

Ghasidas: The Guru of Satnami

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Abstract

Guru Ghasi Das (1756-1836) was the Satnami sect's Guru (master) in the early nineteenth century. Satnami sect is akin to Sikhism and stands in opposition to Hinduism's inequity. In the remote wooded region of Chhattisgarh, India, it was Guru Ghasidas who began considering everyone as equal. Ghasi Das was born in Girodpuri, District - Balodabazar, on December 18, 1756. Mahngu Das and Amrotin Devi have a son named Guru Ghasidas. Ghasidas preached Satnam to the people of Chhattisgarh in particular. Balakdas, Ghasi Das's son, carried on his father's teachings. Guru Ghasidas founded the Satnami community in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh. During his lifetime, India's political climate was one of exploitation. Ghasidas was exposed to the ills of the caste system at a young age, which helped him grasp the social dynamics of a caste-ridden society and to oppose social inequity. He travelled widely throughout Chhattisgarh in search of answers. Saint Guru Ghasidas founded the Satnami community in Chhattisgarh, India, on the principles of "Satnam" (meaning "Truth") and equality. The Guru's teachings and worldview are comparable to those of Sikhs. Guru Ghasidas devised the "jaitkhambh" emblem of truth, which is a white painted log of wood with a white flag on top. The building represents a white man who pursues the truth. "Satnam" is always firm and is the truth's cornerstone (satya ka stambh). The white flag represents peace.

Keywords: *guru ghasidas, guru, Satnami, Chhattisgarh.*

Introduction

Ghasidas was born on December 18, 1756, at Girodpuri, District - Balodabazar. Guru Ghasidas is the son of Mahngu Das and Amrotin Mata. Ghasidas specifically preached Satnam to the people of Chhattisgarh. He was a staunch supporter of equality and a detractor of the oppressive caste system. He was a monotheist who was opposed to idolatry. Buddhism is comparable to the teachings and worldview of Guru. He was antagonistic to all Hindu beliefs and customs, particularly idol worship (Murtis). Ghasidas was exposed to the afflictions of the caste system at a young age, which aided him in understanding social dynamics in a caste-ridden culture and rejecting societal injustice. Guru Ghasidas supplies the "jaitkhamb" emblem, which is a straight piece of white wood with a white flag on top. That indicates a guy who pursues the truth, or satnaam, and is always like that symbol, which is sturdy and cannot be broken, which represents the pillar of truth (Satya ka stambh), and the flag denotes peace. In his honour, the Chhattisgarh government designated a part

of the Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve Guru Ghasidas National Park. They also built the "Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya," or Central University.

Satnam Dharm / Satnam Panth

Ghasidas, a Chamar caste field labourer, founded the most important Satnami clan around 1820 in the Chhattisgarh area of central India. Dharm is a Sanskrit term that combines Dharan (acceptance) and Aham (law) (me, my) The resultant sentence means "I accept." Satnam Dharm means that I embrace and follow Satnam. The teachings of Guru Ghasidas may be summed up in one word: Satnam (satnaam), which means "True Name." The Lord's name is regarded to be the one true truth and the germ of the cosmos, from which all else sprang. In modern times, the word "satnam" is repeated with Guru Nanak Dev's name as "Satnam Vahe Guru." By viewing all persons as socially equal, this new system constituted a threat to the Brahmanical social order. Satnam Panth holds that truth is God and that there is only one God, Nirgun (formless) (infinite). Satnam condemns all types of idol worship because Ghasidas saw a relationship between Brahmin rule and idol worship. Ghasidas, on the other hand, took a holistic approach, believing that institutional adjustments to abolish social injustice and inequality would be insufficient and incomplete unless individuals were transformed. In contemporary Hinduism, it is believed that the only way to worship the Lord during the Kalyuga is to say his name. Satnam adherents believe in the name of the Lord and do not worship idols. They adhere to Buddhist practises. Connections to the Kabir Panth have historically been important at various stages, and Satnamis have negotiated their place within a greater Hindu hierarchy in a variety of ways over time.

