (But-Shikan). Mahmud died in 1030 AD at the age of 62 years having enriched his capital at Ghazni with Mosques and Libraries. He spoke often with the author of the great Persian epic 'Shahnama' (Book of Kings) Firdausi and the great writer Abu Rihan Muhammad. Zinkin observes that the Afghan Turk, Mahmud of Ghazni did not go beyond looting and it was later that Muhammad of Ghur established the Muslim capital at Delhi (Zinkin.T. 1964. P38).

For 50 years India was free from invasion. The Rajput clans destroyed by Mahmud were replaced by new ones, (the Gaharwars of Kanauj, the Tomaras of Delhi and the Chuans of Ajmer). In 1192 the Muslim ruler Mohammed of Ghur defeated Prithviraj Chohan at Tarain, continued to Ajmer, Gwalior and Delhi, taking also Kanauj. The Rajput revival was



crushed and the survivors (called the Rahtors) founded the State of Jodhpur.

In 1194 the Muslims went Eastwards. Benares was captured five years later and Bihar was taken, the college and library sacked, and many Buddhist priests (thought at the time to be Brahmins) killed, the survivors escaping to Tibet. By 1200 the whole of Northern India, except Rajputna, Malwa and part of Gujarat was under Islamic influence. In 1203 the Chandels were defeated. In 1206 Muhammad of Ghur was assassinated and his conquests passed to his Generals. One General Kutub-Ud-Din-Aibak assumed the title of the Sultan of Delhi. Kutub-Ud-Din-Aibak in 1210 was killed in a polo accident and he was succeeded by his son-in-law Iltutmish. In the 26 years reign of Iltutmish the famous tower of Kutub Minar was built, Muslim power was re-established in Bengal, Multan and Rajputna.

Following the death of Iltutmish, his daughter Raziyya was nominated to rule, but she and her husband were assassinated four years later. Out of the ensuing anarchy, and disorder, in 1246 order was re-established by Nasir-Ud-Din-Mahmud. He was succeeded in 1266 by his General, Balban.

The whole of this period had been threatened by the Mongol Chingiz Khan, who previously had turned his advance at Pershawar, going west along the

banks of the Dnieper.

Balban died in 1287 two years after his son had been killed by the Mongols. His 18 year old grandson succeeded him and lived for three years and was murdered by rebels.

In 1290 Jalal-Ud-Din ruled and his Provincial Governor and nephew Ala-Ud-Din moved South and raided the Yadava, Capital of Deogir. On return from this conquest, Ala-Ud-Din arranged for the murder of his uncle, Jalal-Ud-Din. He then marched on Delhi and assumed power. Up until his death in 1316 he waged campaigns in the South, Malwa and Gujarat was annexed. During his reign he took pains to prevent rebellion by seizing property, and introducing new taxes. Edwardes quoting Barani, the Muslim historian:

"The people became so absorbed in trying to keep themselves alive that rebellion was never mentioned"

Ala-Ud-Din set up so minute a system of espionage that nothing done, good or bad was hidden from him. No one could stir without his knowledge, and whatever happened in the houses of the nobles, grandees and officials was brought by his spies for his information, and their reports were acted upon. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967 P97-98).

Ala-Ud-Din was succeeded by his son in 1316. Four years later his son was murdered and Ghiyas-Ud-Din Tughluk ruled. His reign lasted five years and again murder was the result of the change in power, in favour

of his son Muhammad Tughluk. Ghiyas-Ud-Din Tughluk was remembered for his justice and honesty. Edwardes contrasts this with the reign of Muhammad Tughluk, quoting the accounts of the traveller Ibn Batuta.

"Muhammad above all men delights most in giving presents and shedding blood. At his door is seen always some pauper on the way to wealth or some corpse that has been executed. Stories are rife among the people of his generosity and courage, and of his cruelty and severity. Yet he is the most humble of men and one who shows the greatest equity; the rites of religion are observed at his Court; he is most strict about prayer and the punishment of those who neglect it. But his characteristic is generosity" (Edwardes.M.1961 Revised 1967. P100).

Following the death of Muhammad Tughluk in 1351 his cousin, Firuz, came to the throne. His reign represented a brief period of peace. Most of the ferocious economic policies of Ala-Ud-Din had been abandoned and one new innovation was the granting of land to office bearers. Firuz was also notable for his pre-occupation with collecting slaves. In 1388 Firuz died and during the next ten years six successors occupied the throne. When the kingdom was at its weakest the Mongols once more attacked Delhi.

In the 14th Century the empire of Chingiz Khan had dissolved into a number of independent kingdoms whose rulers had been converted to Islam. Timur (Tamerlane) from 1369 had been carving an empire, and in 1398 he crossed into India and laid waste to Delhi. He advanced as far as the Ganges, but troubles in Western Asia forced him to return there. The

only mark he left on India, according to Edwardes, was the ruins of the Turkish Kingdom of Delhi. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967. P103-105).

The conquest of the South had not been so positive as the success in the North. In 1347 Deogir was ruled by the Bahmani Muslim Dynasty, and in 1377 the Hindu City of Vijayanagar was attacked. Twenty years later the City of Vijayanagar was captured, this was during the reign of Firuz Shah.

Ahmad Shah (the brother to Firuz Shah) on coming to power continued to wage war against Vijayanagar and in consequence, transferred his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar. The last great ruler of the Bahmani Kingdom, Muhammad III, extended his Kingdom to Goa. At the time of his death in 1482 the Bahmani Kingdom was rife with disorder. During the rebellion in 1527 the last ruler fled to Ahmadnagar.

#### THE SAYYID DYNASTY

Apart from reuniting the Punjab to Delhi the Sayyid dynasty was not an exciting period of development. Khizr Khan, Viceroy of Shah Rucku (the fourth son of Timur) founded the Sayyid dynasty by claiming dubious descent from the Prophet. This claim relied on the casual recognition of the claim by the famous saint Sayyid Jalal-Ud-Din of Bukhara.(Haig.W.1928. P206). Haig observes that the chronicles of this time are chiefly a

history of expeditions. (Haig.W.1928. P206).

The Sayyid dynasty lasted until 1450, during this time there were three successors to Khizr Khan (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967. P115). It was in this period of revolt by Hindu Chieftains, South of Delhi, and further rebellion in Multan, that attention was first attracted to Malik Buhlul Lodi. He was an Afghan of the Lodi tribe, nephew and adopted son of Islam Khan and Governor of Sirhind. His influence gradually extended over the whole Punjab to such an extent that he felt strong enough to withhold revenue from the Royal treasury. The ruler of Delhi, at that time Muhammad Shah, requested Buhlul Lodi to march with him against a threat to his rule posed by Mahmud Shah Khalji of Malwa; who was marching on Delhi. Buhlul Lodi assisted with the defeat of Mahmud of Malwa and received extravagant gratitude of Muhammad. Such was Buhlul Lodi's strength, that later, he marched on Delhi, but failed to capture the City.

Following the death of Muhammad Shah in 1444, his son Ala-Ud-Din inherited the Kingdom and assumed the title of 'Alam Shah'. After an uninspiring reign which lasted until 1448, he retired to the full time pursuit of pleasure, leaving the rule of Delhi to a Governor (one of his wife's brothers). (Haig.W.1928. P222-225).

Haig describes the conditions of the territories over which Khizr Khan

established his authority.

"The province of Multan had elected a ruler of its own who never recognised, even formally, the royal authority, and the rest of the Punjab, as far south as Panipat and Hissar was in the possession of Buhlul whose relative, Darya Khan Lodi, held the district of Sambhal, the Western limit of which he had pushed forward as far as the ford of Khvaja Khizr, on the Jumna near Delhi. Adjoining this petty state on the South, within the limits of the Doab, was the state of Koil, held by Isa Khan the Turk, and South of this state Hasan Khan, another Afghan held Rapri. The lower central Doab, including Bhongaon Patiali and Kampil was held by the Rajput, Raja Partab and to the West of the Jumna, Daud Khan Auhadi was independent in Bayana. All these rulers were partisans of Buhlul. Gwalior was an independent Hindu state, and such tracts of Mewat as did not acknowledge the rule of Daud Auhadi were held by native chieftains, whose power extended almost to the gates of Delhi" (Haig.W.1928. P225-226)

With the retirement of the ineffectual Alam Shah, quarrels broke out between the brothers-in-law. These quarrels coupled with the precarious position of the Kingdom, resulted in Buhlul being invited to rule Delhi, an arrangement which Alam Shah agreed to (being contented to voluntarily abdicate in favour of Buhlul in 1451). (Haig.W. 1928. P227)

#### THE LODI DYNASTY

Haig documents the turbulent reign of Buhlul and describes the many battles to annex territory (Haig.W.1928. P228-235). The period of thirty eight years which spanned this reign may be summarised, however, as a period of continuous conflict, intrigue and attempts to establish

authority against a back-drop of various small empires. Even in respect to the succession of Bahlul, violent controversy and intrigue was present. Eventually, the third son of Bahlul, Nizam Khan (known later as Sikandar Shah) assumed power with the help of his mother.

Edwardes, referring to the reign of Sikandar Shah, assists in distinguishing it from that of Bahlul.

"Bahlul was succeeded by his son Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) who effectively ruled from the Indus to the frontier of Bengal. Sikandar moved his capital to Agra in order to have his base nearer to his military operations against the Hindu Chiefs to the South and West of the river Jumna. Muslim historians searching as all propagandist historians do in times of anarchy and indecision, for a golden age, found it in the reign of Sikandar". (Edwardes.M.1961 Revised 1967.P115).

As Zinkin observes Muslim conquests were at times not fully reported, particularly the defeats.

"The Muslim conquest was never complete. The extreme South was never touched; only the Ganges Valley and the East Punjab were under Muslim rule for virtually the whole of the period."

And in a further observation:

"Moreover, the history of the Muslim conquest has been one-sidedly recorded since all we have to go by is the writing

of Muslim Court Chroniclers, who tend to magnify Muslim victories and ignore Muslim defeats" (Zinkin.T.1964.P36-37)

Summarising an account by Haig, (Haig.W. 1928 P235-250) Sikandar, was the greatest of the three kings of the dynasty and succeeded in the pursuit of power started by his father Buhlul. He instituted a competent and vigorous administration, however, his relentless bigotry, wholesale destruction of Hindu Temples and the murder of a Brahmin (whose offence was a desire to bring both Hinduism and Islam together) did little to endear him to the Hindus. For his campaigns in the East he did not draw troops from the Punjab, and indeed, the Punjab appeared more tranquil and obedient to the Crown than it had been during the reign of his father, Buhlul.

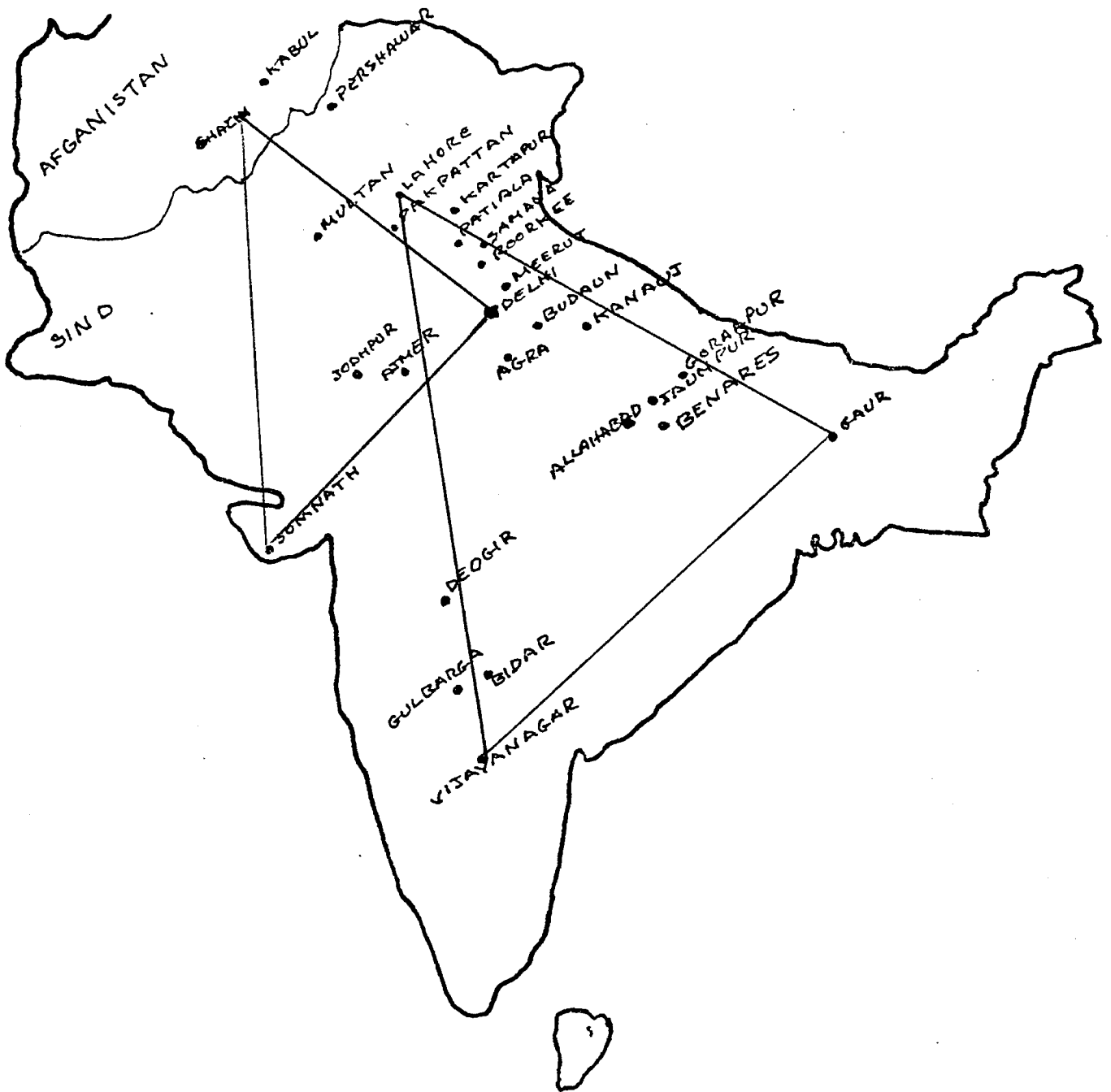
Sikandar died in 1517 and was succeeded by his son, Ibrahim. Edwardes observes that the dynasty came to an end in 1526.

"Sikandar was succeeded by his son, Ibrahim who through distrust of the powerful Afghan nobility drove them into rebellion, firstly in Bihar and then in Lahore. The Governor of the latter, Daulat Khan Lodi appealed for help to Babur, King of Kabul - an action which led to the death of Ibrahim at Panipat in 1526 and the establishment of the Mughal empire" (Edwardes.M.1961 Revised 1967 P115).

The map at page 47 illustrates the areas of Muslim influence during the whole of the period of the Muslim conquest up to 1526.



The above description of the Turko/Afghan military-political conquest of India with its turmoil, intrigue and uncertainty, provides a backdrop against which the interaction between Hinduism and Islam may be examined.



MAP.1 OF INDIA SHOWING THE  
 MAIN PATH OF THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL  
 CONQUEST BY ISLAM UP TO THE END OF THE  
 15th CENTURY:

## CHAPTER IV

### HINDUISM AND ISLAM - THE INTERACTION

#### RELIGIOUS INTRACTABILITY

Zinkin indicates quite positively the intractability of the religious interaction between Hinduism and Islam.

"While every previous conquerer of Northern India had been absorbed into Hindu society, the Muslims were not. By the time the Muslims began to invade India they had become too big, too militant and too settled into their own culture to be swallowed by the boa-constrictor of Hinduism".  
(Zinkin.T. 1964. P37)

Hiro suggests an attraction towards Islam (a casteless creed) by some members of the Hindu low caste and outcastes, particularly when Islam became a ruling dynasty in certain parts of India. This conversion clearly suggests forsaking one religion for another and not a condition of mutual tolerance. (Hiro.D. Report No 26.P6). The Muslim state in India was justified by the Islamic religion and the actions of the Sultan only limited by the Koran. In practice the Sultan, the mainspring of the entire administration, was an autocrat. (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri Datta. 1946. P391).

The administration of the provinces was undertaken by Viceroys, each

province enjoying freedom of rule subject only to the control by Delhi, (which varied depending on the strength or weakness exerted at Delhi). Internal intrigues in the provinces precluded any real peace and tranquility, and large tracts of land, in some cases had to be left in the hands of Hindu Chieftains providing that revenue was paid to the Delhi administration.

Village life was virtually unchanged by the establishment of a new government and the disparity in wealth between the nobles (both Hindu and Muslim) and the peasants, was very pronounced. Gradually Hindu and Islamic thoughts, customs and cultures gained mutual respect. The growth of a new language (a mixture of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words and ideas with languages of Sanskritic origin) created a linguistic synthesis between Hinduism and Islam. There was some evidence of intermarriage; assimilation between cultures in art architecture and music brought both close together. Co-operation also existed to some degree politically. In some cases Hindu headmen and Accountants were retained in villages and the Muslim state employed a large number of Hindus who became quite prominent in the administration. It was not uncommon in Malwa, Bengal and Golkunda to find Hindu officers in the army (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, Datta. 1946 P391-403). Muslim soldiers as well as administrators learnt local languages, Muslim rulers gave encouragement to trade and the commercial classes of the Hindu responded. (Qureshi. I. 1962. P83-106).

In respect of culture, politics, trade, administration, art, literature and science it was possible for the Hindu and Muslim to come closer together and move towards some form of integration. However, there was inadequacy within the formal and orthodox structure of the Hindu and Muslim religions which prevented any form of integration. This inadequacy created a vacuum between the two religions. This inadequacy is summarised by Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta in the following terms;

"Hinduism could not completely absorb Islam but was in turn influenced by it in two ways. On the one hand, the proselytising zeal of Islam, strengthened conservatism in the orthodox circles of the Hindus, who, with a view to fortifying their position against the spread of the Islamic faith, increased the stringency of the caste rules and formulated a number of rules in the Smriti works" (Majumdar Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946. P403)

Qureshi observes;

"The Muslim polemics against idolatry were unrelenting, merciless and vigorous. The argument was pushed through debate as well as song". (Qureshi.I. 1962 P107)

In addition, this rejection of idol worship had been reinforced by the desecration of Hindu Temples. Qureshi further observes that religion was at the root of stagnation and had become a matter of superstition and ritual.

"The flight of human imagination and thought which was responsible for giving the world one of its richest systems of speculative philosophy had long been dormant when the Muslims established themselves in the North"

and in a further observation by Qureshi to illustrate the 'dead ends' of Hinduism,

"At the popular level religion was just a matter of dead ritual followed because of fear or the hope of some reward not coloured by any emotion except that of the propitiation of the deity. The ritual was not only lifeless, but sometimes also exacting and even harsh" (Qureshi.I. 1962 P105)

#### RELIGIOUS FORMALISM

It is suggested that when a religion contains an exclusive set of creeds, forms of worship, rules of purity governing food, contact and marriage, that religion possesses a high degree of formalism. When creed tends to become more important than faith, a particular form of worship more important than religious experience, and a co-religionist more human than an outsider or outcaste, that religion is likely to be intractable in its approach to other religions. The rigid divisions between two religions are further magnified by visible boundaries in the form of Temples and Mosques, separate quarters for the followers of the religions etc. Added to this, if the two religions use two different languages and communication between the two is at a superficial level, the gap is further widened.

If related to the two forms of religious expression, there is inequality of power and wealth, the differences can become aggravated into an exploitative relationship. When one religion is represented as the conqueror and the other, the conquered, then indeed, they are beyond hope of mutual trust and enrichment. Any interaction at this level is minimal.

#### HINDU-MUSLIM SITUATION

In India during the 14th and 15th Centuries, all the features enlisted above were present. The Hindu Rajahs had lost their dominions and were vassals of the Delhi Sultanate. The Hindu masses laboured under a threefold yoke; the Muslim rulers, the regional Hindu Rajahs and the caste system. This caused some loss of identity for the Hindu. He had to re-think his perspective of how he could relate, through the caste structure, to someone who was outside the caste structure, the Muslim. It will be discussed how Bhakti created a means of borderline contact between the Hindu and Muslim. It is a matter of speculation what shape the Bhakti movement would have taken, if it had not been for the presence of Islam. The Muslim situation was less problematic. The Muslims were the conquerors and rulers, confident of a simple and well-organised system of beliefs and practices. The Muslims faced four fundamental challenges: the political challenge of a majority that was non-Muslim; the necessity of working out a framework of co-operation with the Hindu in order to rule effectively, and secure a permanent position in India; the conflict

at the formal level of both religions that allowed no common meeting point, the Hindu wisdom enshrined in the Upanishads and Gita - a challenge which required a highly sophisticated Islamic response.

The Sultans themselves were unable to meet the spiritual challenge, having to content themselves with attempting to build the political and strategic foundations.

The secular relationship between the Hindu and Muslim could not go beyond a functional level because caste prevented the Hindu becoming an individual. The state ideology of Islam could not go beyond the political level of relationship with the Hindu because of the dominance of a legalistic understanding of Islam. This inadequacy in both religions to create a secular relationship created a vacuum between the two.

#### THE ROLE OF THE SUFI AND BHAKTI MASTERS

Sufism and Bhakti will be discussed in Chapter V. Mention is made at this juncture, however, of the role of the Sufi and Bhakti Masters to reinforce the contribution of both, in filling the vacuum of inadequacy between Hinduism and Islam created by the formalism that existed in the two religions.

The Sufi Master created a totally new mode of contact with the Hindu



masses. He stepped out of the political ideology, the dominant ruling class and the judicial structure. He became a 'Faqir' (a beggar) identifying himself with the image of a wandering Hindu yogi. He related himself to others on a human plane. He spoke in the language of the people, using Indian 'stories', 'songs' and 'music' to impart to the people a new awareness.

The Sufi movement became a bridge between the ideological Islam and Hindu masses. It took up the challenge of the Hindu metaphysics.

The Bhakti Masters created a similar bridge primarily between the different castes of the Hindu society. It was an intra-Hindu movement living out the potentialities of the Vedas on a broad human plane. Bhakti contributed to make the Hindu an individual, casteless and human. God became personal, man became a servant of God, a devotee. Bhakti recognised no intermediaries between God and man.

The Sufis created a spiritual framework for the Islamic presence in India. Bhakti led to the individuation of the Hindu. Both streams met to create a composite spiritual order.

The Sufi and Bhakti movements filled the vacuum created by the religious formalism of Hinduism and Islam.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MYSTICAL DIMENSION

#### RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM

Mention has been made of two devotional approaches that existed within Hinduism and Islam. These two approaches allowed for some religious liberalism to be expressed. In Hinduism, the Bhakti movement recognised God as a supreme being capable of loving man in return and rewarding him. The disregard of caste barriers brought God, through Bhakti, within the reach of all men, including the low castes and outcastes. In Islam Sufism allowed men to escape from factional strife and bickering about religious, political and dogmatic questions, into the tranquillity of contemplation.

It has been discussed how these two forms of expression filled the religious vacuum created by the formalism of Hinduism and Islam and brought both religions closer together.

#### SUFISM

There are conjectures about the derivation of the word 'Sufi', but its connotation is less open to doubt. Valiuddin summarises some theories of derivation:

"(a) they were so named because of the purity (Safa) of their hearts and the cleanliness of their acts (Athar)

(b) or - they were called Sufis 'because they are in the first rank (Saff) before God, though the elevation of their desires towards Him, the turning of their hearts unto Him and the staying of their secret parts before Him' Valiuddin adds, however, that if the term referred to rank they would be called 'Saffi' not 'Sufi'

(c) or - because they resembled in qualities those people of the Bench (Ashab Al-Suffa) who lived in the time of God's Prophet. He points out that they would possibly then be called 'Suffi' and not 'Sufi'

(d) or - they were called Sufi because they wore wool (Suf) Valiuddin quoting Abu Bakr Al-Kalabadhi suggests this theory of derivation gives all the requirements 'at the same time has all the necessary meanings such as withdrawal from the world inclining the soul away from it leaving all settled abodes. Keeping constantly to travel denying the soul its carnal pleasures, purifying the conduct, cleansing the conscience, dilation of the breast and the quality of leadership"  
(Valiuddin.M. 1959. P1-2)

Valiuddin helps with the connotation of Sufism, quoting several references. Perhaps, one particular definition summarises Sufism in sufficient depth for this present work.

"The end and aim of a Sufi's life is God alone, he loves God alone his thinking, meditation and prayer are to God alone. He is ever ignorant of everything save God and when he thinks of God alone his mind is purified and in this sense he finds himself attached to God and disconnected with everything save God. He is totally captivated by God alone" (Valiuddin.M. 1959. P7-8)

Although Hinduism and Islam are dissimilar in many respects, the

concept of the devotional approach to God previously discussed with reference to the Bhakti movement and the total immersing of oneself in the will of God in Sufism tends to create some similarity of dedicated approach to the love of God which brings the devotional side of both great religions slightly closer together. Just as Bhakti tended to reject cold formalism and ritual, so according to Titus, with Sufism,

"It is rather a natural revolt of the human heart against the cold formalism of a ritualistic religion" (Titus.M.1930 P111).

Sufism was brought to the Indian Sub-Continent by the Chishti Masters following in the wake of the Islamic conquest.

#### THE CHISHTI MASTERS

During the year 1000 AD not only scholars like Al-Biruni (D.1048) (who made a careful study of Hindu philosophy and life) but theologians and poets entered the Indian Sub-Continent. Lahore became the first centre of Persian inspired Muslim culture. Hujwiri (D.1071) (who composed the famous Persian treatise on Sufism) made Lahore his base. The full impact of Sufism, however, was felt in India during the late 12th Century by the Chishti Order (Schimmel.A.1975 P.345).

