

Social Philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Sociological Study of North India

Thesis

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*Ramesh Kumar***

Enrolment No- 1234/16

**UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
*Prof. Bibhuti Bhushan Malik***

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
SCHOOL OF AMBEDKAR STUDIES FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
(A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
VIDYA VIHAR, RAEBARELI ROAD, LUCKNOW-226 025
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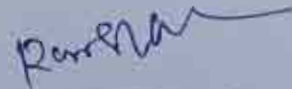
DECLARATION

I, **Ramesh Kumar**, declare that the work embodied in this thesis entitled **Social Philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Sociological Study of North India** has been carried out by me under the supervision of **Prof. Bibhuti Bhushan Malik**, Professor, Department of Sociology, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (A Central University), Lucknow.

The work included in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree and, unless otherwise stated, is all original. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me in the preparation of this thesis. I also declare that the thesis is essentially free from all kinds of plagiarism.

Place: Lucknow

Date: 29/06/2022



(Ramesh Kumar)

Enrolment No: 1234/16

Department of Sociology

School of Ambedkar Studies for Social Sciences

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University

Lucknow- 226025

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **Social Philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Sociological Study of North India** submitted by **Mr. Ramesh Kumar** is an original research work and has not been previously submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree or diploma to this or any other university.

The thesis submitted to Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow, satisfies all the requirements as stipulated in the *Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) regulations -2016 as amended in 2017* and it is fit for submission and evaluation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University.

Date: 29/06/2022


Supervisor


Head of the Department

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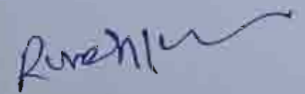
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Chapter-1
Introduction



Chapter-1

Introduction

Kabir is a great social reformer of Indian society. His social philosophy has dramatically impacted the social structure of Indian society from medieval India. He is noticed as a pioneer in the Bhakti Movement who advocated the equality of every individual. His social philosophy is still relevant in the current era. Further, it will remain relevant until there is discrimination and evil in society and people are considered inferior or superior among fellow human beings. Discussion in this chapter to use Kabir and the structure of Indian society in which it was challenging to work, preach and practice; before discussing more Kabir, it is essential to briefly discuss the structure of the Indian society in which he worked.

The Kabir and Kabir Panth can be traced to when Aryans entered the Indian region in the early 1500 BC. They categorised the society in the Varna system during the Vedic period. Later on, during the post-Vedic period, they created a caste system that adulterated Indian society. Consequently, women and the lower caste people were forced to live in horrible and miserable conditions (Srivastava, 2013).

The structure of Hindu society was divided into high and low status by birth, where people belonging to upper strata enjoy all kinds of privileges and statuses. On the other hand, people belonging to lower strata were denied in every life sphere, even fundamental rights, for thousands of years. This exclusion and hierarchy were based on the caste system. Over the period, two egalitarian religions landed on Indian soil: one was Christianity, which came to India much before it entered Europe, and the other was Islam, which appeared on the coast of the Arabian Sea by mercenaries from Arabian countries (Chandra, 1981).

Islam came to India along with Sufism, which promoted the idea of equality and brotherhood. The worthiness of Islam and Sufism is reflected by considering all humankind with equal status and making no distinction between caste, class, and creed. It was the main reason Sufism influenced the lower strata of society. The core values of these two religions were equality which gave new hope to depressed caste by providing more reasonable status to the lower caste compared to the orthodox Hindu religion. However, the arrival of these religions had created new tension among the masses on Indian soil. Later, in the medieval period, Muslims became rulers, and the Hindu political elite lost their hegemonic power. Islam offered equality to everyone in the early period as an egalitarian religion. Due to this, a chunk of the population had converted to Islam. The Hindu and Muslim society was experiencing deep disappointment, confusion, and depression due to the prevalence of substantial social evils and bad practices in society. Under these social circumstances, the 'Bhakti movement' had received enormous impetus and created an atmosphere to raise the social reformers and saints like Kabir (Srivastava, 2013).

Kabir emerged in India as the champion of non-conformity to religious orthodox. Kabir and his followers popularised the doctrines of 'Bhakti', which Ramananda preached. Nirguna Bhakti profoundly influenced him and held high faith and respect for the truth beyond worldly affairs. He described God as *Nirguna* and tried to establish the superiority of Bhakti as the path to achieving a Supreme Being. According to him, the easiest way to get closely associated with God is Bhakti, and it is the highest sentiment of respect and love. Kabir's God is impersonal, and no word can define Him. Kabir has left the concept of God as it was itself unexplained to him. He did not believe in the incarnation of God but had one's own internal God (Soul). Kabir kept himself from the traditional and orthodox beliefs of Hinduism and Islam. Instead, he preached the ideas

of universal humanism that go beyond religions' narrow and dogmatic practices. The God, who is formless, has been adored by Kabir. He preached that 'Bhakti' or devotion is the ultimate way of inner realisation and the only means to meet the devotee's God. Kabir harshly criticised the malpractices and superstitions prevalent in both Hinduism and Islam.

Construction upon such criticisms, he tried to evoke a new synthesis by taking good elements from Hinduism and Islam and keeping social vision before society. His vision was free from all kinds of narrow dogmas. After the Kabir, his ideas were materialised and institutionalised by his disciples. Thus, this study focussed on the role of Kabir in evolving a new synthesis, borrowing from both Hindu and Muslim faith, which over time consolidated into an institutionalised form, paving the way for the creation of Kabir Panth. Through Kabir Panth, Kabir's ideas were encoded in the daily life practice of people.

Further, this research will highlight Kabir's core social vision and interpretation that his followers have carried out. Various interpretations by 'Kabir Panthies and its related social constructivism have evolved into many sub-sects. This research would also focus on the similarity and differences between two sub-sects of Kabir Panth, namely the Dhamkheda section of Chhatisgarh and Kabir Chaura math of Banaras.

Statement of the problem

Earlier, many studies have been done on Kabir Panth, which is historical in nature. They focus on the institutionalisation of Kabir Panth or any particular math. This proposed study is unique because it emphasises Kabir and his followers (Kabir Panthies). His followers construct Kabir's philosophy differently as Kabir had de-emphasised ritual, incarnation, casteism, and gender inequality, while he emphasised universal

brotherhood, equality, believing monotheism, which was *Nirakar*¹ in nature, establishing an egalitarian society equipped with scientific temperament. After Kabir, his disciples formed Kabir Panth according to their convenience and interpreted his philosophy. The deviation of Kabir Panthies has been influenced due to social setup. For example, Kabir Math of Chhattisgarh believes that Kabir took incarnation, and in this way, they have propagated a myth regarding his incarnation. In some regions of Central India, particularly in Gujarat and Rajasthan, there is a belief that Kabir was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Some disciples like Bhagodasi and Jagudasi of Bihar followed different ideologies of Kabir. At the same time, Kabir Chaura Math of Banaras believes that Kabir was a social reformer and humanist. Generally, Maths are also known as 'Gaddi', and each Gaddi has '*Bijak*',² the sacred text of Kabir which mentions the philosophy of Kabir in terms of *Sakhi, Shabad, and Ramaini*.

Interestingly, each Gaddi has '*Bijak*' while the interpretation of '*Bijak*' differs. Now many 'Kabir Panth emphasise rituals to earn money. They also elect their chief of *Math* based on the caste. Therefore, it can be said that the Kabir Panthis deviated from Kabir's core philosophy. So, it is crucial to find Kabir's social philosophy and its relevance in today's context.

Kabir's social philosophy advocates harmony and peaceful co-existence of the different sections of society. Kabir tried to reform the society through the religion of Bhakti which may be acceptable by all the people of different faiths and beliefs. However, in the present era, there is uncertainty, trust deficit, communal disharmony, degradation of ethical values, caste tension, gender discrimination, educational crisis, linguistic

¹ The formless God.

² *Bijak* is the most well-known of the Kabir's compilations, and it serves as the Kabirpanthi religion's Holy Scripture.

domination, environmental problems and corruption in every sphere of life. Therefore, Kabir's social philosophy becomes very significant and relevant in the contemporary world on this background. By noting the changing dynamics of Kabir Panth, this study tried to see the relevance of Kabir Panth in today's contemporary world. It also traces its relation with other essential aspects like Kabir Panth' as an alternative to Brahminical social order. Kabir Panthies have established different symbols, rituals, signs, myths, and ideologies alternative to the Brahminical social order.

Review of Literature

The review of literature is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the ideas of Durkheim, Malinowski, Parsons, Karl Marx, Max Weber and their pioneering thought on religion in modern times. The second section describes the orthodoxy of Hinduism and its contradiction and the rise of the Bhakti Movement. The third section focuses on the life of Kabir and Kabir Panth. It also deals with the formation of Kabir Panth by its follower. Finally, the fourth section discusses three Panths, one Satnamis, the second Ravidasi Panth, and the third Mahima Dharma in Odisha. These three Panths more or less follow the tradition of Kabir Panth means the follower of these sects come from the lower strata of the society. Moreover, these Panth firmly stand against Hinduism like Kabir Panth. So, in this context, it is important to see the socio-historical background of these Panths.

Religion in Modern Time

Sociology as an academic discipline is the product of modernity, and it has changed the complete discourse of religion. Initially God and religion were refers to otherworldliness and more of thological beliefs, however the emergence of sociology has gave a new interpretation to religion by bringing the notion of God onto the earth. The functionalist

claimed that religion plays a vital role in society as it is a functional prerequisite for society to function efficiently. According to Durkheim (1947), religion has a social function, unity. Durkheim discussed that religion acted as a source of solidarity. Religion provides social control, cohesion, meaning for life and purpose for people and another means of communication and gathering for individuals to interact and reaffirm social norms. Religion reinforces a sense of belonging and shared identity to society, as Durkheim defined the feature of religion. Durkheim says:

“Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that are to say set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.” (Durkheim, 1912/1976:47)

Durkheim believed that religious values and norms hold society together as ‘glue.’ With the advent of modernity, these values and norms are threatened. Thus, people seek alternatives to religion in modern religious movements for stability. Moreover, the experience of modernity entails moral ambiguity among members of the urban middle class. Equally, contemporary religious practice is creating unity among Kabir Panthies. In contrast to Brahminical social order. According to Durkheim’s view, it is the form of this solidarity among the Kabir Panthies.

Functionalist scholars have provided different functions of religion in society as Malinowski (1948) argues that religion promotes solidarity by performing a psychological function of individuals, helping them cope with the stress that would undermine solidarity. He defines crisis as the primary cause of a religious event, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, marking a significant change in a social group. Religion helps to minimise disruption. The funeral rituals reinforce the feeling of solidarity among the survivors, while the notion of immortality comforts the bereaved by

denying death. Malinowski argues that death is the main reason for religious beliefs. Hence religion helps people deal with situations they cannot predict or control. Likewise, Kabir Panth, notably Dharamdasi, created many rituals to handle emotional situations such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, which marked a significant change in social groups, particularly Kabir Panthies.

According to Talcott Parsons (1951), religion's primary function is maintaining social order through beliefs and rituals; it help individuals make sense of unpredictable events. Therefore, He argued that religion helps individuals cope with unforeseen events and uncontrollable outcomes. He identifies two other essential functions of that religion in modern society. First, it creates and legitimate societies' central values that socialise them. He saw that religion provides general guidelines for conduct expressed in various norms by establishing principles and moral beliefs. Religion provides the consciousness which is necessary for order and stability in society. As a cultural part, the cultural system gives meaning to life. Religion answers such questions, e.g. by explaining suffering as a test of faith that will be rewarded in heaven; by doing so, religion enables people to adjust to adverse events or circumstances and helps maintain stability. So, it can be said that religion can also help people make sense of contradictory events. Thus, how do the religious movements play a role in the lives of the devotees? Therefore, this study tried to know how Kabir Panthies in a modern religion make sense for the day-to-day life of their devotees and how Kabir Panthies make sense of contradictory events. Such as heaven, hail (Satlok), good and bad, and others.

Barker (1989) mentions a New Religious Movement (NRM) that provides a sense of belonging and security to the urban middle class who feel alienated due to weakening traditional social support systems like families, village communities, and caste networks.

Kakar (1984) mentions that guru-faith brings the individual back to a social and moral world centre.

Karl Marx (1970) looks at religion as a kind of institution located in the superstructure of society. Marx said religion is a form of illusion, giving people falsified faith. Marx further argued:

“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.” (Marx, 1970:131)

Religion is the hope of hopelessness, the soul of soulless. In other words, it is the opium of the masses. Marx argues that faith in religion took people away from faith in themselves. Therefore, religion stops not going for revolution. Marx said that until people have faith in religion, class consciousness will not occur, and society will not change. Karl Marx argued that religion is a tool in the hand's upper strata of society. The upper strata used it to exploit the lower section of society. In the Marxian context of Hinduism, Brahmins used religion to exploit the lower section of the society, including Shudra, the untouchable and women. When exploitation reached its peak, the heterodox revolution was known as Buddhism and Jainism in ancient times and Kabir Panthies in modern times. So, Kabir Panth tried to establish a religion of humanism where everybody was treated equally in the religious sense.

On the other hand, Max Weber rejected that economic factors continually shape religion. He does not deny at a particular time and specific place. Religious behaviour may be an economic force, but he maintained that this is not always the cause. In his famous work *“The protestant ethics and spirit of capitalism”*, Max Weber examined the relationship between the rise of certain forms of Protestantism and Western industrial capitalism developed. According to Max Weber, The sect is more likely to emerge within

marginalised groups in society. This is because group members of outside, mainstream social life often believe they are not receiving the status or financial reward they deserve. One solution to this problem is sect formation, which Weber called theodicy of the disprivileged class.

Max Weber went to speak on the religion of the non-privileged. First, he stated that there are religious diversities among the people. He further argued how the subaltern strata of the society have different religious beliefs compared to the dominant section of the society. Finally, Weber stated that according to socio-economic privilege, an assortment of religious attitudes among the populace contrasts.

“This is indeed highly checkered diversification, which at least proves that a uniform determinism of religion by economic forces never existed among the artisan class.”
(Weber, 1966:96).

In the modern age, the modern proletariat has a unique religious position; it is characterised by apathy to the refusal of religions common to large groups of the modern bourgeoisie (Weber, 1966:100). According to Weber, religions of the disprivileged stand for egalitarian principle, which concentrates on various issues without being seen by the mainstream religion. He states,

“The religiosity of the disprivileged much worried with suffering rather than salvation which is more manifest among the privileged” (ibid).

There is no harmony in class, caste, gender, and race. There is a different notion of thought in terms of subjective meaning according to their social milieu and location of society. So, in this context, the sociology of religion plays a vital role in seeing how religion excludes certain sections of society. From the mainstream of the society and how subaltern people conceive the notion of religion. In this context, the sociology of

religion wanted to find out how religion serves as an ideological tool in the hand of the dominant section of the society. Therefore, it is enormously important to make sense of how religiosity of India's debarred marginal section of society.

It was mythical that pre-historic Indian society was a casteless millennium of equality, plenty, and piety. The core of structured Hinduism is the chatur Varna system, the basic structure of Hindu society. The notion of the Varna system merged (Sharma, 2007:33). Varna is different from caste groups. Varna provides an ideological framework, whereas caste is a practice on-ground reality. It can be said that Varnas refer to broad divisions of Hindu society, whereas castes signify the occupational endogamous groups. The Shudras were the later entrants in the Varna scheme; another group, Pancham (the fifth), was not included in the Varna scheme. Later on, the Shudra became part of the Varna system. Shudra was forbidden from wearing the sacred thread, a sign of purity and Dwija. Aside from this, a fifth community known as Pancham was not part of the Varna system.

Illaiiah (2009) believes Hinduism is a Brahminical faith that advocates spiritual fascism. He distinguishes the Adivasi-Dalit-Bahujan religion from the upper castes, known as the Dwijas. Although he found that the Adivasi-Dalit-Bahujan religion is the scientific, technical, and efficient knowledge structures that the Dalit-Bahujan communities built and nurtured, he argues that 'Brahminical Hinduism adopted an anti-production antiscientific ethic' (Illaiiah, 2009:ix). Illaiiah (2004) argues that the Aryan ruler-centred spiritual practice resulted in spiritual castism, resulting in spiritual fascism. Hinduism arose from a Brahminic doctrine claiming that God created humans unequally.

Nevertheless, no human history has dominated people, the Dalit-Bahujans, or the 'oppressed majority' for long. Spiritual fascism is the mechanism by which they have accomplished this (Illaiiah, 2009: xvii). He considers Hinduism to be fascist because it

seeks to eliminate all opposition that stands in the glorification of inequality. Spiritual fascism despises debate, reform and change and emphasises outward behaviour, including physical force to suppress dissent. The 'oppressed majority' (the Dalit-Bahujans) has been oppressed by spiritual fascism disguised as Hindu religious scriptures, but it will not last long. In civil society and politics, spiritual fascism cannot last.

Bhakti movement was aroused in the medieval period to challenge Brahminical spiritual fascism. Many saints denounced the evil practices of Hinduism; among one them was Kabir Das, who played a lead role. As a result, many sects come into existence. As Krishna Sharma (1987) points out, caste discrimination had strongly played a role in the emergence of the Bhakti movement. This bhakti movement had attracted large-scale participation of the masses in the emergent sects. So the Bhakti movement revolted against the hierarchical social order, providing the spiritual right to subaltern strata of society to access religious scripture and do Bhakti to God. This movement has critical implications for lower sections to elevate their socio-economic and cultural status. Briefly discussing the bhakti movement's key features is necessary for this context.

Bhakti Movement

The trajectory of the Bhakti movement in India, the course and genesis of the movement, Bhakti comes from the Sanskrit word Bhaj; it is also similar to the Tamil word *Anmu*³. Bhakti is an affection stable on God and Ishwar. Bhakti emphasises devotion and practice to the above rituals, representing human relationships. Most often, beloved

³The word Anmu similar sankrit word Bhaj The word 'bhaja' means 'observe.' The mind is influenced when one *observes* something. A Bhakta seeks out God in all things. As a result, his devotion is focused on God. Each minute particle is nothing more than the essence of God to him. As the Bhakta's quality increases, his mind receives the message loud and clear. The mind relaxes and absorbs God's attributes.

friend, parents, child, and master-servant also refers to devotion to a spiritual Guru or teacher, as Guru is an impersonal form of God. A scholar like C. N. Venugopal has considered Bhaktism as liberal dogma for too long. It provided a spiritual forum for people drawn from diverse castes. The core principles of Bhaktism were (a) cultivation of personal devotion to god, (b) de-emphasis on rituals, (c) monotheism, and (d) involvement in brotherhood and equality-based collectivity (Venugopal, 1990:80). On the other hand, Krishna Sharma (1987) argued that the Bhakti movement provided a new perspective by rejecting the current academic definition of Bhakti, which has served as a substratum of all theorisation about the Bhakti movement.

The Bhakti movement was explicitly divided into (i) *Nirguna* and (ii) *Saguna Tradition*. The former took a radical stand leading to various new and unorthodox sects. Krishna Sharma (1987) argued that Kabir Das was the first to separate *Nirguna Bhakti* from *Saguna Bhakti*. *Nirguna* school of Kabir presents similar kinds of phenomena, *Astika* and *Nastika*. The distinction between the *Nirguna* and *Saguna Tradition*.

“The Saguna bhaktas had strengthened the existent sects and supported the established socio-religious norms. Against this, the Nirguna bhaktas had taken a radical position, and their teachings had led to the formation of new and unorthodox sects. Therefore, the Bhakti movement embodied the conservative and the liberal and the revivalist and reformist trends. It contained both conformism and dissent” (Prentis, 1999:27).

On the other hand, Max Weber (1967) stated that Saguni Bhakti has liberated only the upper caste and excluded other society sections, including women and Shudra. At the same time, Nirguni Bhakti opens the door to all sections of the society, including women, Shudra, and the non-privileged group. Max Weber further argued that *Nirguna* Bhakti is more liberal and rational; because most saints come from the lower strata of society,

whereas Saguni is more conservative than Nirguni, most of the saints come from upper strata of society. The Bhakti movement was a revolt against orthodox belief systems and provided a space for the saints from lower sections of society to express their Bhakti tradition.

According to Gail Omvedt (2008), radical Bhakti saints led a strong devotional movement with a vision of equality, which emphasises empirical thinking, and access to ecstasy for all. She further argued that the radical Bhakti saint revolted against the structure. They wanted to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system and establish an egalitarian society. Further, Omvedt criticised Marxists because they belonged to reformists and never gave space to anti-caste movements. Marxists never focused on restructuring Indian society; their main concern was to reform caste within the Hindu fold.¹⁵

Life of Kabir

Kabir was one of the great saints of the Bhakti tradition. He occupied a unique position among the bhakti saints in medieval India. However, many things are unclear about their birthplace, parents, upbringing and deaths. Scholars are at variance. So, things are very scanty among scholars and Kabir Panthies. Therefore, still debate regarding his parents, marriage, death, and his original gospel.

Based on available sources, a rough biographical outline can be presented. Kabir was born around 1440 A.D. in Benares. Kabir was found by a Muslim weaver couple, Nima and Niru as an infant child in the secluded Lahartara in Banaras; they brought the child to their home and raised him. Many sources claim this child was an illegitimate and unwanted child of a Brahman widow. In later life, Kabir had received instruction from Sheikh Taqqul of the Chietl order of Sufis and was a prominent disciple of Ramanand

(Hedayatullah, 1977:182). Kabir was married to Loi and had a son, Kamal, and a daughter, Kamali. Kabir was a householder who supported himself by spinning, which did not detract from his devotion.

Kabir did not affiliate himself with any major religions of their time, whether Hinduism or Islam. Kabir referred to himself as a Banarasi wearer. Since his foster parents were members of the Jogi caste, they were sari wearers who had recently converted to Islam (Dwivedi, 1976:29). He maintained a distance from organised religions by referring to himself as a son of Allah and Ram. He stressed the flaws and strengths of both religions. Despite not having obtained formal education, he was a well-informed person. There was a belief that if anyone died in Banaras, they went to heaven, and if they died in Maghar, they went to hail. So, to get rid of the superstitions. He shifted from Banaras to Maghar in the Basti region (now Sant Kabir Nagar). In 1518, he died here.

Bhakti Tradition

The rise of the Bhakti tradition almost coincided with the influx of Islamic groups into India. Bhakti was a liberal creed. Bhakti saints faced uncertainty and often incurred the hostility of Hindu and Muslim rulers in the initial stages, as the Bhakti sects were heterodox. Discipline was liberally enforced among the members to enter the Sect, and flexibility was enabled among the marginal section, individuals and groups. In addition, the cults often accommodated marginal, fugitive, and deviant individuals. It is tough to understand Sant Kabir's contribution without considering the Sufi tradition in India, which had a strong tradition during the Kabir's time. Sufism began around the 8th century with Saints such as Hadrat Habib Ajami (AD 738). Some scholars feel that Sufism is not against Islamic law.

On the contrary, the process of Sufism is closely interwoven with Islamic law. Sufism can be explained by three basic religious attitudes found in the Quran, i.e. Islam, Iman and Ihsan. The Islam attitude is that of submission to the will of Allah and the teachings Quran. Iman designates penetration into the religion and strong faith in its teachings. Further, Ihsan is the highest stage of spiritual ascent (Prentiss, 1999:14).

Thus, the ideas of Kabir were interwoven with the text of the ideas that were developing in the Sufi and the Hindu tradition in India, how the forms of Sufism were widespread in North India in this period. At the time, Kabir had already been influenced by Vedanta monism and had also assimilated some yogic methods so that the Sufis appeared to the people like a variety of Yogis (Vaudeville and Partin, 1964:195).

This very acute synthesis is found in Kabir's work, as his intellectual roots are ingrained in the culmination of the two distinct yet similar lines of thinking. The Kabir's poetry was full of the composition of Hinduism and Islam. Who refused to identify himself exclusively with either religion? In the mystical experience, subject and object are felt to be transcended, and Kabir shared with Samkara the conviction that when ignorance is abolished, the soul knows itself to be one with the Supreme Atman, in which, as Kabir said, following the *Mandkya Upanisad*, "God is one; there is no second."⁴

Primarily he was influenced by Vaishnava bhakti but was also impressed by Yogic and Sufi ideas and practices, such as the ideals of self-perfection and the oneness of God, respectively. He was also impressed by the meditative recitation of God's name to express his love for him, which was common to Hindu devotees and Muslim Sufis. His followers were mostly from lower castes, often untouchable, including Muslims. Kabir

⁴ Kabir as quoted in Partin, Harry, B and Charlotte Vaudeville. 'Kabir and Interior Religion.' Source: *History of Religions*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter, 1964), pp. 191-201 Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

expressed himself in the forms of thought of his own time and culture, but he was neither an apologist nor a critic of any school of philosophy. His motive is practical to express his luminous experiences so that men filled with ignorance and superstition might know liberation and peace. Throughout Kabir's work, the accent is on interiorisation: man ought to turn his attention away from the exterior world, from all sensible forms. In order to withdraw into the innermost depths of his conscience, where God dwells: Kabir was influenced by the tradition of the Bhakti and Sufism and by the "Yoga" tradition of Hinduism, but Kabir fosters a tradition which is-

"Contrary to Yoga, which is an essential technique, Bhakti is essentially faith, the adoration of a personal God, who is generally 'manifested' in an anthropomorphic form, that of an avatar or 'descent.' This visible form of a 'qualified' (Saguna) God is the object of Vishnuite devotion. This God asks of his devotee "Bhakta" or his servant (das) nothing but faith, love, and trust' (Vaudeville and Partin, 1964:194).

The Sufis liberalised Islam in the same way as the Bhakti movement liberalised Hinduism, and the convergence of these two streams of thought met in Kabir. Kabir was devoted to the Guru, who provided personal knowledge and guided him. As a result, Kabir considers Guru, an essential person in his life. Guru, he says, is the one who prepares the way for his disciple's salvation. Kabir was one of the most vocal Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy critics.

Philosophy of Kabir

Kabir das is one of medieval India's most prominent and influential saints. From an early age, he mystically focused, which allowed him to see one God, humanity, and faith as facts of the universe and our lives within it. Hinduism and Islam, he claimed, were the same and real. As a result, he refused to accept that religious differences exist among

humans, such as Hindus and Muslims. As a result, he sought to reconcile monotheism and monism by denying all superstitions, malpractices, and traditions present in both religions—Kabir’s outstanding contributions to India’s social and religious sphere (Hedayatullah, 1977:297).

Muslims, who ruled India from the eleventh century before the arrival of the Britisher, had a profound influence on Kabir. Simultaneously, he operated under the influence of Hinduism. As a result, he condemned both faith and external authority, Veda and Quran. According to Roland Stahl, Kabir speaks about God’s oneness based on humanity.

“Rejecting the external authority of the Vedas and the Koran, Kabir, who was brought up in a Muslim family, preached the goal of inner realisation based on the love of transcendent and formless divinity” (Roland Stahl,1954:141).

Kabir’s work is a resounding satire on Brahminical orthodoxy and popular Hinduism superstitions. He not only categorically condemned idol worship but also dismissed all the rituals and ceremonies by which popular Hindu devotion expresses itself: purification bathing, ritual fasts, pilgrimages, and a wide range of other activities.

