

**History of Religious Establishments in Punjab: A Study of  
Dera Sachkhand Ballan**

**(\*Dr. Aman Jyoti & \*\*Dr. Vinay Kumar)**

\*Assistant Prof. in History, Hindu Kanya College, Kapurthala

\*\*Associate Prof. in History, JC DAV College, Dasuya (Hoshiarpur)

The time from 550 AD of Buddhism's decline in India is referred to as the time of the rulers of Rajput and also a period of Hinduism's revival. In this time, two great revolutions were launched, one led by Adi Shankracharya and the other by Guru Gorakh Nath and other Nath Jogies. Indian Society came under the influence of Muslim Culture with the Muslim invasion of India. So during this period, a combination of Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist culture was visible there. There was political uncertainty. The economic formation was feudalistic. Kings and feudal lords, with the priestly class of their respective religion, were controlling the masses. Exploitation by feudal lords and priests was at the peak. In this frustrating environment, a great religious and revolutionary movement appeared in India, which is known as the Bhakti movement. It is a movement of Prem Bhakti Yog means to love and devotion. This Bhakti movement lasted for about five hundred years. There might have been a unique spiritual aura during that time which has produced such a large number of enlightened masters not only in one part of the country but throughout the whole of India. The extra-ordinary revolutionary point of this movement was that majority of these enlightened Masters were from the Backward Sects of the society. In this series, the names of many Bhakats are worthy to mention and an important one is Guru Ravidas. Guru Ravidas is an important example of conscious evolution from the physical body to Braham and ultimately Nirvana or liberation. In the spiritual language, it is known as the unity of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness or unity with God. Guru Ravidas attained it with Prem Bhakti means love and

devotion with almighty existence. This idea became popular very soon as it was too simple to be accepted. Many spiritual leaders in India decided to spread this idea of Guru Ravidas in the different parts of the country. He was a monotheist, following the general lines of his master's teachings, and even purer faith than Kabir. The followers of Ravidas, amongst who are a great leather worker, are found all over the Provinces. Many leather workers prefer to be known as Ravidasis. Members of this sect are very numerous in Punjab also. Guru Ravidas taught that the soul differs from God only in that it is encumbered with a body. His teachings are based on the general principles that underlie the teachings of all the reformers.<sup>1</sup>

Many important centers for the propagation of this idea were established in different parts of India out of which Dera Sachkhand Ballan became a prominent center for Ravidasdarshan<sup>2</sup> in Northern India. The founder of Dera Sachkhand Ballan was Sri 108 Baba Pipal Das, who was born in the village Gill-Patti in district Bathinda of Punjab. He was a religious-minded person from his childhood. He was greatly influenced by Baba Mohan Das and usually remained busy in spiritual prayers. His wife was Bibi Shobhavanti who was a religious-minded lady. He got a son who was given the name of Sarwan Das. With his wife and five-year-old son Sarwan Das, he started his travels in different parts of Punjab to propagate the philosophy of Guru Ravidas. Baba Pipal Das reached village Ballan in district Jalandhar where he was greatly welcomed by the public and he decided to stay for some time here. Due to the affection of the people of the village Ballan, he stayed here permanently. Later on, he founded a Dera here, which became the center of Ravidasdarshan and became popular as Dera Sachkhand Ballan. In 1928 A.D. he went to heaven. First Navratra is very important in the history of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, as on this festive day, in the memory of Sri 108 Baba Pipal Das Ji, the residents of village Ballan and Sarmastpur presented two Nishan Sahibs respectively. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Briggs. G.W *The Chamars*, Delhi: Low Price Publications reprint 1999, p. 211

<sup>2</sup> The basic philosophy of Guru Ravidas is popularly called Ravidasdarshan in Punjab.

followers of the Dera pay their homage to the respective Saint along with their family members. After that, the Kirtan and Langar made the ceremony much more religious.<sup>3</sup>