The Chishti Order traces its origins to Khwajah Abu Abdal Chishti (D.966) and was introduced into India by Muinuddin Chishti who was born in Sistan,

Afghanistan in 1142 A.D. He became a disciple of Khwajah Uthman Chishti Haruni and arrived in Delhi in 1192. Finally, he settled in Ajmer, and died 1236 A.D. (Titus.M. 1930. P118). Muinuddin Chishti reduced his teachings to three principles -

"A Sufi should possess a generosity like that of the ocean, a mildness like that of the sun and a modesty like that of the earth"

With this influence the Chishti Order spread, and through many khalifas his views became known, attracting many converts (particularly from the lower castes). (Schimmel.A. 1975 P345-346).

Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (D.1235), a friend and disciple of Muinuddin came to India with him. He was venerated by Iltut Mish (Schimmel.A. 1975. P346) and the great column at Delhi, the Qutb Minar is said to be named after him (Titus.M.1930. P119),

Shaykh Fariduddin Shakarganj (better known as Baba Farid) (D.1265) (Titus.M.1930 P119) succeeded Bakhtiyar Kaki, but because of the politically confused state Delhi was in at the time, left, and settled at Pakpattan (near the Sutlej river in the Punjab). He was known for performing particularly difficult penances, fasting, hanging upside down in a well for 40 days. He was an example of the early Chishti way of life, not owning or cultivating land and condemning everything in the hands of the rulers as unlawful. Fariduddin (Baba Farid)

invested seven Khalifas (Schimmel.A. 1975. P348). On his death he was succeeded by two disciples, Hadrat Nizamuddin Awliya of Delhi, and Hadrat Makhdum Alauddin Ali Ahmad Sabir (D.1291). Nizamuddin was nominated by Fariduddin to be his Khalifa in Delhi. Hadrat Makhdum Alauddin Ali Ahmad Sabir, the second disciple acquired a great reputation for piety. He died in Rurki and his followers are still known as Sabirs. (Titus.M.1930. P119- 121).

Nizamuddin (D.1325) became a noted Sufi of Delhi, and marks the 'high tide' of mystical life in the City, encouraging many to follow a pious way of life. Before his death he outlived 7 kings and saw constant intrigue, rebellion and bloodshed. During his lifetime, Sufism became a strong movement in North Western India and the influence of previous Chishti Masters did much to shape moral values in the Muslim community in that part of India. (Schimmel.A.1975 P349-350).

Along the spiritual chain, Nizamuddin left as his Khalifa Nasiruddin Muhammad, (known as Chiragh-I-Dihli)(Lamp of Delhi) who died in 1356 A.D. (Titus.M. 1930 P121). The spiritual chain then passed to Muhammad Gisudaraz (D.1422) who migrated to Gulbarga. He enjoyed the patronage of the Bahmani Sultans. He was a prolific writer of both poetry and prose. He was the first known Sufi author who tried to introduce Sufism on a broad scale by writing some of his works in Dakhni, the Southern

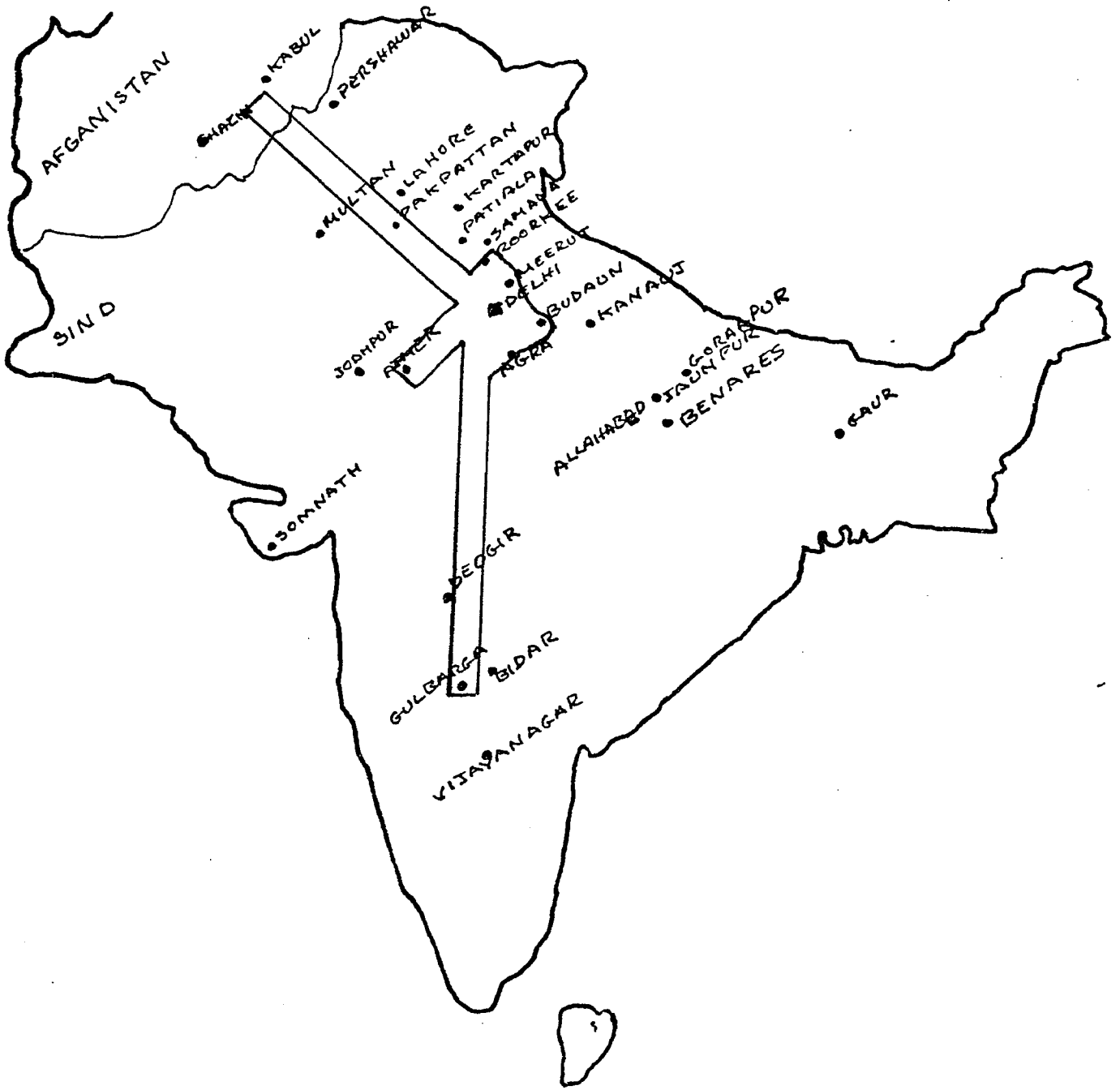
dialect out of which Urdu emerged. (Schimmel.A. 1975. P351).

Hamiduddin Nagori (D.1274) was a Chishti follower noted for his poverty and vegetarianism. Amir Khosrau (D.1325) (a close friend of Nizamuddin) was a poet and musician, was also a friend of the disciple, Hasan Sijzi Dihlawi (D.1328), a poet who collected his masters sayings. Buali Qalandar Panipati (D.1323) wrote the first of many verses and eulogies to the Prophet written in India (Schimmel.A. 1975. P350-351).

The Chishti Order remained for centuries the most influential Order on the Indian Sub-Continent but never spread beyond the borders. Through the Chishti Masters, Sufism provided a religious liberalism within Islam which could extend beyond the ritualism and formalised dogma. Similarly, the Bhakti movement provided a liberalism within Hinduism that brought God within the reach of all men and disregarded the rigid and unequal caste barriers.

The map at page 61, indicates the path of the main Chishti Masters during the 12th to 15th Centuries, not surprisingly, the route taken is within the boundaries of the military and political conquest. This route of political and military conquest is shown on the map at page 47

A list of the Chishti Masters is contained at page 72 and for ease of reference, a list of the Bhakti Masters is contained on the same list.



MAP.2 OF INDIA SHOWING THE  
 PATH OF THE CHISHTI MASTERS  
 UP TO THE 15TH CENTURY:



## BHAKTI

'Bhakti' (a derivative of the root 'Bhaj') was often used in Sanskrit literature to express 'love' in various compounds - e.g. 'Bhakti Namra' (bent down in devotion), 'Bhakti-Mat' (devout, loyal, pious), 'Bhakti-Visista' (distinguished by devotion), 'Bhakti-Vada' (declaration of love), 'Bhakti Yoga' (discipline of loving devotion) etc. However, Bhakti in the religious sense implies reverential devotion and loyal love to God or to God's manifestation. (Dhavamony.M. 1971. P13-23).

The orthodox view implies:

- "(a) a belief in a personal God of absolute love, mercy and grace (Prasada) especially to his devotees:
- (b) a burning, indeed, all-consuming personal love for the deity:
- (c) absolute faith in, and devotion to the deity:
- (d) resignation or total self-surrender and submission to the will of God (Prapatti):
- (e) coming to God (Sarangati)"

(Walker.B. Hindu World Vol.I. P138)

A belief in God as a Supreme Person is suggested, rather than a Supreme Abstraction. The former has the capacity to love man and to reward him. Of the three paths of Hindu religious expression, Bhakti, the path of devotion has been more popular than Jnana, the path of knowledge, or Karma the path of religious performance. Little knowledge is required to follow the path of Bhakti, indeed, the main obstacle is lack of belief.

The Bhakti religious movement probably began in the South of India in the pre-Vedic age, 2,500 B.C. This tradition can be traced through the writings

of the Tamil Alvar saints, the last of them being found about the 8th or 9th Centuries A.D. It started in Dravidian country and its non-Aryan origins are further evidenced by the two deities, Vishnu and Siva, around which the movement centres, for in respect of both these deities, non-Aryan origins are to be supposed. The Bhakti movement was long opposed by the Brahmins; not, it is suggested, because of its possible non-Aryan origins, but because of its disregard of traditional religious ceremony and ritual, and its indifference to caste divisions. (Sen.K. 1961. Chapter 8, 17)

The worship of Siva found favour amongst many high officials during the Gupta age, but the Siva movement was less widespread than the expression to be found in Vishnu, although the Siva following was by no means negligible (Sen.K.1961. P95). During the 9th and succeeding Centuries, Kashmir (in the far North of India) produced a number of teachers who were regarded as the greatest exponents of Bhakti doctrine and philosophy. Of no less importance to the movement were the works of the Tamil and Kanarese saints and scholars, known as the Nayanars and Vira Saivas respectively (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946. P202-203).

It is the expression of Bhakti through Vishnu, however, which assumes prominence in this present work.

The Mahabharata makes reference to the Vaishnava Sects (the devotees of Vishnu) and this indicates that the sects were very old possibly C400-200 BC.

From the tradition of the Alvar Saints and through their followers like Nathamuni, Alvandar-Yamunacharya and Pilley-Lokacarya, the Bhakti movement gradually developed, but it was Ramanuja who gave eloquent expression to the movement. (Sen.K.1961. P72,92,93).

Ramanuja, (A Tamil Brahmin philosopher) was born in Madras in South India. Uncertainty exists about the dates of his birth and death. Walker suggests these dates are 1017-1137 (Walker B. Hindu World Vol.II P285). Edwardes suggests 1175-1250 (Edwardes.M.1961.P87) and Loehlin suggests 1016-1137 (Loehlin.C. 1964. P56). It may be inferred that Ramanuja lived during the 12th Century. He made Kanchi and Srirangam the chief centres of his activities. However, the hostility of the Chola government made him seek shelter for a time at the Hoysala Court in Mysore. Ramanuja represented the intellectual aspect of Bhakti just as the Alvars had represented the emotional aspect. The school of philosophy that he established was known as Visishtadvaita (a form of qualified Monism). His followers were known as Shri Vaishnavas and Ramanuja was to be the inspiration of many great reformers who were later to have a great influence. (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta, 1946 P205). However, their influence on Indian medieval liberalism was not solely due to the effects of Bhakti but also from the interaction of

Islam and Hinduism. Bhakti provided a powerful reply to the monotheistic character of Islam when there was much to commend conversion to the religion of the invader. (Edwardes.M. 1961 Revised 1967 P116-118).

As Sufism, spearheaded by the Chishti Order, spread and gained popularity, similarly, Bhakti also spread and gained momentum, particularly in Northern India. The chief name associated with the Bhakti movement in Northern India at this time was Ramananda. He was particularly notable in respect of the extent of his influence. (Macnicol.N. 1915. P114). Grierson, in a contribution to the 'Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics Vol.10 P569-570' points out that Ramananda was the fifth in descent from Ramanuja, the line being Ramanuja, Devacharya, Hariyananda, Raghavananda and Ramananda.

According to the Northern Indian tradition respecting the life and times of Ramananda, he was born a Brahmin, at birth called Ramadatta and sent to Benares to be educated. Whilst still young he met the prominent teacher, Raghavananda (of the Shri Vaisnava Church which had been founded by Ramanuja). Raghavananda foretold that the boy Ramadatta had but a short time to live, but agreed to help him. Ramadatta became his pupil, changed his name to Ramananda, and was instructed in Vaisnavism and yoga.

Ramananda travelled extensively, and on one occasion when he returned to the Vaisnava church (of which Ragnavananda and Ramananda were members) the brotherhood refused to receive him. The reason: only Brahmins were allowed to occupy the post of teachers so during his wanderings it was said it would have been impossible for him to carry out all the observances required by a Brahmin in respect of his food. The dispute was resolved by Raghavananda who decided Ramananda should go his own way and form a sect of his own. This solution was to result in one of the most momentous revolutions that has occurred in the religious history of Northern India (Grierson.G.1918. P569-570).

Doubt must be expressed concerning the accuracy of dates of birth and death of Ramananda. These dates, however, assume some importance later in assessing claims that he received twelve disciples including Ravidas. Walker suggests Ramananda was born in 1360 and died 1470 (Walker.B. Vol.II P284). Loehlin, in pointing out that little is known of the life of Ramananda puts his teachings between 1400-1450 A.D. (Loehlin.C.1964 P58). Macnicol suggest that Ramananda lived about the end of the 14th Century and the beginning of the 15th Century, he supports this by quoting Bhandarkar who inclines to date his birth at 1299 or 1300 (Macnicol.N.1915 P115). Qureshi quite forcefully disputes the birth date of Ramananda of 1299 and quoting Zutshi, suggests a more acceptable view is that the career of Ramananda lay 'in the last quarter of

the 14th and the first half of the 15th Centuries' (Qureshi.I.1962 P109). Pandey argues that Ramananda died sometime between 1395 and 1410. (Pandey.S 1965. P11).

Contained in the 'Guru Granth Ratnavali' are claims that Ramananda was born in 1366 and died in 1467 (Narang and Colleagues, undated P103).

Although it is a matter for some speculation it is possible Ramananda lived during the first quarter of the 15th Century.

His teachings included that God should be worshipped by fervent devotion, and whilst not condemning idolatry and making no break with the Hindu pantheon, emphasised the equality of man and admitted all castes even the lowest to his fold (Walker.B. Vol.II P284-285). One of the sayings attributed to Ramananda in Hindi illustrates his disregard for Caste.

"Jati Pati Puchhai Nahin Koi  
Hari Ku Bhajai, so Hari Kau Hoi"

"Let no one ask about Caste who  
worships Hari, he is Hari's"

(Loehlin.C.1964 P58)

In addition to teaching the equality of man, Ramananda's speeches and writings were prepared in the vernacular Hindi (Walker.B.Vol.II P284) and not Sanskrit. This helped to spread his doctrines among the masses (Loehlin.C. 1964. P58) and increased his following.



Ramananda was noted for the disciples he gathered around him and taught. Grierson, in a contribution to the 'Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics' Vol.10 lists the disciples: Anantananda the first disciple (who later settled in Jodhpur), Sukhananda the poet, Surasurananda (who became famous for his faith), Narahariyananda, Pipa the Rajput raja, Kabir, Bhavananda, Rai Das (Ravidas), Padmavati and Surasari (wife of Surasurananda), Sena and Dhana (Grierson.G. 1918 P570).

In order to give perspective to the teachings and mission of Ravidas, mention must be made of a fellow disciple, Kabir. Some doubt must be expressed whether in fact Kabir ever met Ramananda, but Ramananda, however, did influence Kabir. Qureshi supports the doubt about the meeting, observing the different views authors have concerning the dates of birth and death of Kabir. These dates range from 1398 to 1440 for Kabir's birth and 1492 to 1518 for his death. Qureshi makes the valuable point, however, that Ramananda was only mentioned by Kabir in respect of Kabir's earlier life, but later no mention is made of Ramananda by Kabir. Qureshi further observes that if the legend of association is accepted at all it would have been for the utmost of three or four years. (Qureshi.I.1962. P111). Titus supports the latter date of 1440 for the birth of Kabir and 1518 for his death. (Titus.M.1930. P173).

A legend associated with Kabir ascribes an unusual start to his life. It is suggested he was the illegitimate son of a Brahmin mother who

abandoned him at birth. He was found by a Muslim weaver who adopted him, and taught him the trade of the weaver. (Walker.B.Vol.I. P506). Kabir attempted to foster unity between Hinduism and Islam. Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta describes this attempt in the following way;

"Though, as Dr Carpenter puts it 'the whole background of Kabir's thought is Hindu' he was also influenced to a great extent by Sufi Saints and poets with whom he came in contact. Thus he preached a religion of love which would promote unity amongst all classes and creeds. To him 'Hindu and Turk were pots of same clay; Allah and Rama were but different names' (Majumdar Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946. P405).

Kabir refused to acknowledge Caste distinctions and indeed, appeared to be quite outspoken against such distinctions. (Macnicol.N.1915. P137). He preached in Hindi which had appeal to the masses. (Majumdar Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946.P407) and the lucid quality of his poetry made his ideas accessible to ordinary people. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967) P117). His influence was not only confined to his teachings and poetry, nor indeed the Sects which comprise of his own immediate followers; other religious teachers in whom the influence of Kabir can be traced include Dadu, Jagjivan Das, Baba Lal, Bribhan, and his most famous follower, the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, (Macnicol.N. 1915. P136).

During the period which Ravidas taught and preached in Northern India, Nanak (1469-1539) also taught and preached there. Ravidas, Kabir and Nanak contributed greatly to the expression of religious liberalism in that part of the sub-continent.



Nanak was born in the village Talwandi, (Macnicol.N.1915. P145) (since renamed Nankana Sahib in memory of Nanak) which is situated in District Shekhupura, 15 miles from Lahore in Pakistan. He was the son of a village Accountant and Cultivator of the Kshatriya Caste. (Sahi.J.1978 P86). Macnicol observes that Kabir and Nanak taught the same message (Macnicol.N.1915. P147) and Loehlin reinforces this message of peace and reconciliation preached by Nanak in quoting Teja Singh -

"His message was one of peace and reconciliation: 'there is no Hindu and no Mussalman'. This was the heart of his mission, which aimed at the reconciliation of these two warring communities to form a new brotherhood" (Loehlin.C. 1964. P4)

Nanak toured extensively on his quest for knowledge, including Assam, Ceylon, Nepal, Mecca and Baghdad. (Loehlin.C. 1964. P4). Kabir and Nanak were dynamic influences in the Bhakti movement, but their main significance in this present work is that they were contemporaries of Ravidas. Mirabai the Rajput princess also gave expression to Bhakti in her poetry. (Edwardes.M.1961. Revised 1967. P117) and made mention of Ravidas in some of her work. (Pandey.S. 1965. P10-12). Pandey observes that Mirabai lived between 1503 to 1546 A.D. and Ravidas was her senior by at least 50 years. (Pandey.S. 1965. P12).

The relationship between Ravidas, Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak and Mirabai will be discussed later. For ease of reference a list of some of the

Bhakti Masters are contained in a list on page 72, and for ease of reference have been included with a list of the Chishti Masters.

The Map on page 73 shows the route travelled by some of the Bhakti Masters. The route has been plotted from references made to place names visited, and referred to in various works. These works are not specifically quoted in this dissertation.

Reference has already been made to the Map, page 47 this Map shows the extent of the military and political influence of Islam in India.

Comment has been passed that the route of the Chishti Masters, shown on page 61, is within the path of the Islamic influence, particularly in respect to Northern India.

The Map on page 73 showing the path of the Bhakti Masters suggests quite forcefully that the Northern part of India was the main centre for Hindu/Islamic religious interaction.

LIST OF CHISHTI AND BHAKTI MASTERS

(UP TO THE 15th CENTURY)

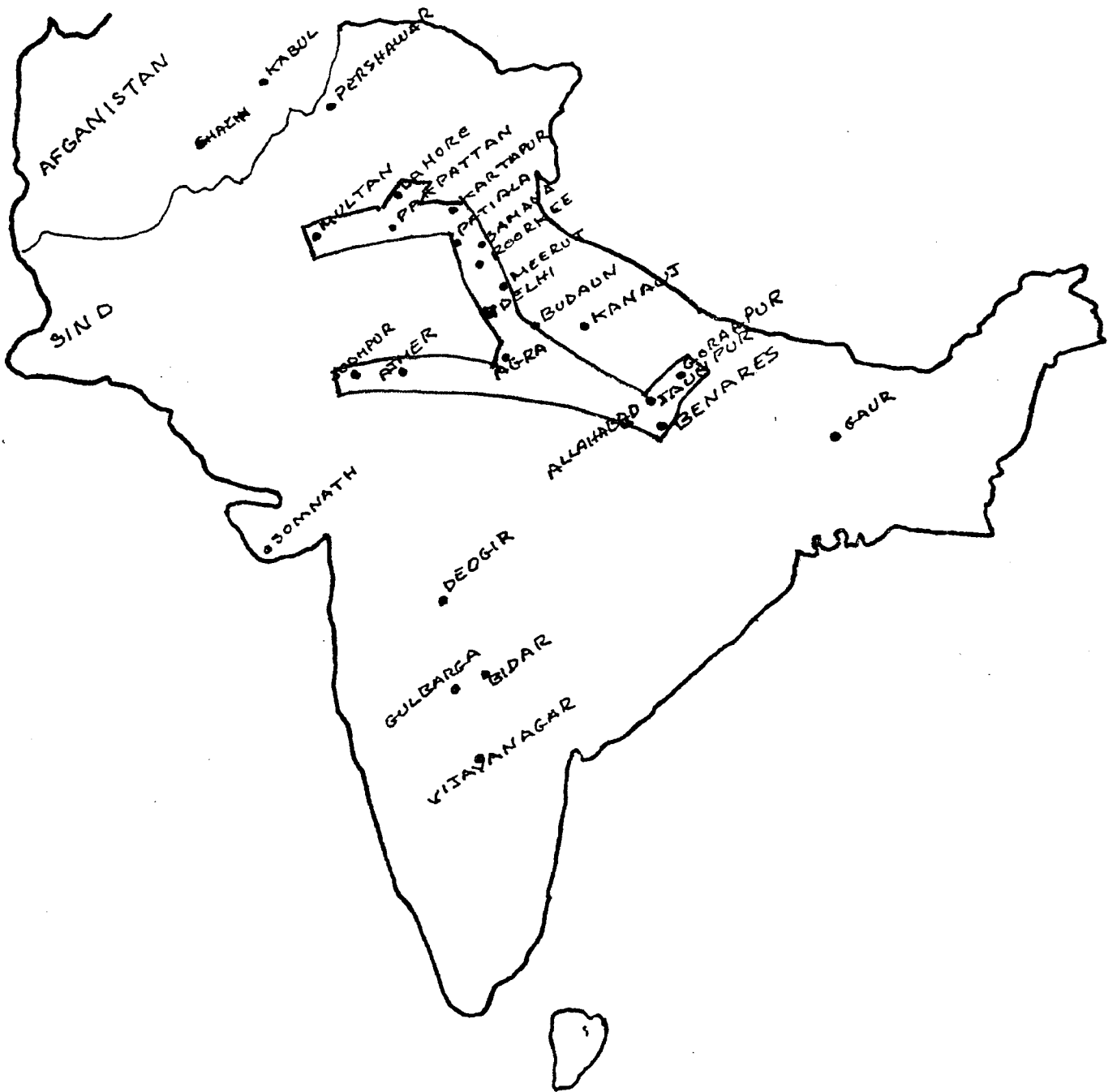
CHISHTI MASTERS

BHAKTI MASTERS

<u>CHISHTI MASTERS</u>		<u>BHAKTI MASTERS</u>	
	Hujwiri - D 1071	Ramanuja	** - D 1137
*			
(2)	Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki - D 1235	Devacharya	- D 1207
(1)	Muinuddin Chishti - D 1236	Hariyananda	- D 1277
(3)	Baba Farid - D 1265	Raghavananda	- D 1350
	Hamiduddin Nagori - D 1274	Ramananda	- D 1440
	Sabir - D 1291	Kabir	- D 1518
	Buali Qalandar Panipati - D 1323	Ravidas	- D 1520
(4)	Nizamuddin - D 1325	Nanak	- D 1539
	Amir Khosrau - D 1325	Mirabai	- D 1546
	Hasan Sijzi Dihlawi - D 1328		
(5)	Nasiruddin Muhammad - D 1356		
(6)	Muhammad Gisudaraz - D 1422		

\* The numerals shown in brackets indicate the spiritual chain of the Chishti Order of Masters:

\*\* The dates quoted in respect of the Bhakti Masters are open to debate concerning their accuracy:



MAP.3 OF INDIA SHOWING THE  
ROUTE TRAVELLED BY SOME OF THE  
BHAKTI MASTERS INCLUDING GURU  
NANAK DURING THE 15TH CENTURY:

## CHAPTER VI

### A JOURNEY INTO

### MYSTICAL LIBERATION: RAVIDAS

#### RAVIDAS - HIS LIFE

It is believed that Ravidas was born at Benares, now named Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Northern India. A brochure published in 1971 by the Indian Government, to mark the issue of a Commemorative stamp in honour of Ravidas, refers to his birth place as Seer Govardhanapura in Varanasi (Government of India Brochure 1971. P6). Pandey relying on a reference suggested to have been made by Ravidas, that the family of Ravidas daily disposed of carcasses round Benares, further supports the location of his birth. (Pandey.S. 1965 P12).