So, Kabir preached a new kind of spirituality or piety with which he hoped to unite India’s two religious cultures, which had been divided for decades. Kabir’s method of achieving unity was Bhakti, which required purity of heart and sincere remembrance of God’s name, acceptable to all. Kabir advised people to think about God with a pure heart under a real Guru or pier to attain salvation. Guru was the most important person in Kabir’s life. He is God’s pinnacle; in other words, Guru has supreme authority, and his words are more genuine and valuable. He despised all forms of asceticism and ritualism. He did not believe that spiritual and temporal existence were incompatible. He praised household life (Underhill, 1945: XIV). Kabir denounced idolatry and portrayed Ram as

a formless figure. His Ram, however, was not the incarnation of Vishnu, who was Dashrath's son. However, his Ram was *Nirguna* in nature. As a result of Ram's lack of complexity and duality, he did not need idolatry. So, Kabir frequently used Rama's name instead of God in his dohas (Couplets). The Kabir utilised Rama to represent the Supreme Being, God, and Ultimate Lord. *Nirguna* is how he describes his Rama.

On the one hand, Kabir described his Rama as *Nirguna* or the home of all qualities. On the other, he described his Rama as *Nirguna* because he is free from all qualities, the Prakriti qualities known as *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tams*. When God is all-powerful and all-present, why should he be reduced to the minimal form of a living being, Kabir argued? How can God, immortal, take birth and be subjected to death? (Varma, 1977:62). On social and religious grounds, Kabir das harshly opposed caste practices. As a result, Kabir is regarded as one of medieval India's pioneering saints. As a result, W. W Hunter has drawn parallels between Kabir das and Luther (Hedayatullah, 1977: 269).

Kabir urged Hindus and Muslims to put aside their sense of contradiction and separation between men and become modest. He targeted Brahmans in particular because they perceive everything in terms of purity and pollution in terms of caste. Furthermore, he argued that if the divine spark of life is present in every living being, how could there be any difference in the essence of life? Because of his greed and ignorance, humans create caste and creed. Why do Brahmans and Shudras dislike each other because neither is a high or a low caste?

As a consequence, their hate is folly. Neither the Brahman is high caste nor a Shudra low; why hate one another? So, their hatred is foolishness (Machwe, 1968:30). He did not agree to accord special privileges to Brahmans and Mullahs. Kabir was a firm believer in Ahimsa (non-violence). He placed a strong de-emphasis on ritual and

strongly opposed Hindu and Muslim animal sacrifice in worship. He also condemned the rites or ceremonies held in memory of deceased relatives' spirits.

Since Kabir's teachings are founded on equality, he rejects all forms of hierarchy, regardless of caste, class, creed, or religion. As a result, he struck elitism at heart: the Pandits and Maulvis' monopoly on booklore. Sanskrit was a dead language, so he spoke in a common dialect. Sanskrit encouraged elitism in his eyes. When preaching, Kabir chose to preach in the people's language, rejecting Sanskrit as a medium of speech because he claimed it was a language of the wealthy, limited to the upper class. As a result, Kabir wished to persuade ordinary people that bookish knowledge was not needed for actual knowledge or fellowship with God. As a result, he wrote plain and metaphoric poetry that anyone could understand.

Kabir was enraged by religious corruption and the social evils committed in the name of faith. The most heinous of these institutions was Sati. That was a widow being burned on her deceased husband's pyre. Kabir firmly refused Sati's promise of redemption. Moreover, he was a staunch opponent of the dowry system. According to Kabir, people sold their sons and daughters in marriage for money, as if marriage were not a romantic relationship but a flourishing money exchange. These rituals have tarnished human ideals and suffocated culture (Varma, 1977:85).

Kabir claimed that accumulating wealth contributed to social injustice, so he condemned hoarding and displaying wealth. He firmly believed in abstaining from luxury and intoxication and called for simple living and high thinking while opposing greed. He asked whether Gathering forces, besieging castles, and showing off prowess is the only job of a Badshah (king)? When the emperor dies, what remains of this game? Crores of rupees and many elephants may be there with a king; such a miser's wealth is no use. The king and his people are both human beings.

Kabir opposed idolatry and futile ritualistic rituals. He condemned idolatry and rituals such as wearing rosaries, sectarian symbols, and the holy thread. Furthermore, he was a staunch opponent of bathing in holy waters, pilgrimages, and fasting. Finally, Kabir did not follow these evil practices when selecting his disciples.

Kabir's social philosophy can be outlined and depicted below.

1. Absolute denunciation of the caste system and specifically the practice of untouchability;
2. Disapproval of sectarian distinction between Hindus and Muslims;
3. Refutation of Brahmans and Mullahs as being specially privileged or holy;
4. Denunciation of booklore and Sanskrit that promoted elitism;
5. Condemnation of social customs like Sati and dowry and religious practices like fasting, pilgrimages, idolatry, animal sacrifices, superficial display of sectarian diacritical marks, ritualism, the idea of incarnation,
6. Condemnation of hoarding wealth and of a life of luxury;
7. Exaltation of domesticity, the value and reality of diurnal existence, etc.;
8. Cultivation of personal devotion to a god;
9. De-emphasis on rituals;
10. Focused on monotheism, which is *Nirguna* in nature;
11. Participation in a collectivity built on brotherhood or equality.

Kabir Panth

Kabir preached vehemently against the existing social order when the people were being stratified on the caste basis, and the bottom-ranked had to bear all the burden of it through all forms of discrimination and exploitation because of their location in the

society. The society had its own rules and regulation and norms for its members. So Kabir has shown the masses a space to challenge their exploitation. As Weber views:

“...in a revolutionary and sovereign manner, charismatic domination transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms: “It has been written..., but I say unto you....” (Weber, 1978:1115).

The Charismatic authority of the Kabir challenged the existing traditional practices. It inverted all value hierarchies and overthrew custom, law, and tradition in its most Charismatic forms. Charismatic structure arose out of anxiety and enthusiasm for an extraordinary situation. Again, Weber reminds us of Charisma’s importance compared to rational or bureaucratic authority. He believes that, unlike bureaucratic or legal-rational authority, Charisma works effectively for a change; it attacks the system and the individual from within.

“Charismatic belief revolutionises men ‘from within’ and shapes material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will” (Weber, 1978:1116).

So the Kabir attack on the establishment motivated the masses to join him by discarding the various unmindful rituals, idol worship, and caste practices. The importance of recognising it by the followers is also based on something concrete, reinforcing the followers’ faith in Charismatic authority. The whole charismatic structure is being constructed by the interpersonal relationship between the followers and the Charismatic figure. It comes out of the interaction between them. Charisma is not isolated but rather deeply rooted in the conditions, and the Charismatic authority is being constructed from that interplay.

The word *“organisation of Panth”* refers to the routinisation of sectarian movements led by charismatic leaders. The characteristics of a charismatic personality are endowed with supernatural abilities and treated as extraordinary. According to Weber, charismatic

personalities have supernatural or exceptional influence because they are regarded as “leaders”. Kabir’s disciples felt compelled to create a formal organisation to spread and maintain Kabir’s ideas and principles. Kabir’s teachings were later institutionalised through the formation of Kabir Panth. The creation of the Kabir Panth involves a process defined by Max Weber (1978) as the “*Routinisation of Charisma*”, in which an institutional type safeguards the Saint’s teachings.

While writing about the Kabir Panth, scholars such as G.S. Westcott (1907) note that the Kabir Panth primarily registered its challenge to Hinduism through a frontal assault on the ‘Trinity’, regarded as an illusion on earth. Kabir Panthies claimed that if the earth’s *Maya* (illusion) increased, Kabir would free the jiva. After criticising Hinduism’s Pantheon, Kabir Panth turned its attention to the caste system and the authority of the twice-born castes. Due to these factors, Kabir Panth attracted a strong following from the lower castes. However, the Kabir Panth established internal division over time, resulting in the emergence of two ‘Maths’ simultaneously. While addressing the creation of Maths, Westcott claims that the Kabir Panth had two major branches, one at Kabir Chaura in Banaras (Head Quarter) and the other at Maghar.

Purunendu Ranjan (2008) claims that in later years, Kabir Panth established four ‘*Acharya Gaddis*’ in three locations: ‘Satmalpur Math’ (Satmalpur), ‘Bidupur Math’ (Bidupur), ‘Bagicha Math’ and ‘Mahadeo Math’ (Rosara). Following Kabir’s death, his immediate disciples disseminated his ideas and founded the Mathas mentioned below.

1. *Surati Gopal* (Kabir Chaura, Kashi),
2. *Dharamdas* (Bandhogarh Math, Chhatisgarh),
3. *Bhagodas* (Dhanauti Math, Bihar),
4. *Jagudas* (Cuttack Math, Odisha) (Ranjan: 2008).

More divisions arose inside the Kabir Panth due to caste and ideological factors. Some lower castes mobilised under the leadership of Krishna Karah to resist caste within Kabir

Panth (against the Bagicha Math). This rebellion ultimately culminated in creating a separate branch known as the '*Krishna Karahi Vachan Vanshi*' under the leadership of '*Mahadeo Math*'. Later, new Maths appeared, such as 'Bhagodasi' and 'Jagodasi'. Along with caste and other ritual factors, the followers' religion influenced the creation of new Maths, such as the two Maths in Maghar that cater to Hindu and Muslim needs.

For Ambedkar, the second preceptor is Kabir. Ambedkar said, "*My father belonged to Kabir Panth. Therefore, I am greatly influenced by the personality and philosophy of Kabir*". Nevertheless, he had no faith in either the Hindu or Islam religions. He stood for absolute unity with God, who was *Nirguna* and truth. He was a staunch supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity. Ambedkar accepted his thoughts of Kabir because they stood in the test of reasoning. Kabir Panth had emerged as a protest against Brahmanism and fundamentalism. It proposed establishing spiritual and social equality, liberty of thought and expression and human brotherhood. In the words of Ambedkar, "Kabir could realise the real secret of the philosophy of Buddha. (ibid.)? Named as Kabir Panth" (Ambedkar, 1979:100).

Some other sectarian movements rebelled against Brahminical orthodoxy and tried to establish a separate sect as their Sect, like Kabir Panth. These Panth are Satnami Panth, Ravi Dasi Panth, and Mahima Dharma. These Panth propagated religious equality among the people irrespective of caste, class, creed and gender. Their objective was to bring the marginal section into religious force and provide spiritual right that was denied in Hinduism. So let us have a brief discussion about these three Panths.

Satnami Panth

The Satnami movement protested against the Hindu social order that replaced Hindu religious values. Birbhan was the one who initiated it in 1543. He was born in *Narnual*,

then in Punjab (currently, *Narnaul* is a city and the headquarters of the Mahendragarh district of Haryana). Birbhan was a monotheist who referred to God as Satnam, which means reality. He founded the Satnam sect. Satnami had its holy text (Granth), referred to as *Pothi* like Sikh's Granth is highly regarded by its adherents. Satish Chandra found that Satnamis are mainly from the lower castes of society, such as goldsmiths, carpenters, sweepers, peasants, artisans, and low caste tanners, among other low caste peoples (Chandra, 1981:221). Satnami did not believe in caste, class, religion, or rank distinctions. They also condemn all forms of religious misbehaviour and superstitions, such as idol worship and ritual, which were common in society. Birbhan emphasised meditation and living a virtuous life to achieve total absorption with God. He admonished his followers to abstain from intoxicants, animal food, and excessive wealth accumulation (ibid, 221).

According to the Imperial Gazetteer, in 1672, the Satnamis and the Mughal state had battled at *Narnaul*. This conflict began with a local official but quickly escalated into an open revolt. Satnamis quickly seized *Narnaul*, consolidating their status through tax collection and posts (Provincial Series, 1908:28).

The Imperial Army's detachment was defeated, and the rebels rapidly marched on Delhi. Fear had spread across the Army, making it extremely difficult to bring soldiers to face the enemy. In this case, Emperor Aurangzeb marched toward the rebellion with a well-trained and seasoned army and artillery and weapons to put down the rebellion. Finally, Aurangzeb suppressed the uprising with ruthlessness. As a result, few Satnamis were able to escape this ruthlessness, and as a result, the Sect experienced a drastic decline. Interestingly, the local Hindu Zamindars, Rajputs, sided with the Mughals in this conflict (Chandra, 1981:221).

Jagjiwan Das of Barabanki district near Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, revived the Satnami sect in the eighteenth century. Jagjiwan Das belonged to the Rajput caste. Under the name Sat Nam (True Name) preached God's worship and taught that He is both the creator and the substance of all things because He is omnipresent. Jagjiwan Das envisioned God as an eternal and impersonal being devoid of sensible qualities and without a beginning or an end; in other words, God was without attributes. As a result, he propagated *Nirguna* God. He preached renunciation, self-reliance, and tacit devotion to the Guru to his followers. Tolerance, charity, compassion for others, prayer, research, and animal kindness were all encouraged by his followers. He forbade eating meat, red lentils (due to their red colour, which was thought to imitate blood), brinjals or eggplant (due to its form, which was thought to resemble flesh) and intoxicating liquors. In 1761, Jagjiwan Das died. There is a striking resemblance between these directions and the Kabir Panthies' doctrines (Wilson, 1977:356; Fuchs, 1965:99).

The state of Chhattisgarh has many forests. Here, people of different castes and creeds have settled. Over time, people migrated from the Himalayan terai area and as near as the state's neighbouring regions. The Marathas ruled this area from 1742 to 1854, and they did not only rule but also brought their people and settled down here. Following the partition in 1947 and the Bangladesh war in 1971, refugees from all over the country, including Sindhis, Punjabis, and Bengalis, have settled here. Those who migrated early were mostly Brahmans, Kurmis, Telli Yadavs, Chamars, and others who lived on this land. They cleared forest land and turned it into arable land for a living. Land ownership by different communities was regularised by granting them the title of ownership in the second half of the nineteenth century under the British regime. The Chamars, the most hated of the people, could purchase the land the same way as the others. They were migrants in this region just like the other high caste communities, and the land was

plentiful, so the traditional restriction that they could not own land could not be applied to them.

The labour scarcity in the nineteenth century in the plains of Chhattisgarh benefitted the Chamars by enabling them to gain admittance into the class of cultivators (Funch, 1965:97). As a result, Chamar caste men's economic situation improved. The change in the economic situation of this poor and hated caste sparked a burning desire in them to crack the humiliating Hindu caste system and rise to a higher social status. Ghasi Das, the extraordinary founder and propagator of the Satnami Panth in Chhattisgarh, encouraged this desire.

Ghasi Das was illiterate. Ghasi Das is from Girod village near the Sonakhan hill forests, and the confluence of the Jonk and Mahanadi Rivers of Raipur district comes from a poor farmer family. At eighty, he passed away in 1850 A.D. (Verma, 1973:114). Based on this date, he may have been born in 1770. Ghasi Das was a light-skinned young man who was charming. He did not force his physical appearance, and he has visions and resenting the caste Hindus' harsh treatment of his caste members. He was from a well-informed family member who had travelled widely among them. He was known for being highly smart and well-liked by everyone (Briggs, 1975:220).

Ghasi Das and his brother visited Puri but only made it to Sarangarh. They stopped their journey and returned home, shouting Satnam, Satnam nonstop. Ghasi Das was most likely first exposed to Jagjiwan Das teachings in Sarangarh. From here, he embarked on his ascetic journey. He was taking a walk in the woods for prayer and meditation. Over time, Ghasi Das gained a reputation as a saintly man with supernatural power and some miracles. Finally, he wanted to create a new code of conduct for his caste men. He went to the forest for six months to do this. As his return date approached, a large crowd of

Chamars gathered at Girod to hear his revelations. The new prophet descended from the rocky height above the village on a peaceful morning to deliver the news from heaven. On the other hand, his letter was identical to Jagjiwan Das's. Ghasi Das declared that all men are equal, regardless of caste, class, or religion. He declared himself the new faith's heaven-appointed high priest, promising the role would be passed down through his family for generations. (Keay, 1931:166; Babb, 1972:144, Fuchs, 1965:101). In terms of office bearers, it was identical to the Dharmdasi branch of Kabir Panth, where Dharamdas decedent would be the head of Math until the 42nd generation.

Ghasi Das' primary goal was to abolish caste and challenge the Brahmans' authority. The Satnamis began to wear Kanthi (a sacred basil bead rosary worn by the Kabir panthies) and Janeu (a sacred basil bead rosary worn by the Satnamis) (the sacred thread which was the sacred symbol of the twice-born). They used to walk through the streets of high caste Hindus in their shoes, which was previously forbidden. Previously, they were prohibited from using horses, elephants, or palanquins at weddings. Satnami women started wearing nose rings to spite the Hindu social order. Wearing nose rings was the traditional privilege of high caste Hindu women. So, it can be said that the Satnami movement was essentially a social uprising of the despised chamars (Dube, 2001).

Satnamis create their universe in which outsiders are not permitted. For example, they do not accept members of castes they consider inferior to their own into their society. They refuse to accept cooked food from anyone other than their caste and water from anyone other (ibid.). Chamar agricultural workers in the Chhattisgarh area mainly work on the farms of their caste men (ibid).

In Indian culture, the land is a sign of status; most landowners are from the upper castes, while the lower castes have been unable to obtain it. However, a significant number of Satnami Chamar were landowners or tenants. The Satnamis, as landlords or at least tenants, believe they have advanced beyond their status as village drudges and menials and therefore deserve a better deal from the Savarnas.

In a caste-based society, higher castes have certain benefits, which they preserve and perpetuate through power. On the other hand, low castes are afflicted with a host of ailments and are considered disadvantaged. As a result, caste status is built on privileges and caste relationships are based on power. Although, for example, some Satnamis were wealthy landlords, they collected taxes from the upper castes. Therefore, an untouchable was to punish a tenant from the upper caste who refused to pay the rent. In addition, the Satnamis' economic condition in Chhattisgarh had improved. As a result, if the Chamare and Malguzar (landlord) had a dispute in the village, the Malguzar (of high caste) had to leave the village often (Verma, 1973:114). Therefore, Satnamis' attempted to adopt high caste symbols, improve their social and economic status, and eliminate the hierarchical social order of Hinduism and their world.

Ravidas Panth

Ravidas was a pivotal figure in the Bhakti movement, revolting against corrupt rituals, superstitions, social evils, and the Varna rule, among other things. However, there is no precise knowledge about Ravidas' birth and death. Sant Bani Sangrach believes he was born between the end of the 15th and the middle of the 16th century. (Srivastava, 2013). A similar controversy arose about his name; many names, including Rohidas and Ravidas, knew him, but Ravidas and Ravidas are the most well-known. He was born into the Chamar caste, which is a low caste. His mother's name was Ghurbinya, and his father

was named Raghu. He was a disciple of Ramananda. Ravidas was a cobbler, saint, poet, philosopher and social reformer who used Bhakti (love and devotion) as a form of social resistance against the centuries-old system of untouchability (Bellwinkel- Schempp, 2007:2182).

Ravidas found in his time that people were governed by their respective caste and Varna system where they were born. Their action, duty and occupation were restricted to their caste. Even they did not have religious and spiritual life. Therefore, Shudra and women were not allowed to access Holy Scripture. It means they could not option liberation from this world; as Ambedkar observed, The Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya can study the Vedas. Of these, the Brahmins alone have the right to read the Vedas. However, in the Shudra case, he is restricted from studying the Vedas but should not be allowed to hear them (Ambedkar, 1987:43).

The Bhakti movement posed a challenge to the orthodoxy of caste and religion. *Nirguni* Saints, especially Kabir and Ravidas, played a pivotal role. Vaudeville (1999) Compared to other Bhakti saints, northern saints, especially Kabir, have taken a much more radical stance. They believed that complete submission to God was the only way to attain salvation, regardless of caste, class, or religion. Likewise, J. Schaller found egalitarian social philosophy in Ravidas poetry, in which all who practice selfless devotion are rendered equal, no matter their caste affiliation or other status (Schaller, 1996:107).

Ronki Ram argued that Ravidas chose Bhakti as a middle way to combat caste-based oppression. His middle-path approach was novel and bold, free of religious customs and sectarian formalities. It stressed the importance of labour integrity and compassion for all people. It embodied his social philosophy's democratic and egalitarian characteristics. It was bold in that he wanted to confront his tormentors by using the

iconography of their clothing as a sign of social resistance, which was offensive and deadly for a low caste in his time. He challenged the tyranny of the Brahmin and defied their hegemony by adopting the prohibited dress- *Dhoti* (cloth wrapped around the waist), *Janeu* (sacred thread), and *Tilak* (sacred red mark on forehead) for the untouchable (Ram, 2008:1344).

On the other hand, Surinder Singh Jodhka (2009) and Gail Omvedt (2008) trace back modernity in the Indian context from the Bhakti period by bringing the idea of Begumpura, which was put forth by Guru Ravidas, imagining a society without sorrow, distress, fear, tax and focusing on worldliness. Omvedt argues that the Bhakti movement emerged as a protest against the unjust society much before the arrival of colonial modernity. The Bhakti saints all over India vehemently against the hierarchical social order, exclusion, and mindless rituals. They were also critical of the existing socio-economic condition of the society. In the colonial period, many Chamars got an opportunity to set up their business; they got empowered and started following the *Adi dharma* movement. Later on, they converted to the Raidasi Panth and established their Gurudwara.

Ravidas openly spoke about his caste, occupation and identity though he stated that he belongs to a low caste, but God will enhance his position by Bhakti. Ravidas was a very radical saint who opposed the existing society of that time and gave the utopian view, which is very important for the modern age. He imagines a state based on reason where people will live with joy and happiness, and there will be no taxation and no pain for anyone residing in Begumpura. Later on, Raidasi Panth came into existence based on Ravidas' vision.

Ravidas was a social reformer saint who tried to reform Hinduism without dismantling the Varna and caste. However, the problem goes beyond the formations of Ravidas Panth. Later, his follower Ravidasi took away Ravi das from Hindu identity and tried to associate Ravidas with Buddhism and counter Hinduism with the philosophy of Ravidas. The earlier writer argued that Ravidas took the middle path to reform the Hindu fold's untouchability, caste, and gender discrimination. In contrast, Ravidasi argued that Ravidas goes beyond the narrow dogma of Hinduism, which was based on hierarchal social order.

Likewise, Schaller observed that devotees of Ravidasi and their contempt for the hierarchical social order of the caste system were expressed in their songs. Devotion contradicts the conventional interpretation of the Bhakti movement integrative force mitigating the worst aspects of casteism. Instead, many of Sant Ravidas's contemporary followers express a dissident socio-religious ideology that challenges the dominant caste's hegemonic power that these devotees often perceive and portray as their oppressors (Schaller, 1996: 111). It can be seen in songs the follower of Ravidas sing.

By accepting any religion which was created with feelings (Bhavana) of high and low,

Humanity feels shame

That religion that does not judge (chinhe) one by his actions has given us great

Sorrow. It has given us great sorrow.

Even though devoid of good qualities the – fair-skinned Brahmin [are highly regarded],

While Shudras though wise, skillful, and of good character are disregarded.

That religion which is expounded in Ramayana, has given us great sorrow.

We were forbidden from studying the Vedas and were blinded for donning so.

Those of us who listened to them were caused to go deaf.

You established the tradition that Shudra is not a human being; this was established by

you

And you not a demon like Ravana.

You have taken away our means of livelihood by force; and have stolen all of our right.

Having needlessly become Hindu, our deeds meet frustration is religion has caused

Us great sorrow.

Who is more knowledgeable than Vyasa muni about the Mahabharata?

Is there any other creator like Valmiki of the Ramayana?

The sages Supach, Kumbhaj and Parahar were the light of knowledge, but Cheta and

Ravidas were not their inferior in wisdom.

O great Manu! You didn't do justice: you didn't believe like a human being.

That religion which does not know the internal mysteries of the sants has caused us

great sorrow.

What did the glorious Guru Dronacharaj [Sanskrit: Dronacharya] do with his

disciple?

Eklavya did not obtain any instruction from him.

Having cut his thumb, you snatched away his knowledge of archery by force; and you

become

Pleased having distributed this knowledge amongst your best disciples.

You made the Kauravas and Pandavas very pleased and set yourself on the sinful path.

You set yourself on the sinful path; and you treated the Kauravas brutally. That

religion has

Caused us great sorrow.

In Ram's reign Sambukh did not anything to lessen Ram's glory.

He was a Sudra practicing asceticism; he was not committing any sin. Why did Ram

Ultimately have to punish Sambukh with death?

From the Shudra's austerities a crisis arose in this hypocritical religion. Considered the recent story of Babasaheb Ambedkar: has any man been born who was more law-abiding than him?

When everyone heard that he had switched religions they burned [with anger].

Shit in water will not remain submerged for long; this pot of sin will certain be filled.

Find a way to create a little love immediately.

This religion has caused us great sorrow.

This religion has caused us great sorrow (Schaller, 1996:1010).

Tales from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, two of India's great epics, are interpreted by Guru Ravidas' Chamar devotees in this bhajan. The author emphasises rather than reverencing these stories' overwhelmingly high-caste heroes as men of great wisdom or manifestations of the divine (avatars), upholding the sanctity and moral rectitude of varnashrama dharma order the injustice and suffering meted out to the untouchable and low caste victims as heroes. He refers contemptuously to semi-divine figures such as Manu, who established this order and the inhumanity it fosters towards those lowest in it (ibid). So, it can be said that there was a total rejection of Hinduism by the follower of Ravidasi.

Ravidas play a pivotal role in reforming the hierarchical social order of the society. He wanted to deconstruct Indian society and try to emancipate society's lower strata by providing spiritual and social rights; therefore, he gave utopian ideas such as Begampura, a city without sorrow where there would be no discrimination on the ground of caste, class, gender, and religion. However, after its formation, Ravidasi Panth denounced any link with Hinduism. Ravidasi Panthies tried to take away Ravidas from Hindu identity and put them with Buddhism.

Mahima Dharma

Like Kabir Panth, another tradition arose in Odisha in the late nineteenth century. Like Kabir, he has protested against all kinds of hierarchical social order. The movement was started by Mahima Swami, also known as Mahima Gosain. He also preached a formless God that is indescribable absolutely who had created the world out of his “Mahima” (radiance/glory) and who was accessible to all through Bhakti (devotion). He was against idolatry. The creator of the universe was “Alekh” (indescribable) or “Mahima” (glorious), a spiritual being without form, omnipresent and omniscient. Mahima Swami was very popular among the lower castes, untouchables, tribal and marginal, although it was open to all.

The founder Mahima Swami emerged from Kapilas Hill in the Dhenkanal state of Odisha. There is no exact information related to the origin of the Mahima Swami. However, two sources people came to know about him: newspaper reporting. ‘Utkal Deepika’ first newspaper reported its spreading in Cuttack.

Furthermore second, it was colonial administrators to make a study on him. The colonial administrator also detailed this faith and the Swami following the attack on the Jagannath temple by the Mahima Dharmis (Banerjee and Dube, 2001:151). The report identified him as Mukund Das.

He was a worshipper of Lord Shiva. However, he became a renouncer after getting the ‘Alekh Parama Brahma’ direction. Mahima Swami believed in egalitarianism, denounced Brahminical interpretation of Dharma and preached against idolatry and ritualism. He preached about the one and only invisible almighty creator known as ‘Alekh Parama Brahma’.

He started wearing the bark of a tree. He criticised caste practices and advocated equality for human beings, making him very famous among the people. He was known for feeding many people through mass gatherings or large feasts, symbolising a big heart. He constructed many temporary houses that fed forty to fifty thousand people⁵ (Ishita Banerjee Dube, 1999, 2001).

He did not reside in one place; he kept moving from one place to another to propagate the teaching of '*Alekha Parama Brahma*'. Before moving, he used to burn the houses where he stayed for a brief time. In his early years, he stayed near the Shiva temple of Kapilas, where the land was very productive. So, he cleared the forest, made it a place for the pilgrims, and cared for them. He was popular among the masses for his humble and generous attitude. It brought the King of Dhenkanal's notice and established contact with him. The king's mother was a devotee of his, and she used to send milk for him.

