



Saint Rabidas A Silence Movement: A Case Study in the Perspective of both Local & Global Issues

Ramu Kumar Das

Dept. of Ancient Indian and World History (AIWH), Sanskrit College and University, West Bengal, India. E-mail: rkd.caluniv@gmail.com

“Man Changa to Kathouti Me Ganga”—Saint Rabidas

Abstract: In the first time of Indian history by choosing Bhakti as a path of social protest saint Ravidas (Shri Guru Ravidass Ji was born in the year 1377 CE. i.e. Bikrami Samvat 1433 (widely accepted by most scholars & institutions) to father Shri Santokh Dass Ji and Mother Kalsa Devi Ji in Chamar caste, also known as Kutbandhla, one of the Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh) did not only challenge the Brahmanical tradition caste-based system of social exclusion and untouchability practiced for ages in India. Bhakti is considered to be a privilege of the upper castes only In the Brahmanical social order but how & What made him distinct from his contemporaries was his low caste birth and the unique method of Bhakti that he deployed to challenge the oppressive structures of social dominations.

Saint Ravidass became prominent because he unleashed a frontal attack on the long tradition of social oppression and untouchability in the Hindu society. Though born and brought up in Uttar Pradesh province of North India, Saint Ravidass came to command large followings among Dalits of the state of Punjab, which he believed to have visited during his journeys towards Rajasthan. Another factor that made him further popular in Punjab is the inclusion of his Bani (spiritual poetry) in Granth Sahib, sacred scriptures of Sikh faith. His stature grew still further when the Ad Dharm movement made him its patron Saint and a political rallying point. His fellow low caste followers, who consider him Guru, dedicated to him temples, memorial halls, educational institutions/chairs, cultural organizations, and hospitals. They founded several missions to accurately establish facts about his life and works and to disseminate his message of compassion, equality, and brotherhood in India and abroad (Hawley 1988:270).^[1]

Keywords: Saint Rabidas, Casteless Society, Silence movement, Local context, global issues

Received : 13 May 2022

Revised : 05 June 2022

Accepted : 11 June 2022

Published : 17 June 2022

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Das, R.K. (2022). Saint Rabidas A Silence Movement: A Case Study in the Perspective of both Local & Global Issues, *Society and Culture Development in India*, 2: 1, pp. 129-148. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2022.v02i01.09>

Introduction

Since the beginning of the time, Rabidas or Chamar community is described as untouchable. After independence, the community faced many Socio, Political, and Economical changes due to the enactment of various laws as per the guideline of the Indian constitution. The origin of the word Chamar is Chamada, it has various nomenclatures such as *Ad-dharmi*, *Ravidasia*, *Ramdasia*, *Jatav*, *Muchi*, *Charmakar*, etc. in North India and seven southern states. Though untouchability has been abolished legally from Indian society this community is still facing the slur of this evil. In view of the above, it is now the opportune time to concentrate on the history, origin and cultural evolution of the 'Chamar community'. The main aim and objective of this paper to highlight contemporary Socio-Cultural significance. The most interesting part is that it would be an insider's story of a movement which investigates a wide range of issues, like marginality, subordination, tortured and the institution of caste. There are very few scholars in India, who have explored the links between the *Chamar* identity and the *Ravidasia* movement. More importantly, when there is an attempt on the part of some sections of the privileged to attract the *Chamars* to the process of *Hinduisation*, there should be concerted attempts to understand the pasts and presents of this movement as a part of cultural oscillation, which has had a long journey from the days of Swami Shraddananda, Swami Achutananda, the *Harijan Sevak Sangha*, construction of Birla Mandir, communist involvement in *Chamars* Mahallas in Delhi, the mobilization of the *Chamars*, *Lal Beghis* and Doms in the cause of the Hindu religion in the 1940s, Babu Jagjivan Ram and the nationalist identity of marginalized depressed castes, Congress' scheme of appropriation, the break with the Congress and the move towards Kanshi Ram's BAMCEF and the later day formation Bahujan Samajwadi Party . So now the question is **"Is India is really ready for a casteless society even after different enactment laws in this regard by the Government as the Preamble of Indian Constitution?"** at the same time scholar interesting and academic study for another reason since the *Chamars* have had a long social involvement with the city of Calcutta as émigré businessmen and leather workers. But, in course of time, many of them taking advantage of the leather export market were able to amass wealth and their social mobility did not lead to any sub caste formation, but an agglomeration in terms of a new affiliation with the *Ravidasia*.