Ravidas was born into the Chamar Caste and is believed to have followed one of the traditional occupations for that Caste, a shoemaker. Pandey assists in supporting claims of these humble origins by quoting the following verses, translated into English, attributed to Ravidas.

"Mean by caste, mean by lineage, mean by birth, I have rendered no service to God, the King, says Ravidasa the cobbler"

"There is none so poor as I"

and

"My caste is low, action is low and low is the profession"  
(Pandey.S.1965 P16. 118)

However, a legend does exist which ascribes to Ravidas Brahmin ancestry, being a Brahmin reborn in the womb of a Chamar. It is said, that one day a disciple of Ramananda received food from a shopkeeper who had had money dealings with a Chamar. When the food was cooked Ramananda refused to accept it because it was unclean. In his anger, commanded that the disciple be reborn a Chamar. The infant at his birth, remembering his past life refused to accept milk from his mother until the whole family had been initiated by Ramananda. This was done. (Briggs.G. 1920 P.208). A further legend also attempts to suggest Ravidas was a Brahmin by origin. A convert to his teachings, Queen Jhali of Chitaur, invited Ravidas to a religious feast. Brahmins refused to eat with him, but by a miracle, he multiplied himself so as to be sitting between each two of them. He then tore open his flesh revealing beneath the skin the sacred caste thread of gold, he died and went to heaven. (Grierson.G. 1918. P560-561).

Ravidas is referred to by many variations of his name. Ravidasa, Ruidasa, Raidasa, Rohidasa, Rahadasa, Rayadasa, Ramadasa, Raedasa, Haridasa (Pandey.S. 1965. P6) Rai Dasa (Grierson.G.1918. P560) Ravi Das (Loehlin.C.1964. P6) Rae Das (Briggs.G. 1920. P207) In this present work he is referred to as 'Ravidas' being the most popular usage and the name used by the followers who are known to the present author.

It has been discussed how Ravidas was believed to be one of the disciples of Ramananda and a contemporary of Kabir, Nanak and Mirabai. In attempting to assess the influences that Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak and Mirabai had on the teachings of Ravidas, it is necessary to attempt to calculate the possible date of birth and death of Ravidas. No authority that has been consulted gives these dates with any accuracy, so at the best such attempts are a matter of some speculation.

Grierson suggests Ravidas probably flourished in the earlier part of the 15th Century A.D. (Grierson.G. 1918. P560). Briggs on the other hand, suggests Ravidas was born late in the 15th Century (Briggs.G. 1920. P210), whilst Pandey argues that birth and death of Ravidas may be roughly fixed at 1450 A.D. to 1540 A.D. (Pandey.S.1965. P12). The Indian Government brochure issued to commemorate Ravidas suggests he was born around the 15th Century (Government of India Brochure 1971 P6). A pamphlet issued by the Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha UK to celebrate the birthday of Ravidas put the date of his birth between 1414-1432 A.D, (unfortunately, the sources for this information are not quoted in the pamphlet). A further contribution in the document, referring to the confusion surrounding the date of birth of Ravidas claims it took place in the second quarter of the 15th Century A.D. (Pamphlet of Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha UK 1977).

Pandey, referring to the poetry of Ravidas, makes reference to 'Kabir having crossed the ocean of the world'. This reference indicates that

that particular work was written after Kabir had died, which means Ravidas must have outlived Kabir. Pandey assists further by pointing out the controversy surrounding the date of the death of Kabir, between 1448 A.D. and 1518 A.D. (Pandey.S. 1965 P9). Pandey observes in respect to Mirabai, that Ravidas was her senior by at least 50 years, and suggests her dates of birth and death were 1503 to 1546 A.D. (Pandey.S. 1965. P12). Kabir makes reference to Ravidas in one of his poems.

"The barber has sought God the washerman and the carpenter  
even Ravidas was a seeker after God"  
(Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta. 1946 P406)

From the above statements there are indications that Ravidas was a younger contemporary of Kabir, and Briggs describes Kabir living to an advanced age. (Briggs.G. 1920. P205). Briggs suggests that Ravidas, at the age of 18 years worshipped a clay image (Briggs.G.1920.P208) If this is accepted, the first 18 years of the life of Ravidas were probably not influenced by Ramananda. It has been discussed previously that if Kabir did meet Ramananda it would only be in respect of the last few years of the latter's life. This would clearly suggest that Ravidas in fact never met Ramananda, a theory which is shared by Pandey. Pandey goes further, and suggests Kabir never met Ravidas, but that Ravidas was a contemporary of Mirabai. (Pandey.S. 1965. P11-12).

It may be assumed that if Ramananda died in 1440 and Ravidas had not been influenced by him for the first 18 years of his life, then Ravidas



would probably have been born about 1420 A.D. Pandey suggests Kabir died between 1448-1518 A.D. Mirabai was born in 1503 and Ravidas was her senior by at least 50 years. Probably she would not have been influenced by Ravidas until she was about 17 years of age, which would suggest that Ravidas must have lived up to at least 1520 A.D. This suggests that Ravidas would have had to have lived for at least 100 years, to have been a disciple of Ramananda, outlived Kabir, and been known to Mirabai. Whether Ravidas was a disciple of Ramananda during the latter's life or a follower of his teachings after his death, is a matter of some speculation. Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion was born in 1469 A.D. and could quite conceivably have met Ravidas and possibly Kabir.

Grierson points out that several of the hymns of Ravidas have been included in the Sikh Holy Book, the Adi Granth, the message of these hymns was that devotional faith in Rama was more important than belief in the Vedas or in the teachings of Brahmanical Hinduism. Stress was also placed in these hymns on the unimportance of caste distinctions. (Grierson.G. 1918. P560). Briggs summarises the teachings of Ravidas in the following terms -

"Rae Das taught that the soul differs from God only in that it is encumbered with a body. For him God was everything, and he gave himself over to passionate devotion to the Deity, believing that God is gracious to all and is accessible to

persons of lowly birth. God alone can save a man from evil passions. His conceptions are based on the general principles that underlie the teachings of all the reformers" (Briggs.G. 1920. P211)

Pandey, in supplying an English translation of one of the hymns of Ravidas illustrates the teachings of Ravidas.

"Brother, devotion is not such; whatever you do without the name of God is said to be illusion  
Devotion is not love - gift;  
Nor the parade of erudition  
Nor the excavation of den, in the forest  
Devotion is not a joke  
Nor the bondage of hope  
All these are not devotion;  
they are the loss of the family honour  
Devotion is not continence,  
Nor the practice of Yoga  
and nor fasting,  
These are all vain actions.  
Devotion is not the control of organs,  
Nor indifference to wordly pleasures.  
These are extremes set by the Vedas.  
Devotion does not mean shaving of the head and beard  
or display of rosary  
or getting the feet washed.  
Those who practise these are said cunning persons.  
Do not talk of devotion,  
Till you assert yourselves,  
When egohood is lost  
You get devotion  
This is devotion, my brother  
God meets and abolishes the sense of egohood  
And all riches and power with it.  
Says Ravidasa, God is near him whose all hopes are relinquished.  
His self then becomes stable.  
And achieves all the treasures"  
(Pandey S.1965. P69-70)

The approach of Ravidas through devotion may be compared with Kabir and Nanak, Kabir wrote,

"It is not by fasting and repeating prayers and the creed that one goeth to heaven; the inner veil of the temple of Mecca is in man's heart, if the truth be known.

Make thy mind thy Kaaba, thy body its enclosing temple  
conscience its prime teacher;  
Sacrifice wrath, doubt and malice;  
Make patience thine utterance of the five prayers.  
the Hindus and the Mussalmans have the same Lord"  
(Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946. P406)

Similarly, Nanak on the same theme of devotion through Hinduism and Islam discusses religion -

"Religion consisteth not in mere words;  
He who looketh on all men as equal is religious  
Religion consisteth not in wandering to tombs or places of cremation, or sitting in attitudes of contemplation.  
Religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries or in bathing at places of pilgrimage  
Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world;  
Thou shalt thou find the way to religion"  
(Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta 1946. P406)

There would appear to be a common theme here of disregarding ritualism, but Ravidas preaches, in addition, a self analysis to rid the make up of pride, but at the same time forcefully recognising the equality of man, Ravidas wrote as follows,

"No one has attained to the supreme state sheerly on account of his birth in a high caste. The special thing for achieving that is devotion to God" (Pandey.S. 1965. P120)

In attempting to describe a profile of Ravidas, some speculation must be present in such a task. Ravidas followed the trade of shoemaker and about the age of 18 years came under the influence of the teachings of Ramananda, either as a disciple, or follower of the latter's teachings. Ravidas had no formal education (Government of India Brochure, 1971 P6) and was illiterate (Pandey.S. 1965. P20). This would not necessarily preclude him however, from composing the poetry and hymns that are attributed to him, for it is not uncommon to find songs, verses, hymns etc. handed down by word of mouth, later to be recorded in writing. Indeed, it is claimed that 39 poems and one couplet composed by Ravidas have been included in the Sikh Holy Book, the Adi Granth. (Pandey.S. 1965 P20).

Ravidas was a Monist, this is illustrated by Pandey quoting a poem of Ravidas;

"One Hari is in the Many  
The many is one Hari  
So how can there be dualism"  
(Pandey.S. 1965 P24)

Ravidas had a faith in, and devotion to God which was all consuming, and as Briggs points out -

"and of even purer faith than Kabir"  
(Briggs.G.1920. P210)

Ravidas is believed to have had a belief in miracles, Pandey, in support of this, refers to three descriptions by Ravidas of miracles;

"Look at the merit of the worship of the absolute, Kabir passed away with his body". "Moved by devotion the Lord went to the Devotee, and met Bithala with a garland" and "He offered milk to Nama Deva the Low" (Pandey.S. 1965. P17-18)

Ravidas preached in Hindi (Pandey.S. 1965 P8) which gave him an appeal to the masses. He condemned those who did not have love and devotion to God, (Pandey.S. 1965. P64) but exhorted humility. (Pandey.S. 1965 P118).

Although Ravidas disregarded the caste system he did not blame "the Hindus or Brahmins, Muslims, Yogis and the like as his predecessor Kabira had done" Ravidas devotes a poem to this theme;

"Blame - Blame is the greatest of all vices" etc:  
(Pandey.S. 1965. P122)

Ravidas saw God 'beyond personality' whereas Ramanuja saw God as Vishnu (Pandey.S. 1965. P56). Pandey, quoting Dr. S. N. Dasgupta forcefully demonstrates that Ravidas did not display the reforming zeal of Kabir. (Pandey.S. 1965. P127). Pandey relying on a quotation by Nabha Dasa shows the fine line of expression which Ravidas possessed.

"The pure speech of Ravidasa is skilled in untying the knots of doubt, it is not contrary to good conduct, the Vedas and Shastras. He was an expert in making fine distinctions between milk and water, true knowledge and sensory experience. Even the Saints of acute insight have embraced his speech"  
(Pandey.S. 1965 P129)

Ravidas was a Hindu philosopher (Pandey.S. 1965 P115) and Mirabai, Nanak and a large number of later Saints and devotees remembered him as one who had realised God or the highest value of human life.

(Pandey.S. 1965 P19). It is believed Sikandar Lodhi, the Sultan of Delhi was impressed by the teachings of Ravidas, the social reformer who emphasised the fundamental truth underlying all religions.

(Indian Government Brochure, 1971. P7-8).

Ravidas made God accessible to all men, even those of low status. He preached a message of devotion and equality but did not advocate apportioning blame to those, who may have created the rigid caste inequality. Although his message of social reform is not clearly demonstrated in his teachings, the implications of this aspect, however, manifested themselves several centuries later. Ravidas was a Hindu who remained a Hindu, who updated what had become a stagnated philosophy which could not meet Islam. Ravidas had two sides to his religious message.

On the one hand he possessed the fire and positiveness in singleminded devotion to God, by contrast, on the other, he preached humility and passive acceptance of his lowly state without apportioning blame.

for his position. These aspects of his message were to assume importance later in the manner they influenced his followers.

#### RAVIDAS - WHAT HE LEFT

It has been discussed how the Hindu religion emerged over a period of time by the integration of members of an advanced civilisation, and the Aryans. Further, how the Aryans assumed prominence and religious acceptance was given to a division of the community into four fundamental groups (castes) and the outcastes. These four caste-groups and outcastes later being fragmented into many divisions each one being apportioned status on a sliding scale of social acceptability. Ravidas was born into one of the most menial and degraded positions of Hindu society. It is against this back-drop of social disability that attempts are made to assess what Ravidas achieved and what he left as a legacy to his followers.

Ravidas was not a Prophet or Messiah. Ravidas did not create a separate religion from Hinduism. Ravidas did not draw a group of disciples around him, nor even did he attempt to form a religious sect within Hinduism. He did attract followers, who later, became known as Ravidasias. At a time when religious alienation of the Sudras, (which included the Chamars) by the higher Hindu castes, the Sudras must have occupied a religious limbo position. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, (all casteless creeds) were open to the Sudras as converts from Hinduism. Ravidas offered members of the low castes a means of finding God and remaining within Hinduism. He held a group of the Chamars together who might otherwise have become fragmented by conversions. In referring to Ravidas, Pandey

describes this as follows;

"He thus stopped the mass conversion of Shudras into other sects and religions and consolidated the perennial religion in which he was born by which he was brought up and through which he attained to the vision of God. He abolished for good the religious alienation of Shudras and integrated them with other Hindus"  
(Pandey.S. 1965. P154)

This may be contrasted with Kabir who bridged Hinduism and Islam, and on his death, both Hindu and Muslim claimed his body. (Briggs.G.1920. P205), and Nanak, through his followers founded the Sikh religion. Both Kabir and Nanak were not strictly within the Hindu religion, unlike Ravidas.

Ravidas was not a celibate monk nor was he known for the miracles he performed. He was not a Brahmin, nor was he a legalist nor faith healer. Such was his influence, however, that the Indian Census 1891 showed that 417,000 people had recorded their caste as 'Raidasis'. (Grierson.G. 1918. P560). A further indication of his influence is to be found in Sikhism. Those Sikhs that usually follow the occupation of weaver, and who came from a tribe that had followed the trade of leather dressers are known as 'Ramdasis Sikhs' (a corruption of 'Ravidasia'). (Bingley.A. 1970. P62-63).

Those religious leaders of low-caste origins who flourished during the 15th Century were known as 'Bhagats', Kabir and Ravidas are examples of



Bhagats of this period whose hymns and poems were included in the Sikh Holy Book, the Adi Granth. Those Chamars who were converted into Sikhism ( a casteless religion) were known by the name of the first Bhagat of their former caste, Ravidas. This was to show they followed Ravidas. (Bingley.A.1970. P63) and is a further indication of the influence Ravidas exerted.

It is a matter of speculation if Ravidas could have achieved any success as a preacher and teacher had it not been for the influence of Islam in India at that time. It is clear, however, that the military political and religious presence of Islam in the Indian Sub-Continent did highlight an inadequacy of both Islam and Hinduism which in turn created a favourable climate for some religious liberalism to be expressed. This liberalism was expressed by Sufism and Bhakti. Ravidas, through the devotional approach of Bhakti was able to remain a Hindu, preach against the rigidity and inequality of caste and bring God to a socially disadvantaged group of people.

Ravidas enabled a low-caste group to find God in the Hindu context. To accept their degraded position but at the same time have pride in themselves. His message held them together as a group identified by his name, Ravidasia. It is suggested that Ravidas offered a menial degraded group of people a way of meditation and prayer that enabled them to meet God in their own humble situation in life. This helped his followers to have self respect (in that they were not second class citizens in relation to God). It would also make it unnecessary to envy those who being a higher caste, felt that they enjoyed a closer affinity with God.

His followers could dispense with priests and temple rituals because Ravidas taught them a more direct way of devotion by prayer. Yet, at the same time the followers could live at peace with those in the caste system.

The Ravidasias made the second journey into mystical liberalism in the context of a 20th Century Western democracy, the West Midlands County in England. They took with them the message of Ravidas, transmitted over 500 years, or as Pandey observes,

Ravidas "is more alive now than when he actually lived".  
(Pandey.S.1965. P7)

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INDIAN PROFILE

#### FREEDOM MOVEMENTS

As previously indicated (Chapter IV) the 14th and 15th Centuries represented a period in Indian history of mystical liberation which created a climate for Ravidas to express his religious teachings and exert a subtle influence on his followers (who occupied a degraded and menial position in the Indian society). The 20th Century represents to some extent a period of political liberalism, particularly before Indian Independence in 1947, in which the influence of Ravidas was also exerted through the part played by his followers. Srinivas writing in 'Social Change in Modern India' forcibly demonstrates certain factors which made the political climate possible.

"The full implications of Westernization are indeed revolutionary for India, if what has already happened is any indication. That Westernization is indeed a fundamental process, and not something superficial and external is made clear by the fact that it is the Indian elite who have taken upon themselves the great task of modernising their society. Indeed, it is my contention that no alien body, however powerful and competent, could have introduced the changes which the indigenous elite have in the brief period since India became Independent.

The foundations for these changes were laid by the establishment of British rule over India, and the consequences, direct and indirect which flowed from it. In the first place, the new technology brought by the British made possible the effective administrative and political integration of the entire sub-continent. The building of a network of roads, the creation of a modern country wide bureaucracy and the steps taken toward

establishing a uniform legal system were all indispensable to administrative and political integration. These, together with the ending of local wars everywhere, the stamping out of thuggee, the abolition of slavery, the introduction of tenurial reforms, the opening up of plantations for such crops as tea, coffee, cotton, tobacco and indigo, and the development of towns and cities, laid the basis for the eventual economic development of the Country".

(Srinivas.M. 1966. P89)

In addition to those factors outlined by Srinivas, the climate for political liberalism was also assisted by British insensitivity towards Indian culture and religion, particularly following the Indian mutiny 1857-1859 (Edwardes.M.1961, Revised 1967 P280-282). The mutiny also brought an end to the East India Company, with the result that the British Parliament became responsible for governing India. In 1878 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. Also at that time a 10 year old boy, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was being educated, a boy who would play an important part in the independence of the Country.

As Zinkin points out -

"When the British won the mutiny, they lost India"  
(Zinkin.T. 1964. P58-59)

In considering freedom movements only those are discussed which, in the opinion of the present author, have some relevance to the creation of the climate for the further influence of Ravidas. For it will be discussed how one such movement was spearheaded by the followers of Ravidas, the Ad-Dharmi Movement in Northern India. The climate in which the Ad-Dharmi movement was created was caused by the creation of other Movements. The Brahma Samaj, which emerged out of the reformist

ideas of Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833), later led by Keshab Chandra Sen, who caused a split in the Brahmo Samaj Movement by pursuing such emotive issues as inter-caste-marriage and widow marriage. They followed a path of social reform, but did not think in terms of revolution. However the scaffolding of the Nationalist concept was laid by the Brahmo Samaj, and other religious freedom movements, following the religious revival in the aftermath of the Indian mutiny.

The Arya Samaj founded in Bombay in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, (1824-1883) pursued a philosophy which maintained that the true religion of India was contained in the Vedas and that all modern inventions were alluded to in the Vedas. They attacked caste restrictions, child marriage and many other popular features of Hinduism.

At its beginning the Arya Samaj was religious and not political, however, in the establishment of the Suddhi movement (a movement within the Arya Samaj) for the conversion of non-Hindus, some political concept of a United India is apparent. Further, Dayananda Saraswati founded the Cow Protection Association in 1882 which suggests some anti-Muslim overtones, which much later did assume some political significance. The Ramakrishna Mission led by Narendranath Dutta (1863-1902) crystalised the feeling of the 'Hindu tradition' and gave expression to the idea of nationhood. (Edwardes.M. 1961. Revised 1967 P292-293). Just as the early freedom movements tended to create an ambience for the 'nationhood' idea and made attempts to lift caste restrictions, other factors had the reverse effect in respect of caste. Some emphasis was given to the caste

divisions in the Punjab with the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900.

During the latter part of the 19th Century large sections of the Punjab peasantry were losing their land to money lenders, who were predominantly Hindu. Many of those affected had connections with the army; a large percentage of army recruits came from the Punjab. The Act defined non-agricultural castes in an arbitrary manner which left the non-Jat castes at the mercy of landlords and rich peasants. (Jat: A farmer, agricultural class - Loehlin.C. 1964. P103). This tended to create the 'Jat Brotherhood' and a cleavage between town and country, (the landlords' commercial interests were allied to the towns).

By focussing attacks on the money lenders and carrying legislation against him, the Unionist party was able to rally behind it the 'Punjab Countryside'. (Josh.B. - undated P116-117). The effect on the menial castes was that since the Act tended to strengthen the Jat landowning caste a further hurdle was placed in their path to emancipation.

Two names emerged that have been associated with attempts to ease the plight of the depressed castes - Ambedkar and Gandhi. Brief mention must be made of both in order that some perspective can be given to the major reform movement, the Ad-Dharmi movement, inspired and created by members of the menial and degraded castes themselves.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) a member of the Mahar caste (a menial and degraded caste) worked right up until the time of his death for the

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abolition of the caste system. He was educated in London and the United States of America, returning to India with an impressive academic record - BA. MA. PhD. D.Sc. Barrister-at-Law. It is interesting to note that this education was only possible because of a temporary relaxation of the caste rules. Normally his caste would have precluded him from receiving any formal education, but his father, a serving soldier, was entitled, because of his association with the army to have his children educated. Later, army recruiting from the Mahar caste was stopped, because they were considered Untouchable. The Maharaja of Baroda, who was philanthropically interested in helping 'Untouchables', paid for the education of Ambedkar.

In 1924 Ambedkar formed the 'Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha', an educational and cultural organisation aimed at improving the conditions of 'Untouchables'.

The 'Chowdar Tank Case' in 1927 is an example of the pioneering zeal of Ambedkar. Following a dispute that had arisen because 'Caste Hindus' would not allow 'Untouchables' to take water from communal wells, (even though a legal right to do so had existed since 1924), Ambedkar led a delegation of 10,000 members of the depressed castes to the Chowdar Tank and exercised their civic rights to use the water. This act demonstrated that 'Untouchables' did have a potential of strength in

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virtue of their numbers to seek redress. The Mahad Municipality, however, revoked the 1924 decision, and declared the Tank was no longer open to members of the depressed classes.

There were other landmarks in the quest of Ambedkar to eradicate caste. In 1929 he spearheaded the 'Temple Entry Campaign' in which 15,000 'Untouchables' attempted to worship Shree Rama in the Temple at Nasik. Ambedkar became the official representative of 'Untouchables' to the Simon Commission, and represented 'Untouchable' interests at the Prime Ministers Round Table Conference in London in 1930.

The Communal Award (granted by the British Government in 1932) gave the depressed classes most of their requests, the Poona Pact, an agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi and his followers (who were against communal awards) and signed by Hindu leaders agreed similar concessions. (Ambedkar.B. 1973)

In 1935 Ambedkar decided to reject Hinduism, and twenty years later became a Buddhist. He believed that Hinduism was based on the caste system, and the only way to break caste was to 'destroy the religious notions on which caste is founded'. (Bamfield.J.1972 P21-29).

In order to add to the scenario of 'Untouchable' emancipation, brief mention must be made of Gandhi. This brief mention is not intended to

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detract from or devalue the contribution Gandhi made to the Independence of India. His life and work, particularly in this respect is well documented, what is relevant in this present work, however, is his stance respecting the position of the lower castes.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, born in 1869 and educated in London, became an advocate at the Bombay High Court. He visited the Transvaal, and founded the National Indian Congress in 1894. In 1915, returning to India, he pursued a campaign against British rule. He recognised the plight of the 'Untouchables' (Gandhi referred to them as 'Harijans' Children of God) (Zinkin.T.1964.P70) and campaigned for their menial and degraded position to be improved. (Ambedkar.B.1970. P44-49)

Ambedkar describes Gandhi's stance in respect of 'Untouchables' as follows.

"Does this not show that Mr Gandhi is more anxious to tighten the tie which binds the Untouchables to the apron strings of the Hindus than to free them from the thralldom of the Hindus?" (Ambedkar.B.1970. P87).

The important difference between Ambedkar and Gandhi was that Ambedkar wished to abolish the caste system whereas Gandhi wished to retain it, but improve the conditions of the lower Castes.

Despite the difference, during the first quarter of the 20th Century there was an increase in political awareness by the depressed castes,

assisted on one hand by Gandhi pioneering for their conditions to be improved, and on the other, by Ambedkar attempting to eradicate caste barriers altogether. A political and religious response did come in the Punjab from members of the menial castes themselves, who no doubt realised that if India did eventually gain independence, the plight of the lower castes could remain unchanged by the exchange of British rule for Hindu rule. Das does give some tantalising hints about the political and religious responses of the low castes, as follows:

"In Punjab, many of the Chamars return themselves as Ad-Dharmi although this title is not their sole monopoly. Many of the sweepers also return their caste as 'Ad-Dharmi. Like the Adi-Dravida Movement of South India, this movement was also started by Chuhra and Chamar leaders of two major Untouchable castes of the Punjab". (Das.B.1972. P39)

The Ad-Dharmi Movement of the 1920's in Northern India provided an important catalyst for religious and political expressions of the low-caste peoples who joined the Movement and indeed, was possibly one of the most important developments amongst the low castes since Ravidas himself preached equality of man and devotion to God.