The nineteenth-century period in Odisha was at its extreme for caste practices. The Priest-King nexus governed society. Varna and caste were the epicentres of governing principles. Through this, it got legitimacy from the Hindu religion to regulate society. So here, the location of the individual in a particular stratum of the society brings certain avenues and resources, at the same time disabilities for many others.

So, the Brahmins at the top of the ladder can practice, teach and preach. They controlled society through the power of knowledge and their claim of sacredness. Although the Varna order remains ideal, it manifests through various castes on the ground level. So,

⁵ Ishita Banerjee Dube.1999. 'Taming Traditions: Legalities and Histories in Twentieth Century Orissa' in Gautam Bhadra and Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu (eds.) Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society.Oxford University Press: New Delhi; Dube Ishita Banerjee.2001.'Issues of Faith, Enactments of Contest: The Founding of Mahima Dharma in Nineteenth Century Orissa' in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard.

each caste had assigned specific duties and responsibilities prescribed by the caste. Therefore, it becomes detrimental for the groups belonging to the bottom.

Furthermore, the absence of mobility further made things more complicated. So, the various disabilities faced by the societies down worth include untouchables, Shudra, tribal and marginal's due to their location. Swami denounced the orthodoxy of Hinduism and questioned the orthodox caste practices embedded in the Hindu social structure. He also advocated that Mahadeva and other deities worshipped by the Hindus were nothing but idols of stones and woods which could be destroyed, so there was no point in worshipping them⁶ (Banerjee, 1999:52).

Various ways vehemently attacked the caste practices through his teaching and preaching. Therefore, in this context, it is essential to go through certain principles of the Mahima Dharma. This Mahima dharma will give us a platform to examine how they were engaged, particularly with individuals and society with the larger. One of them is related to one's past before joining the faith. It is strictly prohibited to reveal the past of the believers⁷ (Biswamoy, 2010). No members were supposed to know their past. Therefore, one must carefully examine the probable causes for this rule.

This practice can be read to delegitimise the Brahminical notion of time and ritual hierarchy and remove the members from the shackles of the Hindu caste order. So, it might be one strategy to transcend the caste-ridden social order founded on the individuals' caste division. So, the faith tried to undermine the caste system by ignoring or forgetting the past. This understanding of the time of the faith brought up some

⁶ Dube Ishita Banerjee.1999. 'Taming Traditions: Legalities and Histories in Twentieth Century Orissa' in Gautam Bhadra and Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu (eds.) Subaltern Studies X: Writing on South Asian History and Society. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 52.

⁷ Pati Biswamoy.2010. 'Religion and Social 'Subversion': Re-examining Colonial Orissa', Economic and Political Weekly, Volume-XLV, Number-25

promise, a ray of hope to the masses, particularly the marginal affected due to their location in the society. They could dream of a life independent of their birth or social origin. However, on the other hand, it undermined the dominant social structure because it was characterised by the practice of untouchability and various caste-based discrimination like the prohibition of inter-dining and marriage.

Travelling was an essential aspect of the Mahima Dharma, as sanyasis were required to teach by travelling from one location to another. This was also true of Mahima Swami, who travelled extensively from place to place until dying in 1867 (Fanindam, 2008:173-18). The Swami spread his message by travelling from village to village. To propagate the faith, he travelled extensively throughout Odisha. The sanyasis were required to move continuously and never stay in one area. They were intended to rest for a short while in a makeshift structure before burning down. Otherwise, they could rest in the "tungi"⁸ built for the sanyasis. It was a strategy developed by the Swami to reach the maximum number of people. Through this, he could interact with the people directly face to face. Surabh Dube (2001) discovered similar Guru Practises among the Satnamis in Chhatisgarh.

Who used to travel extensively in order to visit their devotees? This was significant for the people to discover their location, as his magnetism drew many people. It was a feeling of empowerment for the oppressed, who were barred from entering the temples. The feeling of exclusion caused by the site was traumatic for the masses, who could now meet the people and fulfil their spiritual desires. As a result, this was an attempt to undermine brahminical Hinduism, which preaches the importance of the temple as a

⁸ Tungi were small buildings, which used to be the rest place of the travelling sanyasis as well as the place for store house. For details please refer to Eschman A .1978. 'Mahima Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movement' in Anncharlott Eschman and Hermann Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi (eds.) The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa .New Delhi: Manohar, pp 402

place of worship for God and the Goddess. The Swami was a staunch opponent of Hindu pilgrimage. The Swami preached pinda-Brahmanda, which means that the individual and God are present in one person. As a result, he was unable to justify his pilgrimage. Pilgrimage rituals revealed the exploitative aspect of Hinduism to him.

The Mahima Swami had established "*tungis*" in several locations. A "*tungi*" is a special-purity hut for Mahima Dharma ascetics. He built a mud altar and kindled a sacred fire in its centre. This was the only area where Alekha Brahma could be worshipped. Because Mahima Dharma rejects idol worship, there is no proper location of worship like a Hindu temple. Fire is present in the worship site, devoid of idols or other symbols (ibid, 402). Some structures are built, and some are temporary for various purposes; as Eschmann reported, the existence of Bhajanalaya, Caupadhi, Ashram, Math, Tungi, etc., in her study (ibid, 402). These are constructions that have been constructed for a variety of purposes. A bhajanalaya is a place where there is a fire. Caupadhi is a school in a community. The sanyasis used others as a storehouse or a restroom. These places also challenged the rural setup's ceremonial and Brahminic dominance since they provided an alternative space for followers who had previously been excluded from the rigid caste order. According to Biswajit Das (1990), Bhagvat Tungi can be found in rural areas and the interior. It is worth noting that these Tungi helped propagate Hinduism in the tribal hinterland. (Das, 1990:155). It was a well-designed Hinduization technique. Furthermore, orality's prominence is a potent medium among the nonliterate populace in rural areas. (ibid, 223). As a result, the *Tungis* establishment may be understood as a response to the mainstream manner of the religious discourse of the time. In addition, the meeting location provided them with a place to congregate and communicate with one another. This location was utilised for activities such as singing bhajans, largely penned by the early founders such as Bhima Bhoi and became highly popular in rural

Odisha, where they were performed in every family. The value of alternate space can be evident in a hegemonic exclusionary social order that fulfils the needs of the excluded masses. The Swami always preached that the purpose of sanyasishood is not for personal salvation but rather to work for the "*Bhagatas*" and "*Jagata*", the followers and the universal.⁹ Initially, the Svami had initiated two types of people: the sanyasis (renouncers) and Gruhi Bhaktas (lay followers).

Furthermore, the sanyasis were divided into two groups: Kumbhipats, who were given Kumbhi tree bark, and kaupins, who were given a loincloth to wear. The sanyasis were to work for the larger society by spreading the message of Creators. So those who have already attained it had the responsibility of spreading it. Therefore, the sanyasis were to work for the greater good of society by sharing the creator's word; becoming sanyasis and not working for the "*Bhagatas*" And "*Jagata*" was a fundamental breach of the principles of Mahima Dharma. Self-perfection and social interaction were at its core. The pursuit of wisdom and fellow feeling was an integral part of it. The Swami was firmly against performing miraculous acts, reflecting incomplete spiritual development (ibid). According to him, rather than performing miracles, the sanyasis should work for the emancipation of the followers through spiritual realisation. Large numbers of "*Grihibhaktas*" Or "*Asritas*" (householder followers) were also initiated by the Swami. There is no evidence of any written work by the Swami, but it is documented that he used to address vast gatherings of Bhaktas and Sanyasis. There was a practice of accepting cooked food from all households without caste discrimination (Dube and Banerjee, 1999). It also challenged the various caste norms of commensality governed

⁹ Deo Fanindam.2008. 'Institutionalization of Mahima Samaj' in Ishita Banerjee Dube and Johannes Beltz (eds.) Popular Religion and Ascetic Practices: New Studies on Mahima Dharma. New Delhi: Manohar.

by purity and pollution. Nevertheless, the sanyasis were forbidden from accepting Raja, Brahman, Barber, and Washerman foods. The Raja and the Brahman were the symbols of authority of power in politics and ritual, respectively.

There was the provision of the mass feast. The Swami was known for giving a feast to many people at a time. There were reports of feeding forty to fifty thousand people by the Swami. It had many important insights that need to be elaborated on. Firstly it challenged the rule of commensality based on purity and pollution. To substantiate this argument, those people who transgressed these caste norms and lived in the relief camps were declared out-casted. The emergence of Chhatrakhia is one example before us. It disturbed the caste norms and angered the higher caste populations.

There are various studies on Mahima. Among the earliest was by NN Basu (1911), who, in his work, *The Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, tried to find a connection between the Mahima Dharma the Buddhism. He argues that Mahima Dharma is the new Buddhism and is concerned with its revival (Basu, 1911:151-166).

In the medieval period, India had a sectarian movement between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Part of the drive for these movements can be attributed to Islam's invasion of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the sects were founded on the teachings of a saintly founder and included elements of Bhakti or devotion to varying degrees. Ghasidas, Ravidas, Mahima dharma Dadu and Kabir are the key figure. The creation of the Kabir Panth based on Kabir's teachings could be considered a representative example of sect formation against the orthodoxy of the Hindu religion. There was tremendous exploitation of Hinduism in the Varna system. After Buddhism, the Bhakti movement challenged Hinduism. The core teaching of Buddhism is carried by Bhakti saints,

particularly Kabir Panth and Mahima Dharma. Satnami Panth and Ravidas Panth. The follower of these Panth tries to associate themselves with Budhha

Objectives

1. To explore the social philosophy of Kabir and its relevance in the contemporary period.
2. To unearth the social vision of Kabir vis-à-vis the vision of different sects and sub-sects within Kabir Panth.
3. To find commonalities and differences between various sects / sub-sects of the Kabir Panth.
4. To know how Kabir Panth engages with contemporary socio-political issues, especially the emancipation of the disadvantaged and marginalised society.

Methodology

This sociological study seeks to explore the impact of the day-to-day religious activities of Kabir Panthies. In other words, it seeks to connect the micro with the macro. The study draws the sociological approaches from the following discussion which are relevant to understand the specific subject matter of the study. In this context present study tries to see the religion of the disprivileged as discussed by Max Weber.

The present research work conducts its ethnographic study in the light of Weberian theory of religion, particularly the concept of **Sect formation and routinisation of Charisma**. Max Weber discusses that the sect formation is most likely to arise within groups that are marginal in society members of the groups outside the mainstream of social life often feel they are not receiving either the prestige or the economic reward

they deserve. One solution to this problem is sect formation which Weber called the theodicy of the dis-privileged class. According to him, the religion of the disprivileged stood for egalitarian principles, trying to address the various issues being ignored by the mainstream religion. Furthermore, he views that the religiosity of the disprivileged was concerned with suffering rather than salvation which is more evident among the privileged. Martin E Marty (1960) makes a difference between cult and Sect. He defines sects as particularistic groups with a negative orientation, whereas cults tend to be positively oriented and organised around a charismatic leader. Sects and cults are established to achieve isolation's spatial and psychic context.

Max Weber (1966), with the death of the charismatic leader, followers either abandoned the movement or it became more traditional and eventually even legal-rational. Weber called this process the 'Routinisation of Charisma'. The pristine teachings of the religious saint were safeguarded by giving these teaching an institutional form. These teachings became beliefs, guiding norms, and values of social groups (sects) that follow the religious Saint. So likewise, the teachings of Kabir were institutionalised by the creation of Kabir Panth after the death of Kabir by his flower. Further, this explores how Kabir Panth emancipates the lower strata of society. So, many other thinkers such as Budha, Phule, Ambedkar and Periya discussed emancipation from the bondage of orthodox Hinduism.

Research Design

The research design of the study is exploratory. It used a qualitative research method approach. The research design includes a worldview and method to achieve the analytical findings of the study. The philosophical worldview of this study is social constructivist. Social construction emphasises how social institutions and social life are

generally socially produced rather than naturally given and determined (Jary & Julia Jary, 2000:565). In this light, the researcher observed the behaviour of Kabir Panthies in different settings. Furthermore, within primary data, qualitative data have its due place in the totality of the research. Thus, although this research gets its sharpest insights from a multi-sited ethnographic study of Dhamkhera math of Chhatishgargh and Kabir Chaura Banaras and their branch located in different parts of North India, it is prefaced with a qualitative study through observation, informal conversations, group discussions and in-depth interview of the Kabir Panthies.

Sampling

In this study, the purposive sampling method is used. Purposive means that the researcher deliberately and consciously selects respondents who, in his opinion, are relevant to the research issue and are readily available. For specific data collection, the theoretical Sampling method is used. It is important to remember that numerical boundaries are not a common element of qualitative research. As Ahuja (2013) correctly points out, sampling in qualitative studies does not use numerical constraints to establish sample size.

To collect the information and data, several visits were made to the Maths located at Varanasi, Maghar and Dhamkheda and stayed there for several months in the year 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 and interviewed the visitors, pilgrimage and other Saints and Sadhus in these Maths. A quasi-participatory approach was used to collect the information from the respondents. The respondents sampled for this study are the Kabir Panthies who have participated in various melas organized during February, June, July and November 2018 to 2021 at Varanasi, Maghar and Dhamkheda. The researcher has visited these mela sites on subsequent occasions, met the respondents, and discussed

various aspects of the social philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panth. They are randomly interviewed from Maths, including the Math chief (Mathadish), Pujari, Kothari, and various followers of Kabir.

Tools of Data collection

While the ethnographic study focuses on Kabir Panthies saints and the follower of Kabir Panthies (Bhakta) and their families, the data is generally on Kabir Panthies across two major Math, Dhamkheda Math of Chhattisgarh and Kabir Chaura Math of Banaras along with the sub-branch of Kabir Chaura located at Maghar to furnish a comparative perspective on Kabir Panthies. This study is based on qualitative data and also interpretative analysis. In this study, an in-depth/informal conversation was essential, along with persuasive language to collect the information. Such language is vital for creating trust, confidence, and comradeship. Therefore, a substantial part of the research is conceived as ethnographic research over three years with close interaction with the sadhus, saints, Kabir Panthies of Varanasi, Maghar and Dhamkheda). That includes quasi-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with the help of an interview guide.

An interview guide is used to obtain information for research purposes. In the case of the interview guide, the researcher initiates the interview with specific broad questions in mind. Following questions emerge during the interview and from the respondent's response. An *interview guide* helps focus attention on salient points of the study, securing comparable data in different interviews by the same interviewer. *The interview guide* serves its best purpose when the interviewer digests its various details. It is different from the interview schedule because there is no fixed interview question format, which should be resorted to for the conduct of the interview.

On the other hand, it shares a logical similarity with the interview schedule in that it is utilised for none other than the interview itself. The kind of interview that the researcher has undertaken is an in-depth, direct, face-to-face qualitative one, which is not restricted to a mere question-answer dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Though it is an interview, the researcher goes much beyond that. His quest is not merely to elicit responses; instead, he is to study the workplace, the respondent's colleague-colleague interaction, his equation with his respondent, and the entire work environment in which the researcher operates. In other words, it is a kind of detailed ethnographic study. Focus group discussion is a common qualitative method for gaining a deeper understanding of social issues. Rather than a statistically representative sample of a larger population, the method tries to acquire data from a purposefully selected group of individuals.

Secondary Data and Textual Analysis

The Secondary data collected through archival documents, government records, and gazetteers and secondary sources like books, journals, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines and vernacular writing provide a rich account of the historical development of the Bhakti tradition and the Kabir Panth. Further, a textual analysis of Kabir's Dohas has been incorporated into this study. A textual analysis refers to various study and methodologies for describing, interpreting, and comprehending texts. From the literal meaning of a document to the subtext, symbols, assumptions, and values it communicates, a text can reveal a value of information. So, the textual analysis method was applied to interpret Kabir's *Doha* to provide a deeper analysis of the social philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panthis.

Data Analysis Technique

Ethnography Research is one of the most important qualitative research where the researcher observes or interacts with the members of culture sharing group or individuals representative of the group. As Wolcott (2008) argued, Ethnography is based on the culture-sharing group's description, analysis and interpretation. On the other hand, Fetterman (2010) stated that Ethnography is the study of the pattern of thought and behaviour and focuses on key events that can use to analyse an entire culture (e.g. ritual observance of the Sabbath) (Fetterman, 2010:109). So, the data collected through observation, informal conversations, group discussions, and in-depth interviews were analysed to develop themes about the religious life of the Kabir Panthies. Uniformities and patterns of behaviour and practices were revealed from the data for drawing inference. Simultaneously, the inference emerging from data was compared with the theoretical framework to provide structure to the interpretation. The focus was on their thoughts and behaviour and key events such as Kabir Nirvana Divas, Guru Purnima Prakat Divas, and a fair analysed and interpretation of the culture-sharing group of Dhamkheda math of Chhatishgargh and Kabir Chaura Banaras.

Significance and Limitation of the Study

Kabir's ideas of Bhakti stand for harmony and peaceful co-existence of the different sections of the society. Kabir tried to reform society through a religion that may be acceptable for all people of different faiths and beliefs. Kabir's philosophy is very significant and relevant in the contemporary world. In this post-modern era, uncertainty, trust deficit, communal disharmony, degradation of ethical values, caste tension, gender discrimination, education crisis, linguistic domination, environmental problems and corruption in every sphere of life. By noting the changing dynamics of Kabir Panth, this

study has tried to see the relevance of Kabir Panth in today's contemporary world. In addition, it has tried and traces its relation with other important aspects like the involvement of Kabir Panth in the process of emancipation. As this study has been based on primary and secondary data, the study has been limited to analysing the published material on the subject.

Chapter Scheme

The first chapter, Introduction, describes the socio-religious condition of North India. The Bhakti movement comes into existence in the leading role of Sant Kabir Das. Thus, this chapter deals with the social philosophy of Kabir and Kabir Panth with three other major sects that worked against the hierarchical social order of Hinduism like Kabir Panth, Satnami Panth, Ravidas Panth, Mahima Dharm and their relation with Buddhism.

The second chapter, The Social Philosophy of Kabir deals with Kabir's philosophy and its relevance in contemporary times. His philosophy pertaining to the environment, education, religion, Hindu-Muslim unity, politics, superstitions, and economics are discussed in detail.

The third chapter, Kabir Panth in North India: Formation, Function and Contradictions, discusses the routinization of Charisma and the condition of north India, which made people accept the Kabir Panth. The shrines at Maghar, the earliest evidence of Kabir's follower are discussed, followed by the organisation of the Kabir Panth, their formation, function and contradiction emerged in due course time.

The fourth chapter, Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Comparative Analysis, highlights the similarities, commonalities and differences among Kabir Panthies in general, particularly the Dhamkheda section of Chattisgarh and Kabir Chaura of Banaras along with the sub-branch of Kabir Chaura located at Maghar.

The fifth chapter, Kabir and Kabir Panth--Hinduism to Alternative Emancipation, deals with four phases of the social revolution of Indian society to emancipate the lower section of society from orthodoxy and discrimination against Hinduism. The challenged emerged with Buddhism, Bhakti movement, Phule Periyar, Ambedkar, along with Kabir Panth. Kabir panth provides an alternative way of emancipation of the marginalised.

The sixth chapter, Conclusion, describes the major findings and conclusion suggesting the relevance of the social philosophy of Kabir Panth in modern days.

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Chapter-2

Social Philosophy of Kabir



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Social Philosophy of Kabir

Introduction

Kabir is the name of inclusive love, in which the whole of humanity gets immersed. Kabir believes in extending the concept of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam* (the whole world is one home). Kabir, the creator of an era, brought enlightenment to the restless mind with the spirit of truth and explored extraordinary strength of mind to attain enlightenment over time. He is a dynamic philosopher of the fourteenth century, which was the time of India's economic, political, social and cultural turbulence. We have travelled far from the Kabir's age, where change takes place in every movement. Things have become more destructive as the present society is gripped by the number of evils during Kabir's time, such as corruption, injustice, violence, stereotypes, caste system, illiteracy and anarchy. Science and technology have given momentum and comfort to the world. However, at the same time, it has complicated human life. In such rapid change, there is a transformation in feelings, emotions, thoughts, beliefs and the overall structure of the society. It is a time when religion, politics, society and individuals are not performing their roles appropriately and have separated themselves from ethics and human values.

In the present chapter, Kabir brought from the 14th to the 21st century to see his relevance in the modern period. In the medieval period, anarchy was evident everywhere in society, reflecting a trust deficit. Bhakti aroused to counter social turmoil. Various saints and social reformers emerged to bridge this trust deficit and give new hope to society with their teaching; Kabir was one of them. He tried to unite people irrespective of caste, class, gender, and religion. Kabir teaches lessons of love and

compassion to everyone. With changing times and conditions, society's values and norms get changed along with lifestyle and thoughts. Kabir revolted in his time against those things that persist in society. Hence this chapter discusses Kabir's relevance in environment, economy, education, religion, gender, caste, language, superstitions, ritualism, monotheism, and Hindu-Muslim unity and explores the importance of Kabir's philosophy in the changing era.

Social Philosophy of Kabir

The social philosophy of Kabir is concerned with the existential problems of his time, which are quite prevalent in the present day society. Various social problems persisted in the contemporary period, even worse than in the medieval period. It might continue in the coming period because these problems are associated with human beings. So, it can be said that Kabir's ideas and his philosophy are relevant even today because ideas cannot be bound to any particular period, so the idea is beyond any time or space. No one can destroy Kabir's idea because men can die, but ideas never. Hence Kabir's ideas are relevant even contemporary period. Kabir was very confident about it; he mentioned that.

Ham Na Marihain, Marihain Sansara

(World will die, but I am not)

His social philosophy is still relevant because chaos in society and among the people in the name of caste, creed, gender, religion, and communalism exists today. Therefore, Kabir is relevant in the current era of discrimination and evil in society, and people are considered inferior and superior among fellow human beings. In this way, this chapter attempts to link the philosophy of Kabir to present issues.

Economy, Environment and Sustainable Development

Economy

There will be no human existence without an economic system. Karl Marx argued that the accumulation of surplus production led to class conflict and widening inequality, which became the reason for exploitation in society. Economic inequality led to social inequality among the masses. Likewise, Kabir also advocated that there should be no wealth accumulation beyond his own need because it creates inequality in society. Therefore, he strongly opposed the accumulation of wealth. These lines reflect the philosophy of Kabir –

*Sai Itna Dijiyee, Javen Kutumb Samay,
Mai Bhi Bhukha Na Rahu, Sadhu Na Bhuka Jay.*

(Yugeshvar, 1998: 463)

(Kabir says to the Lord to give him wealth in such amount that no one is hungry he can feed his family member and his gentle guest.)

Kabir denounced hoarding and showing off wealth and against all sorts of luxury and indulgence in intoxicants. He preached simplicity and criticised greed. He asked whether Gathering forces, besieging castles, and showing off prowess is the only job of a *Badshah* (king)? When the emperor dies, what remains of this game? As Kabir mentions, crores of rupees and many elephants may be there with a king, but this wealth is useless after death.

*Kaudi Kaudi Jori, Kai Jore Lakh Karon,
Chalti Bar N Kachu Milya, Lai Langoti Chori.*

(Yugeshvar, 1998:514)

(Kabir says that during his life, time person makes lakh crore of wealth by collecting every penny, but after his death, nothing will go with his soul; everything will be left here only.)

“Sau Papan Ka Mul Hai, Ek Rupya

Sadhu Kai Sangrah Karai Hari Hari Sa Thok”

(Yugeshvar, 1998:463)

(When one started accumulating even single rupees, it gave birth to hundreds of sins.)

So with these couplets, we can say that he was not only concerned about the social issue, but his ideas are still relevant in the economic field. When people make thousands of crores of rupees in throat-cut competition to earn comfort and luxurious items, he says all these are the only reason for sin.

Environment

The term ‘environment’ was coined from the French word “Environer or Environer”, meaning “neighbourhood” in a broader sense; place, people, things, and nature surrounding any living and the non-living organism is called environment. So it can be said that the environment is the total of biotic and abiotic aspects of life. Our environment affects many factors in which developmental process is one among them. With time, many developmental processes took place in various fields like technology, industrialisation, and urbanisation, which enhance the living condition of human beings. Nevertheless, we should remember that these developments are not available to free of cost. Although these developments brought many comforts to humans, at the same time, they also brought many disadvantages for people like deforestation, pollution of water and air, noise and hole in the ozone layer, and cutting down of forests, which become the cause of ecological disbalances. To overcome this

disadvantage, a new development concept Sustainable development Approach, came into existence.

Sustainable development

Definition of the concept of Sustainable Development was put forward in the report titled 'Our Common Future' (1987) as "Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Likewise, Kabir also talks about the environment and spirituality, synonyms for the modern global term of sustainable development. He believed in an ecological balance between human beings and non-human beings, living beings and non-living, and that balance was based on spirituality.

Further, Kabir argued that everything in nature is an extension of *Nirakar* God. So, God resides in each part cosmos, including living and non-living. Further, he argued that everything in the cosmos is constructed with five elements: water, fire, sky, earth, and air. Exploration of Everything in the universe has stood out among these five elements: such as flora, fauna, and human beings. In other words, every biotic and Abiotic is made of these *Panch Tatva*. The disbalance of any elements from *Panch Tatva* can put living in a dangerous zone. In modern times due to the greediness of human beings, deforestation has become the cause of deteriorating the environment. So, God resides in every part of the cosmos, including living and non-living. Therefore, Kabir's kindness, love, and non-violence are also toward trees, stems, and leaves, linked with environmental problems in the contemporary period. For example, Kabir assumes that if someone harms the tree, it will suffer from pain, so Kabir alerts the gardener not to pluck the leaf and say -----

Pati Tore Malini, Pati Pati Jiu

Jis Pahun Kau Pati, Tore So Pahu Nirjeev

Bhuli Malini Hai Eu, Satiguru Jagata Hai Deu

Bramha Vishnu Dari, Phul Sankar Dev

Teenani Dev Pratakhi Torahi, Karahi Kisaki Sev

(Yugeshvar, 1998:722)

(Kabir said to the gardener that when she is plucking flowers and leaves for worshipping stone which is abiotic (*Nirjeev*), but leaf and stem are alive, further, Kabir said that she would worship that stone non-living by nature while in tree leaf Brahma resides, Vishnu resides in the stem, and lord Shiva stays in flower. Finally, Kabir said that these three gods reside in nature.)

Kabir strongly believed that each living plays an essential role in nature to balance the ecosystem. Nature has decided the role of one *Jiva* to another. Therefore, everyone has to play an essential role in maintaining ecological balance. However, greediness, the test of mouth, and showoff make human beings greedier; they kill innocent animals. Kabir stated that.

Bakari pati khat hai, tinke kadhe khal

Jo nar bakari khat hai, tinke kaun hawal

(Vanshi, 1998:174)

(Kabir said that a goat eats a leaf, and a human removes her skin; what about the human who eats a goat.)

Like, Buddha Kabir also preaches Pragya and Karuna. Pragya was understanding of true knowledge, and Karuna was love and compassion. For Kabir, every living is equal and makes the same footprint and balanced ecology. Therefore, he firmly opposed killing a living being.

Daya kaun par kijiye, ka par nirday hoy

Sai ke sab jeev hain, kidi kunjari hoy

(Yugeshvar, 1998: 589)

(Keep kindness to each living being, whether an elephant or ant, because everyone is a creature of God.)

Kabir opposed animal killing during his time because people sacrificed animals for religious belief, hunting, and entertainment, but it is still related to the environment.

There was an environmental problem in the medieval period, but it was not as horrible as today. Kabir had come from Banaras to Maghar to solve the environmental problem.

At that time, there was a drought in the Maghar region.