Saint Rabidas: Life, Teaching and Message

From early childhood, Rabidas was much inclined towards spirituality. He would frequently go with his mother to attend holy discourses and showed great respect

and devotion to holy men. When Rabidas was only seven years old, he attained maturity in devotion to God. The above behavior of Rabidas worried about his parents. They tried to divert his attention by engaging him in their family profession. Thus Rabidas though learned and engaged in the profession of shoemaking his love and devotion for God continued undiminished. His poetry has universal appeal. It is full of radical fervor and boundless love for the formless God. Although the poetry of Ravidass is rich with references to the adoration of and longing for God, it also gave significant space to the “hope for a better world and a fight against exploiters, power-holders and oppression going on under the name of religion” (Omvedt 2003:33)^[2]

To comprehensively analyze the mind of Ravidas, it is imperative to venture into his literary creations, including his simply worded yet blunt poems. His eloquent words were his strong message to society, and continue to be integral to the daily conversations of the Hindi belt of Northern India. A classic example is written below, in which he traverses from the individual to the society to the state and subtly communicates his egalitarian vision of the ideal society:

“मन चंगा, तो कठौती में गंगा”

When the soul is pure one can feel the presence of the Holy water of Ganges even in the water pot of the cobbler. Ravidas was always against artificially created scenes of purity. With a belief that work done with integrity and commitment is holy, he held the view that the water used in his profession of cleaning shoes was as worthy as the holy river Ganga. It was, and remains, a powerful message to the masses that Brahmins or any other ‘upper-caste are not the sole custodians of spiritual divinity. Rather, spirituality resides within everybody: a message that had a lasting impact on the minds of the disadvantaged. Ravidas’s views on the relevance of the Dalit fraternity are another legacy he is reckoned by. He underlined that the divinity within two individuals is identical, irrespective of their caste, creed, or gender. While dividing individuals based on social origin is indeed criminal, it really has no effect on the spiritual core of the person:

“कह रविदास खलास चमारा, जो हम सहरी सो मीत हमारा।।”^[3]

A few other defining words by Guru Ravidas which reflect the great mind that he was and that has shaped an entire era are:

“रविदास जन्म होत न कोउ नीच । ओछे करम की कीच ।”^[4]

Deeds, not birth, decide your fate. Guru Ravidas conveys that one's caste and birth will not solely decide their worth. It will be their work and deeds.

“जाति-जाति में जाति हैं, जो केतन के पात,
रैदास मनुष ना जुड़ सके जब तक जाति न जात”

Our society is divided into several castes. Even these castes are also divided into several sectional groups. But no eternal fruitful result can be achieved and the society cannot be united in this system.—Like the trunk of a Banana tree. Even we peel every layer of it one after one, at the end, no substance is left out and the trace of tree vanishes “In protest against the then social cleavage, he writes that caste as an institution has eroded and divided humanity and emphasizes that anything that creates rift the human society would never sustain in the longer run.

“ऐसा चाहू राज मैं, जहाँ मिले सबन को अन्न ।
छोट बड़ो सब सम बसै, रैदास रहे प्रसन्न ।।”

A socialist ideology is visible in his thinking. In the aforementioned lines, he envisions a state where no one sleeps with an empty stomach and everyone is equal and content. His vision for society was vehemently opposed by the traditional orthodoxy and was accused of deforming the social order. Yet, he continued on the path of devotion undeterred by worldly influences.