The following description of the origins and development of the Ad-Dharmi Movement has been supplied by members of the Ravidas community, known personally to the present author, whose fathers and elder relatives were part of the Movement as members and organisers. Also reference has been

made to a document written and published in Urdu in 1931 by the Secretary of the Ad-Dharmi Mandal, Hazara Ram, entitled 'History of Ad-Dharm' (Ram.H.1931).

In addition, the present author, during a visit to India met the founder of the Ad-Dharmi movement, Mangoo Ram.

#### AD-DHARMI MOVEMENT

Ad-Dharm may be translated to mean 'Beginning Religion' and is believed to refer to some concepts which pre-date the Aryan invasion, the period before the caste system. 'Ad-Dharm' should not be confused with 'Adharm' which means 'a man with no religion'. The founder of the Ad-Dharmi Movement, Mangoo Ram, from the village of Muggowal in the District of Hoshiarpur, Punjab, was a member of the Ravidas community. He objected to the activities of the various freedom movements pursuing Home Rule for India whilst low caste people were suffering extreme social disadvantage because of their caste. The oppressors he saw as the high caste-Hindus whose oppression would continue when Independence was won.

In 1925 an inaugural meeting was held of the Ad-Dharmi movement attended by 587 members drawn mainly from the Punjab. The present informant (a member of the Ravidas community resident in the West Midlands whose father was a founder member of the Ad-Dharmi Movement) in respect of the Ad-Dharmi movement, stated that nearly all 'the delegates at this meeting' were from the Ravidas community. Indeed, the President,

Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and three Chief Missionaries and 33 of the Honorary Missionaries of the Ad-Dharm movement were drawn from the Ravidas community. The Editor of the movement's newspaper, 'Adi-Danka' was also a Ravidasia. A chart on page 101 indicates the Districts represented and numbers of persons attending. The area of the Districts referred to are shown on the map, page 102.

There may be a variety of reasons for the preponderance of Ravidas members at this inaugural meeting. The present author suggests that one reason may have been the influence of the teaching of Ravidas. The influence of his message not only in terms of equality of all men but, as previously discussed, his teachings prevented a fragmentation of his followers from the Chamar caste. If this is accepted, then this prevention of dispersal enabled a group under a common influence to spearhead this religious, social reformist movement. To quote Pandey again,

"For although Ravidasa died about 400 years ago he is more alive now than when he actually lived"  
(Pandey.S. 1965. P7)

The Ad-Dharmi movement was quite important in drawing attention, in a concerted and organised way to the plight of the low caste people in India. Indeed, the resolutions passed at two conferences of the movement give a clear indication of the problems which the members of the low-castes were experiencing (and those members included the followers of Ravidas).

At a conference held in June, 1926 attended by 200,000 people, 25 resolutions were passed. The following extract of some of these resolutions indicates the sort of problems suffered, and the kind of attempts to organise a religious basis for social reform.

"The first word will be (Sohang) (God)  
The form of address when members meet will be 'Jai Guru Dev'  
(Our Guru is great)  
When members asked what their religion is they will register  
as 'Ad-Dharmi'  
All castes that have come together are a brotherhood.  
When an Ad-Dharmi is attacked by a high caste, all Ad-Dharmi's  
should help against the aggressor.  
All Ad-Dharmis should propagate holy words of all Sages and Sadus  
who belong to the low-caste and do not believe in the caste  
system, high or low, and condemn all Temples who do not admit low  
caste people to enter.  
(Low caste Sages include: Kabir, Ravidas, Nam Dev, Sadhna,  
Tarlochan)  
That India must not get freedom until low-caste standards of  
living are brought up to other Hindus. (The informant told the  
present author that Gandhi was against this suggestion).  
Requests Britain to understand that leaders of other communities  
do not represent Ad-Dharmis.  
That sons and daughters of the low castes should get at least a  
primary education.  
That Hindu Holy books should not be read where it is stated women  
animals and low castes should be kept in their place.  
That the Minister for Education, Lahore, should be asked to grant  
to Ad-Dharmis free education and a grant for books.  
A proper wage for Farm Labourers; and surplus land should be  
divided up and given to Ad-Dharmis.  
Low caste people cannot buy land even land on which their house  
stands. The Government should be petitioned to allow Ad-Dharmis  
to buy land.  
In Census reports Ad-Dharmis should not be counted as Hindus and  
all Ad-Dharmis must have rights proportionate to their numbers.  
Government should be asked to grant permission to Ad-Dharmis to  
join the army and the police.  
That the ban for low castes to wear red colours should be lifted -  
(Ad-Dharmis used to wear red turbans at conferences)"

The present informant (whose father had been a founder member of the

Ad-Dharmi movement) also stated that the Ad-Dharmi movement in addition to acting as a political pressure group, provided community welfare by collecting and storing amounts of food, so that members of the movement could be provided for when food was not otherwise available, or the food could be sold to provide funds. It is claimed by the informant that by 1930 the Ad-Dharmi members had increased to 6,000,000. Although the Ad-Dharmi movement appeared numerically strong and for a period prior to Independence, reasonably well organised, it appears to have lost its initial impetus and direction, being swallowed up in the political quagmire of conflicting interests of the major forces of Hindu, Muslim and British self interest after Independence. There are several possible reasons for this incapacity to maintain momentum. Some have been suggested to the present author by existing adherents to the concept of Ad-Dharm and are stated below.

Many of the organisers lacked the education to respond to the vicious cut-and-thrust of politics. Again the dedication shown by some prominent high caste Hindus, 'to keep the lower castes in their place'. Yet again some of the principal organisers of Ad-Dharm became members of the Legislative Assembly which tended to prevent them from spending time organising the movement and in some instances they were seen as 'Establishment Figures'.

That the low-caste people were at the bottom of the economic ladder

and because of lack of funds could not afford sustained expensive political championship of their cause. This situation was aggravated even further by low-caste refugees entering the Punjab from Pakistan following Independence, so placing an additional burden on existing sparse funds. Dr. Ambedkar, the dynamic champion of the low-castes announced he intended to forsake Hinduism in favour of Buddhism, and this tended to weaken the Hindu low caste position.

The Movement, however, did not die. It will be shown in Chapter VIII how the spirit of the Ad-Dharmi Movement emigrated with some of the members of the Ravidas community to the West Midlands County in England where it found new impetus inextricably bound up in the teachings of Ravidas.

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DISTRIBUTION BY DISTRICT OF INAUGURAL MEMBERS OF THE

AD-DHARMI MOVEMENT

District Hoshiarpur	149	District Jullundar	120	District Lyallpur	90
District Shekhupura	12	District Ferozepure	13	District Ludihana	14
District Sargodha	15	District Montgomery	18	District Gurdaspur	14
District Multan	10	District Hissar	5	District Karnal	2
District Gujranwala	2	District Sialkot	2	District Lahore	4
District Kangra	42	District Patiala	2	District Beekaner	2
Kaputla	15	Bewal Estate	2	Chamba Valley	4
Malerkotla	2	District Ambala	2	Delhousi Cant	3
District Gujarat	3	Dehadaun	2	Meerut	2
Delhi	11	Saharnpur	2	Karanpur	2
Lucknow	2	Allahabad	2	Benares	6
Calcutta	11				

FIG. 2.





MAP.4. OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT SHOWING  
MAIN AREAS OF AD-DHARMI INFLUENCE:

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## ABOLITION OF UNTOUCHABILITY

The present informant (whose father had been a founder member of the Ad-Dharmi Movement) indicates that representatives of the Ad-Dharmi Movement met the Senior Commissioner in 1930. It is difficult to assess how effective these representatives were in influencing whatever concessions were later granted to the low-castes. Ambedkar and Gandhi figured so prominently in these and other issues, that their contribution may have detracted from the prominence of similar activities by others.

The Indian Constitution, Article 17 abolishes Untouchability and authorises the President under Article 341 to specify castes, races and tribes which will be 'Scheduled'. This term 'Scheduled Castes and Tribes' was a device in 1935 to describe 429 'outcaste' communities - e.g. Mahars, Bhangi, Khatik, Chamar, Pasi etc. (Scheduling enabled concessions to be granted to certain castes and outcastes). The 1971 Indian Census revealed that Scheduled Castes represented 18% of the Hindu population (Hiro.D. Report No 26 P8). Hiro forcefully demonstrates that although Untouchability has been abolished by Law and some concessions granted to Scheduled Castes the old prejudices with the attendant harsh treatment in certain areas remain (Hiro Report No. 26 P9.10); it follows that the former attendant problems of social disadvantage and inequality can also tend to remain in those areas.

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## CONTEMPORARY INDIA

India is the seventh largest Country in the world covering a land mass of 3,287,782 sq km with a population recorded in the 1971 Census of 548,159,652 - an increase of 24.8% on the 1961 Census (India 1980 Reference Annual).

The economy has been developed under a series of five year plans. The sixth (1978-1983) was abandoned however, following Indira Gandhi's landslide victory in 1980, by the introduction of a revised plan covering 1980-1985. Although labour disputes have decreased since 1980 there has been little indication of the easing of caste and sectarian lawlessness and discrimination against the lower castes is still a problem. Although the industrial sector has made appreciable progress, agriculture accounts for more than 40% of the gross national product. (Intelligence Digest Special Report No 54).

This present work is mainly concerned with the Northern part of India, particularly the Punjab, the state from which most of the Ravidas community in the West Midlands have emigrated. The Punjab state covers an area of 50,362 sq km and houses a population of 13,551,060 with a density distribution of 269 persons per sq km in 12,188 villages and 106 towns. Of the population 76% are engaged in agriculture. They

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have 12 seats in the two Houses of Parliament. There are 4,562,123 literates, yielding a literary level of 38.69%. The Punjab, containing the City of Amritsar, (Amritsar is the focal point of the Sikh religion) interestingly, but not surprisingly 8,159,972 Sikhs make-up the majority of the population. Hindus account for 5,087,235 while 3,348,217 members of the total population are members of the Scheduled Castes. (India 1980 - Reference Annual) Contained within the 3,348,217 Scheduled Caste members are proportions of the followers of Ravidas. The Maps on pages 47, 61, 73 show that the Punjab state of India was influenced by the invasion of the Turko/Afghans bringing with them Islam, similarly, there was influence of Sufism spearheaded by the Chishti Masters followed by Bhakti. Sikhism became established in the Punjab and more recently (in 1925) this area saw the rise of the Ad-Dharmi Movement. In order to give some perspective to the Punjab a comparison table is provided on page 107 giving statistical returns for Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, being areas that, in the opinion of the present author, have become caught up in this religious and political liberalism to some extent. A map on page 108 shows the relationship of these states.

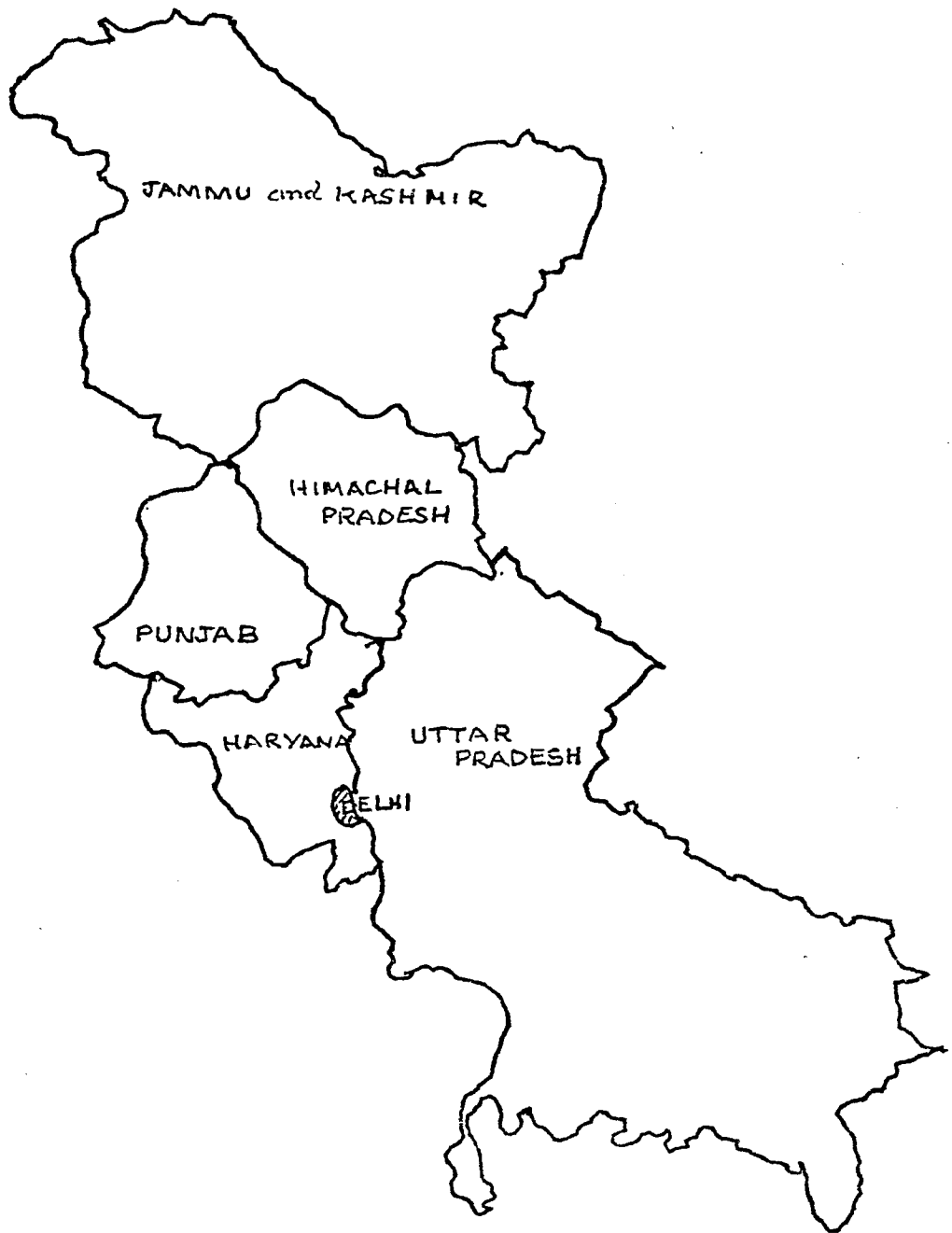
It was only natural that when some members of the Sikh religion and followers of Ravidas emigrated to England, many finding their way to the West Midlands, old traditions were continued.

The Ravidas community in this new British arena of an open democratic thriving and prosperous society were able to establish themselves and follow their path towards an expression of a bygone vision of equality.

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	Punjab	Himachal Pradesh	Haryana	Uttar Pradesh
Population	13,551,060	3,460,434	10,036,808	88,341,144
Area (Sq Km)	50,362	55,673	44,222	294,413
Density of Population (Per Sq Km)	269	62	227	300
Hindus	5,087,235	3,324,627	8,956,310	73,997,597
Muslims	114,447	50,327	405,723	13,676,533
Christians	162,202	3,556	9,802	131,810
Sikhs	8,159,972	44,914	631,048	369,672
Buddhists	1,374	35,937	845	39,639
Jains	21,383	626	31,173	124,728
Other Religions	355	319	5	423
Religion not Stated	4,092	128	1,902	742
Number of villages	12,188	16,916	6,731	112,561
Number of Towns	106	35	65	293
Seats in Two Houses of Parliament	12	3	10	85
Total Literates	4,562,123	1,105,825	2,699,179	19,173,970
Percentage of Literacy	38.69	37.30	31.9	25.44
Population Scheduled Castes	3,348,217	807,609	1,895,933	19,095,413
Population Scheduled Tribes	-	141,647	-	198,565
Percentage of Population engaged in Agriculture	76	75	72	Not Quoted
Percentage of Irrigated Area	Not Quoted	16.1	51.5	Not Quoted

FIG. 3.



MAP.5. OF THE NORTHERN STATES OF INDIA  
SHOWING THEIR POSITION IN RELATION  
TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR AND DELHI:

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE UNITED KINGDOM PROFILE

#### THE INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

Desai writing in 1963, a contemporary period for Indian immigration to the United Kingdom, points out that immigration was voluntary and the motivation was one of economic need. He adds that the present pattern of immigration from the Indian Sub-Continent started immediately after the second world war with economic expansion in the United Kingdom, and the resulting shortage of labour attracting workers from all over Europe as well as many parts of the Commonwealth. (Desai.R. 1963. P1). No doubt most of the immigrants from India intended to return to India when they had saved enough money. In many cases their behaviour indicates their departure will be deferred indefinitely. (Desai.R. 1963. P12)

The numbers arriving from India and Pakistan had become significant by 1952 reaching a peak between 1954-1955 when the Government of India introduced new regulations for issuing passports which required a stricter check on emigrants. (Desai.R. 1963. P3)

Desai suggests that in 1939 in the City of Birmingham there was an estimated population of 100 Indians; by 1945, however, the numbers

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had increased to 1,000. In 1953 the estimate of the Indo-Pakistani population in the City had grown to 2,000. (Desai.R. 1963. P3).

Desai significantly points out -

"One result is that migrants have retained the unity given by their regional culture, language and kinship ties. Indian communities overseas are found organised to this day on the recognition of regional culture and language rather than on an all - India basis. Further, the regional character of migration made it easier for migrants to transplant Indian culture and values by forming themselves into voluntarily exclusive communities and retaining contacts with India wherever economic conditions and means of communication permitted"  
(Desai. R. 1963.P1)

The regions from which most of the Indian immigrants came were the Jullundur and Hoshiarpur districts of the Punjab and the Central and Southern parts of Gujerat. (Desai.R. 1963. P13) Concerning the immigrants from the Punjab, according to Desai, the great majority were Sikhs and only a few Hindus, usually from upper and middle castes.  
(Desai.R. 1963. P14)

Rose, writing in 1969, draws attention to the limited area from which the immigrants are drawn, and adds -

"The Sikhs who constitute four fifths of the Indian migration to Britain come mainly from two Districts in Eastern Punjab, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur in an area known as the Doaba, a Mesopotamia that lies between the two rivers - Beas and Sutlej. They are men of the plains which are among the most fertile in India"  
(Rose.E. 1969. P52)

Rose suggests that the number of Hindu immigrants is comparatively small in number and attributes this in part to the ritual impurity that follows when a Hindu travels across the sea. (Rose.E. 1969. P57) Desai also comments about the taboo involving Hindus travelling across water. (Desai.R. 1963. P93).

Both Rose and Desai agree that the immigrants from the Punjab were mainly Sikhs and relatively few Hindus from the upper and middle castes. The present author is persuaded that Desai and Rose have tended to oversimplify the immigration patterns in respect of the Punjab. No mention is made of the Ravidasia or indeed low caste Hindus. It will be shown later that in fact the Ravidasia did comprise part of the immigration from the Punjab at this time. Clearly, Desai and Rose must have mistakenly included them in the Sikh category; they could not have been included in the Hindu category for in this category numbers were small and comprised mainly of upper and middle castes, not the Chamars, a degraded caste. If this assumption is accepted, it is possible to roughly estimate the numbers of Ravidasias living in the West Midlands County.

Rose claims four-fifths of the Indian community who came as immigrants were Sikh, contained within this proportion it is assumed are the Ravidasia. The India reference Annual, 1980, published by the Government of India (India 1980 Reference Annual P.8.10.12) shows that out of a total population for the Punjab of 13,551,060 the Sikh population accounts for 8,159,972 and the Scheduled caste (which would include the followers of Ravidas) number 3,348,217.

The numbers of the Scheduled caste represent 41% of the Sikh population. Assuming that this percentage represents the same percentage of the estimated Sikh population (which also contain proportions of the Schedule caste) in the West Midlands County, it is possible from the Census 1981 to roughly estimate the numbers of Ravidasias residing in the West Midlands County. Desai assists further by estimating that of 40,000 immigrants from India, 8,000 are from the Gujerat, or 20%. (Desai.R. 1963 P19).

It may be inferred that out of the total population of people born in India resident in the United Kingdom 80% are from the Punjab, 80% of the Punjabi's Rose and Desai would have described as Sikh, but more accurately, 41% of that number would be Scheduled caste including Ravidasias. It is claimed by an elder leading member of the Ravidas community that a very large proportion of the Scheduled caste resident in the United Kingdom are Ravidasias. The Table on page 115 estimates the number of Ravidasias born in India and residing in the West Midlands County.

These figures do not, however, account for Ravidasias born in the United Kingdom. By using the Census figures for 1981 it is possible to deduce the ratio of New Commonwealth Citizens, and assuming this ratio is reflected in the same proportion to their families, again a rough estimate may be deduced of total Ravidasias within the West Midlands County.

The Census 1981 records a total of 164,125 New Commonwealth and Pakistan

residents born outside the United Kingdom resident in the West Midlands of which 63,090 were born in India; a ratio of 1: 2.6. The Census figures group together New Commonwealth and Pakistani persons born in and outside the United Kingdom, a total of 285,350 of which it may be assumed contains Indians in the ratio of 1: 2.6. The Table on page 116 shows the estimated population of Ravidasias resident in the West Midlands deduced from percentages of estimated Punjab Sikhs.

An estimate of the Ravidasias population was provided by an elder leading member of the Ravidas community. That estimate of population is also contained in the table on page 116 by way of comparison.

Comparing the two estimates, it is interesting to note there is only a discrepancy of 2,682 in respect of the total figure. However, there is disparity regarding the distribution of the Ravidas population. The present author believes that the details supplied by the Ravidas community are more likely to be accurate in respect to distribution, than the estimates derived from the Census figures. The Map on page 117 shows the main areas of Ravidas population in the West Midlands County.

In support of this, Desai assists by pointing out that when the immigrant arrived he usually found accommodation with a relative or fellow villager and from that time found himself participating in the activities of the group. (Desai.R. 1963. P17). This would tend to suggest that communities grew in the United Kingdom located on a geographical base with common

kinship or village ties.

The estimates of population from the Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom clearly suggests that the main area of distribution is the West Midlands County. Derby is estimated at 600, Leicester at 250, Bedford 500, Luton 500, Southall 15,000, East London 1,000 and Bradford 600. The Map on page 118 shows these population distributions in terms of the United Kingdom.

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	*Persons Born in India (A)	Estimated (B) Punjabi's 80% of - A	Estimated (C) Sikhs 80% of - B	Estimated (D) Ravidasia 41% of - C
West Midlands County	63,090	50,472	40,378	16,555
Birmingham	22,267	17,814	14,251	5,843
Coventry	9,768	7,814	6,251	2,562
Dudley	1,958	1,566	1,253	6,437
Sandwell	10,501	8,401	6,721	2,756
Solihull	484	387	310	127
Walsall	5,516	4,413	3,530	1,447
Wolverhampton	12,596	10,077	8,061	3,305

\* Census, 1981

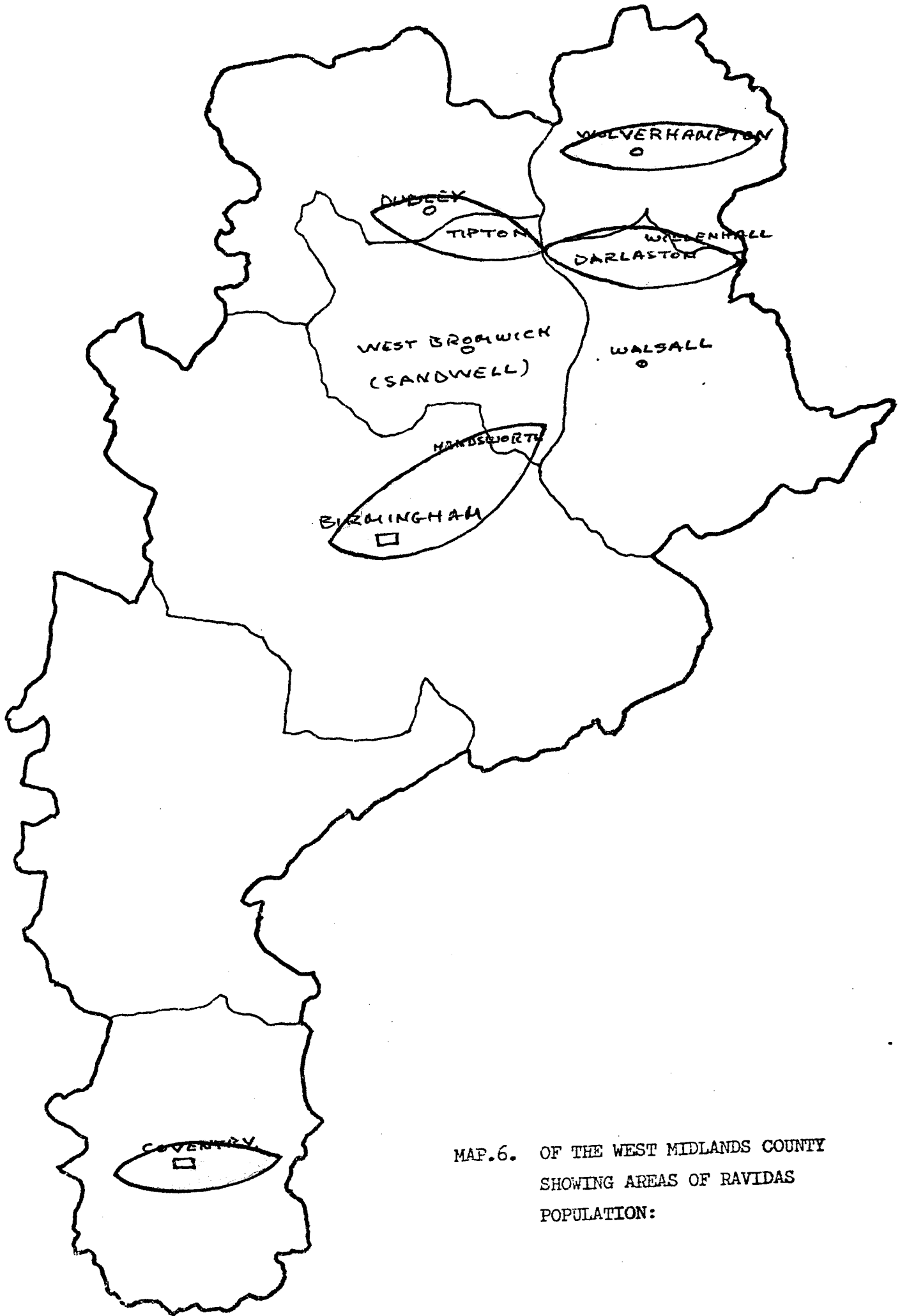
FIG.4.