Language, Education and Literacy

Language

Language is a powerful means of communication that makes smoother conversation between one people another. The speaker's intention must be to reach out to the listener without obstacles. It should be accessible to everyone when the language opted by the speaker is people's language. Therefore, Kabir opted for the language of the masses while preaching and rejected Sanskrit as a medium of communication. Kabir believed that Sanskrit was the language of the elite and confined to only the dominant section of society. So, Kabir argued that if Sanskrit was Dev Vani (the language of God), why did it put Shudras, untouchables and women out of the study. So, He considered Sanskrit a dead language and spoke in the language of the masses. According to Kabir, Sanskrit promoted elitism. Therefore, he used the commoner's language to propagate his teaching. Kabir convinced people that booklore is unnecessary for experiencing proper knowledge or establishing connectivity with God. Accordingly, his poems used simple imagery and metaphors that ordinary men could easily understand. Therefore, Kabir mention in his gospel about Sanskrit and the local language.

Kabira Sanskrit Kup Jal, Bhasa Bahata Neer

Pad Sakhi Sarovar Salil, Sukhi Peevein Sab Koi

(Yugeshvar, 1998:434)

(Kabir said that the Sanskrit language is like the water of a well, which is not accessible to everyone, while Bhasa means the ordinary person's language is like running water that anyone can access. Likewise, he said that Pad and Sakhi are like clean water ponds, which satisfy everyone who needs it.)

As Sanskrit was the language of the elite in the medieval period, English has become the modern world. As a result, a large section of society has been put out in modern discourse. None of the regional languages of India is part of knowledge and science. Modern discourse is read, written, and discussed only in English. Many times people feel they hesitate to express themselves in their regional language. They feel inferior in their regional dialects compared to English. Kabir believes that language is a medium of expression and it is not the symbol of knowledge. Some people feel it is a matter of pride while speaking in English.

People are running for English, which puts people into a paradox. Consequently, people lose their culture and regional identity because language carries the culture. Therefore, if one is losing language, it means culture is weakening and shows the matter of identity crises.

For the people of North India, Kabir is one of the great names in the literature and religious history of North India. He belongs to the first generation of poets of the "Hindi" language who composed couplets and songs for the people in a language understandable to the common person. The people very well accepted his use of the local language to foster his ideas, which helped enrich the local people's language.

Education and Literacy

The word education offers various understandings according to its implementation in day-to-day processes. Education is derived from the Latin word — “*Educare*”, which means to bring up ‘or nourish’. In other words, education refers to the process of instructing or training. Education in its most basic form entails the acquisition of knowledge and experience and the development of skills.

Education can be viewed in a narrow and broad sense as a mechanism. Typically, schooling as a social mechanism is limited to primary school and introductory to higher education. Formal education is restricted to the classroom only. This style of education follows a structured syllabus and is logical and deliberate. In formal education, everything is pre-planned and follows the anticipated business situation. In this case, education is delivered by a specific educated and skilled individual. I.e. a teacher-controlled condition in the classroom.

The term sociology of education is defined as studying the relations between education and society. It is an investigation of the sociological processes involved in an educational institution. In general, education means overcoming individuals' uneducated and all-inclusive development. The main concern of education is the development of an individual's intellectual, moral, philosophical, and spiritual growth. In other words, education means establishing human values in person and society, as Emile Durkheim defined education as a social fact and supported moral education among people.

According to sociologists, education occurs in society and is a social phenomenon. Durkheim argued (1950) that society and each particular social milieu decide the ideal that education realises. Education perpetuates and promotes this homogeneity by instilling in the child the necessary commonalities that life needs from the beginning.

However, without a certain amount of diversity, all cooperation would be impossible; education, on the other hand, implies the persistence of this required diversity by becoming diverse and specialised, as Durkheim viewed education.

“Education is the influence of adult generations on those not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined” (Durkheim, 2011:52).

On the other hand, Karl Manheim keeps in viewing class structure. Manheinn (1940) stated, “Sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realising abstract ideals of culture, such as humanism or technical specialisation, but as part of the process of influencing men and women. Therefore, education can only be understood when we know for what society and social position the pupils are being educated.”

For Kabir, education means liberating human beings from all kinds of bondage and well-being of society. In the time of Kabir, Brahman and Mullah, they were misleading, misinterpreting to means of education to the people in the name of religion. So, Kabir opposed bookish knowledge and emphasizes on practical wisdom knowledge. In other words, he makes a difference between literate and educated. Kabir believed literacy could make the learning process faster, but it does not mean those people are illiterate; they are not knowledgeable.

Further, he argued that knowledge is not acquired only through formal education, but it could be acquired through practical wisdom of observation, internalisation and company of gentlemen, etc., which could solve social problems. However, unfortunately, Kabir themselves did not receive formal education. This can be seen in his gospel.

I did not touch a paper.

This hand never grasped a pen.

The greatness of four ages,

Kabir tells with his mouth alone.

(Hess and Singh, 1986:111-12)

For Kabir, education means liberating a human being from its *Agyanta* along with all kinds of bondage by which human beings are surrounded. Moreover, education aims to establish human values in society based on society's holistic development and well-being. Therefore, Kabir always wanted to avoid bookish worm knowledge and advocated for practical wisdom and knowledge.

Kabir emphasises the practical wisdom of education based on experience and self-interception, which would be better than traditional bookish things. However, as Kabir stated about bookish knowledge, bookish knowledge is one part of the education system.

Knowledge in front, knowledge in back,

Knowledge right and left.

The knowledge beyond knowledge,

is my knowledge.

(Hess and Singh, 1986:112)

Kabir's view that knowledge was not confined to the only book but could be found beyond it. Moreover, it could be in terms of the communication education system. So, in this context, his view was very modern and relevant in the contemporary period. Science and technology brought new tools and techniques for communicative education, which were important in modern education. This communication system can be seen in the contemporary period in TV, radio, computer, internet, mobile,

newspapers, magazines, and others. It was proved during the pandemic of COVID-19 when all formal institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities were shut down. Education reached out to all students through online mode only.

Kabir knew that book was the only means and not the end. In other words, a book is the only source of information, making learning faster. This is because the book shows the only life path. First, however, whether right or wrong, one has to decide themselves is that path.

Why was Kabir so critical about the bookish knowledge? Because the task of teaching and preaching was confined to only Brahman and Mullah, they were misleading and misinterpreting people to means of education in the name of religion. So it was the situation that Kabir came out and denounced Brahman and Mullah and stated that people make fools of Hindus in the name of Vedas and another in the name of the Quran, as Kabir stated.

Kaji Kaun Kateb Bashane

Padhat Padhat Kete Din Beete, Gati Ekai Nahi Jane

(Yugeshvar, 1998:548)

(Kabir scolded Mullah that they had spent many days reading but could not realise the real essence of God and education. So, what they benefited.)

On the other hand, he also scolded Brahmin.

Chariu Ved Padhai Kari, Hari Sun Laya Na Het,

Bali Kabira Le Gaya, Pandit Dhude Khet.

(Yugeshvar, 1997:285)

(Kabir asked Brahmin, after reading four Vedas and Purana, you cannot devote your mind to God, what benefit of reading it is? Without reading, Kabir found the essence of God and Brahmin searching into the field.)

Kabir said that the actual knowledge was not in Vedas and Purana but the experience of wisdom and the gentlemen's company. In his view, experience knowledge was much more authentic than the book. So, he gave more importance to the knowledge of experience than the bookish knowledge, as is reflected in his gospel.

Kabira Padhiva Duri Kari, Pustak Dei Bahai,

Bavan Aakhir Sodhi Kari, Rarai Mamai Chitt Lai.

(Yugeshwar 1997:280)

(Kabir threw out the book, left the study, and devoted his mind to researching new things through practice and experience.)

The education system is confined to getting a job only and left behind the purpose of character building and cultivation of morality. In other words, Kabir advocated education along with ethical cultivation, which should be based on scientific temperament. The teacher (Guru) plays an essential role in showing the right path to individuals to get practical wisdom of knowledge.

Guru Kabir endorsed devotion to the Guru, who gives the right path to the individual and guides him throughout life. For this reason, Kabir regards the Guru as of supreme importance. He regards the Guru as someone who paves the way for his disciple's salvation. Thus, he said in one of his couplets-

“Can one without feet take a leap?

Can one without a mouth burst into laughter?

Without sleep, can one rest?

Can one churn the milk without a vessel?

Can a cow without teats give milk?

Can one accomplish a long journey without a road?

So, the path cannot be found without a Guru.”

(Ezekiel, 1996:16)

So, it can be said that a person is nothing without his teacher. A student cannot do anything without his Guru. Guru is the torch-bearer of his disciple and society at large. No society can progress without a teacher.

Hermit, that yogi is my Guru

Who can unite this song?

A tree stands without root,

without flowers bears fruit;

no leaf, no branch, and eight

sky- mouths thundering.

Dance has done without fee,

the tune played without hands,

praises are sung without tongue,

a singer without shape or form-

the true teacher reveals.

Seek the bird's, the fish's path.

Kabir says both are hard.

I offer myself an image:

the great being beyond boundaries

and beyond.

(Hess and Singh, 1986:49-50)

Kabir was visionary and critical in each and everything in his philosophy. Though he advocated that one cannot achieve anything without a teacher, whether salvation or knowledge. But at the same time, he alerted against fake teachers as well, who can make the situation worst and can divert from the right path, as Kabir mentioned in his couplet-

*The pundit and the torch-bearer-
 Either of the two in darkness gropes,
 To others, he doth give the light
 But he himself, in darkness, goes.*

(Kakari, 2001:47)

On the other hand, Kabir warns against the wrong person as Guru. Although Kabir was a versatile personality, social scientist and philosopher, he did not discuss only Guru but also focused on the character of a sincere disciple and his quality. According to Kabir, a disciple should have qualities such as obedience, sincerity, curiosity about learning, humility, and others. If a disciple does not possess these qualities, the teacher cannot make him perfect.

*Satguru Bapura Kya Karai,
 Je Sish He Mahain Chuk,
 Bhavai Tyun Pramodhi Lain, Jyun Basi Bajai Phunk.*

(Yugeshvar, 1997:393)

(Those students do not have sensitivity and curiosity toward the learning. the word of the teacher con does not affect the student.)

*Your wisdom, when you teach a fool,
 drops from sight.
 Use up a ton of soap, but coal
 will not turn white.*

(Hess and Singh, 1986:108)

Therefore, in Kabir's view, modern education should focus on the experience of knowledge and ethical and moral education. He advocated going beyond the book to

get this kind of education in people and society. The present education system is not loaded with morality, character building, and ethical cultivation of personality and society. Students are running behind to get only one degree. So, in this context, we must think about moral education without which the future of our society will go in vain.

Caste and Gender

Caste

Indian society is divided into purity and pollution, reflected in the caste system hierarchy. This hierarchy constitutes the Varna system, where Brahmins were placed at the top, followed by Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. These three varnas, known as Dwija, contrasted with Shudra (Dumont, 1980:67). A caste system occurs where a society comprises birth ascribed to hierarchically ordered and culturally distinct groups. The hierarchy entails differential evaluation, rewards and association (Berreman, 1965).

Kabir believed in the egalitarianism of social equality. He revolted against the malpractice of caste and Varna. Before the Kabir, the voice was raised against caste and Varna discrimination by Vaishnava and Alwar in the south and north India by Boudh-Sidh, Shiv-Shakti. These voices were also loud, as Kabir had. He did reject not only Varna and caste but also refused six Hindu schools of philosophy, as Hess and Mcleod observed.

Kabir refused to acknowledge caste division or to recognize the authority of the six Hindu schools of philosophy, nor did he set any store by the four divisions of life prescribed for Brahmins. Instead, he held that religion (dharma) without devotion (bhakti) was religion at all (adharm) and that asceticism, fasting and almsgiving had no value if not accompanied by adoration (bhajans) (Hess in Schomer and Mcleod 1987, 139n).

The caste system is the primary root cause of exploitation in the Indian social system. Lower caste and untouchable were denied ritual access to the sacred text and were also denied into the public sphere. Kabir brutally criticised the practice of caste-based hierarchy and discrimination and argued that consider the talent or intelligence of saints and not their caste. These can be seen in the Kabir couplet-

Jati Na Puchho Sadhu Kee, Puchh Lijiye Gyan,

Mol Karo Talwar Ka, Pada Rahan Do Myan.

(Doohan, 2018:65)

(Kabir stated that do not ask about the caste of people, only ask about their knowledge likewise do not ask the price of sword cover only ask about the price of sword.)

Kabir not only attacked untouchability but also questioned it and asked where it was born as Hess and Singh translated gospel.

Pandit, look in your heart for knowledge.

Tell me where untouchability

Come from, since you believe in it.

Mix red juice, white juice and air-

a body bakes in a body.

As soon as the eight lotuses

Are you ready? It comes

Into the world. Then what is

Untouchable?

Eighty- four hundred thousand vessels

Decay into dust, while the potter

Keeps slapping clay

on the wheel, and with a touch

cuts each one off.

We eat by touching, we wash

By touching, from a touch

The world was born.

So who's untouched? Ask Kabir.

Only he

Who has the taint of Maya?

(Hess and Singh, 2015)

Gail Omvdet argued that in Kabir's song, caste inequalities are as unjustified as mentioned in the songs of Kabir

Baman Se Gadaha Bhalla, Aan Jaat Se Kutta,

Mulla Se Murga Bhalla, Raat Jaagaave Suta,

(A donkey is better than a Brahman, a dog beats other castes, a cock is better than a mullah to tell us night is past.) (Das' edition, Kabir 1991, Shabad 85. Omvdet)

Janmate Maanus Hot Sab, Yah Jaanat Sansaar,

Bancak Suud Karaavadhii Kahai Kabir Pukar

(Omvdet, 1991)

(All are born as human beings, all know this, and lying rogues make Shudra: this is Kabir's call.)

Who's Brahmin? Who's Shudra?

Brahma rajas, Shiva Tamas, Vishnu sattva.....

Kabir says, plunge into Ram!

There: no Hindu. No Turk.'

(Hess and Singh, 2015:67)

After reading these couplets, Kabir Das is the leading figure who criticised and denounced the caste system and advocated establishing an egalitarian society irrespective of class, caste, creed, or gender.

Gender

Some scholars argued that Kabir had blasphemed the women. However, he has not shown any leniency toward the woman. Nevertheless, when one goes through all his work of Kabir, we find there is no truth to his discriminatory attitude towards women. In the authentic voice of Kabir *Bijak*, there is nothing like women- blasphemy, but in two or three gospels of *Bijak*, some people realise as women- blasphemy. So, it is necessary to analyse that gospel in which context has been used and determine whether it is women- blasphemy or something else.

Kanak Kaminee Dekhi, Tu Mat Bhul Surang

Milan Bichhuran Duhelara, Jas Kenchul Tajat Bhujang

Saanp Bichhu Ka Mantra Hai, Mahurahu Jhara Jay

Vikat Naari Ke Pale Pare, Kadhi Kaleja Khay

(Bijak Sakhi, 148]143AA)

(“Kabir, in his couplet, says, “O knowledge man! Do not forget duty in seeking *Kanak* and *Kamini* because there is difficulty between meeting and separating from *Kanak* and *Kamini* as snakes bear trouble while leaving skin. Further, Kabir says there is a ‘*Mantra*’ to cure the bite of snake and scorpion, but if a man came in contact with the wrong woman, he might get himself in trouble, and there is no cure for that.”)

Kabir’s contemporary Hindu and Muslim kings, princes and zamindars and other responsible elite people considered women an object of lust, game and enjoyment. The minds of such men are not engaged in constructive works but with the women, and these women suffering from these men should be free. Therefore, these lines used in

Bijak Sakhi are meant to benefit *Kamini*. It should not be considered against women. *Kamini* means a woman indulged in wrong activities like luxury and enjoyment. These lines advocate for the salvation of women. Therefore, we cannot call it blasphemy. Kabir has often used the term 'Maya' in his *Bijak*, and it is considered that in his sense, Maya does not mean only women. *Maya* is associated with all material things like an idol, diamond, penny etc. He says that Maya is a materialistic thing by which an individual forgets his duty and devotion. Kabir argued that everyone has born with the same drop: Hindu, Muslim, Brahmin, Shudras and women. So Kabir considers men and women are equal. As Kabir sated in *Bijak*.

Saints, a huge surprise:

If I tell, who will believe it?

Just one man, just one woman-

Imagine that!

In just one egg all eighty-

and a universe

lost in delusion.

Just one woman spread her net,

the world filled with confusion.

Searching, they could not find the end,

Not Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva.

The snake- noose tightens in the body,

the world's plundered, they struggle

without the sword of knowledge,

no one can lay a hand on her.

She alone is root, flower, garden,

She herself plucks and eats.

Kabir says only those are free

Whom the Guru has shaken

awake.

(Hess and Singh, 1986:43)

Thus, it can say that Kabir equated men and women are equal. Kabir was a great social reformer and saint who wanted to remove all kinds of social discrimination and inequality that prevailed in society. Kabir's idea on gender is to emancipate women, but later scholars interpreted it differently. Because during the field study and interview with Kabir Panthies, one noted scholar said there are two kinds of literature available on Kabir. First, like *Doha* was written during Kabir's time, there was no discrimination regarding women. Another piece of literature that had written after the death of Kabir in which women were gets subjugated.

According to other scholars, Kabir's views seem contradictory, but they are not. Because sometimes, he considers women as Maya who stop human beings from being liberated from the inner-worldly, whereas sometimes, he considers himself a woman.

Politics, Religion and Hindu-Muslim Unity

Politics

Kabir has not explicitly described the political atmosphere of his time, but the tyranny of the ruler class and the description of his misdeeds are usually reflected in his work, though he does not show a clear picture. However, what we see is not very pleasant, at least. So, based on texts, it can be said that the political situation of the Kabir era was a period of instability and unrest. Colossus, feudal people and state employees used class power to comfort their interests and persecute the weaker section of the society. This era was divided between the ruler and the governed, nourished and exploited, rich

and the poor. The pain of this exploitation and atrocity has bedecked with poignancy in Kabir's gospel.

Ab Na Basun Ihi Gaun Gusai

Tere Navegi Khair Sayane Ho Ram

Nagar Ek Taham Jeevdhar Mahata, Basai Ju Panch Kisana

Nainu Nakatu Shravanu, Rasanu, Indri Kahaya Na Mane Ho Ram

Gai Ku Thakur Khet Ku Nepai Kaith Kharach Na Parai

Jori Jevari Khet Pasarai, Sab Mil Moko Marai Ho Ram

Khoti Mahato Vikat Balahi, Sir Kasdam Ka Pare

Buri Deewan Dadi Nahi Lagaik Bandhe Ik Marai Ho Ram

Dharamai Jab Lekha Mangya, Baki Nikasi Bhari

Paanch Kisan Bhaji Gaye Hain, Jeevdhar Bandhyau Pari Ho Ram

Kahai Kabir Sunahu Re Santau, Hari Bhaji Bandhau Bhera

Abki Ber Bakase Badai Kaun, Sab Khet Karao Nabaira

(Yugeshvar, 1998: 615)

This verse is mainly a hymn of well-known devotion, in which, while regretting the unbridled atrocities on the weaker section of sufferers, plead with God to take him away from the ocean of sorrow. From this point of view, this is a general term, but it is made unique by the metaphor of the atrocities on the peasants. There were many atrocities done by soldier and feudal. One binds, and another beats. In such a situation, besides leaving the village and running away, what path does the poor have? This condition was so severe that a sensitive saint-like Kabir was spiritually stimulated to reflect in his hymn. It shows that Kabir was aware of the ruler's atrocities and torture. Kabir always stands with the weaker and is opposed with his full effort; he has never had a cordial relationship with the ruler.

Kabir was very disappointed that kings, emperors, landlords and other responsible persons were not discharging their duty for the welfare of their people. They were always working for their interest and always ignored ordinary people. Therefore, Kabir did not have any respect for them. Kabir stated that-

Kabir Tasau Priti Kar, Jako Thakur Ram

Pandit Rajai, Bhupati Aavahi Kaune Kam

(Yugeshvar, 1998:516)

(Kabir says that there is only one to whom one can love, Ram. Because he loved every creature and cared for them, he was the emperor of the whole universe. Landlords, kings and Brahmin work for their vested interests. They rule only to exploit weaker sections, so in Kabir's view, they are worthless to people.)

Whether it is a democracy or monarchy, the rulers are responsible for the happiness and miseries of their people. Ruler class who do not work for their subject has always disappointed the ordinary people of every age. In one of his, Sakhis talks about the king for the responsibility for the happiness of their people.

Nagar Chain Tab Janiye, Jab Ekai Raja Hoy

Yahi Duraji Raj Mein, Sukhi Na Dekha Koy

(Yugeshvar, 1998:470)

(Kabir says that peace is possible in the city under the rule of only one king; when every person starts thinking of himself/ herself as the king, peace and order do not remain in the society, and the masses are not happy at all. This situation also applies in today's scenario. In the present situation, there are many kings instead of a single king. MLA and ministers consider themselves a king from soldiers standing at the crossroads. In such a situation, no one listens to one another, making the situation problematic. It can

be said that if there is one king and everybody follows his instruction, society will be happy; otherwise, there will be anarchy, and everybody will try to finish other.)

Though Kabir, through their couplet, tries to reflect the political situation of his own time, it is still very relevant even today. In Every government office, everybody is a self-proclaimed ruler/king. The nature of duality drives every minister and office-bearer. Today, the Indian state is egalitarian by the constitution, but we can observe the practice of biasness by the office/minister. They work in favour of /her caste and religion instead of following the constitutional command.

In Kabir's era, during the monarchy of the medieval period, kings and Maharajas were beyond the commoner's reach. More than seventy years have passed since the establishment of democracy in India, ordinary people, based on adult franchise, elect their representatives and send them to the legislative house to enact the law for them, but they are not discharging their duty with true intention towards their people.

In contemporary situations, even people are indulged in crimes and corruption after getting all the facilities and prestige. Today, our country faces colossal poverty, pollution, population, disability, and pandemics like the Corona and other natural outbreaks in India. These government servants and leader have forgotten their duty to the people. Some have become modern, but public persecution is still happening today.

Religion

The prominent religion during medieval India was Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Persian. However, everyone's condition was not similar. Hindu and Islam religions were prominent at that time. These two religions continue to indulge in conflict. Hindu religion was trying to save itself from the blows of the religion of foreign rulers, and the Muslim religion was trying to strengthen by the sword by creating fear and terror among the people.

Kabir's view on religion automatically manifests in his gospel by how he denounced meaningless rituals, show-offs, superstitions, and ostentatious activities, so his gospel makes evident that religion is not of pretence. However, he believed in the devotion of the mould. If Kabir denounced the evils of Hindu and Muslim religions, then his purpose was not to despise religion, but here he criticised only the malpractice that was the reason for religious exploitation. Kabir believed that religion is cognizant and not dependent on any ritual, but it should be open and accessible to all. The purpose of religion is to perform one's devotion with heart, word and deed, which paves the way to the presidency and salvation of human beings. Those who take the shelter of the religion of Bhakti and do not persecute other human beings and those who renounce all demerits find God. Kabir says further how one can get God in his gospel.

Kam Krodh, Trishna Tazai , Tahi Milai Bhgwan.

(One will only get God by leaving his lust, anger and jealousy.)

Hindu or Muslim is not Kabir's religion. Kabir's religion means to love and compassion. However, practices like fasting, pilgrims, Nawaz, ritual, and prayer, these hypocrites have turned us away from religion. So, Kabir has criticised both religious practices as Kabir's idea depicted in translation by Tagore.

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing

Places; and I know that they are useless,

For I have bathed in them.

They are all lifeless; they cannot speak;

I know, for I have cried aloud to them.

The Purana and the Koran are mere words;

Lifting up the curtain, I have seen.

Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience;

And he knows very well that all other

Things are untrue.

(Tagore, 2005:50-51)

Hence, Kabir says that his religion is based on inner realisation and does not require rituals and practices like holy bathing pilgrims and idol worship. As Kabir said,

*Mo Ko Kahan Dhunro Bande, Main To Tere Pass Mein
Naa Main Deval Naa Main Masjid, Naa Kaabe Kailaas Mein
Naa Main Koune Kriyaa Karam Mein, Nahin Yog Vairaag Mein
Khoji Ho To Turate Milaihe Pal Bhar Ki Talaas Mein
Kahyein Kabir Suno Bhai Saadho Sab Swason Ki Swasn Mein*

O SERVANT, where dost thou seek Me?

LO! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque:

I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:

Neither am in rites and ceremonies

nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see

Me Thou halt meet me in a movement of time.

Kabir says, "O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath" (Tagore, 1915:1)

So, Kabir religion was based on the "inner religion" of self, not outside of the world in temples and mosques. Finally, his religion was based on the truth and righteousness of people.

Hindu-Muslim Unity

The period in which Kabir was born is recognised as the start of India's "Bhakti Movement". Kabir argued for universal religion. His common religion is where

individuals, regardless of their caste, class, creed, and colour, can worship the Supreme Lord and find peace and tranquilly. Each religion's primary doctrine is that one can get unified with the Supreme Soul by serving one's fellowmen. Only a genuine, selfless, tolerant, and compassionate person can consider others' well-being and help the poor. These characteristics define humanism.

A real Bhakta recognises his God in every particle in the universe. He senses his adored God's presence all around him. Over time, the power of the Bhakta's bhakti/devotion allows him to perceive the world from an entirely new perspective. As a result, he becomes one with the divine soul. The goal of Kabir was Hindu-Muslim unity. He was a strong supporter of Bhakti dharma. He believed arrogance and pride were impediments on the way to union with the divine soul. His teachings influenced both the rich and impoverished of society. Indeed, the conservative society of his time posed challenges for him.

Nevertheless, Kabir's teachings' of universal humanistic appeal erased such barriers and bridged divisions between the Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, his preaching and teachings introduced an air of concord to North India, where groups were furious over each other. As a result, he combined the ideas of Islam's monism with Hinduism's *Advaitavada* to create a mixture of Bhakti Dharma that would eliminate the disparities between Hindus and Muslims.

Kabir never claimed to be a follower of a particular religion and sect, nor did he subscribe to any political or ideological school of thought. He felt himself to be Hindu as well as Muslim. He did not distinguish between any religious communities. Through Bhakti, he solely attempted to bring individuals together from different religions.

“Ram Rahim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui

Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi

Krishna Karim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui

Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi'

(Singh, 2001:15)

(Ram and Rahim are the same, though they have different names. According to Kabir, it is a common misconception that Ram and Rahim are two unique beings. Same as Krishna and Karim are the same; the only difference is that they have different names. As a result, after knowing this, one should not make a mistake).

Social Philosophy of Kabir and Contemporary Discourse

Kabir was one of the leading saints of the Bhakti movement. He was well known as a poet, social reformer, saint, revolutionary thinker and good orator. He revolted against corrupt practices such as superstitions, ritualism, and polytheism that were in practice during the medieval period. He criticised these corrupt practices in a very bitter way. However, bitterness in the idea was not the product of his thought but was the reason for the social milieu and environment. So, he was very upset about his surroundings, and his agony can be realised in Kabir's couplet.

"Sukhiya Sab Sansar, Khave Aur Sove

Dukhiya Das Kabir, Jage Aur Roye"

(Kabir, with these couplets, tried to convince that peoples are not concerned about their surrounding problems and are busy only with eating and sleeping. While Kabir is concerned with society's problems and he is grieving without sleeping the whole night.) Kabir did not form any kind of organisation or Panth during his lifetime. However, it is another matter that his follower formed Panth after his name, Kabir Panth. Kabir Panth is an ideology that is based on equality. It was adapted by Hindu, Muslim, Dalit and backward class people who believed in Kabir teaching. He was free from all kinds of social evils and corrupt practices. The teaching of Kabir is not confined to Kabir Panthies; his philosophy and teaching are for all sects and religions of the world.