Concept of Begumpura: City Free from Sorrows

Saint Ravidass envisioned an egalitarian model of state for ensuring human rights and civil liberties for all alike. He called his ideal state as *Begumpura* (free from sorrows). In his ideal state no one would be discriminated against on the basis of caste and religion and everyone would be free from the burden of taxes and worries of food. His ideal state would be free from the graded system of caste hierarchy. There would be no segregated colonies for the downtrodden and they would be free to move around without caste prejudice. In other words, in *Begumpura* the evil of untouchability would cease to exist. Though *Begumpura* was an ideal state as visualized by Ravidass, it was not a mere figment of his mind. In fact, its articulation was based on in-depth understanding of the socio-economic and

political conditions prevailing during his lifetime. He lived during the period when Shudras were doubly oppressed by their political masters along with the members of higher castes and by the Brahmins, the custodians of Hindu religion (Singh 1996:99; See also Raju 2001:141-47)^[5]

'Man Changa to Kathouti Me Ganga' Sant Ravidas (When the soul is pure one can feel the presence of Holy of Ganges even in the professional water pot of the cobbler) Saint Ravidas was always against artificially created scenes of purity. With a belief that work done with integrity and commitment is holy, he held the view that the water used in his profession of cleaning shoes was as worthy as the holy river Ganga. It was, and remains, a powerful message to the masses that Brahmins or any other 'upper-caste are not the sole custodians of spiritual divinity. Rather, spirituality resides within everybody: a message that had a lasting impact on the minds of the disadvantaged. Ravidas's views on the relevance of the Dalit fraternity are another legacy he is reckoned by. He underlined that the divinity within two individuals is identical, irrespective of their caste, creed, or gender. While dividing individuals based on social origin is indeed criminal, it has no effect on the spiritual core of the person:

The problem is inbuilt in the society. If we want to resolve the problem we have to demolish it from the very root. First of all the Government has to take steps regarding the abolishment of the Caste system. While the Government says that we are all same, we are all humans but at the same time, special provisions like creating of quota within quota are being continued. The constitution of India has provided 7 to 15 % reservations to Scheduled Castes in various states of India. But the benefit of this reservation is not reaching all the deserving people.

1. In terms of population, the biggest caste in India is Chamar. They are about 25% of the Indian population. The Chamar caste is spread all over India.
2. Their work was related to leather such as skinning of dead animals like tiger, lion, deer, cow, buffalo, horse, donkey, camel, etc., ready the raw leather into finished leather, make musical instruments, make armour. Make leather water vessel, shoe, belt, jacket, etc.
3. They also known as different names as in Maharashtra they are Mahar and also have other three names, In Haryana, they are Jatav, in U. P. and Uttarakhand they are Jatav, Chamar, Ravidas, and also three other names, in Bihar, they are Chamar, Ravidas, and Mochi, in Bengal they are Muchi and Ruhidas.

So the aggrieved communities have raised voice against discrimination. If we want to demolish the caste theory from society then first of all we have to remove

the mindset of the people and upper-caste Society, and the same will be possible if we educate our People, our Children, our Generation, and our Society. Bhagwad Gita shows three paths of enlightenment i.e. Karma, Bhakti (Devotion), and Gyan (Knowledge). While it may seem that Ravidas and in general Dalits belong to the Bhakti Marg, he, embodied Karma and Gyan with equal fervor. A man who lived by the philosophy that Samvad (dialogue) and not confrontation is the path to an integrated and cohesive society is the man who truly represents what Dalits are and more importantly, what they can be. I conclude my write-up with mention Dr B.R.Ambedkar quote '*Ours is a battle not for wealth; nor for power, ours is a battle for freedom; for reclamation of human personality.*'