After Sri 108 Baba Pipal Das, Sri 108 Sant Sarwan Das Ji became the head of the Dera. He is considered the real founder of Dera Sachkhand Ballan. He was the son of 108 Baba Pipal Das Ji and Mata Shobhavanti. He was born in 1895 A.D. at village Gill Patti, District Bathinda. When he was only four years old his mother died and he was brought up under the able guidance of his father. His father Sri 108 Sant Pipal Das Ji, Sant Karta Nand of Kishangarh, and Sri Harnam Das of Jalandhar gave him a good education. 108 Sant Harnam Das Ji of Jalandhar with the consent of his father baptized him. Presently on the name of this Saint, Mohalla Harnamdas Pura is also situated in Jalandhar. He honestly and efficiently performed his duty to preach the masses the lesson taught to him by his father and Guru. Slowly and gradually the number of the followers of the Dera was increased. He laid special stress to educate the people. He usually took the class of the students within the Dera premises. He was a good scholar and had a deep knowledge of the Bani of Guru Ravidas. Many a time, he went to the nearby forests for self-analysis and always came back with new ideas. The place he used to sit is presently a memorable temple within the Dera and Sardar Hazara Singh of village Ballan donated the land for it. Sant Sarwan Das Ji, fortunately, got the help of Sant Hari Das Ji, Sant Garib Das Ji, and Sant Niranjan Das Ji. They all well performed their respective duties which were assigned to them by Sant Sarwan Das Ji. Once Sri Sunder Singh of Kathar told Sant Sarwan Das Ji that in Pakistan few followers of Ravidasism decided to construct the temple of Guru Ravidas but the people of the locality complained about it and in the court, the Judge ordered not to make any temple on the name of Guru Ravidas so they had no right to construct it and the building constructed was demolished. Sant Sarwan Das Ji was well

---

<sup>3</sup> Klair, Kanshi Ram, *Dera Sachkhand Ballan De Itihasik Gatha(Punjabi)* Jalandhar: Dera Sant Sarwan Das Ji, 2000 p. 4

aware of the fact that on the birthplace of Guru Ravidas the temple was still not constructed. So he decided to construct it at Kanshi. Sant Hari Das Ji laid down the foundation stone for it on 14th June 1965. The construction work was preceded under the able guidance of Sant Garib Das Ji and other important devotees of the Dera. It also popularised Dera Sachkhand Ballan in the whole of the world. As per the orders of the Almighty, Sant Sarwan Das Ji went to heaven on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

Now Sri 108 Sant Hari Das Ji became the patron of Dera Sachkhand Ballan. He was the son of Sh. Hukam Chand and Smt. Tabi Ji of village Garha of Jalandhar. He was born in village Garha in Jalandhar. His early name was Punnu Ram. The name of his elder sister was Punna Devi. His parents died very soon so he took responsibility for the family. He started working as a painter at Jalandhar Cantonment and later on, he got his sister married in the village Maheru. Now he was free from his family responsibility and decided to propagate Ravidasism. He went to village Ballan to worship Baba Pipal Das Ji and later on became his disciple. Baba Pipal Das Ji himself was greatly influenced by Sant Hari Das Ji because of his simplicity and devotion. After Baba Pipal Das Ji, Sant Sarwan Das Ji had also great affection for Sant Hari Das Ji. After the Death of Sant Baba Pipal Das Ji, in his memory, Sant Hari Das Ji organised a religious conference at village Garha in which many important religious personalities of the region participated and showers their blessings. Sant Sarwan Das Ji also came here. Early in the morning at 10 O'clock Bhog ceremony was performed after which all the spiritual leaders delivered their sermons. Muslim Faqir Sayyad Gulam Jilani also shared his views and thanked Sant Hari Das Ji for inviting Sant Sarwan Das Ji at Garha. Here Sant Sarwan Das Ji shared his philosophical views with the Sangat. On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1972, Sant Sarwan Das Ji went to heaven and with the request of the followers of Dera and the desire of Sant Sarwan Das Ji, Sant Hari Das Ji became the next patron of the Dera. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1972, he started the work of the construction of a temple in the memory of Sant Sarwan Das Ji at Village