On the other hand, it can be said that his ideas are associated with entire living and non-living. Values like truth, righteousness, love, non-violence, Bhakti and good conduct are equally associated with all, such as living and non-living. So, it can be said that Kabir evaluated religion and society from a humanistic perspective, so his preaching is beyond time and space.

The core teaching of Kabir was based on the religion of love without any distinction of caste and creed. He was a prominent and enlightened saint who prorogated that true God resides in the righteous person. He condemned the caste system and idolatry. From this conversation, we find that the central theme of Kabir's religious philosophy was a firm belief in humanism. Some of his verses from Bijak will clarify his teaching in this context.

Saints, I see the world is mad.

If I tell the truth they rush to beat me,

If I lie, they trust me.

I have seen the pious Hindu rule- followers,

early morning bath-takers-

killing souls, they worship rocks.

They know nothing.

I have seen plenty of Muslim teachers, holy men

reading their holy books

and teaching their pupils techniques.

They know just as much.

And posturing yogis' hypocrites,

hearts crammed with pride,

praying to brass, to stones, reeling

with pride in their pilgrimage,

fixing their caps and their prayer- beads,

*painting their brow- marks and arm- marks,
braying their hymn and their couplets,
reeling. They had never heard of soul.*

(Hess and Singh, 2015:42)

It can be stated that the central teaching of the Kabir religion was to show the right path to individuals and society. His religious interpretation was based on rationality, code of conduct and inner realisation. However, society moves forward, but religion and society are stuck in corrupt practices; in this way, Kabir is relevant to humankind and society. As mentioned above, Kabir was not only a saint but also a social reformer and revolutionary thinker. Therefore, we focused on the topic mentioned above that is of utmost importance in the contemporary period. One significant relevance of Kabir's thoughts in the present time is the environment, which is a burning issue in the world.

Conclusion

Kabir, a fearless and uncompromising reformer in medieval India's religious history, was constantly against caste and religious differences. He spent his entire life attempting to reconcile religious conflicts between different societies, which arose from superstition and religious dogmatism. Kabir emphasised Bhakti because he knew that without Bhakti, Gyan and Karma become meaningless. Therefore, Kabir and Bhakti devotion alone can make one realise oneself from bondage. Therefore, with the help of devotion, one can annihilate selfishness distinct among human beings and thereby realise *Moksha*, i.e. the true sense of humanism. Kabir's teaching help to attain real success in living a social and religious life. Kabir is relevant in contemporary times regarding environment, economy, education, religion, gender, caste, language, superstitions, ritualism, polytheism Hindu- Muslim unity, etc. Therefore, though masses and Kabir Panthies studied and preached the teaching to people.

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Chapter-3

Kabir Panth in North India: Formation, Function and Contradiction



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Kabir Panth in North India: Formation, Function and Contradiction

Introduction

Kabir's preachings are notable for their emphasis on the importance of both religious and social transformation. He criticises not only Hindu and Islamic religious rites that are shallow and superstitious but also the hallowed authority of religious scriptures like the Vedas, Puranas, and Quran. He also satirises high-class people's claims to social superiority, particularly Brahmins and Kazis. Kabir Panth came into existence based on his philosophy. So in this regard, the Kabir Panthies movement has evolved into a definite kind of ecclesiastical organization in a different part of the country in the seventeenth century. However, until the late nineteenth century, the Panths expansion appears to have been slow. Subsequently, it became popularised and attracted members from weaker society sections, particularly backwards and ex-untouchable caste.

Consequently, Kabir Panth established itself as a significant socio-religious movement and came to challenge the domination of Brahmanism. The Kabir and Kabir Panth has advocated dissent from the more dominant socio-religious ideology of Hinduism. The social and religious dissent that Kabir and his followers have fostered has had significant consequences, and they tried to break the hegemony of upper-caste dominance. The present chapter discussed the formation of the Kabir Panth and the salient features of the contradiction in their formation and split within the Kabir Panth. This chapter includes a field view analysis, and data was collected through in-depth interviews, focused group discussions, and observation of respondents who were

followers of Kabir Panth. According to the respondent's response, Kabir Panth, Formation, Function, and Contradiction have been precisely discussed.

Kabir Panth: Formation and Function

The teachings of a prophet, as Weber pointed out, are always open to interpretation by his followers. While studying Weber's writings, Kabir can be considered an exemplary Prophet who challenged the tradition and wanted to develop an egalitarian society. Kabir was a contemplative mystic, so his teachings have a unique, subjective, and untouched aspect. His disciples attempted to reintegrate his teachings into society through a rationalization process involving the institutionalisation of charisma, which eventually introduced notions and activities that were not part of the original teachings. In this context, it is appropriate to quote Weber extensively. He writes:

A decline or petrification of prophecy is practically unavoidable. The prophet himself is usually a righteous lay preacher of sovereign independence whose aim is to supplant traditional ritualistic religious grace of the ecclesiastical type by organizing life based on ultimate ethical principles. However, the laity's acceptance of the prophet is generally based on the fact that he possesses a certain charisma. This usually means that he is a magician. It usually means that he has the power to raise the dead and possibly that he himself may rise from the dead. In short, he can accomplish what other magicians cannot accomplish. It does not matter that the prophet attempts to deny such imputed powers, for after his death, this development proceeds without and beyond him. If he is to continue to live in some manner among large numbers of the laity, he must become the object of a cult, which means he must become the incarnation of God. If this does not happen, the needs of the laity will at least ensure that the firm of the

prophet's teaching, which is most appropriate for them, will survive the process of selection (Weber, 1956:78-79).

So in this context, the organisation of Panth encompassed the routinization of sectarian movements headed by charismatic authorities. The Charismatic authorities are treated as endowed with supernatural power, superman with extraordinary qualities. Max weber further stated that these qualities to be identified by sectarian followers gave validity. Recognizing supernatural power in a charismatic personality leads to complete devotion to the leader (Max Weber, 1978: 241-234).

Max Weber (1978) also discussed the sect and sect formation that mainly arose within marginal groups led by Charismatic leadership. Those marginal in society and outside the mainstream of social life often feel discriminated against regarding the dominant section of society. This is because they were not receiving the power, prestige, or economic reward they deserved. Weber said the solution to this problem is sect formation which he termed a theodicy of the dis-privileged class. The organisation of Panth involves the routinization of sectarian movements headed by Charismatic authorities. The features of a charismatic personality loaded with supernatural power are treated as superhuman. According to Weber, a Charismatic personality has divine or extraordinary power; due to this, people treat them as leaders. This identification leads to complete enthusiastic devotion toward the charismatic authority. Charismatic authority was particularly beyond the realm of day-to-day routine life and impurity. So, it can be said that charismatic authority is harshly opposed to rational and traditional authority. Charismatic authority was full of revolutionary ideas, and it repudiated the past.

Nevertheless, if Charismatic authority is a momentary phenomenon, it can take the shape of a permanent organisation or party in due course of time. Therefore, the

character of Charismatic authority needs to become the means of radical change. Sometimes, Charismatic authority cannot remain in its original form; it becomes either traditional, rational, or both with time and space. Many things contribute to bringing the changes in authority. The first and foremost reason for alteration was a significant difference of opinion between the disciples and the party workers towards materialistic things, and the second was the ideological interest of followers. Likewise, in Kabir Panthies after the Kabir, there was a sharp division among Kabir Panthies on an ideological and social level.

Max Weber (1978) gave the reason for schism like he said that the succession problem arises within sects over time. Further, he said that due course of time, material change leads to change in thinking that causes schism; second, he argued that who led the sect after the death of the Charismatics leader also caused the fragmentation in the sect and third, he described that when diverse group enter into the sect that leads to confusion and contradiction in the sect. Further, he said that these problems could be solved in many ways, such as (1) looking for a new leader with specific qualities, (2) by revelation manifested in oracles, dream and (3) by designation for a successor by the charismatically qualified administrative staff or by the charismatic leader, (4) by the belief that charisma is a quality that is transmitted by heredity.

The formation of Kabir Panth aroused the Kabir philosophy, known as sect formation within marginal society in Weberian terms. The socio-religious conditions in which the Kabir Panthies revolted against Bharminism are briefly discussed below.

The Hindu hierarchical system proposed the categories of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra on the scale of superiority. The Knowledge systems and social values are designed to uphold and sustain the superior status of the higher Varnas. This ideology is generally known as Brahmanism, which created the notion of Dharma in

India. This frame of ideology is designed to cater to higher Varnas needs and, at the same time, detrimental to the existence of lower Varnas. The dichotomy has brought Bhakti tradition that questioned the hegemony of Brahmanism in India. The bhakti movement revolted against the hierarchical social order, and it provided the spiritual right to subaltern people to access religious scriptures and do Bhakti to God. This movement has critical implications for lower sections to elevate their socio-economic and cultural status. Therefore, in the context of the Kabir Panth, David N Lorenzen (2004) stated that there was a vital component of social and religious dissent in Kabir's teachings, which was generally followed by the marginal section of society such as Shudra, Untouchables, and Tribal to express their refusal of certain aspects of hierarchical caste ideology. At the same time, their membership in the Kabir-Panth fostered and gave them a chance to improve their social position, self-esteem, and self-confidence. He cites Jayant Lele's words, "*the liberating moments of Bhakti tradition*" (Lorenzen, 2004:268). So in this context, a brief introduction about the socio-religious conditions under which Kabir Panth got validation by the people.

Kabir Panth in North India: Organisation and Function

In the seventeenth century, the socio-religious condition of north India was the most significant factor in accepting Kabir Panth. Although Kabir Panthies meant followers of Kabir in the beginning, they made their foremost Math close to urban regions because these regions were accessible to most people. In addition, the acceptance of Kabir Panth was based on a long-standing tradition of heterodoxy. The prevalent tradition of heterodoxy, which dates back to Buddhism, may have increased the acceptability of Kabir Panth, particularly among the socially disadvantaged, such as Shudras, Untouchables, and Women.

Satish Chandra found that medieval bhakti sects followed other sects similar to Kabir among urban dwellers, mainly artisans and lower castes, who reacted favourably to bhakti sects. Critique of their caste system; most of them had suffered the contempt of both high-caste Hindus and upper-class Muslims. Further, they focussed on the importance of common elements in the beliefs and practices of Islam, specifically of the Sufis and the earlier devotional cults (Chandra, 1996:110-131). Before the arrival of the bhakti movement in the medieval period, the religious teachings of Islamic scholars and Sufis were widely distributed throughout north India. In addition, several devotional cults were operating among Hinduism during the same period in north India. On the other hand, The Sufis and devotional cults had gained considerable favour among the rural masses, while traditional Islamic doctrines enjoyed considerably larger support in urban towns. Some shared ideas and practices helped keep the heterodox tradition alive in rural and urban areas of north India. Hindu temples were seen as representations of an antiquated religion by Muslims who rejected idolatry. Its emphasis on monotheism and fraternity among its followers was akin to that of pre-Islamic heterodox sects like the Nath panthies and Tantrics, as well as *Nirguna* bhakti sects. (Sen, 1974:58).

The Islamic disdain for idolatry may have been particularly alluring, as these religions similarly opposed idolatry. Sufis arrived in India with Islam and believed in the need for God's unity to be achieved via love. They have glorified the Pir's function in the early stages of religious endeavour, similar to that of the Hindu guru. Occasionally, a Pir established an order whose members were Faqirs or dervishes. (Thapar, 1990:306). Their Khanqahs had become widely popular among the Hindus as well. Instead, the Nath Panthies, Yogis and Tantrics represented two distinct religious traditions within

Hinduism, both sympathetic to unorthodox beliefs and practices. According to Charllotte Vaudeville,

The so-called Nirguni Bhakti, whose chief exponent was Kabir, appears to be so heavily indebted to the Nath panthies form of yoga that Kabir's sayings can hardly be understood without reference to it.... the imagery and vocabulary peculiar to Tantric yoga provide him with a system of ready symbols ... which were certainly charged with much prestige and real power of suggestion for the mass of his listeners (Vaudeville, 1974:120-121).

The Nath Panthies and Tantrics welcomed followers from all walks of life, regardless of caste, class, or creed. They condemned Brahmanism's sacred writings and advised against idol worship. In many ways, the Nath Panthies' views were similar to those of the medieval Bhakti sects (Prasad, 1950:23). Therefore it was not surprising that some of the Nath Panthies Siddhas later figured in the Kabir Panthies myths.

The doctrines and rituals of earlier devotional cults were far from uniform—however, almost all of these rejected castes, at least in theory. Therefore we can attract those in the hierarchy (Raychudhary, 1920:89-90). They could not make a significant difference in the stronghold of caste in contemporary Hindu culture at the operational level. Their most outstanding contribution to the development and spread of medieval bhakti cults was popularising the concept of devotion.

Historians of medieval have found that many of these conditions were prevalent in this region. Members of the aristocracy, artisans, and Banias belonging to both Muslim and Hindu communities had gained prominence in these urban centres. Islamic doctrines and practices had spread over North India by the seventeenth century, Muslim nobility had settled down in towns, and Hindu conversion to Islam had become a significant

cause of anxiety for the Brahmanical orthodoxy (Chaudhary, 1970). In the political sphere, Muslim rule exercised its dominance over the large and influential Hindu estates that had been the region's richest patron of Brahmanism (ibid). These developments might have temporarily undermined the authority of Brahmanism. The Sufi saints had also settled some places in the rural areas. Consequently undermined Brahmanism.

In this period, Hindus were practising a variety of devotional cults. The most renowned were Vaishnava deities, and the divinities' adoration has remained dominant. The concept of devotion was rapidly influencing traditional religious ideas and rituals. Around this time, Ramanandi Panth, a *Saguna* devotional group, began to grow in this region, attracting primarily upper-caste members of society who were attracted to earlier devotional cults (Chandra, 1996:119). Other religious organisations, such as the Nath Panthies and Tantrics, Tapasis, and Yogis, had also grown in popularity among Hindus. Worship of *Chandi, Kali, and Durga* had spread across society, particularly among the lower castes.

Thus, it appears that Kabir Panth was aided by several elements that aided the formation of medieval bhakti sects in other parts of north India at the outset. Islamic scholars, Sufi saints, Nath Panthies, Siddhas, and Tantric practitioners denounced caste and idol worship as religious goals. Amidst these conditions, Kabir Panth, who believed in Kabir's preaching and egalitarian social values, entered north India and founded independent religious centres. It aimed to gain support from both Hindu and Muslim populations.

Although the Hindus were typically the founders of the first Math, they proclaimed loyalty to Kabir as the only religion and promoted modest living. By rejecting the importance of renunciation, as advocated by the Shaiva Sanyasis and Vaishnava

Vairagis, the Panth established its own identity and distanced itself from the previous devotional religious traditions in north India.

It is necessary to have clarity about sect and caste to understand the Kabir Panth in the modern era because many sub-sects have evolved with the influence of caste dominance. Therefore some studies related to sect and caste have been discussed below.

A. M Shah (2006) saw the relation between caste and sect and found that a particular caste has domination within a particular sect. Further, he quoted Dumont, who stated that a sect could not survive on Indian soil if it denied caste. Further, Pocock stated that the sect that opposes caste regulation eventually becomes caste itself. He has shown that Satnami Panth, where Chamar dominates over Satnami Panth, excluded other lower caste-like washermen (Dhobi), oilmen and others. Shah argued that it is happening because hierarchies are present within untouchables. Despite this, he found that many Dalits and Adivasis have joined the sect to uplift their position. Nevertheless, caste goes along with them, leading cause of discrimination. Finally, it can be said that whatever discrimination is found is because of the social structure in Indian society. Lorenzen (1987) has shown that Kabir criticised caste and religion, but monks of Kabir Panth became Hinduised and sanskrtised and Vaishnava Hindu. Therefore, caste has also entered the Kabir Panth.

Organisation of Math

Math plays a significant role in performing religious duty, protecting their ideology, and controlling religious behaviour. Math is the centre of religious organization and the sacred place for the follower. It is organized in a formal, stratified, and hierarchical manner. They hire trained and educated newcomers to do the work in Math.

The Math chief (*Mathadhish*) plays a crucial role in maintaining and propagating religious ideology, values, and practice. He enjoys enormous religious, political, and social power, which flows unidirectional from the chief Math to sub-Math from the chief of the eclectically order to common followers. The chief (head) of the 'Math' accompanied by many scholars, including his disciples and various functionaries, organized the meeting for religious instruction. They also perform religious service and receive a gift from the chief of Math. With due respect to time, ideological differences have come among them so that they deviate from their parent Math and establish their Math according to their interest.

The history of the Kabir Panth can be traced long back to the seventeenth century. In the initial time, *Surti Gopal* and *Dharmdas* were immediate disciples of Kabir. These two disciples of Kabir established their Panth following Kabir; one is the inherited seat founded by Dharamdas at Chhattisgarh, also known as *Vansh gaddi*, and the second is known as *Tyagi* (Kabir Chaura) Math, established by *Surti Gopal* at Banaras. In addition, Jagodas (Cuttack, Odisha) and Bhagodas (Dhanauti Math, Bihar) established two other Maths. These branches are closely identical regarding doctrine and organizations but have slight differences.

Very little is known about the Panth's early beginnings or how the two major branches emerged. Many sources consider *Surti Gopal* and *Dharamdas* to be Kabir's contemporaries by tradition. However, other sources based on Kabir Panthi texts do not substantiate it. There is also an assumption regarding the burial of *Surti Gopal* and *Dharamdas*. It is said that both of these pupils of Kabir have been buried in Odisha's Jagannath Puri, which is a prominent Vaishnava pilgrimage centre where a Kabir shrine still stands. Although they are occasionally represented picture iconographically with Kabir, no author or book claims whether the two were intimately acquainted. However,

it is highly doubtful that Kabir founded any sect even though he allowed disciples informally. According to the estimates of some scholars, the formation of the Kabir Panth occurred one hundred fifty years after Kabir's death.

1. Kabir Chaura Banaras

One respondent narrated the story about Surti Gopal that a Brahmin scholar named Shri Sarbanada of Southern India was very famous for his knowledge among the groups of pandit of his region. He learned many religious scriptures and became arrogant about his knowledge. He was also famous as *Sarvajeet* among the many because no one was there to challenge his knowledge. Once his mother told him that he would be a real scholar and intelligent if he won a debate (*Shashtrarth*) with the great Saint Kabir. After this, he came to know Kabir Chaura of Banaras with many scriptures to have a debate (*Shashtrarth*) with Kabir, but after an hour's long logical debate with Kabir, he realised and agreed that his knowledge was trivial, and finally, he became a disciple of Kabir. After that, he became popular with the new name of Surti Gopal Saheb, and after the death of Kabir, he formed Math at Banaras after his name. Banaras Math is known as the Surti Gopal section because of its founder. It is distinguished by its emphasis on asceticism, which is unsurprising given its location in Banaras, India's sadhu capital.

The Kabir Chaura consists of two courtyards in Banaras: first Niru Tila, the historic site of Kabir's parents' (Niru and Nima) residence, and the second Kabir Chaura proper. The Niru Tila and the Kabir Chaura were obtained around the time of Sukhdas Saheb, the seventh guru of Math (head of Math), around the middle of the seventeenth century. Chet Singh was a Panth patron and provided a monthly stipend and assisted in purchasing the Kabir Chaura. In addition, Chet Singh once hosted a fair for Kabir Panthies. Inside the Kabir Chaura, a shrine has been constructed over the location where

Kabir taught, with a pair of wooden sandals representing his feet. The Guru's Gaddi, or state pillow, can be seen in the courtyard. A painting of Kabir accompanied by Surti Gopal and Dharmdas and his son Kamal hangs over the *Gaddi*. Female bairagis, known as *Mailog*, are housed across the road; seven tombs are located in the area; four belong to former gurus, one to a lay disciple, and the other to Niru and Nima. The Lahartara, two miles from the Kabir Chaura, is a small lake where, according to legend, Niru and Nima found Kabir floating as a child. Kabir Chaura designates a small shrine maintained by a Pujari (worshipper). Now there is math constructed over there.

Surti Gopal Das, believed to have been a disciple of Kabir but had lived a short time, was the organiser and first guru of this branch of the Panth. There is a tradition of belief that the installation of Mahant Gaddi starts in 1559A.D. After that, there has been an uninterrupted series of gurus.

According to tradition, there has been an uninterrupted chain of gurus. However, their names are little is known about the personalities of the individual gurus or how they might have, introduced practices of the Panth.

The name of mahants are - (1) Shree Shrutigopal Saheb, (2) Shree Ghan Saheb, (3) Shree Shyam Saheb,(4) Shree Lal Saheb, (5) Shree Harisukh Saheb, (6) Shree Shital Saheb, (7) Shree Sukhadas Saheb, (8) Shree Hulas Saheb, (9) Shree Madhav Saheb, (10) Shree Kokeel Saheb, (11) Shree Ram Saheb, (12) Shree Mahadas Saheb,(13) Shree Haridas Saheb, (14) Shree Sharan Saheb, (15) Shree Pooran Saheb, (16) Shree Nirmal Saheb, (17) Shree Rangi Saheb, (18) Shree Guruprasad Saheb, (19) Shree Pram Saheb, (20) Shree Ramvilas Saheb, (21) Shree Amrit Saheb, (22) Shree Gangasharan Saheb, (23) Shree Vivek Saheb (at present).

Sadhus of the Panth are celibate; the position of Mahant is not hereditary. The community of *sadhus* elects the Mahant (head of Math), who is in charge of the Math arrangements. In addition to Mahant, there are other office-bearers like Divan, who manages all routine work of Math, another office-bearer is Kotwal, who is responsible for keeping everything in a systematic and orderly way, and the other is *Pujari*, who leads worship. The Kabir Chaura has a majority of Brahmin chief officers. This is particularly intriguing in light of Kabir's anti-Brahminical ideas, and it indicates a trend toward the 'Hinduisation' of the sect. However, people from all castes are invited to Bhandara, but few from some lowest caste people eat separately.

The *Pujari* (worshipper) performs daily ceremonies at the Kabir Chaura in the morning and evening, including *Arti* (flame waving) in front of Kabir sandals. In January, Banaras Kabir Chaura Math hosts an annual *Mela* (fair), during which those wishing to become Bairagis ask to observe a fast for twelve days. After this period, they take a little Gud (raw sugar) and rice cooked in milk. Then, they are accepted to the order as 'Bairagis' after the celebration of Jot Prasad.

Many monasteries (Math) throughout India, primarily in the north, are associated with the Kabir Chaura Math. These Maths are supported by the rural/urban follower of Kabir Panthies who lives with their family. They support these Maths in many ways like providing food, grains, money and other things necessary to survive for a saint. Mahant used to visit the household of their follower and engaged in spiritual talks that could be helpful in their salvation from this worldliness complexities. They often come in contact with new people and invite them to join their sect and enjoy the meeting of knowledgeable saints. They convince them to engage with saints, and following the path of Kabir is only the way to get rid of the evils of this worldliness.

Kabir Chaura Math of Banaras is associated with the birth of Kabir, while Kabir Temple of Maghar is associated with the demise of Kabir. These two temples or places keep massive importance to the follower of Kabir. Because two places make and narrate a complete philosophy of Kabir. Therefore, the importance and association of these two places cannot be ignored. There is an assumption among Kabir followers that if someone does not visit these two places, they cannot understand the Kabir in totality. It is not applicable for only a genuine follower of Kabir, but for anyone who wants to know more about the Kabir, it is essential to know Maghar.

- **Temple of Kabir in Maghar**

Two shrines coexist for both Hindus and Muslims. Earlier, the temple was being cared for by a Pujari of the Kabir Panth sect associated with Kabir Chaura of Banaras. According to folklore, the Hindu shrine located at the same place where Kabir was waiting for his death is now covered with scarlet cloth. According to the Basti district Gazetteer, a respondent stated that the first Hindu Pujari arrived in Maghar in 1764. The Banaras Math still appoints his successors. Every morning and evening, worship is done in the temple.

According to legend, as we discussed earlier also, Kabir das was born in Kashi, where a widespread notion has prevailed that if someone died in Kashi would go to heaven, and if they died in Maghar would go to hell. As we know, Kabir was against these kinds of superstitions and blind beliefs, so he wanted to break this notion of thought that was popular among the masses.

A person interviewed by a researcher narrated the story of the journey of Kabir from Kashi to Maghar. At that time, drought had taken place in the region of Gorakhpur and Basti, so the king of this region, Bijali Khan Pathan, approached many saints, including

Kabir, to solve the drought problem. When Kabir was ready to come to Maghar at the request of King Bijali Khan Pathan, a group of people came to Kabir and tried to stop him from going and argued that if he went and died in Maghar, he would get into hell then. Kabir replied, as mentioned by Santi Das in a Doha:

Kya Kashi Kya Usar Maghar, Jo Pai Hriday Ram Basai Mora

Jao Kashi Tan Tajai Kabira, To Ramahin Kahu Kaun Nihora.

(If Ram is in my heart, it does not matter that weather, I am dying in Kashi or Usher Maghar. So if I will get heaven because of death in Kashi, then what is meant to residing Ram in my heart?)

Finally Kabir came to Maghar. However, this region was the native place of Goraksha Nath, who became furious that instead of calling him why king called an outsider to solve the drought problem. When Kabir arrived with his disciple and started Satsang, Goraksha Nath was also present. Kabir told Goraksha Nath that this is your region, and you can solve the drought problem. Goraksha Nath touched the earth with his right foot's thumb, and a pond emerged full of water, but that was insufficient to solve the problem of the masses. Then Goraksha Nath accepted his defeat and requested Kabir to solve this problem. Then Kabir started to meditate, and rains started pouring. In this way, he solved the problem of the drought.

For the rest of his life, Kabir fought against the malpractices prevalent among the Hindu and Muslim societies, tried to bring harmony to both communities, and taught the lesson of humanity. Therefore there was a massive number of followers from both religions who claimed themselves to the genuine disciple and followers of Kabir. Kabir died in Maghar in approximately 1518 A.D. Nevertheless, after his death, things were gone worst. According to his religion, people from both communities fought for the last rite of Kabir. The Hindu king, Veer Singh Baghel and Muslim king Bijali Khan Pathan

stood against each other with their army to take the dead body of Kabir. Hindus said they would burn bodies according to their ritual, and Muslims were forced to bury the body on the earth according to Muslim rites. Both were fighting for that matter at that time. Another person interviewed by a researcher said that an Akashwani (sky voice) took place at that time.

Kholo Parada, Hai Nahi Murda, Yuddha Mitthya Tum Kar Dalen.

(Why you are fighting unnecessary for the body first, remove the shroud and see there is no dead body here.)

Then they removed the shroud from the body and found two flowers. Both communities had taken the flower and performed funerals according to their rituals. Then, after some time, they built up 'Majar' and the temple of Kabir in front of each other.

Banaras Mathadish has selected the appointment of the Maghar branch. The current Mahant of Maghar is Vichar das Sahib who has taken responsibility of all appointment of Maghar Math. He appoints and supervises activities, including fairs and festivals. He appointed many Kothari and Pujari. *Kothari*, the head of the Math, makes some appointments for conducting the smooth religious function of the Panth. The Math chief appoints Kothari (Bhandari) among sadhu (saints). The work of Kothari provides food to the visitor of Math. Some assistant also helps Kothari to carry out his service smoothly. *Priest*, the next appointment made by Mathadish is priest or Pujari. The role of Pujari is to conduct Arti daily, which is one of the most important rituals of Kabir 'Panth'. *Chauka Arti* is performed on special occasions by the priest.