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	Estimate of Ravidas Population from Census, 1981	Estimate of Ravidas Population Provided by Ravidas Community
West Midlands County	28,798	31,480
Birmingham	15,068	15,000
Coventry	2,977	5,000
Dudley	1,026	150
Sandwell	3,526	-
Solihull	366	-
Walsall	1,912	330
Wolverhampton	3,922	11,000

FIG.5.

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MAP.6. OF THE WEST MIDLANDS COUNTY  
SHOWING AREAS OF RAVIDAS  
POPULATION:





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MAP.7 SHOWING THE MAIN CENTRES OF  
RAVIDAS POPULATION IN THE  
UNITED KINGDOM:

THE RAVIDAS SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The estimates of the Ravidas population resident in the United Kingdom indicates that comparatively small areas of this Country are affected in the settlement. The information the present author has compiled from some members of the Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom particularly the West Midlands County, similarly indicates the limited area of migration from the Indian Sub-Continent. This observation is reinforced by Desai and Rose (Desai.R. 1963. P13) (Rose.E. 1969 P52). The Ravidasias came mainly from the Punjab involving no more than 1,000 villages contained mainly in an area of Jullundur and Hoshiarpur Districts and a few families only from Ludihana and Amritsar. The Map on page 146 shows what a comparatively small area is involved. Prior to their arrival in this Country they had been mainly engaged in Agriculture, Government Service, small business and the traditional caste occupations of leather workers and leather merchants. Although accounts were given to the present author that about half of the immigrant Ravidasias owned land and property in India prior to emigration, the reasons for migrating were (usually) to improve their economic position. Once this had been achieved, they intended to return to India with their newly acquired wealth. From the acquaintance of the present author with their settlement patterns in this Country and his experience of the Ravidasias in India, it is likely that several years will elapse before this intention is realised, if at all;

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and further doubts must be raised concerning the second generation who do not appear to harbour such desires.

The period of immigration of the Ravidasias was, as Desai described in relation to Indians generally, starting in the 1950's and gaining momentum. (Desai.R. 1963. P3)

The first wave of Ravidasia immigrant males came alone, sending for families when they had become established; working in factories, foundaries, bakeries, and public transport. Later some were to try and start small businesses, in some cases doing so while employed in other work. House ownership (usually terraced type housing amongst other Ravidas families) seemed to be a general ambition. The West Midlands was the area chosen by many Ravidasias because it was a centre of industrial activity having a need for unskilled manual labour. Moreover kinship and village ties with people already resident in the West Midlands area provided a means of initial security, and comradeship. This, however, is not peculiar to Ravidasias. Desai makes this point concerning the attraction to previous areas of settlement by all immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent and suggests that the village and kinship ties in the United Kingdom are but an extension of a larger Indian network. (Desai.R. 1963 P17.18) Werbner in writing about Pakistani immigrants indicates similar patterns

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concerning early settlement in this Country, (Werbner.P. 1979. P377 378), which further suggests that members of the Ravidas community tended to follow the same patterns of settlement as other members from the Sub-Continent.

In 1962 the Ravidas Association was formed in Wolverhampton, a town in the West Midlands County. One of the founder members of the Association claims this was the first Ravidas Association to be organised in the United Kingdom. In 1968 the National Ravidas Association was formed and in that same year a Temple in the name of 'Guru Ravidass' was opened in a former Baptist Church in Wolverhampton. Other Ravidas Temples were opened in similarly acquired premises, or worship took place once each week in hired halls. The Temple had a Governing Committee comprising of a President, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee members chosen by the Sangat (Congregation). A Granthi (Priest) read from the Sikh Holy Book the Adi-Granth. Ravidas was of the Chamar caste, the present author has heard on numerous occasions from members of the Ravidas community that they themselves are of the Chamar of low caste.

With respect to caste in the United Kingdom, Desai states:

"The hierarchical system of caste which stratifies the village society in India does not operate in the United Kingdom. There is not sufficient number of castes in the United Kingdom. It may also be due to the fact that economically immigrants of one caste do not depend on other castes. They all depend on the Host Society. Caste distinctions, however, are present and are used in the conflict between persons to gain an advantage".  
(Desai.R. 1963. P15)

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If Desai's view is accepted then why should members of a degraded caste, on moving to a new environment (an open democratic society with no caste barriers, where low caste origins could, to some extent be in disguise), deliberately form an organisation which identified with and perpetuated a degraded low caste position? Had Ravidas created a separate religion? or were there other factors which caused this group, the Ravidasias, to remain within a cohesive structure (identified with degraded caste membership) and to appear to be proud to do so?.

In an attempt to examine the structure of the Ravidas community, and to answer the questions in the preceeding paragraph, a questionnaire was designed, a copy is attached at Appendix 'A'. To test the questionnaire a pilot sample was taken of 10 subjects, six first generation males and four second generation.

These subjects were all known personally to the present author over a number of years, and all involved in the Ravidas Temple. Each of the six subjects knew the present author had been asked by leading members of the Ravidas community to write a history of the life and influence of Ravidas. Confidentiality concerning their identity was assured, and they were willing to co-operate. This survey was completed within three weeks. The check list being completed at the time of interview.

The results appear in the Table at page 134. The six subjects all born in a village in District Jullundur in the Punjab. Two had followed the

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traditional Sub-Caste occupation in India involved in leather work following the occupation of their fathers. Interestingly, three out of the six recorded their religion as Ad-Dharmi, but all six subjects were known to the present author to attend regularly the Ravidas Temple, to occupy or have occupied Committee status in the Temple and to be devotees of Ravidas. In respect of the description of caste, again the Ad-Dharmi was claimed by three subjects. Although this questionnaire collected useful information about the occupation, religious and caste perception and gave some hint of attitudes of second generation Ravidasias (which no doubt would deserve a separate study), the answers to the questionnaire did not elicit responses which showed whether the cohesive force was loyalty to the tradition of Ravidas or some non-religious factor.

In order to test the religious perceptions of known members of the Ravidas community who regularly attend the Ravidas Temple, with the assistance of the Temple Secretary, 100 subjects were asked to nominate their religion from five options.

The following results were obtained:

Hindu	Ad-Dharmi	Ravidas	Radha Swami	Sikh
5	70	21	1	-

2 Buddhists  
1 No Religion

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The results indicate that Ad-Dharmi accounted for 70%, Ravidasia 21%. The present author was informed by an elder informant who was one of the founder members of the Ravidas Association, that since 1969 the concept of Ad-Dharmi had been explained in the Ravidas Temples in the West Midlands. The present author has noticed on many occasions in the Ravidas Temple in Wolverhampton one member of the congregation regularly wearing a crimson turban. When asked, the member said it was worn to show allegiance to the Ad-Dharmi Movement. In other parts of the Country particularly in London, the informant stated the majority of the members of the Ravidas community would have recorded their religion as Ravidasias. In order to establish the religious perceptions about the Ravidasias amongst other members of the community from the Indian Sub-Continent, a survey of thirty subjects from each of three religions was taken.

As wide a cross section as possible of the Asian community known to be Sikh, Hindu and Muslim resident in the West Midlands was included.

The present author was mindful that direct questions over a short period of time may have suggested that a survey or enquiry was being conducted into the Ravidas community. This could have created unwarranted speculation about one particular Asian group. To avoid this possibility the present author, over a period of two months, asked various individual Asians at meetings, religious ceremonies and during individual visits in connection with other matters, one question. 'Who are the Ravidasias'?

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To avoid undue interest at the question, it was asked in discreet terms, the explanation being given that the present author had attended a Ravidas function recently and met a very interesting group of nice people. The results were recorded unobtrusively on scraps of paper, cigar packets etc, to again avoid misplaced interest.

The results were as follows:

PERCEPTION OF RAVIDASIAS	SIKH	HINDU	MUSLIM
Not know of them	1	1	20
They are Sikh	3	5	5
They are Hindu	4	2	2
They are Low Caste	10	14	1
They are equals	1	-	-
They are backward people	2	-	-
Claim to know them but have limited knowledge	7	6	2
Correct appreciation of them	2	2	-
Total	30	30	30

FIG.7.



The Muslims tended to know nothing of them, Sikhs and Hindus, although having heard of them tended to describe them as low-caste people.

The present author is of the opinion that the perception the Ravidas community have of themselves is not shared by other immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent.

In an attempt to examine if the cohesive force of the Ravidas community was indeed religiously based, a set of questions were prepared.

Four subjects from the original sample of six were interviewed in depth, two being selected from Wolverhampton, two from Handsworth in Birmingham. The interviews were conducted over a period of ten days and about two months had elapsed since the pilot survey was made. The results have been reduced into a table which appears at page 135-145. It is suggested that the results show a common devotion to Ravidas, some slight similarity with Sikhism: the Langha (common kitchen), presenting turbans as a mark of respect and using the Sikh Holy Book, the Adi Granth. The results also indicated to the present author that the deep rooted devotion to Ravidas was not readily articulated by the Ravidasias in this piece of research. The question still remained unanswered, how much of the teachings of Ravidas had survived and were adopted by the Ravidasias?

In order to attempt to test the strength and weakness of the Ravidas community and trace how much affinity existed with Sikhism, two members of the community, a graduate and a person widely read in the teachings of Ravidas were asked to answer six specific questions.

The Ravidas graduate and the Ravidasia well read in the teachings of Ravidas were both known personally to the present author and knew that the present author had been asked by the leading members of the Ravidas community to write an account of the teachings and life of Ravidas. They co-operated fully. The graduate prepared his written replies over one week-end. The Ravidasia well read in the teachings of Ravidas took four weeks to think about his answer, and at the conclusion of this period of time elected to make a brief verbal reply incorporating all the questions in this one brief verbal statement.

The following questions were asked;

"How does a Ravidasia differ from a Sikh?"

"What makes the Ravidasia different from any other member of the Asian community?"

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"Does a Ravidasia have any religious symbols or practices that make him different from other religious beliefs?"

"Are there any problems peculiar to the Ravidas community?"

"What has been the strength of the Ravidas community?"

"What has been the weakness of the Ravidas community?"

The graduate supplied a written set of answers, the man who had read widely the teachings of Ravidas, after much thought made a brief verbal statement.

A precis of the graduate's reply:

"How does a Ravidasia differ from a Sikh?"

"The Ravidasia is a separate caste formed by the followers of Guru Ravidas who condemned the caste system. Ravidas belonged to the Chamar caste, a low caste. The Sikhs also consider themselves a separate caste, a high caste. Some Ravidasias under the influence of Sikhs follow the Sikh life style, but are not recognised as Sikhs by the Sikhs. They are not given the full Sikh caste and are not allowed to mix. Most Ravidasias do not look like Sikhs with the beard etc, and look like Hindus generally"

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"What makes a Ravidasia different from any other member of the Asian community?"

"Nothing makes them different, they speak the same language look like the rest of Asians. You will only know they are Ravidasia when they say they are, and they feel proud to tell the truth. Ravidas people are fighting against the caste system and strongly condemn the man made bogus classification of Indian people. The Hindus are not ashamed of the system, although caste discrimination is now unlawful in India. The backward classes and Ravidas people are victims of high handed Hindus who still think they are the only Agents of God, and as such, justified in their false belief of the caste system. There is no difference between Brahmin and Hindu, and the hatred and propoganda against these (Ravidas) people should stop"

"Does a Ravidasia have any religious smymbols or practices that make him different from other religious beliefs?"

"Ravidasias are a Hindu Sect which has been separated from Hinduism because of the rigid and bogus man made caste system which does not allow Ravidasias social justice in the Hindu religion. In the Punjab state the Chamars separated from the Hindu religion and adopted Ad-Dharmi religion in 1920. The main reason for this separation was the thousands of years of hatred and bogus Hindu religious caste system. The religious symbols and practices of the Ravidasias are as follows:

Nationally there is one religious flag, crimson in colour with the word 'Sohang' written on it. The Ravidas people worship the supreme God, and worship and pay respect to Guru Ravidas. They repeat the sacred hymns from the Punjab, keep the Sikh Holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib (Adi-Granth) because the hymns of Ravidas are contained in this book. Also, the sacred hymns of the Gurus and other Saints give the same message of worship to God only to preach peace, love and equality irrespective of caste or colour. This is the main reason why Adi-Granth is used.

The followers of Ravidas in other states of India keep a large statue to Ravidas and his sacred teachings in the Temple and perform worship before it. In some instances they may also keep the Sikh Holy book as well. The birth marriage and death ceremonies are performed like the Sikh or Hindu"

"Are there any problems peculiar to the Ravidas community?"

"In the United Kingdom the Ravidasias have no problems. They live happily and freely with the English as well as other Asians. The Hindus and Sikhs do not like inter caste marriages with the Ravidasias and still want to retain the caste system. In India, the Ravidasias have many problems on the basis of the caste system. Although the Constitution declares everybody equal, the Hindus are not ready to share all the necessities of life with the Ravidasias and backward and low caste people. Every day there are many cases of cruelty and atrocities committed by Hindus and in many cases the culprits are not arrested. Hindus highly placed in the Administration assist the culprits to escape. There are seats reserved in Parliament and the Government Services for lower classes, but these reservations are not fully given. The high caste Hindus are not ready to give the lower castes their due share in the Administration. The Ravidasias and the other backward classes cannot live peacefully unless they are given social justice and wider powers in ruling the Country and positions in the police"

"What has been the strength of the Ravidas community?"

"It is not possible to give accurate figures in the United Kingdom, but there may be ten to fifteen thousand. In India there are one hundred million people belonging to the lower classes. The Ravidasias and Chamars who follow Guru Ravidas may be ten to fifteen million. The Ravidasias and Chamars are, living in all the states in India.

"What has been the weakness of the Ravidas community?"

"The main weakness of the Ravidasias is that they are not properly organised in India. They have no national body who can communicate with all the followers of Guru Ravidas. In the United Kingdom there is a National body which is organising them. The Ravidasias have not got their own newspaper and are financially weak. In India most of the Ravidasias are poor and have not a good education."

The graduate raised many interesting points concerning the make-up of the Ravidas community. The member of the Ravidas community who had read widely the teachings of Ravidas replied verbally to the questions.

"The Ravidasias, there is nothing outwardly different, but they know. The Chamar in the village has many kinds of worship, Ravidas gave them a means of finding God. Nothing would have been known of the hymns of Ravidas if they had not been included in the Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy book). A Ravidasia is different to a Sikh, the Sikh is baptised and still follows caste for marriage. A Ravidasia must pray to God according to the teachings of Ravidas."

The present author made further enquiries concerning the different types of marriage ceremony referred by the graduate. It transpired from information that if the village where the Ravidasia lived was predominantly Sikh then the Sikh ceremonies would be followed, if Hindu, the the Hindu system would be followed. The present author has attended Ravidasia marriages in India and England and observed

the differences in the ceremony referred to.

The present author suggests that the Ravidas community comprises of members of the Chamar caste who follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas. At the same time their habits and life style can be influenced by the predominant influences about them but they remain, (because of the influence of the teachings of Ravidas) Ravidasia.

This is quite forcefully shown with the concept of Ad-Dharm. A religious political and social reformist movement which was used to describe religion and in some instances even caste, was at the same time inextricably bound up in the concept of the teachings of Ravidas. This allows the Ravidasia, to describe himself as Hindu, Chamar, Ad-Dharmi but at the same time remain, possibly not even recognised by himself, as Ravidasia.

The present author has experienced at first hand how members of the Ravidas community can describe themselves in different ways, but still remain members of the Ravidasia paying tribute to Ravidas. Following the custom of the Indian Sub-Continent marriages are arranged. From the experience the present author has had, it appears that in the vast majority of cases, these marriages are arranged within the Ravidas community irrespective of how they describe themselves, 'Ravidasia, Hindu, Ad-Dharmi'. The Ravidasia usually has three names, the first two which are common to himself and are the ones he is usually known

by and a third name, the tribal, family or clan name known as the Ghote. This third name takes on a significance when a marriage has to be arranged. When a marriage is being arranged the prospective couple must not have the same Ghote, otherwise no marriage could take place.

The influences that make the Ravidasia a distinct community are not obvious. The teachings of Ravidas bound them together but at the same time allowed them to live alongside Sikh or Hindu influences, and they were possibly assisted in maintaining a subtle distinct identity by the caste barriers which both Sikh and Hindu appear to have enforced.

The question still remains, however, how much therefore are the Ravidasias influenced by the teachings of Ravidas?



Subjects

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<u>FIRST GENERATION</u>										
Born in Village	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Born in Jullundar District	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Age: 40-49	*			*	*	*				
50-59		*	*							
Occupation in India:										
Leather Work		*	*							
Student				*	*	*				
Public Service	*									
Fathers Occupation in India:										
Agriculture				*	*					
Leather Work		*	*							
Factory	*									
Business						*				
Religion:										
Ravidas										
Hindu			*	*						
Rada Swami	*									
Ad-Dharmi		*			*	*				
Caste:										
Chamar			*			*				
Ravidas										
Adiwasi				*						
Ad-Dharmi	*	*			*					
How long in England -										
10-20 years	*			*		*				
21-30 years		*	*		*					
House Owner	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Terraced	*		*	*						
Semi-Detached		*								
Near other Asians	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Shop					*	*				
Occupation:										
Own Business		*								
Retired			*							
Unemployed	*			*						
Employee/ Own Business					*	*				
<u>SECOND GENERATION</u>										
Age: 10-14								*		
15-19							*			
20-24										*
25-35									*	*
Born - India							*	*		
England							*	*		
If visited India							*	*	*	*
Prefer England							*		*	*
Religion Hindu								*		
No Religion										*
Caste - Chamar							*	*	*	
No Caste										
Expect or had arranged marriage							*		*	*
Will or do live away from parents							*		*	
Attend Temple							*	*	*	*

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SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Do you pray in your own home?
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes with the children before picture of Ravidas
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: If ask Ravidas for help?
1	Refer to God, but remember Guru
2	No, but ask him to return
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: If way to God via Ravidas?
1	Direct to God
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

FIG.9

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: If say Grace before meals?
1	Pray before anything
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: If pray as a family?
1	Separate
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Separate

Subject	QUESTION; Display pictures of Ravidas in home?
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: If have shrine in house?
1	No
2	Yes, picture of Ravidas
3	No
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Pray each day?
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Restrictions on life?
1	Nothing binding except not hurt people: No meat
2	Ravidas says not eat meat and no alcohol
3	No
4	No

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Is Granth Sahib only Holy Book?
1	Yes 41 hymns of Ravidas in there
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Do you have a copy of the Granth Sahib?
1	No
2	Did have, gave it to the Temple
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Do you read it?
1	Yes in the Temple
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: How did you pray before you had a Temple here?
1	Own house or hired halls
2	Hired Halls
3	Hired Halls
4	Hired Halls

Subject	QUESTION: What do you feel about Rhada Swami?
1	Interprets in todays terms and before to Granth Sahib
2	Rhada Swami in India think they are superior to Ravidas
3	Holy man, but not Guru
4	Good people, but separate

Subject	QUESTION: What believe about Ravidas?
1	A prophet
2	Can perform miracles
3	-
4	-

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Is there a religious symbol of Ravidas?
1	Not universal but some carry a medallion showing pictures of Ravidas
2	Some young people wear a medallion with a picture of Ravidas
3	A medallion with a picture of Ravidas is getting popular
4	Not have one personally but medallions are getting popular

Subject	QUESTION: Have any miracles been performed?
1	Gives peace of mind
2	Yes saw Ravidas in a dream and wishes granted
3	-
4	In dream knew cash would be raised for Temple - it was

Subject	QUESTION: In the Temple is there a Langha?
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Do families use it?
1	Yes
2	All families that attend
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Like the Sikhs, to pay honour and respect do you present swords and turbans in the Temple?
1	Yes in the United Kingdom turban not only used by Sikhs
2	Not in Wolverhampton
3	Yes, mostly turbans
4	Yes, mostly turbans

Subject	QUESTION: Are there religious instruction classes in the Temple?
1	Praises to God, recite hymns
2	Language only
3	Yes
4	Yes



SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Is there a subscription for membership?
1	-
2	50 pence per year
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Do they faith heal in the Temple?
1	No, Ravidas said only God can heal, recite name of God
2	Granthi prays for sick people
3	Yes
4	All pray but no faith healing

Subject	QUESTION: Do they preach Rhada Swami in the Temple?
1	No
2	No
3	Only on special functions
4	Special functions only

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Do you hold funeral services in Temple?
1	Pray after cremation or pass Temple to cremation
2	Pray after cremation
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Do you have marriage services in the Temple?
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: What is the qualification for Granthi (Priest)
1	Be learned and religious
2	Two kinds - 48 hour reading, Daily reading
3	Respectable with religious knowledge
4	Respectable and religious

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Is there a Ravidas Temple in India?
1	Yes
2	Small ones
3	Yes
4	Yes

Subject	QUESTION: Do you use any other Temple?
1	Sometimes Sikh or Hindu
2	No
3	If not here, then a Sikh Temple
4	No

Subject	QUESTION: How is the service divided?
1	Prayer, reading, Granth, musicians
2	Prayers and community notices
3	Prayers, hymns, community notices
4	Prayers, hymns, community notices

SUMMARY OF FOUR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Subject	QUESTION: Are articles blessed?
1	People and offerings (Langha)
2	Only food for Langha
3	Food for Langha
4	Food for Langha

Subject	QUESTION: Are travellers looked after?
1	If accommodation available
2	If accommodation available
3	Yes
4	Yes



MAP. 8. SHOWING AREAS OF RAVIDAS EMMIGRATION  
FROM INDIA TO THE UNITED KINGDOM:

## RAVIDAS - A BYGONE VISION OR LASTING MESSAGE ?

The Ravidasias clearly identify themselves as belonging to the Ravidas community. Their community takes its name from Ravidas their Guru. They have established Temples in the United Kingdom in the name of Ravidas for the purpose of worshipping God. The question arises, however, what influence have the teachings of Ravidas had on the lives of the Ravidas community? How widely are those teachings known within the community? Do the teachings of Ravidas amount to a bygone vision or do they in fact contain a lasting message?

In order to examine the extent of the influence that the teachings of Ravidas had on members of the community, sixteen questions were designed which were intended to form the basis of interviews. A copy of the proforma used in the interviews is contained in Appendix 'B'.

The present author selected twenty male Ravidasias between the ages of 25 years and 60 years. All of the subjects were known personally to the present author and all knew the present author was writing an account on the life of Guru Ravidas. Half of the subjects were involved in the management of the Ravidas Temple, the other half were Temple attenders, but had no aspirations towards temple management. In order to give a reasonable cross section of community views, the subjects were selected from Wolverhampton and the Birmingham areas.

The interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, the subjects being interviewed individually and their replies to the questions being noted at the time of the interview on the proforma.

The results are recorded on separate tables, one table for each question asked; The letter 'W' against the subject number signifies he resides in Wolverhampton: 'B' signifies he resides in the Birmingham area. The letters 'TM' against the subject number signifies 'Temple Management' in every other case, the subjects are 'Temple Attenders' but do not form part of the Management Committee of a Temple.

Each question was put to the subject and his reply noted. Where the subject hesitated, seemed doubtful, supplementary questions were asked. For example: The subject was asked to describe his religion in a word. In some of the cases, the subjects hesitated, after much thought replied 'Hindu'. In those cases of obvious doubt supplementary questions were asked, for example: "Are there any differences though within Hinduism" or "do you follow all the Hindu teachings". With the exception of four or five subjects, the remainder seemed to have difficulty articulating their belief; this difficulty, however, was from a lack of education and not lack of belief, Indeed in many cases, once the subject started to explain his beliefs, many of the interviews were rather protracted. The results of the interviews are as follows:

QUESTION

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELIGION  
IN A WORD:

1 (W)	Hindu, but we are one Sect who do not agree with caste. We believe in equality. There is definitely one God that is the teachings of Ravidas
2 (BTM)	Hindu but there is only one God
3 (WTM)	It is a Sect of Hinduism slowly becoming separate. In Hinduism they believe in many Gods, the followers of Guru Ravidas believe in one God
4 (W)	Hindu
5 (BTM)	There is one God and I follow Guru Ravidas Ji on this. People follow this. He is a Hindu, I am a Hindu
6 (BTM)	Hindu, but different in that we do not believe in all the Gods, just one.
7 (W)	Ravidasia. Ravidasia is our Saint. We pray to him. He is always in our mind.
8 (WTM)	Hindu but Guru Ravidas says the God is one if you worship other Gods you will go to hell.
9 (BTM)	Ravidas. I have faith in Ravidas and pray to Almighty God
10 (W)	A Sect of Hinduism but strictly we believe in only one God
11 (WTM)	Hindu, but from Hindu comes Ravidasia we believe in only one God.
12 (W)	Hindu
13 (WTM)	Ad-Dharmi
14 (WTM)	Hindu. Hindu I think it is. God is one
15 (BTM)	Hindu
16 (B)	Hindu
17 (B)	Hindu
18 (B)	Hindu
19 (B)	Hindu
20 (W)	Hinduism

FIG. 10



QUESTION    HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE  
YOUR CASTE:

1 (W)	Ravidas or Ad-Dharmi
2 (BTM)	Chamar - that is the same Caste as Guru Ravidas. My father and brother were shoemakers
3 (WTM)	Guru Ravidas was one of us; A Chamar
4 (W)	Chamar
5 (BTM)	Chamar
6 (BTM)	Chamar
7 (W)	Ad-Dharmi
8 (WTM)	Chamar
9 (BTM)	Chamar
10 (W)	Low Caste - Chamar
11 (WTM)	Chamar
12 (W)	Chamar
13 (WTM)	Chamar
14 (WTM)	Ravidasia or Ad-Dharmi
15 (BTM)	Chamar
16 (B)	Chamar
17 (B)	Chamar
18 (B)	Chamar
19 (B)	Chamar
20 (W)	Chamar

QUESTIONWOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF  
AS RAVIDASIA?