Centre's in India

1. Hijrawan Kalan Fatehabad Haryana 125051
2. Unnamed Rd, Nandan, Hoshiarpur, Punjab 146021
3. Kankhal, Mayapur, Haridwar, Uttarakhand 249408
4. india/Sitarganj/Kailashpuri/Ravidash Gurudwara, Sitarganj, Uttarakhand 262405
5. Ghasi Tola, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh 221001
6. 20/1, Guru Ravidas Sarani, Tiljala Rd, Picnic Garden, Tiljala, Kolkata, West Bengal 700039
7. Katraj, (Shiv Sambhoo Nagar, Katraj Kondwa Road), Pune, Swami Samartha Nagar, Kondhwa Budruk, Pune, Maharashtra 411046
8. Block 51, Dev Nagar, Karol Bagh, New Delhi, Delhi 110005

Centre's in Outside India

The following is a list of Guru Ravidas Gurdwaras and temples.

Australia

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Campbellfield, Melbourne[1]

Austria

Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Vienna[2]

Belgium

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Ooestende[3]

Canada

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Burnaby[4]

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Burlington[5]
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass(Gurbani Sagar), Montreal[6]
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Calgary
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Toronto

England

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Southall
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Leicester
Shri Guru Ravidass Bhavan, Birmingham
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Wolverhampton
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Gravesend
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha,Derby
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,Darlaston
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,Walsall
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Willenhall
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Newham
Ravidassia Community Centre, Hitchin
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Foleshill
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,Coventry
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Luton
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Strood
Guru Ravidass Community Centre, Derby
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Erith Kent
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass,Southampton
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Bedford
Gurdwsra Shri Guru Ravidass, Bradford
Dera Baba Gobind Das(Ravidass Gurdwara), Bilston
Amritbani Ravidassia Community Centre, 300-306 Park Rd., Hockley
Shri Guru Ravidass Community and leisure Center,Church Lane,Birmingham

Fiji

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Nasinu

France

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Paris
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Le blanc Mesnil

Germany

Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Frankfurt

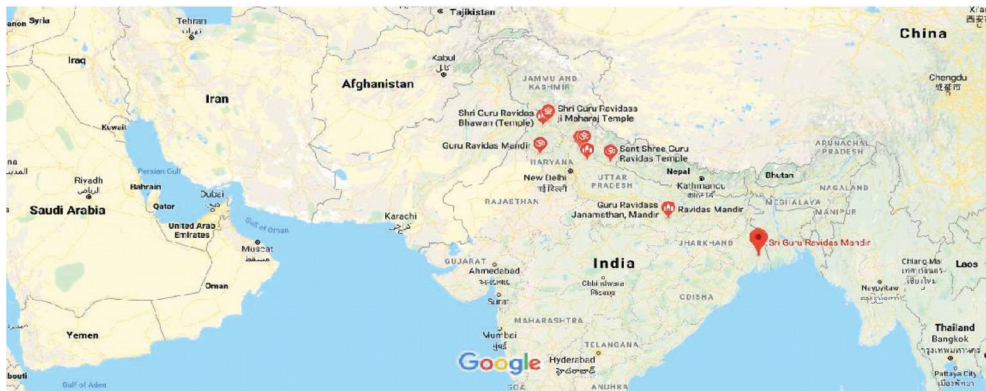
Greece

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass, Koropi
Shri Guru Ravidass Guru Ghar, Psachna

Italy

Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Bergamo
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Vicenza
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Sabaudia
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Marche
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Gorlago
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Narni Terni
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Verona
Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Brescia
Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass dham, Treviso-Pordenone

Google Maps Sri Guru Ravidas Mandir



Map 1: Saint Rabidas Temple of India Through Google Map



Fig. 1: Shri Guru Ravidass Ashram, India



Fig. 2: Shri Guru Ravidass Ashram, India



Fig. 3: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass Mandir



Fig. 4: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass Mandir



Fig. 5: Shri Guru Ravidass Aashram
(Pathankot, India)