Ballan. In this temple, the statue of Sant Sarwan Das Ji was also established. Now it became popular as Dera Sachkhand Ballan. The followers of the Dera in India and abroad contributed wholeheartedly to this temple. Sant Hari Das Ji was deadly against social evils like illiteracy, child marriage, slavery, and inequality. He propagated for good education to the children. He believed that the parents who never pay attention to the education of their children are not their well-wishers. He was deadly against the use of intoxicants. He enlightened the Dalit youth against the evil of taking drugs. He suggested his followers to spend money for the propagation of education and enlightens the people against social evils instead of fake pump and show. He was against the lethargic men of the society who did no work but their daughters and wives work for their livelihood and they pass their time in useless matters.<sup>4</sup> He worked for the all-around development of Ravidasism. On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1982 on the Birthday of Guru Ravidas at about 11 A.M Sant Hari Das Ji went to Heaven. The followers of the Dera residing in the different parts of the country were filled with grief. The very next day the funeral ceremony of Sant Hari Das Ji was performed by Sant Garib Das Ji.

Now Sant Garib Das Ji started the service of the community at Dera Sachkhand Ballan. He decided to follow the path shown by the previous Saints of the Dera. He was born in 1925 in village 'Jalbhe' in district Jalandhar. His father's name was Sh. Nanak Chand and mother was Bibi Har Kaur. When he was just of six months his father died. He was the youngest one amongst all the six brothers. Once he was playing with other children of the locality in the street when he listens about the Bani of Dera Saints from Sh. Jwala Ram, Sh. Surjan Ram and Sh. Kalu Ram of the locality. He was greatly impressed and decided to visit the Dera to pay his homage to Guru Ji. He was in his childhood and Sant Sarwan Das Ji many a time saw him visiting Dera with wholehearted devotion. Once Garib Das Ji gets him in his lap and asked him about his name,

---

<sup>4</sup> Klair, Kanshi Ram, *Dera Sachkahand Ballan De Itihasik Gatha (Punjabi)* Jalandhar: Dera Sant Sarwan Das Ji, 2000 p. 40

he immediately responded that his name is "Garibu". Sant Sarwan Das Ji told that you are not "Garibu" but you are the path shower of the downtrodden people. Whenever Sant Sarwan Das Ji visited the village 'Jalbhe' Garib Das Ji followed him. He was a good player of Toomba<sup>5</sup>. He could weave good silky and cotton clothes also. Sant Sarwan Das Ji baptized him. Sant Garib Das Ji used to recite shabads in the company of Sant Amar Das Ji who was quite proficient in gurbani and music. Sant Garib Das Ji had learned by heart many shabads of Guru Ravidas Ji.<sup>6</sup> On every Shangrand he used to visit Dera. He was just of fifteen years when he started working at the cotton mill in Hoshiarpur. After that, he went to Ludhiana to work with Sh. Kartar Chand of village Bahodipur. In Ludhiana, he got a letter from Sant Sarwan Das Ji to reach Dera immediately. Without any delay, he reached the Dera. Sant Ji told him to be with him during his visit to Delhi. Without any hesitation, Sant Garib Das Ji went to Delhi with Sant Sarwan Das Ji. In Delhi, they visited the residence of two beloved disciples of Sant Ji namely Sh. Bishna Ram Viridi and Sh. Faqir Singh Viridi who were living at Karol Bagh. Here for one month, Satsang was performed and the followers of Dera felt blessed with God's grace. Now Sant Sarwan Das Ji and Garib Das Ji came back to Dera Sachkhand Ballan where the Sangat was waiting for them. Now Garib Das Ji got the permission of Sant Sarwan Das Ji and decided to go to Ludhiana when he came to the bus stop of Sarmastpur Ballan it started raining heavily. There was no means of transportation so he had to retreat to the Dera. When he entered Dera he saw that Sant Hari Das Ji was reciting the Bani and Sant Sarwan Das Ji was explaining it to the Sangat. Garib Das Ji also very patiently listened to the Bani. Early in the morning when all other followers of the Dera decided to retreat Garib Das Ji also went to get the permission of Sant Ji. Now Sant Sarwan Das Ji advised him to stay at Dera to propagate Ravidasism which he

---

<sup>5</sup> A music instrument used in Punjabi folk.