1 (W)	Yes
2 (BTM)	Yes, I follow Ravidas
3 (WTM)	Yes, or Ad-Dharmi
4 (W)	Yes
5 (BTM)	Yes I follow the Guru
6 (BTM)	Yes
7 (W)	Yes, I am
8 (WTM)	Yes
9 (BTM)	Yes
10 (W)	Yes, I am
11 (WTM)	Yes
12 (W)	Ravidasia
13 (WTM)	Yes
14 (WTM)	Ravidasia
15 (BTM)	Yes
16 (B)	Yes
17 (B)	Yes
18 (B)	Yes
19 (B)	Yes
20 (W)	Ad-Dharmi

QUESTION ARE YOU INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ISSUES  
AFFECTING THE ASIAN COMMUNITY?

1 (W)	No. But I attend the Temple and Worship God through Guru Ravidas. Guru Ravidas teachings I always have in my mind. I can sit at home and worship the teaching of Ravidas Ji
2 (BTM)	General Secretary of the Ravidas Temple
3 (WTM)	General Secretary of Ravidas Temple
4 (W)	No
5 (BTM)	Yes very much
6 (BTM)	Temple Management
7 (W)	No
8 (WTM)	Yes Temple Management and Social work
9 (BTM)	I do social work for Asians
10 (W)	Yes, I am trying to organise a Project in India
11 (WTM)	National Secretary Ravidas Association UK
12 (W)	No
13 (WTM)	No except Temple
14 (WTM)	Management of Temple
15 (BTM)	Yes
16 (B)	No
17 (B)	No
18 (B)	No
19 (B)	No
20 (W)	No

QUESTIONHAVE YOU/WILL YOU ARRANGE A MARRIAGE  
FOR YOUR CHILDREN?

1 (W)	Yes we know what is best for our children, what they require to be happy
2 (BTM)	Yes, but I will not put pressure on them
3 (WTM)	I will arrange, but with their agreement if they are in love with someone I would try and arrange it
4 (W)	Yes, I believe in them but my sons won't and I won't interfere with them
5 (BTM)	Yes but if they agree
6 (BTM)	I would like to but with their consent
7 (W)	I will fix it when she is ready
8 (WTM)	Yes wait until the children wish and then find someone suitable
9 (BTM)	We believe in arranged marriages
10 (W)	Yes but they will not be forced
11 (WTM)	Yes but they will have a say
12 (W)	Yes
13 (WTM)	Yes
14 (WTM)	Yes
15 (BTM)	Yes
16 (B)	Yes
17 (B)	Yes
18 (B)	Yes
19 (B)	Yes
20 (W)	Yes

QUESTION

WAS THE MARRIAGE/WILL THE MARRIAGE  
BE ARRANGED WITH ANY PARTICULAR CASTE:

1 (W)	There is a caste system. I don't agree with it, but my children would not be welcome in other castes. I would prefer they would marry other Ravidasias because they would know the teachings of Ravidas. If the other parent did not believe in caste I would have no objection to the marriage
2 (BTM)	I would arrange it with Ravidasias. Guru Ravidas is our Guru and we would not wish to loose identity with him.
3 (WTM)	I would arrange it if possible with a Ravidasia
4 (W)	The time has come now when they should be arranged without caste.
5 (BTM)	With a Ravidasia so they would be happy. We have pride
6 (BTM)	Not arrange on caste, but with a Ravidasia.
7 (W)	Anybody of a background like us.
8 (WTM)	The same way with other Ravidasias
9 (BTM)	I will try and arrange it in my community, the Ravidasias.
10 (W)	It will be arranged with our own, the Ravidasias
11 (WTM)	I arrange within the religion, other Ravidasias, but not caste
12 (W)	With other Ravidasias
13 (WTM)	Amongst Ravidasias
14 (WTM)	If Ghote (tribal, family or clan name) is different, we would arrange, but with a Ravidasia
15 (BTM)	There are no castes, by birth
16 (B)	No
17 (B)	No
18 (B)	I would arrange with believer in Guru Ravidas
19 (B)	We are compelled by other Asians to do it with caste
20 (W)	Arrange with Ravidas community

1 (W)	As a believer in the teachings of Ravidas it does not matter to me, but it does matter to other Asians, not Ravidasias.
2 (BTM)	Only to follow Guru Ravidas, but not to follow the caste system, Guru Ravidas was against caste-system
3 (WTM)	When the children are young they do not understand. Later other Asian groups cause trouble about marriages. If we remain in Ravidas community there is no trouble, but I am against the caste system
4 (W)	No not really
5 (BTM)	We have no bar or caste but other Asians stop us
6 (BTM)	Ravidas follower because the teachings would be followed
7 (W)	Our own community she would be happy
8 (WTM)	With me, if my children wish, I would not mind, they would not be happy if in another caste the other Asians would call her names
9 (BTM)	Yes, I don't agree with caste but as Hindu and Sikh describe us we must stick to caste. For the last twenty years I have been in this country we have not been accepted by other Asian
10 (W)	Not caste that does not matter, but to be happy, religion does
11 (WTM)	I could not do inter-caste marriages, other Asians would not welcome it, but I am against caste.
12 (W)	No, but it is important to stay in the same religion
13 (WTM)	Caste does not matter but the religious beliefs matter
14 (WTM)	Religion is important
15 (BTM)	No
16 (B)	No
17 (B)	No
18 (B)	Yes if they go beyond the caste the children could not arrange their marriages
19 (B)	No
20 (W)	Yes, it's a custom

QUESTION WHAT DO YOU THINK RAVIDAS FELT ABOUT CASTE?

1 (W)	Ravidas said caste was man made and against the Division it caused in the society. This was man made and not by God
2 (BTM)	He never attempted to hide his caste but he was against the caste system. He (Ravidas) said all people were equal and equal before God
3 (WTM)	He wanted to break them down, he said there was only one caste Human Beings.
4 (W)	It should not be there, he was against it
5 (BTM)	Low caste forbidden to worship Lord. Guru Ravidas proved he could and was superior. He was against the caste system
6 (BTM)	He was called low caste but was against caste
7 (W)	Everybody is the same there are no lower or higher
8 (WTM)	He was dead against it and tried to abolish it
9 (BTM)	He condemned the caste system and preached unity, mutual understanding and co-operation. He spoke against inequality and injustice.
10 (W)	He was against it, he said all were equal
11 (WTM)	He never degraded himself being a Chamar, He said there was no shame in how you work, he said he was against caste
12 (W)	Tried to get rid of it. To him all men were the same
13 (WTM)	He treated everyone the same he was against caste
14 (WTM)	He did not believe in caste, he wanted caste to finish
15 (BTM)	Guru Ravidas was against caste system
16 (B)	I don't know
17 (B)	He was against it
18 (B)	He wanted equality
19 (B)	He was against caste
20 (W)	He said he would tell people his caste, with pride, but before God he was equal

QUESTION DO YOU ATTEND THE RAVIDAS TEMPLE?

1 (W)	Yes
2 (BTM)	Yes
3 (WTM)	Yes
4 (W)	Yes
5 (BTM)	Yes
6 (BTM)	Yes
7 (W)	Yes
8 (WTM)	Yes
9 (BTM)	Yes
10 (W)	Yes
11 (WTM)	Yes
12 (W)	Yes
13 (WTM)	Yes
14 (WTM)	Yes
15 (BTM)	Yes
16 (B)	Yes
17 (B)	Yes
18 (B)	Yes
19 (B)	Yes
20 (W)	Yes



QUESTION WHAT PROBLEMS DO THE RAVIDAS COMMUNITY  
ENCOUNTER IN INDIA?

1 (W)	One of caste, this causes disadvantages
2 (BTM)	One of caste
3 (WTM)	All sorts, depressed for centuries, the Brahmins, the British, all prevented them from going to school. The problem is caste
4 (W)	Lack of Education, caused by the caste system
5 (BTM)	We suffer caste
6 (BTM)	Caste
7 (W)	The matter is they are poor people
8 (WTM)	They are centred around caste but they are changing
9 (BTM)	Deprived of our rights still recognised as low class people which is contrary to Indian Constitution. We are nothing in the eyes of high caste
10 (W)	They are oppressed by Sikh and Hindu
11 (WTM)	Lack of self confidence
12 (W)	Caste
13 (WTM)	Only caste
14 (WTM)	No work, they are hated, kept down by high caste
15 (BTM)	Caste
16 (B)	Caste
17 (B)	Don't know
18 (B)	Caste, they are looked down on
19 (B)	Caste
20 (W)	Caste

1(W)	Sect of Hindus who believe in one God and teachings of Ravidas. We do not believe in caste, but in equality
2 (BTM)	They follow Guru Ravidas Ji
3 (WTM)	They were depressed by caste, the only light was the teachings of Ravidas. He did this on his own, now we have each other and follow his teachings.
4 (W)	They are normal people who believe in Guru Ravidas
5 (BTM)	A form of Hindu who was ignored by High Caste. We believe in one God, all people are disciples of same God
6 (BTM)	A religious group who follow Guru Ravidas
7 (W)	We are the Chamar caste our faith is in Guru Ravidas. Anything we do we call Guru Ravidas. Any money we spend for charity in the name of Guru Ravidas we get it back, that is my faith
8 (WTM)	A Sect of Hindus who believe in one God and follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas Ji
9 (BTM)	In Indian history we were Adiwassi, taken by the Hindus and put into low caste, we were kept down, we got some chance to go to school by the British, we are a Nation who follow our Lord and Guru Ravidas
10 (W)	They are people who have been depressed who follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas Ji. They are coming up
11 (WTM)	We are the followers of Guru Ravidas Ji
12 (W)	They are people who follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas
13 (WTM)	Our problem is to show what we are, the others in the Asian community do not want us to uplift. We follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas
14 (WTM)	A religious group
15 (BTM)	It is simple, those who believe in the teachings of Guru Ravidas
16 (B)	Developing, efficient, but lack of confidence
17 (B)	A large community
18 (B)	A religious group
19 (B)	A religious group but they are not developed
20 (W)	Social and religious group

QUESTION DO THE RAVIDASIAS ONLY USE THE ADI-GRANTH AS A RELIGIOUS BOOK?

1 (W)	Yes in Punjab
2 (BTM)	Yes, because some of the teachings of Guru Ravidas are in there
3 (WTM)	In Punjab, yes
4 (W)	Yes, because there are 40 poems of Ravidas in there
5 (BTM)	Yes
6 (BTM)	Yes
7 (W)	Yes the Sholokas and Shabdias are in there
8 (WTM)	Yes in Northern India
9 (BTM)	Yes, once a book the 'Ravidas Deep' was a Holy Book but this was banned
10 (W)	Yes
11 (WTM)	Yes
12 (W)	Yes
13 (WTM)	Yes
14 (WTM)	Yes, once if in Hindu village, the Gita
15 (BTM)	Yes
16 (B)	Yes
17 (B)	Yes
18 (B)	Yes
19 (B)	Yes in this country and Northern India
20 (W)	Yes

1 (W)	We would be suffering in the caste system. He pleaded for equality and showed us one God
2 (BTM)	No where, if Guru Ravidas had not fought for the rights of us we would be nowhere. He gave us everything. We could not go in Temples but he showed us and the rest of High Caste people how to find God. We could be Hindus but worship God
3 (WTM)	Nowhere. If we did not follow his teachings, we would still be slaves
4 (W)	There would be no community
5 (BTM)	According to Guru Ravidas Ji we have an example to follow to disregard caste and worship God. We would not have better way to deal with caste system
6 (BTM)	We would be in the caste system with no hope
7 (W)	Guru Ravidas has saved us we would be nowhere
8 (WTM)	Slaves and no belief in God
9 (BTM)	Nowhere, we would be nothing not recognised
10 (W)	Nowhere
11 (WTM)	Lost my way completely, I may have gone to the Muslims
12 (W)	I have no idea, nowhere
13 (WTM)	Nowhere
14 (WTM)	Nowhere
15 (BTM)	I may have converted to another religion to pray to God
16 (B)	God sent Christ for Christians, Mohammed for Muslims, there would have been Guru Ravidas even if he was not known by that name
17 (B)	Involved in another religion where there is one God
18 (B)	Without the social unity they would be nowhere, very bad status
19 (B)	They would be lost. Guru Ravidas has defined the religion
20 (W)	Hundreds and thousands would have been converted to Islam

1 (W)	Yes, very proud
2 (BTM)	Yes we must be proud. If he had not done these things for us we would not be anywhere. All the trains in India go to the birth place of Guru Ravidas. Thousands of people visit his birthplace. I am proud of what he did
3 (WTM)	Very much
4 (W)	Yes
5 (BTM)	Yes very much
6 (BTM)	Yes, very
7 (W)	Yes very much
8 (WTM)	Yes very much
9 (BTM)	Yes, certainly and his hymns. His message was democracy
10 (W)	Yes, very much
11 (WTM)	Yes
12 (W)	Yes very
13 (WTM)	Yes
14 (WTM)	Yes, I am
15 (BTM)	Yes, I am
16 (B)	Yes, very
17 (B)	Yes
18 (B)	Yes that's right
19 (B)	Yes
20 (W)	Yes

1 (W)	There is one God. There is no high or low, everybody is equal. Only evil people make themselves low. It is deeds which make status not birth. Every soul is a great soul and can worship God. It is only in the human soul there is salvation
2 (BTM)	Simple, pray to god, not harm anyone. There should be no caste pray to God, all are equal before God. God is one, the high caste can do things but so can all men because all are equal. We should try and worship God and no one can stop you. You cannot sit and wait for God to come to you, you should go to God People think we should not make shoes, but we should do any job for a living and be proud
3 (WTM)	Love others but do not let people oppress you. Not to hate, that there is one God he is for all men. All men are equal
4 (W)	You should pray to one God and only God. You are a part of God you should not feel alone. You should insist on your rights because all are equal. Not steal or tell lies or hurt anybody.
5 (BTM)	We read his Sholokas in the Granth Sahib, we find a pride. Anyone can worship God like high caste. If they are taught better than us we are still equal. He has opened up a way for better standards without fear, high castes are not better
6 (BTM)	Very good, I never forget. One God and all are equal
7 (W)	Don't tell lies or be cursing or deceive anyone. The God is in every soul. Respect everybody and love everybody. Call on Guru Ravidas before you start work you will have peaceful life. All men are equal and God is everywhere
8 (WTM)	He said worship one God and give up five enemies. Ego, pride attachment to material things, excess sex, anger, forgive anybody and the God will be pleased. It is a sin to take revenge, all men are equal
9 (BTM)	One god, we must be united with everyone, everyone is equal. There should be no divisions between man and man. Class is not created by a community, all should be treated equally
10 (W)	One God that all men are equal, it is not by birth one is high but by action.
11 (WTM)	One God, equality, equality for worship, work and life. To forgive people and not hurt anyone
12 (W)	One god, that all are equal
13 (WTM)	One god, all equal, not born into status, everyone the same
14 (WTM)	One god, man is same, all are equal, justice
15 (BTM)	One god, all men are equal in the eyes of god. Man can merge into the ocean of spiritualities by worshipping god. Guru is necessary to understanding god. Not to hate people for their actions
16 (B)	No caste, god is one, we are all children of god. We are all equal and always will be

QUESTION    WHAT HAS RAVIDAS TAUGHT YOU?

17 (B)	Way of life, and way to live, that all are equal, one God
18 (B)	Equality. No social barrier. Should have right to worship in Holy places. God is equal for everybody, one God
19 (B)	One God, all men equal and one universal type of worship remembering God. From beginning to end men must acknowledge one God
20 (W)	Equality and social freedom. Human justice, by focussing all attention on the worship of one God

QUESTION BEING A MEMBER OF THE RAVIDAS COMMUNITY  
 DOES THIS ASSIST YOU IN RESOLVING ANY  
 OF YOUR PROBLEMS?

1 (W)	Yes, when you worship you get peace of mind and find the answer. Ravidas said you have to pray to solve problems. It helps in solving problems.
2 (BTM)	It assist me in every way. It would assist me religiously because of the teachings of Ravidas Ji. There is everything in his teachings. How to worship God, I also have my community (during the interview the subject recited some poems composed by Ravidas)
3 (WTM)	Yes because we are encouraging our young people to be educated. The teachings of Guru Ravidas Ji encourages us to improve his teachings, saw all one equal and no social disadvantage
4 (W)	Yes we get moral support from each other and from Ravidas we get the idea of equality
5 (BTM)	Helps to resolve many problems. We do not shrink from other societies, even if call themselves high class. It does not influence our minds anymore. Everyone can worship
6 (BTM)	With help of Guru Ravidas and his teachings in Granth Sahib you could find God
7 (W)	We are thinking if there is a good leader we will help them. We are in England can raise for the needy people in India
8 (WTM)	There are nowadays outside our community against caste, a voice raised against caste from outside is more effective. Guru Ravidas Ji showed us one God, he was a messenger, worship only one God. This helps with problems
9 (BTM)	I don't bring my personal problems into the community but Guru Ravidas Ji has helped me when I read the hymns. We are no less than anybody. We solve our problems with peaceful means because Guru Ravidas Ji said so
10 (W)	We are trying to educate children who can help the backward people in our community
11 (WTM)	To live in a community you have to make a society and get help from each other
12 (W)	Yes, people who have never bothered with our community are coming back in, because the teachings of Ravidas are the right ones
13 (WTM)	As a community we help each other and also the teachings of Guru Ravidas show you how to live properly. We do not care what others call us
14 (WTM)	In this country if we try with the community we can succeed
15 (BTM)	Religiously, spiritually we succeed if we follow Guru Ravidas teachings
16 (B)	We have the elders to draw on for advice



QUESTION BEING A MEMBER OF THE RAVIDAS COMMUNITY  
DOES THIS ASSIST YOU IN RESOLVING ANY  
OF YOUR PROBLEMS?

17 (B)	It helps being a member of the community. (The subject could not comment further)
18 (B)	Socially and politically we have a group behind us. Also if you follow the teachings of Ravidas this helps also for arranging marriages
19 (B)	If they follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas the problems are solved
20 (W)	The corner stone is the teaching of Guru Ravidas, also politically we have the strength of the community

For ease of reference, and in order to provide a rough guide to the awareness of the teachings of Ravidas and how those teachings are practised, the results of the survey are shown in a table on page 172. In order to elicit the awareness and practice of the teachings of Ravidas, 'key themes' have been abstracted from those teachings. Using the replies provided by the twenty subjects to the question and assessing from those replies the presence of 'key themes' the histogram was plotted.

The 'key themes' used are as follows:

**HINDU** Guru Ravidas was a Hindu, he remained a Hindu and made no attempt to form a separate Sect or religion. It could be expected, therefore, that a follower of Ravidas would similarly claim to be a Hindu.

**CHAMAR** Guru Ravidas stated he was of low-caste, a Chamar, and made no pretention about his status. It could be expected that a follower of Ravidas would similarly claim to be a Chamar and be proud to do so.

**ONE GOD** Guru Ravidas believed in one God and was totally devoted to one God. A follower of the teachings of Guru Ravidas must believe in one God.

**EQUALITY** Guru Ravidas recognised the equality of man in the presence of God. A follower of Ravidas would have to recognise equality to follow those teachings.

IDENTITY WITH RAVIDAS A member of the Ravidas community if he wishes to fully identify with Ravidas could be expected to agree he was a Ravidasia.

ARRANGED MARRIAGES It is part of the Asian culture and custom to arrange marriages. To fully follow the teachings of Ravidas Caste should be disregarded in such arrangements.

APPORTIONING BLAME Guru Ravidas accepted his low-caste position with pride, and did not apportion blame for his position. A follower of the teachings of Ravidas similarly could be expected to accept his position without apportioning blame to any specific group.

BELIEF IN RAVIDAS Being a Ravidasia and believing in the teachings of Ravidas, it should be expected that those teachings would assist in the resolution of problems.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RAVIDAS COMMUNITY If the teachings of Ravidas are followed then the description of the Ravidas community should suggest that they are religious people who follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas.

From the results of the twenty interviews, the present author is persuaded that the teachings of Ravidas have, infact, survived over time and over distance from the homeland and those teachings influence the lives of the Ravidasias resident in the West Midlands County. It was surprising to note, however, the survey conducted by the Secretary of the Ravidas Temple showed that 70% of the Ravidasias recorded their religion as Ad-Dharmi, 21% as Ravidasias and only 5% as Hindu. The Survey of the

twenty subjects 85% recorded their religion as Hindu. The present author cannot account for this discrepancy. It is possible that when the Ravidasias were asked the question concerning religion by the Temple Secretary they were thinking of their community in social or political terms.

When asked the same question by the present author (who they knew was interested in the teachings of Ravidas) they answered the question from a religious viewpoint.

The points the subjects made concerning equality and the disregard of the caste-system showed an understanding of the views Ravidas held on these issues. The subjects claiming to be Hindu but at the same time believing in one God was a further strong indication of the acceptance and practice of the teachings of Ravidas.

The issue of arranged marriages showed that Ravidasias were selective; choosing members of the Ravidas community as partners. There was a reluctance by Ravidasias to disregard caste barriers when choosing partners. This reluctance seemed at variance to the teachings of Ravidas. However, their reluctance to disregard caste barriers was qualified by the feeling that they would not be allowed to enter other castes by those other caste members. Also, there seemed to be a desire by the Ravidasias to perpetuate the teachings of Ravidas by choosing partners of the Ravidas community, that is, that the religious factor

(marrying someone who has the same religious beliefs) outweighed other considerations.

The views that the subjects expressed about how they saw the Ravidas community and how the teachings of Ravidas helped with the resolution of problems indicated that the teachings of Ravidas were, infact, practiced by them.

There was some variance with regard to those accounts of what the teachings of Ravidas were. When it is considered that the only Holy book, the Adi-Granth (The Sikh Holy Book) which contains some of the poems and hymns composed by Ravidas is the only written reference available to the Ravidasias, then the variance in the accounts is given perspective and does not detract from the belief that these teachings of Ravidas have survived and are practiced today by the Ravidas community

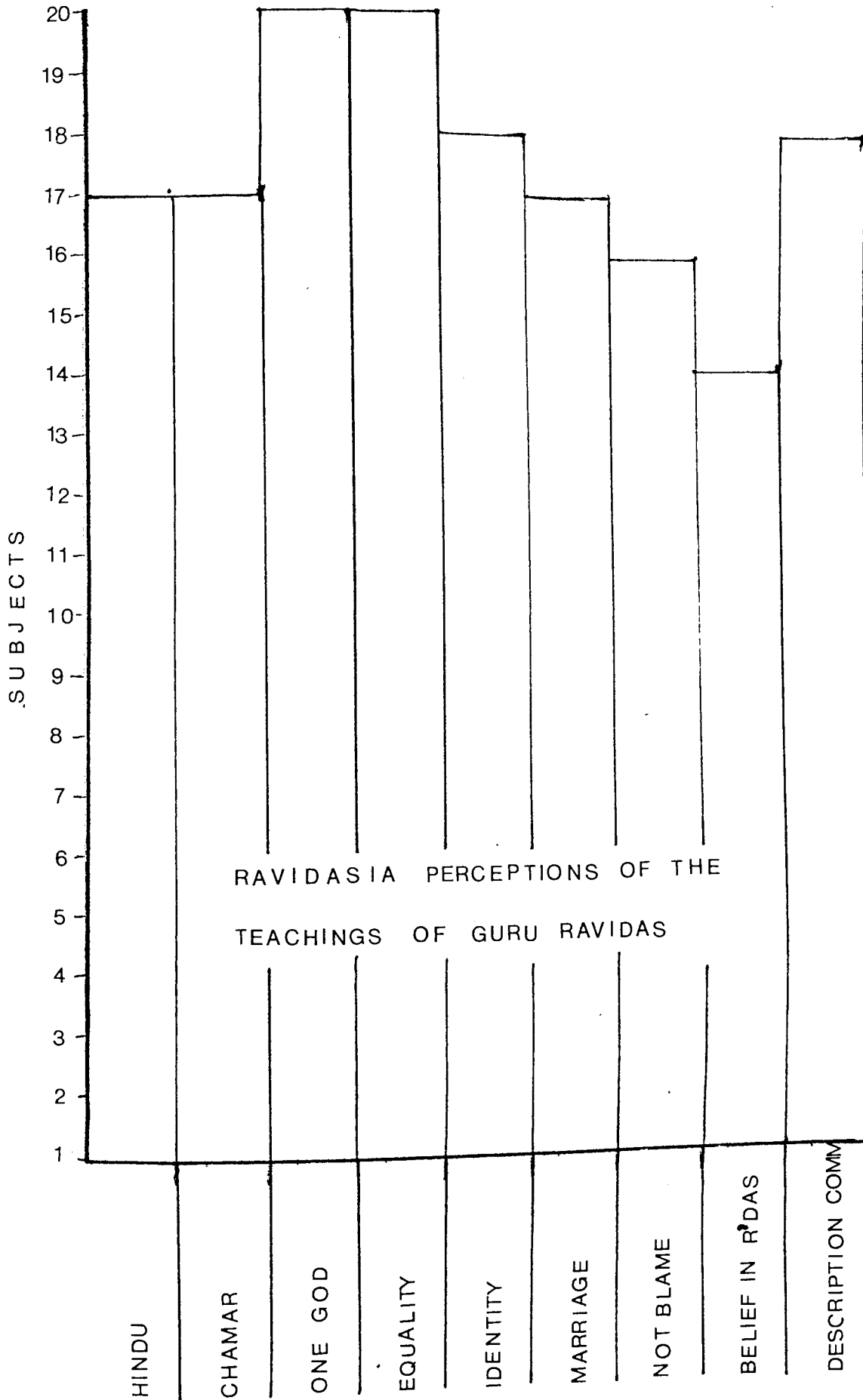
Ravidasias identify as a community with their Guru Ravidas. They are aware of and practice his teachings and recognise their low caste status - Chamars. With the formation of the Ad-Dharmi Movement and the organisation of Ravidas associations in the United Kingdom they have the machinery for examining the social problems which beset them.