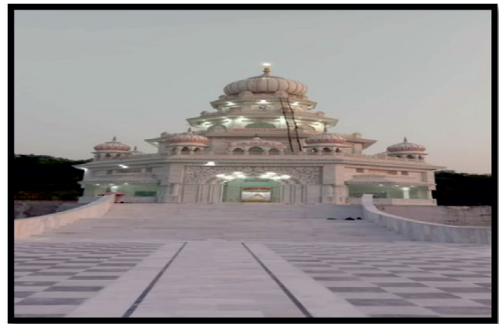


Fig. 6: Shri Guru Ravidass Aashram
(Pathankot, India)



Fig. 7: Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,
Phagwara, India



Fig. 8: Shri Guru Ravidass Temple,
Phagwara, India



Fig. 9: Shri Guru Ravidass Temple



Fig. 10: Shri Guru Ravidass Temple



Fig. 11: Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Foleshill, U.K



Fig. 12: Guru Ravidass Temple (Birmingham) England



Fig. 13: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass Temple



Fig. 14: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass Mandir



Fig. 15: Guru Rabidas Temple (Birmingham) England



Fig. 16: Shri Guru Ravidass Aashram U.K



Fig. 17: Shri Guru Ravidass Aashram



Fig. 18: Shri Guru Ravidass Aashram



Fig. 19: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass Mandir Jammu & Kashmir, India



Fig. 20: Guru Rabidas Temple Adi Dharm Seva Samiti Park Circuss Kolkata W.B

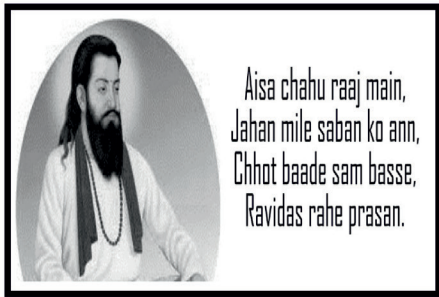


Fig. 21: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass



Fig. 22: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass



Fig. 23: Shiromani Shri Guru Ravidass



Fig. 24: Saint Mirabai : Eternal devotee of Lord Krishna



Fig. 25: Meera Bai had met Guru Ravidass Ji in Kalseveral times. He was under his influence. After her marriage, she adopted Guru Ravidass Ji as her Guru, with the consent of her husband and other elderly members of the family



Fig. 26: The Brahmins of Kashi made a challenge to Guru Ravidass ji when they asked Guruji to prove the power of his 'Shaligram' (a spherical stone idol traditionally worshipped by Brahmin priests) by making it float on the River Ganges



Fig. 27: God does not differentiate between human beings, to him, all humans are same and this is the universal truth. It is only the humans who create differentiations in society based on caste and creed and turn the society into an ugly picture



Fig. 28: Great saints and saints, even the king and king were impressed by his scholarship



Fig. 29: Speaking on the occasion, the PM said that the teachings of the mystic poet inspire us every day. He stressed that people won't be able to connect with each other and there won't be any equality in the society if there is caste-based discrimination. Elaborating on his Government's projects to help the marginalised the PM said, "We brought quota for poor, so that those marginalised can lead a dignified life". This government is punishing the corrupt and rewarding the honest" he added. February 19, 2019

Some Glimpses of Guru Rabidas Jayanti Celebration in India



Fig. 30: A Procession in Adi Dharm Seva Samiti , Kolkata, West Bengal by Ravidas followers to mark the birthday of Ravidas



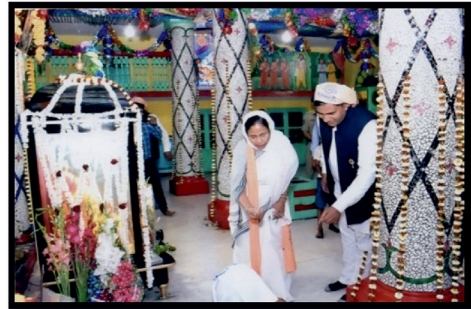


Fig. 31: Hon'ble Chief Minister Smt. Mamata Banarjee at *Adi Dharm Seva Samiti*, Kolkata, West Bengal on the occasion of Guru Rabidas Jayanti, 2018