- **The Mosque of Kabir in Maghar**

A person interviewed by a researcher stated about Kabir's life and mentioned that Kabir died in Maghar, not in Banaras, where he spent most of his life. Maghar is a small village in the Basti (now Sant Kabir Nagar) district of Uttar Pradesh, about sixteen miles

away from Gorakhpur, with a sizeable Muslim population, most of whom are from Julaha communities. It was the capital of the Sarnet Rajput king from 1300 A.D. to 1567 A.D. after Kabir's death; a Mosque was constructed there. The Archaeological Survey of India gave the shrine a shaky date of 1450A.D. However, if 1518 is regarded as the date of Kabir's death, it would have been built soon after.

In 1567 A.D. Nawab Fidai Khan, a Mughal officer, repaired or refurbished this shrine. Julaha has kept it up to date. A revenue-fee contribution from a hamlet in the Pargana (sub-district) funded its maintenance, and a daily payment of four annas was paid from the Gorakhpur treasury. The donation was thought to be given during the Safdar Jang regime (1739A.D. -1759A.D.), the second Nawab of Oudh, who visited the shrine and helped maintain it.

These Muslims regard Kabir as their Pir and reject the Hindu mythology. He was said to have been buried there according to Muslim customs. A person interviewed by a researcher argued that Raja Veer Singh Baghel was absent at the time of Kabir's death and when he returned, he requested that Kabir be cremated, but he was defeated. Within the same compound, there were two other modest shrines. One is claimed to be the tomb of Kamal, considered by Muslims as Kabir's actual son, while the other is said to be the tomb of Bijali Khan, the Pathan ruler who is mentioned in tales about Kabir's death. On the last day of *Aghan* (November), a mela (fair) or festival is celebrated in honour of the Muslim shrine.

Kabir Panth at Maghar organises three main functions in a year. First celebrates Nirwan Diwas in February, which has occupied a unique place because of Kabir's death on this day. So Kabir Panthi used to come from all across the country. Math's second important function celebrates Prakat Diwas in June. Guru Purnima is also celebrated in July when

the new disciples are admitted into the Panth. Finally, since 1987 A.D. Maghar Mahotsava is also celebrated in January and is funded by the state government.

2. Dhamakheda Math of Kabir

Another prominent section of the Kabir Panth is located in a place known as Dhamakheda, which falls under the present Raipur district of Chhattisgarh. This section is known as the Dharamdas section. Dharamdas is the founder of this section of Kabir Panth. He was a wealthy merchant from Bandogarh, which was once the capital of Baghel rulers. By caste, he belonged to the Kasaudhan Baniya. He established the Bandogarh Math of Kabir Panth. At a different time, the importance of Maths shifted from Kadarmal to Kawardha and finally to Dhamakera Math of Raipur.

Many stories narrate the life of Dharamdas and how he inspired to establish the Kabir Math. Some stories narrate that he was a contemporary of Kabir, but no historical evidence substantiates that Dharamdas was a contemporary of Kabir.

According to a story, Dharamdas was a follower of Kabir despite that he was practising many customs and rituals of Hinduism and used to visit the pilgrims of Hindu deities. Once, he went to visit and worship the temple in Mathura; while worshipping the statue, according to the story, Kabir appeared to Dharamdas and asked him to follow the true path of devotion. He realised it might be his confusion. The next time he visited Banaras to worship the statue, he saw the Kabir while worshipping again. According to legend, Kabir taught Dharamdas that you are searching to whom and worshipping are not real God; Kabir gave instances of epic Ramayana and Mahabharata and said they had adopted the inhuman means to conquer their opponent. They are a symbol of violence and hatred. Eventually, Dharamdas and his wife became the disciple of Kabir. Chhattisgarh's Panthies section of literature has attributed many poems to Dharamdas and plays a vital role in describing the relation between Kabir and Dharamdas. As can

be seen, by this poetry attributed to him, Dharmdas was a prominent figure in Kabir's deification

O Master, look on me.

I look to Thee, Thou lookest not on me:

Thy heart is hardened.

On others, some have set their hopes:

My hope is set on Thee alone.

Spread for my mind a bed of bliss in the heavens:

That rising I may give thee thanks.

Dharamdas prays with clasped hands:

O Lord, Kabir, lose me from bondage.

(Shah & Ormerod, 1925:32)

After establishing the Math in Bandogarth again, Kabir appeared to Dharamdas and told him to form a sect. Kabir predicted to Dharamdas that your future descendants would be head of Math (*Acharya Gaddi*) for 42 generations, and each Guru's wife would be with Guru until she gave birth to a son, after which she would also become an ascetic. Each Guru would serve for twenty-five years and twenty days, after which he would hand over to his son and leave the *Acharya Gaddi*. This method of succession clears that all Gurus are Dharamdas' offspring, ensuring his charisma is maintained.

According to another legend, Dharamdas established Kabir Math in Chhattisgarh. He used to live in Bandhograh, from where he formed Kabir Panth. He had two sons, Narayan and Muktamani. Narayan refused to accept him as a disciple of Kabir. Over time, Due to some reason, Muktamani moved to Kudurmali in the district of Bilaspur, where he organised another Kabir Math. As for mythical belief, he was seated on the *Gaddi* (throne) of Kabir Panth by Kabir himself. After sitting on the throne, he also

propagated that Kabir had foretold that his descendants would be head of Math (*Acharya Gaddi*) for the next 42 generations. After sitting on *Vansh Gaddi* (hereditary seat), Muktamani assumed a new name Churamani. As per the instruction of Kabir, the head of Math (*Acharya Gaddi*) had to marry and live with his wife till a son was born. Therefore, both husband and wife were to become ascetic. It was further dictated that each Acharya (chief of the hereditary seat) should hold office for 25 years and 20 days and, after that, offer the seat to his son as a successor.

Nevertheless, all these things were never followed. Instead, many Acharyas deviated from the successor rule of Kabir, practised polygamy, kept Dasis (maidservants as concubines), and captured the *Gaddi* for their entire life. The eldest son of the Acharya succeeds him, while other male members of the family are called Guru Gosains.

In 1894, Praghat Nam, the eleventh guru, died, and the *Acharya Gaddi* was split between Ugra Nam and Dhiraj Nam. Ugra Nam was born to a low-caste woman, while Dhiraj Nam had an excellent lineage. After the death of Praghat Nam dispute erupted over the succession of *Acharya Gaddi* of Kawardha, and a case was filed in Bombay High Court. The court verdict favoured Dhiraj Nam because he had a valid lineage. Ugra Nam, on the other hand, remained popular among the people and established a new Math in Dhamakheda. While Dhiraj Nam was unpopular and he died soon after the verdict. His descendent still lives in a *Gaddi* near Kawardha, but he had few followers. The "*illegitimate*" Dhamakheda dynasty, on the other hand, appears to have received much of the authority and influence and has become the official line.

At Dhamakheda, the Guru lives a very comfortable life. They possess an elephant and a car. A big fair is called at Dhamakheda in the month of Magha (February) every year when the Guru sits on his *gaddi* and receives obeisance. The present Acharya of *Vansh gaddi* (Hereditary throne) of Dhamakheda, Prakash Mani Nam Saheb, was born in

1936. He holds a Master's degree in Philosophy. List of Mahanth (head) of Dhamakheda are (1) Shree Dharam Saheb, (2) Shree Churamani (Muktamani) Saheb, (3) Shree Sudarsan Saheb, (4) Shree Kulpati Saheb, (5) Shree Pramod Saheb, (6) Shree Kewal Saheb, (7) Shree Amol Saheb, (8) Shree Surat Sanehi Saheb, (9) Shree Hakkanam Saheb, (10) Shree Paknam Saheb, (11) Shree Prakat Saheb, (12) Shree Dhirajnam Saheb, (13) Shree Ugranam Saheb, (14) Shree Dyanam Saheb, (15) Shree Ggreedhamuni Nam Saheb, (16) Shree Prakashmani Saheb (at present).

Various other *Guru* lines also claim their lineage with the Dharamdas line. The Hatkeshar Guru, who lives in a small village in Madhya Pradesh, is one of them. They claim their descent from Churamani Nam, Dharamdas's son, and have few followers in Nagpur who recognise the Dhamakheda guru's authority. Other branches can be found in Mandla, Chhindwara, Kodarmal and other cities where the official lines of gurus have lived.

The Kabir Panthies of the Dharamdas branch is mainly from the *Panka* caste, a group of *Dravidian weavers* linked to the *Gandas*, another weaving caste. During the eighteenth century, the *Pankas* might have converted. They make up around ten per cent of Madhya Pradesh's population and are related to the *Koris* and *Julahas* of North India. The *Pankas* have achieved some social mobility and are slightly higher in status than the *Gandas*. It could be owing to their vegetarianism and abstinence from meat and alcohol. However, the Kabir Panth is still referred to by Brahmins as the "*weaver's religion*". The Kabir 'Panth' in Dharamdas members include Telis (oil pressers), Dhobis (washer men), and a handful from higher castes.

The Kabir Panth is frequently compared with other sects like Satnamis in Chhattisgarh. The majority of the Satnami sect belongs to the Chamar caste. Satnami sect is very much equal to the Kabir Panth sect. Another sect started in the eighteenth century is by

Ghasidas. The Kabir Panthies heavily influenced its ideology. However, it has evolved into a militant political movement that has waged strikes against high-caste landowners. Regarding sect, the Satnamis and the Kabir Panth of Chhattisgarh are sects to reform the society of lower strata. Dhamakheda 'Math' is run by the Dharamdas Nyas, a religious charity. This trust is a registered entity with Acharya as Patron. It has an executive committee comprising a president, secretary, treasurer and 12 other members. The trust's office bearers, i.e. the members of the executive committee, are elected from among the members of an electoral college. Any Kabir Panthies who pledge allegiance to Vansh gaddi can join the Electoral College by paying a fee of one rupee per year. The members of the executive committee have a one-year term of office. However, commitment to the Vansh gaddi is the essential criterion of Kabir Panth. Therefore, the member's socio-economic backgrounds are also considered. The executive committee secretary is chosen from among the Guru Gosains and is treated equally to Acharya. The trust's executive committee was established for the first time in 1949. Executive committee members should have good conduct, unwavering commitment to Vansh gaddi of Kabir Panth, the ability to manage Panth's business, and wisdom.

The Kabir Panth's chief is in-charge of all religious concerns, including communication to any member of Panth. On the other side, the executive committee supervises the land associated with Dhamakheda Gaddi, keeps track of income and expenses, and organises Kabir Panth fairs, festivals, and festivities.

The Functions of Math

A board of trustees runs the function of Kabir Panth Math. Member of the board of trustees includes eminent disciples of Math and other people who have faith in Kabir Panth. The board of trustees involves in taking care and function of Math. The number of trust members is not similar in all Maths; it varies from one Math to another ranging

from five to nine. Generally, Mahants is head of the board of trustees. He presides over the meeting of the trust board. The rules and regulations regarding the selection of trust board members also differ from one Math to another. Membership of the Dharamdasi branch trust board is hereditary, while in other Maths, it is constituted periodically by the concerned Mahant. In the case of a trust with hereditary membership, primogeniture applies, i.e., the eldest son succeeds as a member.

In the trust board, Mahant decides all members of the board, and every member has a particular post/duty, which rotates regularly according to the will of Mahant. It is essential to mention that Kabir Panthies Math is a religious trust board with no legal ground. The role and function of a trust board are based on convention.

The trust board plays a vital role in discharging daily routine affairs of Math. So, in this context, the role of a trust board for a Kabir Panthies Math has its principle and vast implication. It looks after the annual income and expenditure of the Math, and its approval is necessary for beginning a project involving a large amount of money. Further, the unanimity of trust-board members is crucial when selecting a Mahant. When Mahant tries to misuse the property of a Math trust, members exercise their authority to put check the attempts of Mahant.

Nevertheless, ground reality shows a different picture. In practice, trust members become a puppet in the hand of Mahant. They do not dare to raise their voice against the Mahant. On the other hand, board members always follow his instruction. There are very few instances of difference of opinion found between trust members and Mahant. Consequently, many of these Mahants and Board members have lost their credibility in the eyes of disciples.

Sources of Income and Expenditure

The land is one of the essential sources of income for Kabir Panth Math. Most of the Math owned a good proportion of the land. Studies show that some Math possesses

more than 100 acres of land; however, their number is minimal. They are said to have accumulated their wealth from the income of surplus agricultural produce.

During the field study, when the researcher asked a Math associate about the sources of income, the respondent replied that most of the Math was established by the local ruler before the independence of India. The ruler provided land to Saint because of the assumption that due to presence of Saint in their region would be suitable for their subject because they would inspire people to follow good deeds and a good path of living, which would bring peace and prosperity to their region. Therefore local rulers sheltered them and granted them vast pieces of land to Saints for their livelihood. On that land, they harvested many crops and produced a large amount of grains. Moreover, they reserve some grain for eating and surplus they sell in the market and earn good profit.

Instead of agricultural produce, these saints receive contributions from wealthy disciples, another income source for Math and saints. Though the disciple's contribution is not obligatory, almost all disciples still come forward to add to the resources of a Math from the religious point of view. The religious aspect of a disciple's contribution becomes clear because these contributions are generally made during religious festivals like Kabir Jayanti. On these occasions, a disciple contributes to Math as a gift to the Mahant.

There is another way of source of income which comes from the disciple. In the Kabir Panthies community, a Mahant should spend most of his/her time teaching Jivas (human beings) to liberate jiva from a world of sorrow. He visits Jivas (Bhakta) to pursue his religious duty in villages and towns. On the Mahant's arrival, a disciple is expected to make some Chadhawa (gift given over the feet of a Mahant) to him. In Chadhawa, a disciple offers both goods and cash. At the time of farewell, the Mahant

also receives some Vidai (at the departure time). In Vidai, he gets Dhoti, Kurta, a handkerchief, undergarments and some cash.

The initiation (known as Nam Daan in Kabir Panthies means entering an individual in Panth as a disciple) of a disciple also provides some income to a Mahant and his Math. At the initiation time, a disciple must pay an amount between Rs. 100 to 200. Besides money, a Mahant also gets some materialistic items like Dhoti, Kurta, undergarments and Sarees. Mahant distributes these items among sadhus and, in some cases, the poor. However, money is added to the income of a Math.

Generally, there are two types of expenses Kabir Panthies do. First on the maintenance of Math buildings where they regularly reside and second, organising religious festivals like Prakat Diwas, Kabir Jayanti, and Nirvana Diwas. A wealthy Math has a larger building and provides accommodation to more disciples than a less-earning Math.

Resident sadhus participate in agricultural activities, works on land, and occasionally visits other disciples of the village living with their family. Math hosts Kabir Jayanti and Nirwan Diwas and also feeds all those people who attend the celebrations of Kabir-Jayanti. Every Math organises these festivals and serves delicious meals for two to three consecutive days without charge. The poorest section, which eats very simple in the village community, appreciates these free meals. These arrangements indicate Math prosperity and reflect the Mahant's ability to manage.

Kabir Panth: Contradiction and Division

After the death of Kabir, his immediate disciples approach Kamal, the son of Kabir, to form Math based on the ideology of Kabir. However, their demand was rejected by Kamal, and he said that his father was very critical about the organisation of fundamental religion. However, over time, his disciple realised that forming Kabir Panth was necessary to counter Hinduism. Furthermore, they realised that it might

provide alternative religion to marginal sections of the society because they were neglected in Hinduism. Consequently, the Kabir Panth was formed by his four immediate disciples, Surti Gopal, Dharamdas, Jagodas and Bhagodas. Everyone claimed themselves as the real successor of Kabir. However, ideological differences erupted among them after some time, separating them. As a result, all established Math at different places like Dharamdas established Math in Madhya Pradesh, which is now situated in Chhattisgarh, who believed that Kabir was an incarnation of God like a Hindu deity. On the other hand, Kabir Chaura of Banaras believed that Kabir spiritually evolved as a human and did not take any incarnation of God. A respondent during the field study said that Kabir Panth has divided into fifteen groups based on ideology and regional variation.

- **Schism within Kabir Panth**

Though the Kabir 'Panth' has been passed through many phases and has transformed some of its original characters, it has split into various sections despite still playing a vital role in providing alternative religion to marginal sections of the society. Although Kabir 'Panth' has divided into many fractions, all those sections have one core value of humanism, which is based on scientific temperament. During the field study, a respondent replied that after Buddha, among other religions and sects, only Kabir's philosophy was based on scientific understanding, which Kabir Panthies still maintain. However, with time they deviated from the Kabir teaching for their interest and fragmented into many parts. Further, he claimed that although they were divided into many parts, Kabir Panthies gave their followers a cultural identity.

The states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh make it apparent that the Dharamdas centre in Bandhogarh has been further subdivided over time. The issues that led to the recurring splits are primarily related to the succession of Gaddi of Mahant and the

Mahant's shrewish character. As discussed above, when Praghat Nam, the eleventh guru, died in 1894, the *Gaddi* was split between Ugra Nam and Dhiraj Nam for succession only, and they established their new Maths.

Maghar is a sub-sect of the Kabir Chaura section of Banaras. As per established tradition, a Pujari was appointed by the Kabir Chaura section of Banaras to take care of Maghar Math. However, since 1996, a Mahant has been appointed instead of Pujari by Kabir Chaura of Banaras. The Mahant of Maghar Vichar Das sold the land of Math without consent of Vivek Sahib Mahant of Kabir Chaura of Banaras which become matter of ego clash between Math of Maghar Mahant and Mahant Kabir Chaura Banaras. So the matter became tense, and of legal course and on the complaint of Vivek Sahib Vichar Das was put in prison in case of fraud and forgery. Due to that, considerable polarisation occurred among the sadhus of Maghar Math and Banaras.

- **Caste versus Kabir Panth**

Kabir Panth is a religious organisation; most of his followers come from Hindu intermediate (Shudra) and untouchable caste (*Avarna* or *Ati-Shudra*) from north India. The spread of the Panth seems to have been slow till the late nineteenth century. Afterwards, it gained momentum and came to attract members from various sections of the depressed social classes. Kabir Panth found some socio-religious conditions in the seventeenth century in north India favourable to its growth. Later, certain developments during the colonial period also encouraged the Kabir Panthies movement. As a result, the number of its followers and monastic institutions began to increase in almost all parts of the country. Kabir Panth established itself as a significant socio-religious movement and came to challenge some fundamental principles of Brahmanism in the region.

In a theoretical sense, followers of Kabir do not believe in caste superiority and inferiority, but in practice, it can be seen by anyone. During the field study, it appeared that many followers emphasised their caste and surname. Although Dubey, Mishra, Sharma, Vaishnav, and Bairagi are Brahmins surname in the top caste group. Some backward caste-like Yadav and Gupta are also among them. The inclusion of Yadavs or Ahirs in this group is fortuitous. However, their transformation into Yadavs from Ahir is well-known.

Ahirs are cowherds who trace their ancestor's linkage to mythical characters Lord Krishna and Yaduvanshi Kshatriyas. They adopted the surname Yadav from Yaduvanshi Kshatriyas as their caste name. They have formed a secret separate caste association to improve their caste monopoly inside the Kabir Panth. Kabir Panth's social ideology was against the practice of untouchability. In light of this fact, Kabir Panth's social ideology condemned inequality and untouchability, but today, followers of Kabir embraced the same, if it is not stricter but can be observed in eating habits.

In order to enhance their position and improve their economic status, followers of Kabir Panth (Kabir Panthies) wanted to acquire status, power and privileges. Therefore, they started to participate in political and religious movements. Traditionally people from the upper and middle caste are in a better position, but despite the following of Kabir, the socio-economic status of people from the lower caste or scheduled castes is not in a better position.

During a field study, a respondent who was head of the Sahib Bandagi sect said that most of the follower of Kabir Panth comes from the lower caste and these people join to enhance their status spiritually and socially. Because earlier, they were denied to follow the rituals and other religious activities in Hinduism. So they felt segregated in older religions. He further said that to fulfil this need, people from low strata of society

come to Kabir Panth. So they become Kabir Panthies after doing Nam Dan and assure themselves that they will get liberation from the bondage of this-worldly.

Another respondent said that Panth means *Rasta* (way) by which one can go and find his goal. One can find liberation from the Hindu social order, where there is no equality in terms of social and religious, by following the way of Kabir. To come out from this disability, marginal section of society Shudra, ex untouchable and women joined Kabir Panth. He further said there is no discrimination based on caste, class and gender and religion. On the other hand, another respondent gave a contradictory view and said there is no discrimination on an ideological basis, but in the practical sense, caste practice still prevails within the Kabir Panth. Another respondent mentions that during the election of the chief of Math, Kabir Panth's followers are polarised on the name of caste. Despite Kabir Panth's firm rejection of caste, followers attached to a Math predominantly practice the caste system. A respondent said the Caste system is the primary cause of exploitation and hierarchy in Indian society. Kabir denounced caste practice and said to consider a person's merit, not his/her caste. Respondent tried to clear his idea with these lines highlighting the gospel of Kabir.

Jati na puccho sadhu ki, puchh lijiye gyan

Mol karo talwar ka, pada rahan do myan

(Kabir stated that do not ask about the caste of people, ask only about their knowledge likewise do not ask the price of sword cover only, ask about the price of sword.)

Another respondent who was Chamar by caste mentioned that “*Ham jati pratadana se bachne ke liye Kabir ‘Panth’ ko apnaye lekin yaha bhi wahi vyohar hamare sath hota hai*” (We adopted the Kabir Panth to save us from the caste atrocity, but here we are facing the same issue). It is a common fact that which caste is in more number close to Math they dominate in Panth. So caste combination affects the proper function of Math,

like the sub-sect of Dharamdas, is dominating over the Math at Kurthaiya Madhya Pradesh. Here the majority of disciples are from the Gaur caste; although other caste people are also disciples, they are in few numbers.

Likewise, the disciple of the *Dhanuk* caste is more in number in *Taraiya*, and here also, the *Dhanuk* disciple influences the function of Math. Mahants are chosen in this Math, usually from the same caste. The caste factor also plays a vital role in selecting *Agua*, an individual associated with Math who disseminates the information and notice of Math to other disciples.

Guar is the most powerful caste in Kurthaiya because they have huge land and land ownership. They make up two-thirds of the village's population and are the most educated and wealthy among the other caste people. Many of them are working for the government. Due to their dominance in the social and economic field, they also influence the selection of Mahant at Nirvana Math. However, other castes' disciples have tried many times to check the dominance of the *Gaur* caste in a selection of Mahant. It was noticed that the Mahant and his follower were misusing a portion of the Math's property. The misuse of Math property is sometimes justified to challenge the caste. Thus internal unity becomes the source of caste supremacy inside the community. As a result, disciples from other castes tend to be alienated from the particular caste. Frequently Conflicts between castes have an impact on followers' attitudes. Therefore, those disciples from the same caste in a Math may feel alienated from the counsel of the Panth.

Marriage is considered the most intimate kind of relationship followed by friendship. Therefore, the sense of commonality endorsed by Kabir should be a tool to dismantle caste barriers among Kabir Panthies. If so, it would not only help them bridge the socio-economic divide but also help them to organise more strongly.

Almost all Math of Kabir Panth organises Bhandara (community feasts) at a vast level. It should be noted that one goal of the community dinner was to eliminate caste disparities by seating and eating together. In this context, it was found that most Kabir Panthies sit with their caste men while dining in Bhandara. However, most Kabir Panthies made no distinction between caste and position. The question of whether Harijans (Scheduled Castes) had their line at the communal was also investigated. In this context, it was found that Chamar did not create separate lines in their Bhandara, according to the majority of the Kabir Panthies. However, they (Chamar) used to form separate lines in community dinners.

As a result, community relations were lacking because other caste people did not like to attend the other's community feast. According to them, it is worth noting that Kabir Panthies used to practice untouchability in community dinners as other Hindus do.

Conclusion

Kabir Panth came to combat the hierarchical division of society in Hinduism as Panth denounced all kinds of rituals and malpractices along with the caste system. For that, followers of Kabir institutionalised the teaching of Kabir in a different setting with a different ideology. Initially, the lower caste joined, and with time all caste joined the Kabir Panth. However, they did not forget their past identity. Consequently, caste polarisation took place in the Panth and further led to fragmentation. Over the period, there had been a split within sects for the successor and material things that had been caused to develop many sub-sects.

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Chapter-4
Kabir and Kabir
Panth: A Comparative
Analysis



Chapter-4

Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Comparative Analysis

Introduction

Kabir Panth (Kabir Path) is a religion (sect) based on the philosophy of Kabir's teachings. It is based on the devotion of one Guru as a route to salvation, i.e. Kabir and his teachings. Its followers come from various religious backgrounds, as Kabir never called for the conversion of religion but rather emphasised their limitations. After the death of Kabir, his followers formed Panth, which later became famous as Kabir Panth after his name. However, his disciple formed math in a different parts of the country in their way. Therefore, each Math varies in its function and traditions. Kabir's philosophy is based on only *Bijak*. However, with time Kabir Panthies deviated from Kabir's core philosophy.

This chapter discusses the theoretical and utopian ideas of Kabir and different strands emerged in the practices of Kabir by different Kabir panthies. Largely there are two different Math, i.e. Kabir Chaura of Banaras and Dhamkheda of Chhattisgarh. Hence the commonalities and differences of Kabir Panth across North India, particularly the differences between the Kabir Chaura of Banaras and Dhamkheda of Chhattisgarh, are analysed and discussed in this chapter.

Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Contextual Viewpoint

Kabir was born in medieval India; there was turmoil in society. Though India is the land of all major religions of the world, the prominent religion of the Kabir's time was Hinduism and Islam. India is a plural society where all significant religions and sects coexist. Including a major part of its history in coexistence, with an interrupted period

of contradiction among them. Kabir denounced the contradiction among these different religions and sects. Kabir gave a new synthesis, taking good elements of existing religions and sects. Kabir is perceived differently throughout India, inspired by their socio-cultural beliefs. Kabir Panthies gave multiple interpretations in their peculiar ways based on their setting.

Gail Omvedt stated that there are four major categories of collection of literature, all of which seems to suggest different Kabir. The Adi Granth collection brings us primarily the *Nirguni* Kabir; many of the Rajasthan collections are more *Saguni* and devotional because these reflect the influence of Krishna-based devotion and those associated with Dadu Dayal Panth (Omvedt, 2008:93). The most popular version of Kabir in the West is Robert Bly's freewheeling translation drawn from the oral Kabir and the romantic mystic presented in Tagore's Kabir, of which scholars take a dim view (Hawely, 2005:267-78). On the other hand, a prominent scholar of Hindi, Hazariprasad Dwivedi (2010), has stressed the Nath Panthies' connections to Kabir and emphasised his individualism to represent the 'Indic' tradition's response to the Muslim challenge.

Kabir cannot abide by one particular traditional school of thought or religion. However, as we know, he was the most learned person of his own time. He was well aware of all religious thought, and practice as Omvedt (2008) observed that Kabir was as familiar with the ritual of Islam as he was with the popularised Puranic stories of the avatars, the well-known sexual symbolism of the Nath- Siddhas, and the Sufi tradition. Thus, though Dwivedi and others read Kabir as standing at the apex of a long Hindu/Indic thought tradition, drawing on the individualistic religious tradition drawing on Vedantic philosophies, as well as tantric Buddhism and Siddha traditions, similarly, he could be seen as standing at the apex of traditions, of Islamic mysticism, which by then had become the main popular force in a far-reaching global civilisation (Omvedt, 2008:95).