The problems the Ravidas community have endured and are enduring in the Punjab State of Northern India and the County of the West Midlands no doubt centre around the degraded low status position of their caste. These problems will be considered in the next chapter.

NOTE TO THE READER

Whereas the material in the next two chapters (IX and X) has been taken into account in the Conclusion, the reader may care to read chapter XI first, because the conclusions are very closely related to the data that has been discussed in chapter VIII.

FIG.11



## CHAPTER IX

### THE PROBLEMS IN INDIA

#### RAVIDASIAS - NORTHERN INDIA

On 22 February 1981 during an anniversary celebration to mark the birthday of Guru Ravidas, the Guru Ravidas Cultural Association, Birmingham presented a memorandum to the High Commissioner of India. Contained in this memorandum was a summary of problems faced by the Ravidas community, in India.

"We are distressed to read reports in the local media that the indignities, members of the Scheduled Castes community are being subjected to in India, despite the ruling Congress Party's manifesto and Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi's concern for the down-trodden, dispossessed and the under-privileged. We demand that those people who commit atrocities pendent society. The system of legal aid should be widely adopted and promptly implemented. We are also distressed to learn about the anti-reservation campaign being unleashed by a section of Indian Leadership in so far as job opportunities for members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are concerned, but the stand taken by the Government Protection for sometime more to come is a fact. We need hardly stress that the imbalances of the past should be thoroughly remedied"  
(Memorandum to High Commissioner of India, 1981)

Srinivas observes that,

"The Scheduled Castes have come together for political purposes but it is not known how far this has been followed up by the widening of the social and cultural fields"  
(Srinivas.M. 1966 P115)



This observation was illustrated on 12 September, 1981 when a memorandum was presented to the High Commissioner of India by a newly formed political movement of the Ravidas community in Birmingham "The Indian Overseas Scheduled Caste Congress UK". Contained in this memorandum, again, the problems of the Ravidas community in India are referred to. The following quotations from the memorandum illustrate these problems.

"We have been striving hard for the past two decades to educate, organise and unite the members of our community through the UK and thus seek to establish a sound and stable platform to demonstrate the aspirations of our people in this country as well as in India and our objectives remained limited and generally confined to the spread of the pious teachings and philosophy of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji. Your Excellency, as you are quite aware that Guru Ravidas Ji stood for the cause of millions oppressed, centuries ago, he sought to secure for our people a rightful and respectful place in Hindu society, a society beleaguered by caste system. It is a matter of great pride for us today that we can so optimistically trace the origin, growth and development of our community as a homogeneous and coherent force. It is due to the arduous and life long struggle of Guru Ravidas Ji that we can find millions of his followers throughout India. Thus Guru Ravidas Ji fought against oppression and social injustice. Historically, India's independence brought a new chapter of hope and prosperity in the history of Indian Nation. Now when we are here today our minds and hearts go to all those who laid down their lives for this great cause. In the past independence period we cannot remain behind to the sacrifices and contributions made by the builders of modern India, amongst whom Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru finds a unique place and a great champion patronizer, leader and above all a very distinguished Prime Minister for near seventeen years.

During these periods, India had made great strides forward in National and International spheres, although we are unable to record these historic achievements in this brief space, the scientific, technological, agricultural and nuclear progress must be placed on record. However, we are deeply aggrieved

to note that our position in Indian society in social and religious sphere put a slur on the face of all those who seem to be declaring themselves the champion of Hindu society. When the time come we will not lag behind in pursuing presenting and propagating this long neglected and forgotten cause of our poor, distressed and depressed people in this regard.

Whatever we have had learnt through press reports in the years passed the atrocities and oppression committed on our people throughout the neck and corner of our country cannot keep us silent forever. It is as a result of all these irregularities that we have now resolved to found this party i.e. Indian Overseas Scheduled Caste Congress UK. Ostensibly there does exist a political organisation named Indian Overseas Congress UK. We have had the opportunity to serve with the members of this organisation even since its inception. But we have felt some compunction on certain grounds. The very thing which we felt really upsetting was the faction fighting, leaving aside the sacred task it was supposed to accomplish, and it is this anxiety and a concern which has prompted us to devote full attention to. This is the cause of millions of our brethren in India, who still suffer subjugation as if they are not living in free India, and in free society. We must say with courage and confidence that we, our people, have been, and still are, staunchly and stoutly true Congress men in true sense of the term. This fact is fully supported by history of Congress Party.

We wish to make it clear that by founding and organising the Indian Overseas Scheduled Caste Congress, we do not intend to remain seclusion or political oblivion. We hope to work hand in hand as well as shoulder to shoulder with all those who would share our sorrow, grief, anxieties and concern on all the issues embracing and affecting the fate and fortune, basis and background, and growth and development of our people as full members and equal citizens of our country and of the society which is deeply indebted to us. We must remind here and address ourselves to all those who try hard to seek the blood of our poor brethren, in one way or the other. Let us strongly and steadily demonstrate to them that your attitude behaviour, trend and ill-treatment towards us is discouraging disgraceful and disparaging and can no longer be tolerated and forgiven. It is your maltreatment tyranny and oppression on which forcing most of our people towards conversion in different part of country. Where as we respect all religion, we cannot afford to be treated as dumb driven cattle. It is high time that the so called reformers or leaders of Hindu Society should be fully alive to this situation and come forward to do and render a human service they have been reluctant to do for centuries together failing which they will be held responsible for the consequences" (Indian Overseas Schedule Caste Memorandum to High Commissioner, 1981).

Further a pamphlet circulated at the Birthday Celebration of Guru Ravidas at Wolverhampton in 1980 also refers to problems of the Ravidas community in Northern India.

"We are proud to mention here that this Sabha got the honour to be the first Organisation of this kind which has established a Shri Guru Ravidas Temple at Wolverhampton in this Country and encouraged our people to establish similar organisations in every town on the name of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji, and also stressed to form a National Body (now known as Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha UK) to represent the interests of the followers of Guru Ji.

This Sabha is also working very hard in the field of Education and has established an educational institution known as Shri Guru Ravidas Technical College, Horshiarpur Road, Phagwara Punjab, which will be the first Institution on this level ever built in India in the name of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji, With the setting up of this Institution we are able to provide a special type of technical education, specially to the poor masses and enable them to earn their living with a pride and dignity" (Pamphlet issued at a Guru Ravidas Birthday Celebration, Wolverhampton, 1980)

Dilip Hiro writing for the Sunday Observer Colour Supplement, 28 November, 1976 in an article entitled 'Untouchable Even in Britain' refers to the Ravidas community. He refers to interviews he has had with low caste people living in the United Kingdom. These interviews illustrate some of the problems encountered in India.

- (a) "At the primary school in my village of Nangal Khurd, I was not allowed to sit on a carpet as other students did, said Chanan Ram, a 52 year old Punjabi Outcaste, now settled in Southall. I was not allowed to drink water from the earthen pots in the school. When I felt thirsty my teacher asked a 'guide' - a caste Hindu classmate - to take me to a well nearby. There he would draw water from the well, in a bucket, and pour it down into my cupped hands. I was forbidden to draw water from that well, or even to touch the rope or the bucket, and I never did.

Later, when he went to a Secondary school in a neighbouring town, the language teacher refused to teach him Hindi because to quote the teachers words - 'Hindi is a language of the caste Hindus'. At the school hostel, he had to have his own plates and bowls, which he was required to take to the dining hall (where he and the fellow outcastes sat separately), and which had later to be washed by him as the caste Hindu cleaning staff would not touch them"

- (b) "The teachers in our village school would punish other pupils by hitting them in the face or back or boxing their ears, but never us, said Maghan Parmar, a 28 year old outcaste from Gujarat who now runs a shop in Maida Vale. They would hit us with a ruler or cloth duster, but never with their hand.
- (c) "You need a shirt and a pair of short pants for a child to go to school said Dulari, an outcaste, mother of three children in a village in the Punjab. These cost 70p and last six months. All told it costs 50p a month to send one child to school. That is a lot for us, if on the other hand you keep your son away from school, he can start working at the age of eight or nine. He can take a landlords cattle out for grazing, and get paid £1.25 and an 82lb bag of wheat a month. No wonder then that in this Harijan colony, only six of the 46 children of school age were enrolled at the local primary school".  
(Hiro.D. 1976)

Two important points emerge. References made to problems by the Ravidas community are in the context of 'Scheduled Caste' 'Depressed Class' 'Poor Masses', and 'Outcastes'. This indicates that members of the Ravidas community articulate their problems in India in terms of the 'Low Castes' and 'Outcastes' generally. The Ravidas community, although maintaining a distinct identity (through the influence of the teachings of Ravidas) identify the problems of low caste status and through their Organisations and the Ad-Dharmi movement, champion reforms for the socially disadvantaged menial caste people. The second point, the problems that the Ravidas community and the other low castes do encounter

in Northern India are directly related to their low caste status. If this is accepted, then a study of the problems that beset the Ravidas community begins with a study of the emergence of the caste system and examples of the difficulties caste can cause in contemporary Northern India.

The written replies to questions supplied by the subject Ravidasia graduate supports the above. Indeed, the formation of the Ad-Dharmi movement came about because of problems caused by the caste system.

#### CASTE PROBLEMS

Many instances may be cited which show problems caused by caste. The following examples serve to make the point of caste rigidity and inequality practiced today in India.

A matrimonial column in the Hindustan Times Weekly, 30 August, 1981 headed 'Matrimonials for Grooms' contains 161 advertisements for suitable marriage partners. In 71 instances caste requirements are specifically mentioned and in only four instances is specific mention made that caste does not apply. In 37 of the 161 advertisements, the Punjab is identified.

Out of those 37 Punjab advertisements, caste requirements are referred to in 24 instances. This indicates that caste barriers apply even in respect to marriage advertisements appearing in the Indian press.

David Selbourne writing in New Society, 11 February, 1982 'Massacre at Deoli the Upstart Niggers of India', describes a massacre of low caste people at Deoli, a village in Uttar Pradesh, Selbourne observes the disparity in Government compensation in respect to caste.

"The going rate for a Harijan death in these bloody days in Uttar Pradesh is 5,000 rupees (£280) in Government compensation. The Thakurs they say bitterly, get 50,000 rupees per dead body if their kin are killed"  
(Selbourne.D. New Society Vol.59. 11 February, 1982. P219-221)

Balachandran, writing in Asian Digest, October, 1981 'Communal Tension Rises in India as Hindu Outcastes Embrace Islam' observes;

"Conversion to Islam is only the latest in a series of efforts by the Harijans to throw off the Yoke of degradation"  
(Balachandran.P. Asian Digest, October 1981. P14)

This movement of conversion to Islam is mainly in the South of India where the influences of Bhaghats like Ravidas was not felt. Rajabhoj, writing in the Illustrated Weekly of India, 3 October, 1971 'Harajans' cites the following incidents involving the low-castes.

"May 11, 1971 Sanchi, the hands of a group of Harijans were chopped off in the Madhya Bharat region, because they were suspected of voting against the locally powerful Zamindars"  
June 12, 1971 Bulandshahar, about 15 Harijan families have fled from Kalan Jahadpur village in Khujra Tehsil. They were denied water from the wells in the village and shopkeepers refused to sell them food grains. Some of them were beaten and threatened with guns when they refused to work as slaves on the Zamindars farms, or in his house"

"August 13, 1971 New Delhi: Mr Kartik Oraon, an MP from Bihar, drew the attention of Government to an incident in which a marriage party of Harijans was beaten up and some Harijans killed near a Bikaner village Temple. Another member (from Ganganagar) spoke of the murder of a Harijan child in his area"

"August 22, Moga (Punjab). A social boycott of Harijans was declared in Duneke village. It was announced that the Harijans would not be allowed to step on lands owned by non Harijans and that they would be beaten up and fined if they broke this order"  
(Rajabhoj.P. Illustrated Weekly of India 3 October, 1971 P9)

Glass, writing in New Society, 29 October, 1981 'The Downtrodden Peoples of India' observes:

"By and large, especially in rural India, the Scheduled castes are still subjected to a routine of atrocities (listed in the Official accounts), and they are still treated as Untouchables despite the constitutional prohibition of this practice, and the legal sanctions against it. (The caste Hindus ancient fear of pollution through the slightest contact with Untouchables is forgotten, however, when men of higher castes rape Untouchable girls and women)"  
(Glass.R - New Society, 29 October, 1981 P190)

The present author whilst living in an Indian village in the Punjab saw the Scheduled caste community living apart from other members of the village and drawing water from a separate well than the one used by the other villagers.

A Muslim High Court Supreme Judge in Pakistan known personally to the present author remembers as a child visiting the house of a family servant, a high caste Hindu. The servant had drawn a bucket of water for his own domestic use, and the Judge touched the bucket. The servant threw the water away.

The above examples serve to identify the scope of the problems which the low-castes encounter. In Northern India, however, these problems although present are not so pronounced as in the South.

The present author whilst in the Punjab visited a Ravidas Temple. This Temple was housed in a small communal yard. It comprised of a picture of Guru Ravidas covered by an awning. This was in contrast to the thriving Ravidas Temples to be seen in parts of England. A further indication of how the Ravidas community have developed religiously in England.

The memoranda previously referred to makes reference to atrocities and inequalities. The Ravidas community have developed a machinery for articulating the problems of low caste people generally. That machinery for articulating those problems, however, has not reached its full potential. From the indications, it would appear that the 'voice of reform' for the plight of the low caste people in India is louder and more organised from the Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom particularly the West Midlands County.



## CHAPTER X

### THE PROBLEMS IN THE WEST MIDLANDS COUNTY

#### RAVIDASIAS - WEST MIDLANDS

The Ravidas graduate (previously referred to) in a written answer to a question concerning problems peculiar to the Ravidas community replied:

"In the United Kingdom the Ravidasias have no problems. They live happily and freely with the English as well as other Asians. The Hindus and Sikhs do not like inter-caste marriages with the Ravidasia, and still want to retain the caste-system"

Two points emerge from this answer. Firstly, the Ravidas community share in the life of the Asian community, therefore, by implication problems affecting the Asian community must also affect the Ravidas community. This is in contrast with the problems in India, where Ravidasias share the problems of low caste people. Secondly, caste barriers are encountered in the West Midlands County with respect to arranged marriages.

In the memorandum presented to the High Commissioner for India by the Indian Overseas Shcheduled Caste Congress UK, reference is made to the Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom.

"We have been striving hard for the past two decades to educate, organise and unite the members of our community through the UK, and thus seek to establish a sound and stable platform to demonstrate the aspirations of our people in this Country as well as in India, and our objectives remained limited and generally confined to the spread of the pious teachings and philosophy of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji"

(Memorandum presented to the High Commission of India  
12 September, 1981).

In a document which sets out problems encountered by the Ravidas community, the above reference indicates that the greatest problem encountered in the United Kingdom has been to organise the Ravidas community into a community. No mention is made, however, of any specific problems peculiar to Ravidasias.

Hiro, writing in the Observer Supplement, 28 November 1976:

"Untouchables - even in Britain"(makes mention of Ravidasia problems in England in relation to caste")

"Yet, there is one area where its attitudes remain as rigid as those of the most obscurantist: inter caste marriage, a euphemism for marriage between a caste Hindu (or Sikh) and an Outcaste.

Although the community has been in existence in Southall since the mid 1950's no inter-caste marriage occurred until the early 1970's. Since then, much to the consternation of the older generation, about a dozen such marriages have taken place. But every time opposition from the parents and communal leaders was so intense that the young couple had to leave the area.

Not surprisingly such an event arouses more hostility from among the caste members of the community than the Outcastes and the higher the caste the more intense the hostility. When asked to comment on the marriage of his daughter to a son of an Outcaste, a Brahmin (the highest and purest caste) father in Southall denied altogether that he had a daughter. It seemed that by marrying an Outcaste, an Untouchable, the daughter had degraded herself beyond redemption in her parents eyes, and that the only way her family could protect itself from this 'pollution' was by disowning her"

and

"Is the Southall of today any different from Urban India? 'Yes and No' said A. S. Naga, an Outcaste from the Punjab now a resident in Southall. 'Yes' to the extent that when a quarrel breaks out between an Outcaste and a Caste Hindu or Sikh the lowly origin is the first thing to be hurled at the Outcaste. 'No' to the extent that it's much easier to hide your Outcaste identity here than in any Indian City. Only people from the same village know who exactly you are, and there are people here from so many different villages that very few really know your origin.

The fact that Naga owns a grocery and has a large Caste Hindu and Sikh clientele is proof enough of liberalism in the Indian community in Southall. 'If I were to open a grocery in my village in the Punjab no Caste Hindu or Sikh would come, he said'

(Hiro.D. - Observer Supplement. 28 November, 1976. P45.48)

Although the above statements refer to Southall, the experience of the present author is that they equally apply to the West Midlands County.

The problem that appears peculiar to the Ravidas community in England (and this includes the Ravidas community in the West Midlands County) is that concerning their low caste position. This problem is not so obvious as the more numerous ones concerning caste encountered in India.

Kanitkar, writing in New Community 'An Indian elite in Britain' observes quite forcefully the subtleties encountered in Britain with regard to caste.

"While caste discrimination is almost non-existent among Indian students and professionals in Britain, caste stereotypes and the prejudices that accompany them simmer constantly just below the surface of social intercourse. Intricacies of sub-caste ranking do not figure largely in Britain; most are content with placing an individual safely in one of the four main divisions"(or as outcastes).  
(Kanitkar.H. New Community. Vol.1. No.5. 1972 P379)

Michaelson assists further in establishing the subtleties of caste in Britain. She observes that when Gujeratis from East Africa claim there is no such thing as the caste system in Britain, it is because they expect hostility about the evils of the caste system in India. They mean, she adds, that there is a common life style in Britain in which all Asians participate, but nevertheless they do make caste distinctions.

(Michaelson M. New Community. Vol.VII. No.3. 1979. P352)

In the West Midlands County, therefore, Asians enjoy a common life style with caste distinction not obviously apparent, but nevertheless under the surface and becoming relevant at times of disagreement or social intercourse. Caste does not appear to affect business relations, educational opportunities etc, but assumes importance particularly in respect to arranged marriages.

Jones and Shah observe that where inter-caste marriages take place between castes which are comparable in status hierarchy, or where the religions of those to be married have not been in conflict (as for example Sikhism and Hinduism) then they are more readily accepted. Marriages between historically antagonistic groups (Hindus and Muslims) are regarded less favourably. (Jones.P. Shah.S. New Community. Vol.VIII No.3. 1980. P340).

Shah makes further reference to the pool of marriageable British Asian males and considers the following in respect to arranged marriages - 'language, religion, caste, age and kinship' (Shah.S. New Society Vol.50 No.889. 1979. P133: My underlining).

Banton reinforces quite forcefully the Asian attitude to marriage:

"An important element in match-making is the prestige of the kin group involved; by making a series of good matches, a group can enhance its prestige. This is crucial to an understanding of the sociology of South-Asian settlements in Britain, since for a substantial period of time the behaviour of South-Asian immigrants is influenced by aspirations and sanctions rooted in the homeland culture. The tendency of South-Asian ethnic community to insulate themselves so far as possible from English influence is greatly reinforced by the difference between their norms of propriety for gender roles and those of the receiving society" (Banton.M. New Community. Vol.VII. No.3. 1979. P329)

The problems affecting the Ravidas community in the West Midlands County fall into two groups. In the first group are those problems which affect Ravidasias specifically, and are matters germane to their low-caste origin.

In India, caste problems viewed against the backdrop of poverty social disadvantage and an established 'caste society' are seen in stark relief. In the West Midlands, caste issues are much more subtle, and although beneath the surface, do on occasions manifest themselves in the context of disagreement with other Asians.

An example of a disagreement within the Asian community affecting the Ravidas community is contained in 'Police Community Relations' by Banton. The present author assisted with the research for this work, and had at first hand personal knowledge of this and the other cases referred to. (CLO refers to Police Community Liaison Officer).

#### A Question of Caste

"The CLO noticed that certain Hindu names had been appearing regularly in Information Sheets when disturbances were reported, so he made enquiries. To start with the incidents were not serious. After four months there were reports of some men seeking to enter the Ravidas Temple with uncovered heads, and after six months one of the parties complained to the area constable that sugar had been put in the petrol tank of his car. The constable's report was sent to the CLO whose own investigation was by this time complete. Though the Sikh religion was in some respects a revolt against caste distinction and though Sikhism does not formally recognise such distinctions, the reality is rather different. There are Hindu groups in the Punjab who belong to what were formerly called the Scheduled Castes, or Untouchables. Some of them follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas Ji, a fourteenth century reformer who worked for equality and social justice. Some of this Guru's writings are incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of the Sikhs. Members of the Ravidas group may worship in Sikh Temples, but if they are numerous enough they prefer to establish their own.

Another way in which low-caste Hindus have rejected caste distinctions has been for them to become Buddhists, and Buddhism

has been used by some reformers as a vehicle for attacking caste. One such group has held meetings in England. Its members (to quote one of their pamphlets) 'have taken a pledge to mobilise the India Untouchable to smash the Hindu imperialism based on the ugly stigma of caste'. Their leader said that 'the real method of breaking the caste system was not to bring about inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dinners, but to destroy the religious notions on which the caste system was founded. History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions'. This group is regarded (with what justification it is difficult to say) as 'radical' and as having Maoist sympathies. It preaches non-violence. In this country its members are from the same villages and the same social strata as the Ravidas supporters. It tries to win their adherence by persuasion and (apparently) by hindering their attempts to organise as a Hindu movement. In the present case it was the members of the Ravidas Executive Committee who were being subjected to harassment though it should be noted that some of the troubles apparently had nothing to do with religion but arose from allegations of swearing etc.

The CLO met both groups. He told a meeting of the Buddhist group that information had been received that some of their members were harassing the others. Those responsible for this were almost certainly present at the time. The meeting agreed to make enquiries into the accusations. The CLO emphasised that if such incidents continued their group would come into conflict with the law and that as they stood for non-violence the publicity would be harmful to their cause. As no individuals had been named, no one lost face. No further cases of disorder between these groups have been reported.  
(Banton.M. 1973. P155-156)

The above example shows how complex the social/political situation is. Here we have ex-low-caste Hindus who became Buddhists who regard Ravidasias as part of the Hindu establishment, and so take action against their Executive Committee of the Ravidas Temple.

The practice of arranging marriages allows for caste and other social issues to be taken into account when suitable partners are being selected. It is within the knowledge of the present author that Ravidasias resident in the West Midlands arrange marriages, usually with other Ravidasias.

There are cases, where young Ravidasias have formed emotional ties with other Asians, independent of arrangements by parents. There are other cases, where the young Asian (which includes Ravidasias) disregards the wishes of parents concerning arranged marriage proposals. This usually results in domestic strife. Using the cases quoted by Banton, which are known personally to the present author, the point is made of the emotional strife and over-reaction which can be attendant when domestic issues do not conform to the norms established by parents. The first case, 'What's in a name'? did not involve Ravidasias. It is within the experience of the present author, however, that the same events could have taken place had the girl and the mother-in-law been Ravidasias. In the case 'Dishonour Rankles' the groom was Ravidasia. The case 'Family Honour' involved Ravidasias.

#### What's in a name?

Someone telephoned the police to say that she had seen an Indian woman dragging an Indian girl by the hair out from a neighbouring clothing workshop and along the street. The report was investigated by the area constable and recorded in the Occurrence Book. A separate report reached the CLO who was alerted by the names. The girl's name was given as Kaur (the standard Sikh name for women) the workshop was owned by a Mr Sharma (a common Hindu name). The CLO feared the possibility of Sikh-Hindu disturbances.