<sup>6</sup> Sant Surinder Das Bawa, "Sant Garib Das Ji-An-Apostle of Peace", in *Saptahik Begumpura Shahir*, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2006, p. 4

accepted wholeheartedly.<sup>7</sup>

Now Sant Garib Das Ji wrote two letters, one to his village Jalbhe and the other to Ludhiana telling that he has decided to stay at Dera Sachkhand Ballan permanently to serve for the propagation of Ravidasism. At the Dera, Garib Das Ji was given the duty to give medicine to the sick that he performed up to the end of his life. He served the Sangat at day and night. Due to this devotion, Sant Hari Das Ji appointed him his successor. Sant Garib Das Ji worked for the spread of Ravidasism in the whole of the world. The construction work of the temple which was built on Guru Ravidas Birthplace was started in the period of Sant Hari Das Ji and Sant Garib Das Ji who made an extra effort for its timely completion. On 11<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1974, Sant Garib Das Ji started the Akhand Path here, which was completed on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1974. On this festive occasion, the followers of the Dera and Propagators of Ravidasism from the whole of the world reached Varanasi. The statue of Guru Ravidas Ji and Sant Sarwan Das Ji was established here. Presently, the followers of Ravidasism use to pay their homage to visit Seer Gowardhan, Varanasi. He also laid down the foundation stone of Sachkhand Mandir, Sant Hari Das Satsang Bhawan, and Langar Hall and also completed its construction work. He also laid down the foundation stone of a hospital at Kathar on the name of Sant Sarwan Das Ji on 22 Oct. 1982, which was started on 1 Jan. 1984. Presently it is a hospital in which 100 beds are kept for the patients. At the entrance of the hospital, the statue of Sant Sarwan Das Ji is established. It is a great work done by Sant Garib Das Ji for the help of the poor people of the region. On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1994, he also started the construction work of the entrance Gate in the village Ballan from Pathankot road towards the village. Sant Ji was indeed a real religious leader who never gave special importance to any political party leader but he always advised all the leaders to serve for the cause of humanity. Sant Garib Das Ji started a weekly newspaper namely

---

<sup>7</sup> Klair, Kanshi Ram, *Dera Sachkhand Ballan De Itihasik Gatha (Punjabi)* Jalandhar: Dera Sant Sarwan Das Ji, 2000 p. 68

“Saptahik Begampura Shahir” for the spread of Ravidasism in the whole of the world. This weekly newspaper is circulated not only in different parts of India but also in England, America, Canada, etc. For this newspaper, he laid down the foundation of the Begampura building at Mohalla Sunder Nagar in Jalandhar. On 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1991 first edition of this weekly was published. Sant Garib Das Ji propagated Ravidasism in foreign countries also. With his extra efforts, Sri Guru Ravidas Bhawan Birmingham is founded.<sup>8</sup> It is one of the beautiful temples of Ravidasism in the world. He toured different parts of the world for the propagation of Ravidasism.

Sant Garib Das Ji also laid the foundation of Sri Guru Ravidas Bhawan Jalandhar on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1988. He also laid the foundation of Sri Guru Ravidas Bhawan at R K Puram New Delhi. Besides these, he also founded the Ravidas Bhawans at Mohali and Chandigarh. He also laid the foundation of Sant Sarwan Das Teaching Block at Guru Ravidas ITI Phagwara on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1988. It is undoubtedly true that the works done by Sant Garib Das Ji for the development and propagation of Ravidasism are unremarkable. He gave the work to take care of Langar and Sangat to 108 Sant Niranjn Das Ji. 108 Sant Garib Das Ji always suggested his followers to search for the real path and truth of life. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1994, 108 Sant Garib Das Ji departed this soul. 108 Sant Niranjn Das Ji performed the funeral ceremony of Sant Garib Das Ji at village Ballan.

Now 108 Sant Niranjn Das Ji took the responsibility of the Dera Sachkhand Ballan. He was born at Mohalla Ramdaspura in Allawalpur in district Jalandhar at the house of Chaudhary Sadhu Ram and Mata Rukmani Ji. His whole family was the devotee of the Dera. He used to visit Dera with his father. He usually insisted his parents to visit Dera, so once his father requested Sant Sarwan Das Ji to allow him to live at Dera permanently. Sant Sarwan Das Ji happily agreed and after that, he started serving the Dera. After Sant Garib Das Ji he is honestly completing all the works, which were initiated