On the other hand, Uma Thukral has argued that the Kabir Panth initially protested against the Hindu social structure. She recently attempted to evaluate Kabir's reincarnation theory. She claims that the nature of the Kabir Panth avatar appears inferior to that of the Puranas' avatars. Her claim is based on the Puranic belief that Parameshwara descends to earth at certain intervals. In the Kabir Panthies story, Kabir avatars were also direct descendants of Satyapurusha, the original form of the most popular Hindu avatars, such as Ram and Krishna. In the Kabir Panthies narrative, a part of Satyapurusha's being is shown to be powerful enough to hold evil forces at bay. Such a representation of Satyapurusha is vital for Kabir Panthies. In their scheme, Satyapurusha is the ultimate source of creation, while Hindu gods are considered, as a consequence, immoral. As a result, Kabir has reincarnated in every period as part of Satyapurusha, and in Kabir Panth's literature, he symbolised the supreme and ultimate religious authority on earth. However, it is not always easy to judge a religious community's belief systems and declare one superior to another. As a result, Uma Thakural's assessment of Kabir's reincarnations does not seem correct.

The study of these tales also reveals that they were created as a counterweight to Puranic Hinduism. The most noticeable feature of the Kabir Panth stories is their endeavour to elevate Kabir and his incarnations to the greatest rank in the Hindu pantheon in terms of merit and power. Satyapurusha is the creator of the universe in Kabir Panth mythology, rather than Brahma, who is the creator of the universe in Puranic traditions. The Kabir Panth attempt to delegitimise the Hindu trinity was most likely motivated by their opposition to Brahmanical Hinduism. In their own stories of the avatars of Kabir, who regained over the Puranic avatars in all four epochs, the spirit of protest against and emulation of the Brahminical avatar myths appears to be implicated.

Myth, Ritual and Symbol

Myth, ritual, and symbol are three inter-related themes in the study of religion. Each of these has a bearing on understanding a religion's symbolic representation. In addition, the ubiquity and diversity associated with these aspects of religion have led to the proliferation of various schools in their study.

The word ritual means a visible bodily involvement in symbolic activities predominantly in the religious domain. One of the most important aspects of a ritual is its repetitiveness, constantly informing its practitioners. Moreover, a ritual takes on hieratic attributes as it emphasises its symbolic intention. Hence, then it was designed as a manner of ritual. Recently, some scholars have pointed out more striking characteristics of ritual, i.e., ritual actions are prescribed by 'ontological stipulation'. At the same time, performing a ritual, only following the rules, counts as an action. However, its proper meaning remains unclear unless we consider different schools of interpretation (Zuesse, 1987:414).

The first major theoretical contribution to the study of ritual came from Emile Durkheim, who stressed the view that societies fashion themselves in their ritual symbols. To him, the 'sacred' is the essential social idea inherent in rituals; therefore, studying rituals can facilitate the findings of society's structural and cosmological model. The sacred is a set of rituals and objects set apart from the 'profane' by special prohibitions, dispensation, and prescriptions that do not pertain to everyday life (Durkheim, 1915:127). Emile Durkheim (1915) further argues that the ritual works as the battery in society; whenever social solidarity gets weak in the community, collective consciousness is reinforced by the religious festival. Likewise, whenever social solidarity among the Kabir Panthis gets weaker than Satsang, a fair takes place to reinforce solidarity. Therefore, it is essential to understand religious events to

understand rituals, myths, and symbols. On the other hand, Victor Turner has suggested that ritual acts endow religious significance on important cosmological conceptions and values. These purposes are served by the ritual's persuasive, emotive force.

Moreover, the experience of shared belief in ritual performance unifies the individual participants into a genuine community (Turner, 2017:91). To Victor Turner, rituals have existential import and explicit meanings. However, he disapproved of the social function inherent in a ritual's explicit meaning. The action-field context of a ritual can be observed in the Kabir Panthies community has been depicted. Some rituals are performed by lay followers, while sadhus and Mahants can only perform others. Bandagi, Bhandara, Charanamit, Satsang, Anguli-Chuman, Bhajan, and Pravachan are among the most popular rituals among lay followers. The most significant of the Sadhu's rites is the one that necessitates using a Tika on his or her forehead. Guru-Prasad, Guru-puja, and the bestowal of Tika on the Mahant's forehead are some of the Mahant's rites.

Kabir, during his lifetime, opposed all kinds of ritual practices in the period. According to Ranjan (2008), Kabir Panth and its follower do not adhere to ritual practises in principle, but they have evolved a variety of rituals over time. The Puranic Hinduism appropriated ceremonial hierarchy of purity and defilement appears to provide a set of focal areas for Kabir Panthies activities. However, these rites distinguish the Panth as a distinct religious order from other Hindu and Muslim sects. Kabir Panth appears to have leaned on Hindu society's ritual order while rejecting some features of a caste-ridden society. Similarly, Evan M. Zuesse noted in theory that Kabir Panthies envision their Panth as non-ritualistic; yet, rituals may appear in any religion or society, including ones claiming anti-ritualistic.

The word myth is derived from the Greek word *Muthos*, which means 'word' or 'speech'. In its original use, the word *Muthos* referred to the study of gods and superhuman beings. Mythology is a term derived from myth that refers to a collection of myths from a specific tradition. Its scope also encompasses the study of mythology (Bolle, 1987:261). To explore and analyse the culture of the American tribes, Franz Boas (1963) studied religion and gathered a significant quantity of knowledge on myths, legends, tales, riddles, art, magic, song, dance, traditions, customs, and ceremonies. He discovered that myths were partly determined by culture and by human imagination. He was particularly interested in myths underlying 'ultimate significance'. Boas also objected that myths arose from a common need to personify nature.

Bronislaw Malinowski (2014), based on his experiences among the Trobriand Islanders, suggested that myths are neither explanations of natural occurrences nor poetry, as evolutionists and classical Greece-Roman academics have pointed out. On the other hand, in Malinowski's opinion, myths are social order's validations. The myths that make up the 'charter' confirm and strengthen existing practices. For example, he attempted to demonstrate how the Trobrianders' origin myths explain the relative superiority and inferiority of various clans and tend to support their existing positions. According to him, historical supernatural personalities usually strongly appeal to believers.

Claude Levi-Strauss (2008), the structuralist anthropologist, has argued that if the meaning is to be found in mythology, it does not reside in the isolated elements that enter into a myth's composition but only in the way that elements are combined. Levi-Strauss further argues that the basic meaning of a myth can be found only in a paradigm obtained through a study of other myths and mental creations. He also suggested that rituals, myths, and other aspects of culture are structured cognitively by processes

resembling binary operations. These mental operations finally lie outside all meanings and reflect an autonomous cognitive drive towards order. It involves impersonal logical necessity.

Hindus were converted to the Muslim religion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. To check on the conversion of Hindus, Brahmins revisited the traditional literature and codified the Hindu religion with highlights of their supremacy and highness. This process resulted in the revival of older texts. They also used various myths to assert their status and power under present threats. The Kabir Panthies followed the same path rewriting and adding Puranic mythology, whatever suited Kabir Panthies' ideology (Ranjan, 2008:197).

In the Kabir Panthies myth, Kabir is shown as the only true liberator of the Jivas from *Kal Niranjan*. Kabir was shown to be assigned to save Jivas from *Niranjan's* tricks by Satyapurusha. In these myths, Kabir was a form of Satyapurusha himself. Later he appeared in every epoch, i.e., the *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dwapar*, and *Kaliyuga*, the first epoch associated with the formative period of the universe (Ranjan, 2008:137).

A cursory review of these myths clarifies that their central purpose was to demean the gods of Puranic Hinduism. Kabir's reincarnations in all epochs are seen as the supreme divine force. The trinity of Hindu (*Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Mahesh*) gods is shown as the progeny of an evil force, *Kal Niranjan*. All their deeds are depicted as misleading and designed to trap innocent Jivas on Earth. Further, they utilised these deceptive tricks to give forms to creatures. While *Niranjan* and his entourage, including *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Mahesh*, and his wife, *Adya*, were represented as deceivers, Kabir and his reincarnations were perceived as the saviours of humanity (Jivas). Kabir was a source of fear for *Kal Niranjan* and an inspiration for the trinity of Hindu gods. Unlike Kabir's Panth, the

Hindu trinity acted at *Kal Niranjan's* instance to make *Jivas* swerve from the path of righteousness (ibid. 196-97).

Kabir descended to earth to rescue *Jivas* from the clutches of *Niranjan* and his agents. *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesh* are shown accepting Kabir's authority. In the myths, Kabir is closely associated with *Satyapurusha*, the primary source of emancipation for *Jivas*.

Kabir Notion of Utopia

The Bhakti tradition challenged the Brahmanical social order. They preached in the local language rather than Sanskrit. Bhakti tradition spread across India and gained acceptance from all the sections of society irrespective of caste, class and creed. Bhakti was based on solid devotion between worshipped and worshipper. The Bhakti tradition started in South India and reached the north. The Bhakti saints challenged the supremacy of Brahmins in Hinduism, while the Sufi saints challenged the ascendancy of Mullah in Islam. Every reformist saint and political leader has utopian ideas in their vision that they want to achieve in society. In this regard, Karl Mannheim, in his book, *Ideology and Utopia*, argued that both "ideologies" and "utopias" arose from political struggles between various social groups (classes). On the other hand, further argued, with the help of utopia, "certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interconnected in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the society which to negate it" (Mannheim, 1936:40).

Utopianism is required for transformational activity; the transformation will be lost if utopianism is gone. Mannheim argued that "*Man would lose his will to shape history and his ability to understand it*" (ibid). Utopia, or the posing of alternatives, society. According to Gail Omvedt, Utopia plays a significant role in any struggle; in other

words, it is a part of social movement rhetoric or frameworks that inspire people to action by uniting ideals with an analysis that claims possible realisation. They unite ecstasy and reason, projecting a future achievable by present action (Omvedt, 2008:14). On the other hand, utopia is a projected vision, sometimes imagined in the past, sometimes located in a different world, and sometimes inscribed in the future possibility. However, they all lay a claim to some reality of possible being and, in so doing, motivate efforts at social transformation (Omvedt, 2008:15).

On the other hand, Lorenzen stated that ideology and utopia had numerous meanings, but he tries to analyse them all. It is a type of discourse, primarily verbal but also behavioural, that claims to directly or indirectly describe the structure and functioning of society in order to justify or protest an unequal distribution of social status, economic wealth, and political power among different groups within society (Lorenzen, 1996:3). Likewise, Kabir Panth revolted against unequal distribution of social and political status. Lorenzen further stated that religious beliefs and practices are employed to define a given community identity and more or less provide a utopian vision for the community's future and society it forms. In other words, these beliefs and practices are normative in a descriptive definitional sense and idealist in the moral sense. Together they constitute, in short, both the identity and the ideology of the community (ibid.). In this context, Bhakti Movement revolted against the dominant ideology of Hinduism, particularly against the Varna and caste, which was based on domination and discrimination against the lower section of society, particularly Shudra, Dalit, and women. They were denied social, economic, political, and religious life. The radical bhakti saints not only protested against the dominant ideology but also gave a new vision, utopia, and ideology before the society; Kabir and Ravidas are among them.

Ravidas was the first saint to formulate an Indian version of utopia in his song "Begumpura". A city without sorrow, distress, fear, tax, and focusing on this-worldliness. An urban society without the mention of temples. "Begumpura" stands for a land with no taxes, toil, or harassment, where there is no hierarchy, but all are equal (Omvedt, 2008:7). Along similar lines, Kabir's version of utopia is given in his songs Amarpur, the city of immortality, or Premnagar, the city of love (Omvedt, 2008:18). So, the Bhakti movement witnessed a protest against an unjust society and put utopia before the society.

Kabir city Amarpur or Prempura was based on an egalitarian society. He attempted to reconcile monotheism and monism by rejecting all superstitions, malpractices, and rituals found in Hindu and Muslim religions. This was one of Kabir's significant contributions to India's social and religious spheres (Hedyatullah, 1977:297).

Kabir Panth came against discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, ritual, and idol worship. However, later with the influence of Hinduism, these gradually entered the Kabir Panth. As Lorenzen has discussed in his work on Kabir Panth, participation in specific communities may indeed be "an element of social protest against the hierarchical structure of the Hindu socio-religious order". However, it simultaneously "represents a general acceptance of the hegemony of the order" (Lorenzen 1987:295). On the premise of the argument given by Victor Turner, K Ramanujan remarked that "Bhakti communities, while proclaiming anti-structure, necessarily developed their structure for behaviour and belief, often minimal, frequently composed of elements selected from the very structure deny or reject" (Ramanujan, 1973:35). Joseph O'Connell goes even one step further, suggesting that Bhakti's work has made discriminatory caste practices in society and structures more enduring. He stated that Bhakti's impact on society "tends not to involve major structural change, but rather

modest modification,” which may soften caste attitudes and make social norm slightly more flexible but simultaneously makes those norms and attitudes more durable (O'Connell, 1993:12-13).

The notion of Bhakti concedes with an egalitarian, democratising philosophy and revolutionary force uniting an Indian notion is relatively recent; the idea that devotion is the true path to salvation is far more time-tested. G. H. Westcott (1907) argued that Kabir refused to accept caste differences, the six schools of Hindu philosophies, and Brahmin's fourfold classification of *Asharam*. Instead, he argued that religion without Bhakti was no religion, and asceticism and fasting also had no value if worship was without *Bhajan hymn* singing (Westcott, 1907:30). The devotee's love for God, just like God's love for the devotee, transcends birth and social class distinctions, is a message as old as Bhakti itself. It seems that from the very beginning, Bhakti has by and large been spiritually egalitarian in theory; however, modern-day scholars have not hesitated to point out that *Bhakti* theory has rarely, if ever, been translated into actual social reform or sustained egalitarian Bhakti practice. As Karen Pechilis described, "Indeed, the failure of not only low but also especially untouchable peoples to effect any change of place through Bhakti has been noted in contemporary scholarship" (Pechilis 1999:29). Likewise, David N. Lorenzen, "The only significant rejection of caste among Hindu sects is found in Virasaivism, in *Nirguni* sects such as the Kabir and Ravidas Panth, and to a lesser extent in the Arya Samaj. Even in these cases, the opposition is limited mainly to ideology rather than practice" (Lorenzen 2004:10).

Kabir refused to accept the theory of incarnation and railed against caste, ritual, and social malfeasance. So Kabir Panth was initially opposed but later began to be accepted by its followers. According to Uma Thukral (1996), the Kabir Panth was a staunch opponent of the form and incarnation philosophy, although anecdotes of Kabir's *Lila*

may be found in Kabir Panth literature, notably in literature from Chhattisgarh or Dharamdasi. She argued that Dharamdasi could not oppose Hinduism with Kabir's abstract philosophy because it was too abstract. Therefore, they created their myth and mythology, which included the doctrine of the incarnation like the Hindu gods and propagated that Kabir also took incarnation to liberate human beings. So, According to Thukral (1996), to myth, Kabir takes incarnation in every Yuga to liberate human beings from the tap of the trinity. On the other hand, Omvedt (2008) argued that Dadu Panth described Kabir as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

So finally, it can be said that Kabir Panth came against discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, ritual, and worship. However, later with the influence of Hinduism and the current situation, all of these vices gradually entered its fold.

Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Perspective from Field

The chief tenets of Saint Kabir are (1) monotheism, (2) impersonal God, (3) the unity of God and (4) a rejection of the avatar theory, (5) rejection of polytheism, idolatry, and external ritual; (6) love as the foundation of mystical religion; (7) significance of the Guru or spiritual preceptor and (8) the insignificance of caste in spiritual attainment. In addition, the Kabir Panthi was passionate about creating an alternative to Brahminical Hinduism and orthodox Islam, which they considered hypocritical. Nevertheless, the different Kabir panthies incorporated more or less all these Hindu symbols of which Kabir was an ardent opponent.

Fieldwork offered an excellent opportunity to interact with Kabir Panthies across India, where different versions of Kabir panths are to be found. Different Kabir Panthies across India constructed Kabir gospel differently along with Math. One of the earliest points of contest among these panths is on the question of who possesses the original

text of *Bijak*. Furthermore, it is supposedly claimed to be preserved by Bhagodasi Acharya Gaddi at Dhanauti. Bhagodasi followers claimed that Kabir Panthies original *Bijak* begins with:

Anatar Jyoti Shabda Ek Nari, Hari Bramha Take Tripurari.

While the *Bijak* used by other branches has a different beginning

Jiv Rup Antar Basa, Antar Jayoti Kinh Prakasha

The second difference is on the question of ‘The social construction of a philosophy of Kabir’ among the different branches of Kabir Panths, primarily related to their ideology and practices. Consequently, the interpretation of Kabir's teaching is constructed and perceived differently by its follower. As example

Magan Maran Saman Hai jo Koi Mage Bhikh.

Magan Se Marna Bhala Yah Satguru Ki Sikh.

(As Satguru (Kabir) mentions, dying is better than begging.)

The Kabir's original teaching was based on egalitarianism; however, later on, when Kabir Panthies interpreted it differently, inspired by their economic interests.

Dhan Diye Na Dhan Ghate Kah Gye Das Kabir,

During fieldwork, a respondent on the formation of Kabir Math said that the formation of Kabir Panth was against the will of the Kabir because if we see his whole life, it is devoted to all kinds of organised orthodox religion. However, his follower formed Math and named it after him. Contrary to this, another respondent said that it was of very much importance to form Math because after the death of Kabir, his followers were feeling directionless, so to give them direction, it was necessary to form Math.

One respondent said that that particular region's earlier religious atmosphere has also contributed to invariance in Kabir Panth. For example, in the western region of India, Gujrat and Rajasthan were parts of the Vaishnava religion before the formation of Kabir

Panth, and due to the influence of this Vaishnav religion, Kabir Panth emerged as Washnavite Kabir Panth. In contrast, North India was dominated by incorporeal saints like Ravidas, Kabir, Guru Nanak, etc. Therefore this region emerged as incorporeal Kabir Math. Hence to understand Kabir and Kabir Panth and its regional tenents, it is important to discuss its ideology, ritual and the difference in the practice of the ritual and other religious beliefs and values.

The Ideology

Kabir Panth is based on the opposing social order of Hinduism, and it adopted many things from the Nath Panthi tradition, which was popular among the lower strata of the society at that time. In this process, Kabir has been made a mythic figure around whom all religious forces opposing Brahminic Hinduism mingled. The hegemony of Sagun devotional groups such as the Ramanandi religious tradition in North India has also been questioned and opposed by Kabir Panthies devotees.

Kabir Panthies' belief system has been codified and formalised beyond Kabir's original utterances. There are many theological complexities, but two points are worth mentioning. Those are cosmology and soteriology, which deal with problems concerning the structure of the world, man's place in it, and the method to attain salvation. Kabir is promoted to the position of the creator of the universe, which contains everything one might contain. Satpurusha, a perfectly pure and benevolent being, is the essential being with whom Kabir is identified.

Stories begin at a time when there was nothing except an ocean. On a lotus in the middle of the ocean, a formless Satyapurusha or Satpurusha was residing. In the thoughts of Satyapurusha, a desire manifested itself in the form of an island known as Diplock. Later, he sat on Diplok's four-legged throne. A total of 84,000 islands were created as a result of his wish. A Kurma (tortoise) emerged and sat at His feet as His second desire.

Satyapurusha expressed sixteen wishes over time, manifested as His sixteen sons: *Gyan, Vivek, Sahaj, Santosh, Kal Niranjana, Sruti Subhav, Anand, Kshama, Nishkam, Jalarangi, Achint, Prem, Dindayal, Rasala, and Yog Santayana.*

According to one folklore, Niranjana or Kal was a descendent of Satpurush. He was exiled from Satya Loka, the domain of Sat Purusha, for his evil deeds. Niranjana married a woman named Maya. Maya, Niranjana's wife, gave birth to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and their wives. Niranjana created the four Vedas at the same time. Brahma created the current universe, and these trinities came to be worshipped as gods. Maya created the goddess Kali, who also came to be worshipped. Niranjana claimed to be Sat Purusha himself. So, Sat Purusha sent Kabir to teach humanity the truth. Kabir, also known as Jnani, has appeared every four ages. According to the Hindu belief, the world is destroyed and recreated at the end of each age. As a result, the Kabir Panthies regard the universe as fundamentally and eternally evils engulfed in ignorance. They consider all other religions as religions of Niranjana, who has been misguided from Sat Purusha. The secret of Sat Purusha's existence has been hidden even from Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who are all subject to karma. Only Kabir is entirely free from karma.

The entire objective of Kabir Panthies doctrine is to stop soul transmigration and escape *Niranjana's* world. The Jivas (soul) is a part of Sat Purusha that has been duped into believing it is separate from Kabir, who has been cast as a saviour. Only by following Kabir's teachings, one can get salvation. The Kabir Panthies believe that the path to enlightenment for the soul is divided into ten phases, the lowest being ceremonial regulations and the highest being absorption into Satya Loka. A guru can only lead his followers as far as he has reached. The Kabir Panth believes that salvation comes from one leading a moral life, second abstaining from meat and intoxicants, third honouring the Guru and all sadhus, four getting initiation, performing specified ceremonies, and

five studying the Svasam Veda. The whole story is narrated in a song by Shiv Lal Das; who belongs to the Kabir Panthi section of Chhattisgarh-

Satguru Bandi Ke Chudavan Hara
Sar Sabad Jo Jiva Pichda ,Ta Bhaya Gavara
Maya Badh Kaid Mai Kinha ,Darin Narak Maghara
Yah Dukh Dayadnidhi ,Satguru liye Avtara
Jivan Maran Ka Sansay, Lake Apane Liye Seer Bhara
Satguru Bandi Ke, Chudavan Hara
Tin Lok Danka Bajaye ,Ghar Ghar Kiye Pukara
Saty Nam Tikat Le Lo, Jo Jiva Hamara
Satguru Bandi Ke Chudavan Hara
Satlok Phatak Ke Upar, Kal Nirjan Khada
Bina Tikat Koi jai Na Pahihe, Mari Mari Karat Ahara
Satguru Bandi Ke ,Chudavan Hara
Sumarin Das Badiya gail, satguru Charan Seer Dara
Kal Nirajan Ko Ladne Ko ,Sar Sabad Talwara
Satguru Bandi Ke ,Chudavan Hara.

Kabir Panthies emphasises the worship of Kabir, equality of all people and an ethical approach to religion; anyone familiar with Hindu thought will immediately recognise the cosmology and sociology of the Kabir Panth as being a variant theme and clearly within the Buddha tradition. Likewise, anyone familiar with Buddha thought will quickly recognise the Kabir Panth's cosmology and sociology as variants themes and obviously within the Buddha tradition.

Rituals

In theory, Kabir Panth and its followers do not value ritual practices but have developed several rituals over time. The puranic Hinduism ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution, which it appropriated over time, provides a set of focal points for Kabir Panthies practices. The Panth, however, is distinguished from other Hindu and Muslim sects by these very practices. Kabir Panth appears to have adopted Hindu culture's ritual hierarchy while rejecting some aspects of a caste-based society.

It is hardly surprising that Kabir's followers, who despise all rituals, would create their unique rites and ceremonies because ritual is an integral part of the religion that brings a religious community together as a separate group. Also, Hinduism's influence on ritual adoption must have been significant. The Kabir Panth had to adopt some outward iconography to attract disciples. Sadhus and Mahants of the Panth wear sect marks and unique clothing. The ascetics in each of the three parts have slightly different sect marks. Mahants wear a sleeveless white garment with a high peaked cap, while other sadhus wear saffron robes. Householders wear a *kanthi* or tulsi bead string.

For the layman, the most important ritual is an initiation; during initiation, they get the *kanthi*, a Mantra (syllable for meditation), and the Parvana, or 'passport', a symbolic betel leaf from his Guru. He or she then commits to abide by the Panth's regulations. The *Chauka* service, an elaborate ritual performed on Sundays and full moon days, is performed regularly. At least twice a year, in the months of *Falgun* (March) and *Bhadrapad* (August), the complete service is preceded by an all-day fast. *Chauka* translates to 'square', and the ritual is named after the four-Foot Square within a wider rectangle in which it is held. Waving a ghee lamp and some camphor in front of the *Chauka*, a ritual known as *Arti*, is an essential component of the ceremony. A Mahant reads from the *Bijak* or another text during the *Chauka* ceremony and leads religious chants.

The initiation ceremony and the *Chauka* are frequently followed by a rite called *Jot Prasad* or *Jyoti Prasad*. It is a community Bhandara, during which devotees eat dough wafers and *Charanamit*, the water in which Kabir's sandals have been washed. This sacrament is seen as a special gift from Kabir that leads to salvation if taken in the right spirit.

Every morning and evening, Kabir Panthies are expected to worship God. It is typically accomplished by breaking a coconut and chanting a few prayers. They consider the coconut to be symbolic of the human head. They are not allowed to eat any portion of coconut from which the tuft has been taken, as it is believed that others broke it off as an offering to some god or spirit. They often crush coconuts at funerals, stating, '*I am shattering Yama's skull*' (*the God of death*). The bodies of bairagis are buried. Kabir Panthis either bury or cremate their dead. Lay follower in the Kabir Panthi community frequently creates singing ensembles to perform devotional songs.

Differences

There are many differences between the Kabir Panthies. One major cause of difference relates to the original possession text of *Bijak*. Bhagodasi Acharya Gaddi supposedly preserved the original text at Dhanauti. In contrast, Bhagodasi followers claimed that Kabir Panthis's original *Bijak* is with them.

I got an excellent opportunity to interact with Kabir Panthies from many parts of the country on the five hundred Nav-Nirvana Divas of Kabir Saheb in the Maghar district of Sant Kabir Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. However, the *Bijak* used by other branches has different interpretations of Kabir's saying and thoughts. A person interviewed regarding the text of *Bijak* stated

“Bahut se log Kabir Sahib Ke Vani Ke Sagrah Ko Nast Karna Chah Rahe The Isliye Hamare Guru Ji Usko(Bijak) Bachane Ke Liye Isko Leke Bagh Gye Aur Usko Chupake

Kar Rakhe Aur Aaj Bhi Dhanauti Math Me Rakha Hua Hi Isliye Ham Sahib Ke Sacche Anuyai Hai Kyo Ki Vani Bijak Ke Rup Me Hamare Pass Hi Hai.”

(Many people wanted to destroy the voice collection of Kabir Sahib, so my Guru ran with Bijak and saved it. It is now in Dhanauti Math. That is why we are the true successor of Kabir Sahib because his voice as Bijak is with us).

Similarly, Parakhi Panthi devotees emphasise Kabir's supreme humanity and divine nature, but non-Parakhi Panthi devotees stress Kabir's heavenly form. To a Parakhi Panthies, Kabir is no different from any other human being; the only distinction is Kabir's extremely high level of consciousness. One renounced scholar and saint, Abhilash Das, has written many books and translated many other books about the Kabir and Kabir Panth. A respondent said-

“Agar Kabir sahib Ke Puri Jindgi Dekho Te Sahib Puri Jimdgi Andhabishawas Karmkand, Poogapath Awtar Jati Byostha Alochna Aur Virodh Kiya. Jo Log Is Sab Ko Mante Hai Woh Kabir Panthi Kaise Ho Sakte Hai, Ham Log (Parkh Panth) Kisi Bhi Tarah Ke Karmkand Ko Nahi Mante Hai Yaha Tak Marne Par Bhi Ham Koi Sanskar Ni Karte Hai.”

(If we see the entire life of Kabir, we find that he fought against the superstitions, ritual theory of incarnation and caste system. Those who believe in these things how they can be called Kabir Panthies. We (Parakh Panthies) do not believe in any ritual; even if someone dies, we do not practice any kind of ritual).