Enquiry revealed that a Sikh family had arranged a marriage for their son without mentioning that the boy had a facial disfigurement. The bride was sent from India and went through a marriage ceremonial during which the groom kept his disfigurement concealed. Some time later the girl claimed that she had been deceived and that she could not stand her husband's deformity. She left home and obtained employment in the Hindu workshop. Probably there was a suspicion of her having formed an improper association with one of the men



concerned with the workshop. Her mother-in-law tried to enforce her return to avoid the disgrace. The police warned the groom's kin against any further conduct of this kind but did not have to take any further action as the girl had instituted divorce proceedings"

(Banton.M. 1973. P122)

In the above example it was the intention of the mother-in-law to reunite the married couple despite the wishes of the daughter-in-law.

#### DISHONOUR RANKLES

"A Hindu girl and a Sikh girl who worked in the same establishment became friendly and used to visit one another's homes. The Sikh girl formed an association with the other's brother and they married in a Registry Office without telling their parents. Both were over 18 years of age. The girl returned home. Two weeks later she told her parents. She wrote to the President of the Vedic Mission saying that she was being tortured by her parents who wanted her to marry a bridegroom they had chosen for her. She said she feared for her life. She also said she wished to go through another wedding ceremony with her husband according to the Vedic rite. (The Vedic texts are the oldest documents of what is now the Hindu religion) The President came to the police and was seen by a Woman Police Sergeant who requested help from the CLO. The girl went to live with her husband. Her father said she could not return to his house unless she agreed to divorce her husband. The CLO saw the bride's parents and explained to them their daughter's legal rights in this country. A week later the bride herself came to the station to say that members of her father's kin group had been making annoying telephone calls to her husband's family. There had been a threat to abduct her sister-in-law (who was held responsible for the initial liaison; if this had been carried out it would have made the score even). Investigation revealed that there had been only one telephone call. The bride's cousin had 'phoned saying that he wished to speak to one of the women of the house. The groom's mother spoke to him while her husband made a tape recording of the conversation. The Woman Police Sergeant dealt with the situation. She required the bride and her sister-in-law to give her notice if they planned to go out unaccompanied, reporting their destination, and subsequently, the hour of their return! Photographs were prepared in case either should be reported missing, and a circulation would be needed. The bride was told not to return to her father's house. A Sikh Welfare Officer was asked to keep in touch with his household.

An incident of this kind does not easily come to an end. It festers. Six months later the groom's mother complained that on two occasions when she had met the girl's parents (once at a doctors surgery) they had embarrassed her, though there was no threat of any kind. The bride's parents were, infact, deeply distressed by the disgrace which the incident had brought upon them. They were continually being reminded by others of their daughter's low marriage. They wanted her and her husband to leave the district so that there would be less talk"

(Banton.M. 1973. P.124.125)

(In the above case the bride wished for two weddings, one in the Registry Office and one in the Temple. This is the usual practice adopted by Asians resident in this Country) In the final paragraph, underlined, reference is made to 'low marriage'. The domestic conflict caused by the girl choosing her own husband is further compounded by the choice involving a Ravidasia as the groom.

#### FAMILY HONOUR

"Lall Joshi, then aged 16, lived with his parents in an English City. They told him that they were arranging for a bride to be brought from India for him. He raised no objection. A year later, the Immigration authorities permitted a girl to enter the Country conditional upon her marrying him, but by this time Lall had left home saying that he would not marry her. He was understood to be courting an English girl.

This was a serious situation both for the Joshi family and for the bride. The Joshi family had lost honour by failing to fulfil the marriage contract. Their dishonour would also affect their kinsfolk back in India. Indeed it afterwards affected a marriage arranged for Lall's younger brother. Having heard

what had happened to the bride destined for Lall, the parents of the bride who was to marry the younger brother refused to send their daughter to England. The contract was still binding so Mr and Mrs Joshi would have to bear the financial burden of sending the younger brother to India to solemnise the marriage. Lall's prospective bride would have to be returned to India and her chances of a second marriage would be reduced. The collapse of the first arrangements would lead people to suppose that there was something wrong with her and a future husband might well be able to demand a much larger dowry.

Lall has an elder brother Ranjit, a university student of 20 years who had himself accepted a marriage arranged by his parents. As the eldest son, he felt obliged to seek a solution with honour. This could only be achieved by going through with the planned marriage. Ranjit therefore tried to get in touch with his brother at his place of work. Lall tried to avoid him. His employers complained to the police that Ranjit was making a nuisance of himself. Ranjit also tried to enlist the help of the parents of his brother's English girl friend. Eventually he wrote to them as follows:

'I have been to see you several times but all to no avail. Both you and your daughter have continually refused to help me, in all the times I have asked for your assistance. I shall not ask you any longer. Your daughter is still seeing my brother, and I advise you as you are the girls father to keep her away from my brother. This is now far more serious than you or your daughter realised, and the matter is now out of my hands. I had wanted to help you as well, but it seems you doubted my sincerity; and now what follows is something I had wanted to avoid and why I was pestering you so much. Measures will now have to be taken that may be utterly dispicable, but as Lall's elder brother I will have to carry them out. I am partly responsible for what has happened, and it is my duty to help him as much as I can'

The recipients were worried by this letter and they also contacted the police. The CLO saw Ranjit who undertook to write no more letters to the English girl's parents and to stop visiting Lall's workplace. A meeting between Lall and the other members of his family was arranged, but no progress could be made. The CLO regarded the problem as insoluable. He noted that if there had been a

party of the rejected Bride's male kinsmen in Britain, they might well have attacked members of the Joshi family"

(Banton.M. 1973. P125.126)

The influence of the teachings of Ravidas enabled his followers to remain in a community with a separate identity to other Asian groups. This has allowed them to gain support from each other and flourish as a community. The group identity has also prevented them from disguising their low-caste origins in the West Midlands County. The group identity has made individuals a ready prey to rumour, which if allowed to continue can destroy the individuals social acceptability within the group (which he relied on for support). A case quoted by Banton illustrates the seriousness of rumour within the Ravidas community. The case quoted is known personally to the present author and all the Asians involved were Ravidasias.

#### THE POWER OF RUMOUR

"An Indian came to a police station late one night reporting that while he was away that evening, four other Indians had forced their way into his house and that he was frightened. His English was not very good and the station officer sent him away after taking the details which he entered in the Occurrence Book. The CLO happened to notice this entry when checking the book shortly afterwards. He recognised the name and asked someone he knew belonging to the same group to find out what was going on. At first he thought it was a dispute between two factions from the same village in India, but it turned out differently.

Mr Dhillon had been at a wedding six months previously in a town some distance away. He gave a lift back in his car to a Mrs Dalbir; there was a third party in the car, and no evidence of impropriety. Nevertheless rumours circulated of an improper association. Dhillon suspected that the source of these stories was Mrs Dalbir's old father-in-law, so he invited him to his house to sort things out. Mr Dalbir senior attended in the belief that it was a purely social affair. He was astonished when Dhillon threatened to cut him up and stick the pieces up the chimney if the rumours persisted. The old man was frightened and got away by climbing out of a toilet window. This was seen by the neighbours who told Mrs Dalbir's husband that they had seen his father making this undignified exit at 2330 hours. The son extracted the truth from his father. He then took three others with him and went to Mr Dhillon's house to punish him for his behaviour towards the old man.

Acting quickly the CLO called a meeting which was held within a week of the first report, in a neutral house belonging to one of the Executive members of the Temple. It was attended by all the male kin of both Dhillon and Dalbir. The CLO listened to both sides. He absolved the old man from responsibility for the rumours and his son for the harassment, but emphasised that if there was any repetition he would testify that the parties had already been warned.

The CLO has good contacts with this particular group and the members know that he has good intelligence concerning their affairs. Therefore disputants are often willing to accept his arbitration and can do so without loss of face. The CLO insists to his contacts that if they wish him to keep their fellow countrymen out of prison they must tell him of disputes and likely occasions for friction before blows are struck or before a report is made to the police. Once the official machinery has been set in motion there is much less he can do to help them"  
(Banton.M. 1973. P127)

The cases quoted above are by no means exclusive, the present author has experience of many similar situations.

## THE ASIAN DIMENSION

The second group of problems encountered by the Ravidasias are those common to the Asian community as a whole. A review of these problems is outside the scope of this present work and indeed justifies a separate study. In order to give further perspective to the Ravidas community as part of the general 'Asian Scene' brief headings are listed of some of the more common types of problems. These are generalisations, and no attempt whatever is made to analyse these problems.

### TEMPLES AND MOSQUES:

The governing body of these places of worship comprise of a Committee chosen by the congregation. From time to time disagreements can arise where a rival group from within the congregation attempts to change the composition of the ruling body. Elections to the Executive Committee can so easily acquire political overtones because membership of these Committees brings prestige which is valued for its own sake. On occasions these disagreements can result in violence.

### IMMIGRATION:

From time to time changes in legislation affecting immigration controls, causes apprehension when those controls are seen to affect the position of dependent relatives in India who are seeking entry to the United Kingdom.

#### ISSUES AFFECTING THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT:

Political religious and economic strife on the Indian Sub-Continent can cause problems for Asians resident in the United Kingdom. The Asians in this Country can be drawn into these issues, and in some instances the various factions in conflict in India can be mirrored by similar conflicting factions in this Country.

#### RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH:

The structure of the extended family system and the institution of the arranged marriage can act in a supportive way to maintain Asian religions and culture in the face of Western influence. However, a younger member of the Asian community not wishing to conform to the Asian values and seeking freedom of individual choice in the Western Society, can cause intense domestic strife. Asian girls who reject Asian domestic traditions and leave home create problems for parents concerning their standing within the community. Similarly, rejection of arranged marriages causes loss of face and prestige in the Asian community for parents and other members of the family.

#### RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE HOST SOCIETY:

Summarised under this heading are problems that immigrants generally encounter involving acceptance or otherwise by the host community. A whole Race Relations Industry has grown around these problems in the last twenty years. Legislation has been passed in an attempt to eradicate discrimination and yet, daily, cases are reported in the press of real or imaginary harassment of ethnic minorities.

#### RESOLUTION OF PROBLEMS:

A review of the problems encountered by the Ravidas community, not surprisingly, gives an insight into the attempts they make for the resolution of those problems. The problem of their low caste status (in India appearing in stark relief, in the West Midlands County in a more subtle form); the creation of the Ad-Dharmi movement (where the Ravidasias figured prominently in the organisation of the movement) a religious, community and political organisation, attacked the social disadvantage caused by the caste system.

The memoranda previously referred to (pages 173-176) of the Ravidas Cultural Association and the Indian Overseas Scheduled Caste Congress UK (both organisations springing from the Ravidas Temple) and the pamphlet circulated by a Ravidas Temple to celebrate the birthday of Guru Ravidas, indicate pressure being brought to bear on the Indian Government to remove social disadvantage caused by the caste system.

This indicates that the Ravidas community, in addition to forming organisations for devotion of God and for preaching the teachings of Ravidas, has used those organisations to draw attention to social disadvantage. These organisations gain support and strength from the Ravidas community.

Rose observes that the Gurdwara (Temple) plays a very important part in maintaining the internal cohesion of Sikh communities, and that



members of the Gurdwara Committee are leaders in the community.  
(Rose.E. 1969 P459-460). The present author is aware that Ravidas  
Temples are similarly organised in respect of management committees  
and members of those committees are regarded as community leaders.  
Problems affecting individual Ravidasias, particularly with respect  
to the 'Establishment' (i.e. the Local Authority, the Police, the  
Immigration Service) are referred to the members of the Temple  
Committee so that it may assist with their resolution.

Being Ravidasia, and identifying as a Ravidasia allows for member-  
ship of a Temple which affords internal cohesion and group support.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

#### THE RAVIDASIAS HAVE EMERGED AS A DISTINCT RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

The followers of Guru Ravidas, the Ravidasias, originally formed themselves into a religious group. In the United Kingdom, however, this religious identity (which enabled them to come together under a common belief in the teachings of Guru Ravidas) formed the basis of a religious and community/political group. Can the Ravidasias, however, be said to practice a religion? It is a matter of delicate assessment as to when the stage is reached that a belief in one supreme divine being entails a separate religion. The difficulty in the assessment is further compounded by attempts to define religion. The working definitions of religion accepted by the present author are contained in the 'Oxford English Dictionary' (O.E.D. 3: O.E.D. 5)

"Action or conduct indicating a belief in, reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power; the exercise or practice of rites or observances, implying this"  
(O.E.D. 3:)

and

"Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to

obedience reverence and worship; The general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effect upon the individual or the community; personal or general acceptance of this feeling as a standard of spiritual and practical life"  
(O.E.D. 5:)

Reed also assists with his definition of religion;

"Religion is a social institution which provides a setting in ritual for the regulation of oscillation processes in a social grouping"  
(Reed.B. 1978. P52)

All the points elicited above are present within the Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom. The marks of Ravidasia 'religion' are; belief in one God who is accessible, though invisible, (but they do not follow Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Sikhism whose adherents also believe in one God). The equality of man in the eyes of God. The individuals identification with the teachings of their Guru. The Histogram, Fig.11 shows a belief in one God, a belief in the equality of man and an identification with Ravidas. The present author is of the opinion that the Ravidasias practice a religion. Moreover, that in the United Kingdom (to some extent unconsciously) they have formed a distinctly separate religion from Hinduism.

The Ravidasia religion is distinct from Hinduism in two important concepts; the perception of God and attitudes to other people. Vohra discussing Hindu devotion to God observes;

"Devotion means complete and exclusive absorption in God and is indifferent to things opposed to him. It is fruit in itself. God loves the meek and devotion implies obedience to the will of the supreme in all the actions of man. Choosing this path the Hindu is free to worship his personal God male or female; to adore a representative image of the Deva which is usually kept in a niche, and decorated with flowers, and saffron in the privacy of the home" (My underlining)  
(Vohra.D. 1981. P20)

The Ravidasias believe in one God and follow the teachings of Guru Ravidas which inhibit the depiction of God in various forms in idols. The 'Oxford English Dictionary' definition (O.E.D. 5:) implies that the followers of a religion adopt a particular outlook on the community. In the case of the Ravidasia, this outlook is that all people are equal in the eyes of the one God. The caste system in Hinduism recognises hereditary divisions of individuals by status - hence, Hinduism recognises inequality between men.

By contrast, Ravidasias follow Guru Ravidas in the disbelief in caste barriers. The Ravidasias have established Temples in the name of Ravidas for the purpose of worshipping God; they disregard caste, they use the Sikh Holy Book (The Adi Granth), they operate a Langha in their Temples (a free kitchen for worshippers; a Sikh tradition). They describe themselves religiously as Hindu, Ravidasia or Ad-Dharmi and whilst claiming a disregard of caste and preaching the equality of man, will champion the cause of low-caste people, will state when

asked directly that their caste is Chamar, Ravidasia or Ad-Dharmi. The Ravidasias occupy a limboic position between Hinduism and Sikhism, but belong to neither. I suggest that they have created a separate religion, although the Ravidasias would not necessarily agree with my verdict.

RAVIDASIAS BELIEVE IN EQUALITY:  
CONFLICT BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE OVER CASTE

It has been discussed that one of the teachings of Ravidas was the equality of men in the eyes of God. Moreover, this teaching also involved a disbelief in the caste system. Ravidasias follow the Asian tradition of arranging marriages, and the awareness of Ravidas teaching of equality is influential in the Ravidas community in the United Kingdom. However, when the Ravidasias do arrange marriages it is usual for such arrangements to be made with other Ravidasias. On the question of caste, the Ravidasias are reluctant to cross caste barriers, but at the same time claim to be against the caste system. At first sight this seems contradictory, but their reluctance to cross caste barriers in arranged marriages stems from the rejection they anticipate from other Asians and not from a desire to perpetuate caste. In other words they are constrained against their religiously informed better judgement to accept, for the time being, that happy marriage often has to follow caste. The views expressed in the sample survey (Fig.7) of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim adherents, (in which the

Ravidasias were regarded by other Asians as low-caste people) helps to explain why the Ravidasias fear rejection if they attempt marriage arrangements which cut across caste divisions. The marriage arrangements with other Ravidasias contribute to the feeling of security of the Ravidasia and also helps them to perpetuate the teachings of Ravidas.

In the open Western society of the United Kingdom, the Ravidasias have a much better opportunity for expressing their religious and community identity than is the case in India. In a community where believers in the caste system are in a minority, it has been possible for them to identify with their Guru, Ravidas, (who himself occupied a low-caste status) to follow his teachings and to build around them community identity separate from those of other Asian minority groups. They have established Temples which have formed the foundation for a community and political organisation. Indeed the religious-community-political spirit of the Ad-Dharmi movement has been re-awakened, here in the West Midlands. Although a separate religious-community-political identity has been forged, there appears to be some confusion in the community concerning their designation. From the sample of one hundred Ravidasias supplied by the Temple Secretary, 70 per cent claim to be Ad-Dharmi, 21 per cent Ravidasias. (Fig.6) They also describe themselves as Hindu, and although they do not normally refer to themselves as belonging to the Chamar caste when they are asked directly about

their caste origins, they claim to be Chamar.

From my observations made on two visits to the Punjab, it is the case that in India, within the context of village life, its emphasis on caste and accompanying social disadvantages, the Ravidasias do not appear to have developed religiously to the same extent as the Ravidasias in the United Kingdom. They are second-class citizens in the Indian village, being influenced by the predominantly 'ruling group' which may be Hindu or Sikh. This is illustrated by the two forms of marriage ceremony used by the Ravidasias in India: Hindu or Sikh, depending on the community structure of the village.

#### THE EMERGENCE IN BRITAIN OF POLITICAL COMMUNITY PRESSURE GROUPS BASED ON RAVIDAS TEACHING

In India during the 15th Century, Ravidas, through his teachings, enabled a socially disadvantaged group of people to find God and to resist fragmentation. In the 20th Century in the United Kingdom, the Guru's teachings have had the same effect. The message of Ravidas has enabled a section of Asian immigrants to remain together in a set of interlocked groups. By remaining members of the association of Ravidasias they show that they prefer to accept association with a low-caste rather than to try to hide their humble beginnings from the remainder of the Asian community and from the host community. In the open, casteless British society they have been able to maintain a

distinct religious identity and at the same time to form a community and political association.

The problems that beset the Ravidas community are centered around their low-caste origins. The Ravidas community resident in the United Kingdom, through their religious-community political associations, are in a much stronger position to articulate the problems of Ravidasias resident in India. However, the Ravidasias resident in the United Kingdom identify with the problems of all low-caste people in India. Yet whereas in the United Kingdom their problems still centre around their low-caste origins the problem is not so dominant as it is in India. In the United Kingdom their problems also include the problems that are commonly experienced by Asians resident in this Country.

The Ravidasias resident in the United Kingdom have developed a machinery for attempting to resolve their problems: notably a National Association and Area Associations. At one Temple in the Midlands, this organisational structure has led to the formation of the 'Indian Overseas Scheduled Caste Congress UK' a political association, which supports the present ruling Congress Party in India. Those associations which the Ravidasias have formed have had two effects. They have allowed community leaders to emerge from within the Ravidas community who can speak on behalf of Ravidasias. Moreover these organised associations have acted as pressure-groups in the United Kingdom, concerning issues affecting Ravidasias in the United Kingdom and India.



## THE FUTURE

The Ravidasias resident in the United Kingdom have achieved much in establishing and organising a religious and community identity over the two decades they have been here. Mainly they came from villages in the Punjab as a simple people, lacking in education. It is possible that the Ravidasias resident in the United Kingdom may encounter a further problem in the future, concerning the development of their community. It is possible that, unless the younger and more educated Ravidasias born in this Country show a commitment for the further development of the community, the limited education of their fathers (who have led the movement so far) may prevent further organisational headway. Having known the Ravidasias for sixteen years, and having learned to value them both individually and as a community, my personal hope is that the young people will take positions of influence in the Temple organisation. Moreover, if they do become involved, the movement will become even closer to the teachings of Ravidas, for the young Ravidasia born in this Country will not be inhibited by caste as their fathers tend to be. It is my experience that so far the young people have not become involved in the Temple organisation, but a recent attendance at a Ravidas wedding, where the young couple, starting out in life pledged themselves to the teachings of Ravidas, does give some hope for the future.

However, the future of young people in the Ravidas community justifies

a separate study and is outside the scope of the present work. It may be that several decades will pass before the teachings of Guru Ravidas are fully realised. Those teachings are alive today in the United Kingdom, the Ravidasias being a living testimony to those teachings, or as Pandey observes;

"Although Ravidasa died about four hundred years ago  
he is more alive now than when he actually lived"  
(Pandey.S. 1965. P7)

1. WHERE BORN - District of:(1) JULLUNDAR (2) LUDIHANA (3) HOSHIARPUR (2) AMRITSAR (5) GURDASPUR (6) IN A  
VILLAGE (7) IN A TOWN (8) OTHER AREA  
(STATE) 2. AGE:(1) 30-39 years (2) 40-49 years (3) 50-59 years (4) 60-70 years 3. OCCUPATION IN INDIA:(1) AGRICULTURE (2) LEATHER WORK (3) FACTORY (4) STUDENT (5) PUBLIC SERVICE (6) TEACHER (7) OTHER (STATE) (8) UNEMPLOYED 4. FATHERS OCCUPATION:(1) AGRICULTURE (2) LEATHER WORK (3) FACTORY (4) STUDENT (5) PUBLIC SERVICE (6) TEACHER (7) OTHER (STATE) (8) UNEMPLOYED 5. RELIGION, SUB-CASTE: IS YOUR RELIGION:(1) RAVIDAS (2) HINDU (3) SIKH (4) BUDDHIST (5) OTHER (STATE) (6) RADA SWAMI (7) AD-DHARMI 6. IS YOUR SUB-CASTE:(1) CHAMAR (2) RAVIDASIA (3) SUDRA (4) OTHER (STATE) (5) DO YOU ATTEND  
A TEMPLE (YES)  
(NO) (6) AD-DHARMI

7. HOW LONG IN ENGLAND

- (1) 5-9 years  (2) 10-20 years  (3) 21-30 years   
(4) 30 years

8. WHY CAME:

- (1) IMPROVE LIFE STYLE  (2) SAKE OF FAMILY OPPORTUNITY  (3) FAMILY OPPORTUNITY   
(4) MORE FREE LIFE  (5) WILL RETURN TO INDIA WHEN RETIRE  (6) WILL NOT RETURN

9. PRESENT TYPE OF HOUSE:

- (1) OWN  (2) RENTED  (3) COUNCIL   
(4) TERRACED  (5) DETACHED  (6) SEMI-DETACHED   
(7) NEAR OTHER ASIANS  (8) WHITE AREA

10. PRESENT OCCUPATION:

- (1) OWN BUSINESS  (2) LEATHER WORK  (3) FACTORY   
(4) STUDENT  (5) PUBLIC SERVICE  (6) TEACHER   
(7) OTHER (STATE)  (8) UNEMPLOYED  (9) MIXED EMPLOYEE and BUSINESS

11. ATTITUDES: DO YOU HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE FOLLOWING  
(only tick if problem)

- (1) EDUCATION  (2) YOUR SUB-CASTE in ENGLAND  (3) YOUR SUB-CASTE IN INDIA   
(4) POLICE  (5) JOB OPPORTUNITY  (6) WELFARE SERVICE   
(7) JUDICIARY  (8) YOUR CHILDREN  (9) ENGLISH SOCIETY   
(10) OTHER ASIAN GROUPS  (11) DID YOU HAVE ARRANGED MARRIAGE  
YES  NO  (12) DO YOU EXPECT YOUR CHILDREN TO HAVE ARRANGED MARRIAGES  
YES  NO

SECTION FOR CHILDREN

12. AGE:

- (1) 10-14 years  (2) 15-19 years  (3) 20-24 years   
(4) 25-35 years

13. BORN:

- (1) INDIA  (2) ENGLAND  (3) IF VISITED INDIA   
(4) NOT VISITED INDIA  (5) PREFER TO LIVE IN INDIA  (6) PREFER TO LIVE IN ENGLAND

14. DO YOU HAVE PROBLEMS WITH:

- (1) JOB OPPORTUNITY  (2) YOUR RELIGION  (3) YOUR PARENTS   
(3) POLICE  (4) YOUR NATIONALITY  (5) ENGLISH SOCIETY   
(6) COURTS  (7) YOUR SUB-CASTE  (8) OTHER ASIAN GROUPS   
(9) SCHOOL  (10) WELFARE SERVICE

15. WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION:

- (1) CHRISTIAN  (2) BUDDHIST  (3) HINDU   
(4) SIKH  (5) RAVIDASIA  (6) RADA SWAMI   
(7) NO RELIGION  (8) AD-DHARMI

16. SUB-CASTE:

ARE YOU -

- (1) CHAMAR  (2) SUDRA  (3) RAVIDASIA   
(4) NO SUB-CASTE  (5) AD-DHARMI

17. DID YOU HAVE AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE:

- (1) YES  (2) NO

18. WILL YOU LIVE ON YOUR OWN IN FUTURE:

(1) YES

(2) NO

19. DO YOU ATTEND:

(1) A TEMPLE

(2) A CHURCH

(3) A MOSQUE

(4) NO RELIGIOUS  
PLACE

1. How would you describe your religion in a word:
2. How would you describe your Caste:
3. Would you describe yourself as Ravidasia:
4. Are you involved in community issues affecting the Asian community:
5. Have you/will you arrange a marriage for your children:
6. Was the marriage/will the marriage be arranged with any particular Caste:
7. Does Caste matter when you arrange marriages:
8. What do you think Ravidas felt about caste:

9. Do you attend the Ravidas Temple:

10. What problems do the Ravidas community encounter in India:

11. Being a member of the Ravidas community, does this assist you in resolving any of your problems:

12. How would you describe the Ravidas community:

13. Do the Ravidasias only use the Adi-Granth as a religious book:

14. Where would you be today without Ravidas:

15. Are you proud of what Ravidas did:

16. What has Ravidas taught you:



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