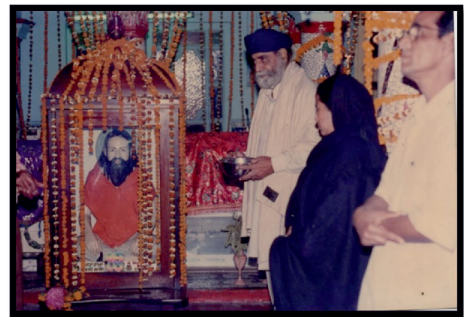


Fig. 32: Guru Rabidas Followers with Smt. Mamata Banarjee at *Adi Dharm Seva Samiti*, Kolkata, W.B



Fig. 33: On the Occasion of Saint Rabidas Jayanti Sri Subrata Mukharjee at *Adi Dharm Seva Samiti*, Kolkata, West Bengal



Fig. 34: Hon'ble Speaker Smt. Meira Kumar at Shri Guru Ravi Dass Sabha, Southall, United Kingdom



Fig. 35: On the Occasion of Saint Rabidas Jayanti Sri Rahul Gandhi



Fig. 36: On the occasion of Saint Rabidas Jayanti, Ravidas followers to mark the birthday of Ravidas through a procession, cultural programs by Bengal Provincial Depressed Classes League at *Subodh Mallik Squre, Kolkata , West Bengal 2018-19*



Fig. 37: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati unveils the Golden Palanquin, brought from Jalandhar, during her visit at Saint Ravidas Temple, in Varanasi on Thursday. (PTI Photo)



Fig. 38: Delhi Chief Minister Sri Arabinda Kejriwal visit at Saint Ravidas Temple



Fig. 39: On the occasion of Saint Rabidas Jayanti, Sri Lalu Prashad Yadav



Fig. 40: Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi lays foundation stone for guru Ravidas birthplace development project dt. February 19, 2019



Fig. 41: Sri Tejashwi Yadav offered prayers at Guru Ravidas Temple



Fig. 42: Sri Akhlesh Yadav on the occasion of Saint Ravidas Jayanti



Fig. 43: Chief Minister of U.P. Yogi Adityanath also addressed the gathering. Feb 20, 2019



Fig. 44 On the occasion of Saint Ravidas Jayanti, CM Yogi ate anchor while sitting on the ground, Varanasi (UP)



Fig. 45: Saint Ravidas Jayanti Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi visited Ravidas Temple in Varanasi, U.P.



Fig. 46: PM Modi offered prayers at Guru Ravidas Temple



Fig. 47: Rahul Gandhi visiting Saint Ravidas Mandir in Varanasi and offered prayers in the temple



Fig. 48: True religions never divides: Priyanka Gandhi at Varanasi Ravidas Temple

Acknowledgements

This article is primarily based on participant observations and a large number of extended discussion that I had with the devotees of Guru Ravidass, priests, Dalit leaders, and Dalit writers as well as followers of various other Ravidass Dears. My thanks to Professor (Dr.) S. N. Bhattacharya, University of Calcutta for providing critical inputs in the preparation of the final draft. I am also thankful to Sri Rabindra Nath Das President Bengal Provincial Depressed Classes League for his kind helps to making my article.

Note and References

Hawley, J. S. (1988.) Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India. *The Journal of Asian.*

Omvedt, G. (2003). "Freedom Songs". *Voices from Vancouver: The Souvenir of The International Dalit Conference, Vancouver, Canada: May 16-18, 2003.* Canada: The Association for International Dalit Conference Inc., pp. 31-33.

Retrieved from online <https://www.thelallantop.com/bherant/full-story-of-sant-ravidas-and-his-followers-whose-temple-was-demolished-by-the-delhi-development-authority-dda/> [Last accessed 09/05/2021]

Retrieved from online <https://dailynewsteller.blogspot.com/2020/02/daily-current-affairs-9-february-2020.html> [Last accessed 09/05/2021]

Singh, D. (1996.) *The Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, 2nd edn. Patiala: Punjabi University.