**Student Handout**

**The Ravidasis**

Membership of the Ravidasi community is exclusively composed of the *chamar* caste, this is a *zat* (caste) of the Scheduled classes. The Ravidasis take their name from their allegiance to a historical figure, commonly referred to as Ravidas, hence he is regarded as *biradari guru* (that is, the guru of the *chamar zat*/brotherhood) by his followers.

Living in the fifteenth - sixteenth centuries CE, Ravidas was both a social reformer, and a spiritual teacher who probably belonged to the *sant* tradition. He himself also belonged to the *chamar* caste, hence his popularity among *chamars*. The association between the followers of Ravidas and Sikhism is evidenced by the fact that forty-one hymns composed by Ravidas are contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

When taken as a whole, the practices during worship in a Ravidasi *sabha* (the name given to their place of worship)are both Hindu and Sikh orientated.

The preference for Ravidas among his followers is against the prescribed behaviour of a Sikh as stated in the *Rehat Maryada,* which states that a Sikh should not follow the teachings of anyone apart from those of the ten Sikh Gurus.

Philosophical beliefs of the Ravidasias closely resemble the beliefs of orthodox Sikhism; indeed the most authentic of Ravidas’s works are contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib.* In their total insistence on Ravidas, the community of his followers lays no importance on taking *amrit* or indeed on any of the 5K’s.

Although the Ravidasis retain some Sikh practices, their identity as Sikhs is limiting, in particular as a result of their total abstinence from the *khalsa* tradition, and the utmost importance given to their Guru, Ravidas.