---

<sup>8</sup> Klair, Kanshi Ram, *Dera Sachkhand Ballan De Itihasik Gatha (Punjabi)* Jalandhar: Dera Sant Sarwan Das Ji, 2000 pp-75



by his predecessors. He is baptizing many people and propagating Ravidasism in different parts of the world. Under his able guidance, the construction work at Seer Gowardhanpur Varanasi is going on. For the convenience of the Sangat, a Langar hall of 85x65 feet is constructed. He initiated the construction work of Lanka Gate on the entrance road of the Birthplace Temple of Guru Ravidas at Seer Govardhanpur Varanasi. He faced many problems here but he with all his honest efforts is ultimately succeeded in this task. The President of India Mr. K.R.Narayanan inaugurated a Grand portal in the memory of great saint-poet Guru Ravidas Ji near his birthplace Seer Goverdhanpur village. The Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Suraj Bhan, and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Kalyan Singh were also with him.

The act of serving humanity is going on under his able guidance. He has completed the construction work of a four-storied residential building initiated by Sant Garib Das Ji. He has also got completed the construction of the langar hall and scooter cycle stand. Langar is open always for the Sangat at Dera. He is a great philosopher and is trying his level best for the intellectual development of the followers of Dera Sachkhand Ballan. In this series, he is paying special attention to the weekly newspaper of the Dera namely Begumpura. He is also taking a keen interest in the progress of Sant Sarwan Das Charitable hospital at Kathar. Here every year Sarwan Das Bangar of England organizes a special eye testing camp. All the religious ceremonies are performed at Dera under the able guidance of Sant Niranjn Das Ji. On the festive occasion of the Birthday of Guru Ravidas Ji he usually with the Sangat visits Seer Govardhanpur Varanasi where the people from all around the world reaches to pay their homage and to seek the blessings of their Guru. Sant Ji has also got repaired the (Tap Asthan) of Sant Pipal Das Ji and Sant Sarwan Das Ji at village Ballan. Every year on the festive occasion of the Birthday of Guru Ravidas Ji the saint poets and scholars are honored by the Dera. Sant Niranjn Das Ji is also honoured by many Deras related to Ravidasism in Punjab. He has also donated for the social welfare many a time as per the need of the Sangat.

He has also toured many foreign countries for the propagation of Ravidasism with Sant Ramanand Ji.<sup>9</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> February 2000, Sant Ji decided to celebrate the Birthday of Guru Ravidas Ji at Seer Govardhanpur and arranged a special train for the Sangat. It was a grand function in which many prominent personalities of India participated. He also laid the foundation stone of the community hall to be constructed at Dr. Ambedkar Bahwan Jalandhar. It is a place where Dr. B.R. Ambedkar visited on 27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1951. For the convenience of the Sangat, he started the construction work of a Satsang hall of 220x180 feet and it has now been completed. So Dera is not working only for the propagation of Ravidasism but also the cause of humanity under the able guidance of 108 Sant Niranjana Das Ji.

In the series to study important followers of Dera Sachkhand Ballan the name of 108 Sant Rama Nand Ji is worthy to mention. He was a great devotee of the Dera and worked wholeheartedly for the spread of the philosophy of Guru Ravidas all over the world. He was a well educated spiritual leader. He was baptized by 108 Sant Hari Das Ji. He served 108 Sant Hari Das Ji and 108 Sant Niranjana Das Ji with his full devotion and dedication. He many a time accompanied 108 Sant Niranjana Das Ji during his foreign tours for the propagation of Ravidasism. Most of the important projects of the Dera Sachkhand Ballan were running under his able guidance. He was the Chief Editor of the "Saptahik Begumpura Shahir". He was such an important and dedicated personality related to Ravidasism that in the whole of the world everyone related to Guru Ravidas mission was well aware of his name and contribution to the propagation of Ravidasism. He was martyred at Vienna in Austria on 25 May 2009. Presently Sant Niranjana Das is working with utmost zeal for the propagation of the philosophy of Guru Ravidas in the region and abroad. This Dera is the pivot of Ravidasism all over the world.

---

<sup>9</sup> Klair, Kanshi Ram, *Dera Sachkhand Ballan De Itihasik Gatha (Punjabi)*, Jalandhar: Dera Sant Sarwan Das Ji, 2000 p-96