Satnamis

In this framework, the caste system, untouchability, and the Untouchables in Chhattisgarh, as well as the negotiation for a new identity, must be examined. The Satnami movement is notable among these negotiations. One of the earliest moves toward the establishment of a new identity has been the founding of a new sect or conversion to another faith. Without a doubt, brahmanical caste rigidity and brutality drove Dalits away from Hinduism. For centuries, one of the primary ways of social development in India has been conversion as a phenomena leading to a change of religion. All Hindu sects that preached equality acquired a huge number of followers. For example, after the 13th century, charismatic individuals like as Kabir, Ravidas, Chaitanya, Eknath, Chokamela, Tukaram, Narsinh Mehta, Ramanuja, Basav, and Nimbark popularised the Bhakti movement throughout India. They preached equality, something the Untouchables desperately desired.

For the same reason, Islam won favour. It provided previously oppressed strata fresh hope for equality and an economic room for progress. Mass conversions to Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity posed a threat to upper-caste dominance. This is the setting in which the creation of a new identity under Satnampanth assumes enormous significance.

"In the early nineteenth century, circa 1820, a farm servant called Ghasidas founded a new sect predominantly among the Chamars (traditionally leather workers) of Chhattisgarh," writes Dube (2001:1). Ghasidas was born in the late eighteenth century, likely in the 1770s, into a family of Chamar farm labourers in Girod, northeast of Raipur [now Balodabazar] district. Satnampanth was the name given to this new sect, and its adherents were known as Satnamis."

Satnampanth's establishment in the early nineteenth century aided in the construction of a new identity for Chhattisgarh's Antyajas. The late 18th and early 19th century were turbulent times in the region. Cultivation flourished, the State's tax needs increased, and a Brahmin-dominated bureaucracy superseded the traditional power structures. According to Dube (2001:25), the Marathas' and British's diverse administrative actions had paradoxical economic and cultural effects for the Chamars of Chhattisgarh. The Satnampanth relied on popular traditions while also rejecting the hierarchy of ceremonial purity and pollution, the "divinely decreed" and societal hierarchies centred on the Hindu pantheon, and repositioning ancient symbols in a new matrix. It questioned and disputed Chamars' given status as inferior Untouchables, as individuals tainted by their handling of the sacred cow's carcass. The Chamars who joined the group were purified of impurities and ritual subordination markings and reconstructed as Satnamis.

The formation of a sect like Satnami was an outright rejection of Manu's religious law and the proclamation of an alternative faith for themselves. It essentially represented their rejection of Brahmanism, which was seen as the core cause of their hardships. The Satnam movement's overthrow of Hindu religious conceptual hegemony as a fundamental condition for Dalit emancipation is the most expressive articulation of this resistance in Chhattisgarh.

The tyranny and torture that the Chamars endured even after becoming Satnamis under Ghasidas' guruship requires rigorous examination. In these lines, Dube (2001: 55) uses Oscar Lohr's report to illustrate Satnamis' issues. "Due to the community's poor ceremonial standing, there were significant limitations on clothing, jewellery, and accessories." Satnami males were not expected to wear a full-size dhoti, a turban, or shoes before upper castes. Satnami women were not permitted to wear sarees with coloured borders or to wear silver or gold jewellery. An umbrella, fashioned as a distinct cover of authority - arguably through a reworking of the meanings of the Chhattra (ornamental canopy) of rajas and gods, which simultaneously represented the divine attributes of royalty and the regal aspects of divinity - was reserved for use by the upper caste order. In

accordance with these cultural ideals, the Satnamis were prohibited from riding horses and elephants or utilising a palanquin during their marriages."

Satnam revolution of Guru Ghasidas

Ghasidas was born on December 18, 1756, in the hamlet of Girodpuri in the current Balodabazar district. His parents were Mahngu Das and Amrotin Devi. He established the Satnampanth (truth path) in particular for the Dalits of Chhattisgarh. Ghasidas was exposed to the ills of the caste system at a young age, which exposed him to the social dynamics of a caste-ridden society and caused him to reject social inequity. He travelled widely throughout Chhattisgarh in search of solutions to this imbalance. Guru Ghasidas devised the "jaitkhambh" emblem of truth, which is a white painted log of wood with a white flag on top. The wood log represents the pillar of truth (satya ka stambh) for anybody who pursues the truth, "satnam," and the white flag represents peace.

Guru Ghasidas is the pioneer of Chhattisgarh's anti-caste revolution. Satnampanth was inspired by Kabirpanth, according to Chisholm (1869: 46-47). Ghasidas was appointed as the new sect's guru. The guru barred his pupils from worshipping idols and instead urged them to believe exclusively in Satnam, the formless creator of the cosmos, and to observe a social equality code. Satnampanth transformed its followers into Satnamis. It was almost entirely limited to the Chamars of Chhattisgarh, with a few exceptions from other socially disadvantaged communities.

During his journeys through Chhattisgarh, on his route to Puri, he abandoned pilgrimage and established an austere life. He meditated in the Sarangarh woods, where he acquired "Satnam" enlightenment. He would go to the forest for meditation on a regular basis after that. A big tendu tree on a rocky hillside about a mile from his natal hamlet is reported to be where he would often sit and contemplate. This is still a Satnami pilgrimage place, with two Satnami temples.

Ghasidas taught his disciples a seven-fold path for the betterment of humanity, which includes faith in truth (satnam), prohibition of idol worship, prohibition of the varna system, abstinence from violence, abstinence from (alcohol) addiction, prohibition of adultery, and not ploughing the field in the afternoon to give cattle rest. He was opposed to the cruel system of caste, untouchability, and animal sacrifice since his boyhood. The guru's teachings implanted in the oppressed people a new degree of confidence, a new identity, and a new spirit to combat oppression and injustice (George 2013).

Challenges before the Satnam movement today

Without a doubt, the Satnam movement had a significant influence on the Untouchables in the nineteenth century. Many obstacles have arisen recently, and the movement has lost its vigour. The movement must

reinvent and revitalise itself at a time when it has various Constitutional protections and regulations at its disposal to combat casteism.

When the string of atrocities over the previous few decades is examined, we discover that the majority of the victims have been from the Satnami group, primarily in rural Chhattisgarh. The community's reaction has been chilly. There has been little systematic attempt to seek remedy under the Indian Constitution, the Protection of Civil Rights Act of 1955, the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, and other statutes. In truth, India has signed a number of international laws, covenants, and treaties. Being a signatory obligates the state to fully implement what has been agreed upon. Even while Dalits have affirmative rights to education, healthcare, reservation, and social security on paper, these rights are frequently denied to them in fact, adding to the litany of abuses of their rights.

The continuation of caste as the most influential institution in the formation of contemporary India poses the greatest threat to its democratic fabric. Chhattisgarh's position is crucial since it has also evolved into a wider laboratory of neoliberal experimentation. The final result has been attacks on Dalit settlements, land acquisition by corporate capitalists, and psychological manipulation of Dalits and Dalit movements through Hinduization or Sanskritization. As a result, today's Satnamis are not only victims of caste-based crimes and prejudice, but also of attempts to culturally and socially marginalise them.

Conclusion

Dalits in Chhattisgarh are terrified. The dominating castes have succeeded in spreading fear that anyone who attempts to remove caste constraints would be vanquished. This social system has been integrated into the political, administrative, and psychological structures. Satnamis, too, does not appear to be attempting to break free from these restraints. This concludes the hypothesis of social power and its link to the oppressive process.

With the hardening of caste politics, Chhattisgarh is now facing the possibility of a new type of slavery. The number of reserved seats has been lowered in the name of delimitation. The actions of both the national and state governments have put reservations in education and employment at risk. The state has already seen the emergence of new forms of casteism. For example, during the last two decades, Dalit organisations have brought to light countless incidents in which Dalit Sarpanches were not permitted to function in a free and fair environment. There have been several reports of instructors discriminating against students in schools. The question is, what is the exit strategy?

Guru Ghasidas's equality movement is under tremendous assault. He opposed Hindu creation and Supreme Being beliefs. He stood alone for the "True Name," the one God, the cause and creator of all things, the Nirguna. There was no apparent emblem or image of the Supreme Being in the religion.

Satnamis today practise idolatry, which contradicts his teachings. They also disregard Ghasidas' opposition to temples, public religious worship, doctrine, and "bhakti." Thus, Ghasidas' movement is at a crossroads now.

Without a question, the 200-year-old Satnam movement has ingrained in historically downtrodden elements of society a strong feeling of dignity, self-respect, and a spirit of self-determination. The question now is, however, whether Satnamis are free of the brahmanical social order. Have they not combined Guru Ghasidas' movement with the Hindu dominance system? Are the Satnamis free of caste today? Is the Satnampanth founded on anti-caste movements like justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity? These questions require solutions right now. His magical powers are attributed to him in myths and beliefs, and legends such as his capacity to resurrect the dead, as he did with his wife and son after their deaths, are commonly told. However, the main issue is that Guru Ghasidas is seen as a visionary social reformer, as evidenced by a large number of Satnam followers.

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