There are other differences between the Kabir Chaura followers and the Dharamdasi followers. They both tend to deny each other from an actual Kabir Panth branch. Like Vachan Vanshi branch stresses that Kabir's real Panth originated from them. However, Kabir Chaura Math Kabir did not authorise any son of his disciple to lead the order because the saints live an austere life. However, in Dharamdas Panth, their descendant

eventually leads the Panth. While Vansh Dori Math, affiliated with the branch, was initially headed by Dharamdas and his kins in Madhya Pradesh, believes that many Kabir Panthies have deviated from the Dharamdasi branch itself.

Some other differences too can be observed among them. Vansh Dori Math generally has celibate Mahants. They do not allow their householder disciples to form math. While Bachan Vanshi Math does not maintain such restrictions, only the Vachan Vanshi branch has married Mahants. The religious legitimacy of forming- household Math increased the number of Vachan Vanshi Math considerably. Presently, Vachan Vanshi Math of the Dharamdas section of Chhattisgarh has more followers than any other Kabir Panth Math.

The Kabir Panthi branch's religious practices differ dramatically from other branches of Kabir Panthies. Each of them has a distinctive sign for identification. A Kabir Panthies follower can quickly recognise the Sadhu's branch. The forehead marks of sadhus and lay disciples also vary in Bandagi (salutation). Bandagi is one of the most distinctive rites performed by all Kabir Panthies. Here various types of bandagi practised by the different sects are being discussed.

In Bandagi, Bhagodasi and Jagudasi disciples do not touch their seniors' feet. They simply bow before their senior's crossed legs and seek blessings. In the Jagudasi branch, pupils bow three times in front of the seniors' crossed legs; in the Bhagodasi branch, they bow once. Instead of bowing down, Kabir-Chaura disciples sit on their feet with hands held forward in a begging stance, seeking blessings from seniors who sit crossed-legged. In the Bachan Vansh, a disciple must touch seniors' feet three times with the nodal point of his nose. He encircles the senior's foot with his fingers and touches it with his nose. A senior in this branch must do the same for his juniors in Bandagi, but this rarely happens.

The practice 'Charanamit' is of taking '*Pad only performed Prakshalan*' or by Vachan Vanshi disciples. Other branches reject this practice on hygienic grounds. The different forms of rituals are discussed in the next chapter.

Despite these disparities, the branches of Kabir Panth exhibit a common identity to outsiders. However, Kabir Panthies are different from the Ramanandi followers who worship Ram and Sita and constitute a dominant religious sect in North India. The peculiarity of a Kabir Panthies identity consists of its followers because they do not worship idols, which is a predominant aspect of Brahminical Hindu religion, including Ramanandis.

Dhamkheda Section of Chhattisgarh and Kabir Chaura Banaras:

A Comparative Analysis

A few distinctions in the character of these two branches can be summed up here. The Dharamdas section has its organisation, and the Benares branch does not recognise it; they question each other veracity. The Kabir Chaura, with its more ascetic bent, disapproves of married males serving as Gurus in Chhattisgarh. Similarly, the literature on the Dharamdas section generally ignores the Banaras section. On the other hand, Gurus and laypeople from Chhattisgarh pay visits to the Kabir Chaura and the shrines in Maghar. While the Banaras segment is mainly confined to Uttar Pradesh and the Chhattisgarh section is mostly in Madhya Pradesh, there are few areas where the two cohabit. In Rajasthan, for example, where the number of Kabir Panthies is minimal, those associated with the Kabir Chaura are referred to as Mul (original), while those associated with the Dhamakheda gurus are referred to as Vachan Vansh (stem of the world). The former belongs to higher castes, whereas the latter belongs to lower castes. The Kabir Panth appears more visible as a sect in Dhamakheda than in North India (Banaras). The Kabir Panth is one of two major sectarian movements in Chhattisgarh,

with the Satnamis being the other. It is just one among several sects in Banaras. Another explanation is that the Kabir Panthies in Chhattisgarh are predominantly from the *Panka* caste. On the other hand, the Kabir Panthies in Banaras have many Sadhus and lay members from various castes. In addition, Chhattisgarh has more Panth members than the Banaras division and has generated more literature. Therefore, the number of Kabir Panthies in both categories is exceedingly unreliable.

The two sections are almost identical in belief and ritual, suggesting a common origin and contact in the early years. So the features described below apply to both. After discussing the general features of significant branches of Kabir Panthies now on is discussed the commonality and differences between the Kabir Chaura of Banaras and the Dhamakheda branches of Chhattisgarh. The comparison emphasised the question of gender, the doctrine of the incarnation, marriage, Acharya Gaddi, ritual, caste and myth.

Table No. 1 Kabir and Kabir Panth: A Comparative View Point

Dhamkheda Math Chhattisgarh		Kabir Chaura Banaras
Foundation	Dharamdas founded the Dharamdasi branch of Kabir, and it is believed that he was the immediate disciple of Kabir. The Dharamdasi branch of Dhamkheda belongs to parivarik math. Later on, the main branch of the Dharamdasi branch shifted to Dhamkheda.	The Kabir Chaura Math was founded by one of his disciples, Sarvjeet belongs to South India. Later changed his name to Surti Gopal.

<p>Acharya Gaddi</p>	<p>Dharmdasi branch claim that they are the true successor of Kabir Saheb. They argue that Kabir appeared before the Dharamdas and instructed him to spread his teaching among the people. Kabir himself installed Acharya Gaddi for Dharmdas, as they stated. Kabir instructed that the 42 generations of Dharamdas would sit on Acharya Gaddi and spread the teaching of Kabir throughout society. Because of that, they are known as Vansh Gaddi.</p>	<p><i>Sadhus</i> of the Panth are celibate, the chair is not hereditary, and the community of <i>sadhus</i> elects the Mahant (head of 'Math'), who is in charge of the 'Math' arrangements. Sometimes serving Mahant nominates his successor.</p>
<p>Marriage</p>	<p>As per the instruction of Kabir that Dharamdas descendant would be head of the Acharya Gaddi till 42 generations, so they have to marry as per the wish of Kabir, and their elder son would become then head of the math, he has to complete 25 years as Mathadish of the Math. After 25 years, he is supposed to hand over his Acharya Gaddi to his elder son, and it has to continue till the 42nd generation. It is also</p>	<p>Saints of Kabir Chaura math of Banaras do not marry. They consider women an obstacle to getting liberation from this world. They believed that Loi was not Kabir's wife but a spiritual companion. According to one respondent, Kamal and Kamali was not his biological child. They were floating dead in the river, and Kabir made them alive.</p>

	<p>known as Bans Baylis. When the first wife is often unable to give birth to a male child, the head of Gaddi marries another woman. They also kept midwives. If she also bears a male child, then there ensues a struggle for Acharya Gaddi's succession.</p>	<p>Further, he said that they did not marry to get spiritual truth. So to know spiritual truth, it is necessary to be non-align with family because Gautam Budha got truth after separation from his family and wife.</p>
Gender	<p>Kabir was an egalitarian and reformist saint of the bhakti tradition. He fought against inequality and discrimination rooted in society and tried to establish a utopian society where everybody would live with love and compassion. Many Kabir Panthies argue that the Kabir believed that women symbolised Maya (illusion), an obstacle to getting salvation. However, the follower of Dharamdasi believes that women are not obstacles to salvation. As the person interviewed regarding gender mentioned-</p>	<p>Many Kabir Panthies argue that the Kabir believed that women symbolised Maya (illusion), an obstacle to getting salvation. However, the follower of Kabir Chaura Benares believed that women are obstacles to getting salvation. As the person interviewed regarding gender mentioned-</p> <p><i>Nari Itani Vishaili Hoti Hai Ki Matra Uske Sampark Se Purush Path Bhramit Ho Jata Hai Jaise Agar Garbhwati Stri Ke Samane Vishaila Sap Aa Jaye To Wah Andha Ho Jata Hai.</i></p> <p>(Women are so poisonous that man deviates from their path only</p>

	<p>“Sahib Ne khud Loui Se Vivah Kiya, Aur Unke Do Baache Huye Jo Kamal and Kamli Ke Naam Se Jane Jate the. Loui Unki Har Samay Unke Sath Rahi Chahe Wah Aadhyamik Yatra Hoy A Samjik. Kya Ham Kah Sakte Hai Ki Loui Kabir Sahib ki Moksha Prapt Karne Ke Liye Adchanb Thi. Kabir Sahib Ne Khud Ghrisath Jivan Ki Bat Karte the”.</p> <p>(Kabir himself marry with Loui, and he had two children. The name of the two children was Kamal and Kamali. Loui was always with Kabir on both a social and spiritual journey. Can we say that she was an obstacle for Kabir sahib to salvation? Kabir himself talked about domestic life.)</p> <p>Some of the Kabir Panthies (Kabir Chaura) do not marry. They formally believed that Kabir did not marry, Loi was his spiritual wife, and Kamal and Kamali were their son and daughter.</p>	<p>by coming in contact with her. So like a venomous snake, they got blind when he came in front of a pregnant woman.</p>
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Caste	Ideologically Kabir Panthies rejects caste, but it reflects in practice in terms of the follower of the Dharamdasi section of Chhattisgarh. Most of the followers come from the weaver caste. One reason for that is that Kabir himself was a weaver by caste. So most of the followers come from the low caste. Mostly they come from the <i>Panka</i> caste, whose occupation is weaving. That is why generally, people call it Panth of the weaver.	Kabir Chaura Benares's disciple comes from a diverse caste. Nevertheless, most of the official seats go to the Brahmin caste as Mahant are chosen among disciples of Math. It has been observed that caste polarisation occurred while selecting the Mahant and other officials.
Incarnation Theory	Dharamdasi section of Chhattisgarh has written myths regarding the incarnation of Kabir in their sacred text named 'Amalmul' and 'Sukh Nidan'. They believed that, like the Hindu god Kabir also took incarnation on earth to liberate human beings from this world, and they claimed that Kabir had been there in every era like a Hindu deity to counter them only.	Kabir Chaura Benares do not believe in incarnation theory. The considered Kabir was a spiritually evolved person. Moreover, he was a great social reformer Saint of his time, and Kabir wanted to establish an egalitarian society.

Conclusion

Despite their internal differences, Math from the same branch tries to appear united occasionally. Like the time of Sant Sammelan, the choosing of Acharya at the Acharya Gaddi and the Kabir fair, the cordial relationship of Math within the branch may be witnessed. Kabir Panthies periodically organises Sant Sammelan. Sadhus from various Math gather to debate in Sant Sammelan.

Amicable relations can be seen among Kabir Panthies irrespective of their sect, Maths, Mahants and differences. This can also be observed when selecting an Acharya when Mahants of senior branches assemble in large numbers. They participate in every procedure of selecting an Acharya. At that time, despite the Mahants' internal rivalry, their primary concern remains the smooth selection of their Acharya. It was noticed that Math of all branches assemble under the banner of the Acharya Gaddi to which they belong at the Maghar fair.

However, the interaction between distinct branches is not always friendly. In most cases, a branch will not allow other branches to interfere in its functions. A Math may occasionally invite a Mahant from another Kabir Panthi branch as a guest or observer in Mahant selection based on personal ties. At the All India Kabir Panthies Sant Sammelan, Mahants from various branches speak from the same platform without displaying their differences. Instead, they strive to paint an image of an integrated Kabir Panthi community before the audience.

It seems that the creation of a new self within Kabir Panth is associated with transforming an unjust world held in place by the dominant symbolic order. At the same time, followers constructed social views of Kabir's philosophy in different regions differently. Somewhere Kabir is interpreted by its follower as Saguni and, in some places, as Nirguni. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, Kabir is considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and in north India, he is associated with Nirguni. Here is a comparison of two math of north India, the Chhattisgarh section Dhamkheda and Kabir Chaura of Banaras.

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Chapter-5
Kabir and Kabir
Panth - Hinduism to
Alternative
Emancipation



Chapter-5

Kabir and Kabir Panth - Hinduism to Alternative Emancipation

Introduction

Sociologists have discussed the religious emancipation of the marginalised from a different perspective. For example, Karl Marx stated that religion is an instrument in the hands of a dominant class to justify their position of religious and class superiority and exploit the lower section of the society. Further, Marx argued that achieving religious emancipation is possible by rupturing prevailing power structures. At the same time, Max Weber mentions the religion of the non-privileged, where the marginal section of the society revolted against the established form of religion with the idea of universalistic principles. So in This context, the chapter focuses on the religion of the marginalised (Shudra and untouchable), which is studied in terms of religion's epistemology and discusses three socio-religious revolutions in India. In ancient times, the first revolution was Buddhism, and the second revolution was the Bhakti movement, particularly by *Nirguna* saint Kabir in the medieval period. Finally, Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar brought the third revolution in modern times. Further, the chapter explores the emancipation of the lower section of society through Kabir and Kabir Panth.

Religion is an essential component of human culture. It has gone through several phases and encountered various events throughout its development. As human civilisation progressed, there has been a change in the outlook and engagement with religion. Nevertheless, religion has been a study subject for a long time. There are numerous techniques for studying religion, each of which sheds light on different aspects of social

reality. Several schools of thought aim to research religion and focus on various aspects of social reality, such as theologians, philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists, who want to examine religion as a social process (Beteille, 2002:185). The theological school of thought is one of the oldest branches that study religion and is concerned with the question of truths and righteousness of belief and practices. The second school, known as the philosophy of religion, had two main components- one is theology, the other is psychology, and the third is the latest school in sociological approach or inquiry to religion. According to Andre Beteille, the sociology of religion is concerned with the "broader interest in studying society as a whole like class, gender, nation, and large politics (Beteille, 2002:184). "Pre-sociological debates on religion were philosophical and polarised; they revolved around its truth and falsity, and accordingly as help or hindrance to human progress." (Aloysius, 1998:2).

On the one hand, religion represented the ultimate truth, and it had answers for everything that works for the welfare of society at large. There was a prevalent and taken-for-granted worldview that some phenomena are beyond human understanding and cannot be questioned. On the other hand, the rationalist or the followers of the scientific viewpoint states that religion represents the various puzzling natural phenomena, which could be explained and understood by the advent of science. It challenged the taken-for-granted understanding of religion and demanded proofs and verifications. As G. Aloysius states, "The birth and growth of the anthro-sociological study of religion is to be contextualised within this religion in transformation as a part of the larger social and societal transition" (ibid, 2). The emergence of the sociological approach to religion, according to Andre Beteille, resulted in the decline of the theological approach.

Religion and the Religion of the Marginalised

Religion

Many arguments have erupted due to the demystification of religion, as shown in the writings of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. It was further unravelled by revealing society's baseness and demonstrating that religion is socially constructed like other human institutions (Aloysius, 1998:3). Aloysius further said that the journey of religion from divine revelation to socially produced phenomenon needs to be contextualised in a more extensive process of ideological democratisation of society. Sociological approaches have attempted to comprehend the relations and dialogue between religion and other social realms. They have tried to figure out how religion contributes to the formation of human society. Beteille believes that there are two essential features of the sociological approach. The first is the extensive use of the comparative method, and the second is an investigation of religious beliefs, practices and institutions about other aspects of society and culture. Furthermore, the most crucial sociological approach is concerned with detachment, objectivity and value-neutrality (Beteille, 2002:187).

As the discipline of sociology is a product of modernity, it has changed the complete understanding of this particular discourse. Emile Durkheim suggests that religion is very social and integral in forging solidarity. Religious representations are the collective representations of society.

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them. The element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first, for by showing that

the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing” (Durkheim, 1915:46).

For Karl Marx, religion is a tool the ruling class uses to wield power and influence over the masses. It is a part of the ruling class's agenda to exploit the masses. It is the false consciousness leading to the alienation of the individual. However, Marx was more concerned with the realisation of the potential of the human being. So in the words of Marx,

“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people” (Marx, 1970:131).

For Marx, religion is an obstacle through its illusionary images in realising actual human potential (Marx, 1970:131-132). In this process, man is alienated from the self, society and nature. Man can reclaim his reason as an actual human being and realise his full potential by questioning religion. Marx was preoccupied with the concept of universal brotherhood.

Max Weber (1966) inaugurated a new phase in understanding the relations between religion and other human behaviour. He wanted a broad comparative understanding of the relations between religious orientations and the social structure. His sociological perspective moved beyond the reductionist economic focus of Marx's and the positivistic focus of Comte's history studies. Instead, Weber was more interested in the question of religious influences on modern capitalism (ibid, 1966:xiii). Weber's primary interest is in religion as a source of the dynamics of social change, not religion as a reinforcement of stability in societies (ibid, 1966:xxx).

Weber was more interested in interpreting the social reality, which must begin with interpretive understanding and lead us to causal explanation (Madan, 1991:7). The external courses of religious behaviour are so diverse that an understanding of this

behaviour can only be achieved from the viewpoint of the subjective experiences, ideas, and purposes of the individuals concerned- from the viewpoint of the religious behaviour's meaning (Weber, 1996:1). In Weber's formulation, the religious fate of humankind is consciously constructed by the human beings through the world images they fashion and the social institutions they construct (Madan, 1991:99).

The sociological tradition pioneered a new approach to religious phenomena. The people's dogmas, practices, and beliefs were questioned and scrutinised. The historically excluded and marginalised masses challenged the monopoly of a few on socio-religious resources. As a result, religion, which had previously been a faraway dream for the masses, found its way to them through protest. As a result, the ruling elites, mainly priests, lost their sanctimonious attitude. The emergence of the phenomenological-anthropological method marked a significant break from functionalist sociology and neo-cultural Marxist replies to economist determinism. According to Aloysius (1998), studying religion involves two stages: first, analysing the system of meaning embodied in the symbols that make up religion itself, and second, linking these systems to social-structural and psychological processes, But it operates in the larger social structure as religion is constructed first and given meaning in the second stage. There can be pluralist, competitive, and conflictive when giving meaning to a larger social structure.

Although the classical thinkers hold entirely different views on religion, nobody argued that religion would wither from human society. On the contrary, they believed that as human society progresses through modernity, the impact of religion on society will decline. Religion had been there in society, although not in the same form. It has changed itself and affected the various aspects of human life differently. Peter Berger

(1973) argues that man and society are in a dialectical relationship. Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established (Berger, 1973:34).

It plays a significant role in world-building. Human beings construct and assign meaning to the world around them and attach meaning to it. With the coming of modernity, it was anticipated that the importance of religion in human life would decline as we understand that modernity stands for rationality which prevails upon irrationality, reasoning over superstition, or science over religion. So our behaviour will be guided by a secular understanding of society, polity and economy.

The Religion of the Marginalised

We all know that human society is divided into castes, classes, genders, and races. However, in nature, no society is homogeneous, and people and groups have diverse subjectivities depending on where they are in the society. Therefore, it is vital to highlight how religion excludes some groups of individuals from society in this setting. How will Sociology of Religion make sense of the religiosity of the marginalised or excluded?

Max Weber was one of the first to advocate for non-privileged religions in the history of the sociology of religion. He defends people's religious differences, and his work explains how the marginal have distinct religious beliefs from the upper classes. According to Weber, religious sentiments among people differ depending on their social and economic privilege levels.

“This is indeed highly checkered diversification, which at least proves that a uniform determinism of religion by economic forces never existed among the artisan class”
(Weber, 1966:96).

Insofar as the modern proletariat has a distinctive religious position, it is characterised by indifference to or rejection of religions common to large groups of the modern bourgeoisie (ibid, 100). According to him, the religion of the disprivileged stood for egalitarian principles, trying to address the various issues being ignored by the mainstream religion. Furthermore, he views that the religiosity of the disprivileged was concerned with suffering rather than salvation which is more evident among the privileged.

Given these circumstances, we must examine the oppressor's religion in depth. This thesis will aim to contextualise the religion of Dalits and tribal and lower-class members of society who are not part of the dominant religious sphere. According to Aloysius, awareness of oppression is a fundamental transformation in the entire discourse of religion.

“Consciousness of oppression, first of all, indicates an epistemological shift. Consciousness of oppression is also an urge, a will, towards change in social praxis”
(Aloysius, 1998:7).

The emergence of oppression consciousness results from various societal changes, particularly in the economic, political, and social realms linked to daily activities and marginalised people's struggles. So, despite their subordination and submersion, these protest religions build an ethical worldview.

First, they advocate for an ethically ideal worldview symbolised as egalitarian, criticising the undemocratic and monopolistic practices of a few who exploit the masses on religious grounds. Secondly, the religion of the oppressed is an option, not given; the subject becomes the author of its destiny, neither the priest nor the God. It is the rejection of the given and acceptance of something based on choice. Third, oppressed people's religion is centred on a single charismatic-messianic figure, and it is always

expressed in terms of sociality and collectively. Fourth, the motto is "*Emancipation as Salvation*". It is done in a way that makes it an identity and makes the entire belief system a socio-cultural principle for fighting oppression. As a result, oppressed people's religion is a weapon of emancipation, promising liberation from current exploitation, oppression, and powerlessness.

Modernity opens doors that were formerly deemed sacrosanct and inaccessible to ordinary people. Modernity has allowed the masses to critically engage with themselves, their lives, and the causes of their misery. Religion was brought down to earth by anthropological and sociological investigations (Aloysius 1998:3). Nothing was sacred, and everything was subject to the practitioners' rigorous scrutiny. If modernity represented ideas, values, and principles that challenged an unjust, undemocratic, and inequitable society for its ill practices, where a small number of people control and monopolies resources, and argued for the democratisation of the entire process and proposed emancipation of the oppressed masses. It puts a strain on the dominants' power structures.

The few elites at the top of the system control and monopolise the resources. Outside of this fold, certain parts were maintained. The marginalised and oppressed have been exploited and subjugated throughout history. Society's outcasts were excluded. As a result, the Indian situation has witnessed exploitation and oppression of the marginalised for thousands of years. The Hindu religion (specifically, its Brahminical element) has played a critical role in maintaining and perpetuating the oppressive system. The Bhakti movement responded to the oppressive system, and in that, the leading role was played by Kabir. Let us briefly discuss the structure of Hinduism, which was a tool of exploitation for the marginalised.

Critical Conjecture of Hinduism

It was believed that pre-historic Indian society was a casteless millennium of equality, plenty and piety. The distention between Aryans and non-Aryans first appeared in Rig- the Vedas. The Aryan 'Vis' or tribe was divided into four groups based on the emergence of different pursuits such as agriculture, cattle rearing, trade and service. Those who indulged in economic activities related to trade and commerce were known as Vaisya. The surplus wealth was diverted towards maintaining the Brahman and the Kshatriya. These three Varnas (castes) were not known by the colour of their skin but by their occupation (Sharma, 2007:33). The Brahman performed religious and ritual activities for the welfare of society. He studied the Vedas and formulated norms (Dharma) for all sections of society. The Kshatriya's duty was to defend the country and maintain law and order. Over time, these three Varnas specialised in their functions and formed a social hierarchy in which the Brahmanas were placed at the top, the Kshatriya ranked below, and the Vaishya occupied the third rank. The fourth rank was of the Shudra or Dasa, who served the three higher groups. The 'Purusasukta' of the Rig-Veda gives a mythological story of the origin of the four Varnas from Bramha -from the mouth (Brahmanas), arms (Kshatriyas), thighs (Vaishyas) and feet (Shudras) of the lord Brahma (ibid, 33).

Varnas and Caste

Varnas are different from caste groups. Varna provides an ideological framework, whereas caste reflects ground realities. In other words, it can be said that Varnas refer to broad divisions of Hindu society, whereas castes groups refer to specific endogamous groups, numbering more than three thousand. Varnas are an Indian general phenomenon, whereas castes are localised groups (ibid, 33-34).

Caste

Hinduism is divided into numerous groups of variables in size, small and big, based on the consideration of birth. These groups are known as Jati or Castes. The first distinctive characteristic of the caste is the restriction on intermarriage. In Hindu society, every person must marry within his caste; if there are sub-groups within one's caste, a person is required to marry within his sub-caste (MSG, 2009:169). The caste system is the hereditary occupation, every caste has one, but in exceptional cases, two or three occupations are assigned. Various castes within the society do not enjoy equal rank. Some castes are considered to be superior, while others are inferior. Each caste is associated with these superiorities and inferiority levels of purity and pollution. Every person acquires this rank based on his birth within a specific caste, and his achievements do not bring about any change in it. It is related to the religious belief in purity (ibid, 169-70).

Varnashrama Dharma

Among the four Varnas, the Brahman Varna is considered the superior, and the Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra take the second, third, and fourth place, respectively. The Brahman Varna's superiority is related to their occupation's ritual purity. Kshatriya was assigned to rule and protect their territories. The Vaishyas, whose interests were connected with economic power, greatly valued stability in the economic sphere and were not inclined to enter the Kshatriya Varna. The Shudras, fourth in the Varna hierarchy, accepted their lowest position out of helplessness. Still, they cherished the desire to enter the Kshatriya Varna if a suitable opportunity was available (MSG, 2009:173-74). In brief, about the ranking in the caste system, we find that although the Varna system posits a definite social rank for each caste. The folk system of hierarchy, which we find in operation in actual social life, has considerable social flexibility and

allows within limits the possibility of change in the social rank of a caste. A caste or a sub-caste group can make a successful attempt to change its traditional social rank. In the absence of centralised political power in historical times, there was considerable flexibility in various castes' social rank and functioning to bring about necessary change in changing situations.

Brahmanism

The history of the development of economic thought in India can be traced back to the times when man started recording his ideas. According to Indian Philosophy, history is defined as a narrative of the past that exemplifies the fulfilment of four ideals of life: Dharma (the doctrine of duty), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (worldly pleasures), and Moksha (Salvation). These ideals have been the regulator of human life and activities in this country since immemorial. The Principle of Dharma leads one to recognise unity in the diversity of human life, aspiration, and values (Hajela, 2014:878). If Dharma and Moksha refer to the ethical aspects of human life, Artha and Kama represent the material side. Dharma, Artha, and the Kama are to be pursued to achieve Moksha. Artha, which means the material objects, is indispensable for the proper conduct of life. The Kama helps the procreation of the species.

Indian philosophy has always distinguished between purity and pollution. Therefore, the Indian sages and seers have attached importance to Artha with a sense of purpose. To them, the accumulation of wealth is essential only for the fulfilment of Dharma. Any excess of it would make a man drift away from the achievement of Moksha (ibid, 879). Indian philosophy thus emphasises rigid discipline and self-control to prevent people from falling into avarice and greed and doing things that are not good for all (ibid, 880). The ancient philosophy dragged the Indian economy backwards and kept it in stagnation. No one had an idea to study the causes of poverty from the perspective of

religion, caste, or disparity. In the economic history of India, for the first time, Phule studied the causes of the backwardness of India from the perspective of religion. For the first time, he used the new name Brahmanism despite Hinduism. Max Weber says *'I use the word Brahmanism rather than Hinduism because I think it better represents the nature of the religion both because of the centrality of the notion of Brahman and the apex position of the Brahmins. 'Only in recent literature has the Indians begun to designate their religious affiliation as Hinduism. It is the official designation of the English census for the religious complex, also described in Germany as "Brahmanism" (Weber, 2007:4).*

Caste is the product of Brahmanism. The existence of caste gives apex position in society with religious, political, and economic privileges. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar describes the effects of the caste and its existence.

The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed the public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy for the deserving (Ambedkar, 2004:46).

According to various Indian and foreign philosophers, Indian society is divided into various caste groups. Consequently, the caste system becomes a big hurdle for economic and spiritual progress in the lower strata of society. Therefore, three social movements in India revolted against the hierarchical social order. It provided the spiritual right to subaltern strata of society regarding accessing religious scripture and doing Bhakti to God. First in ancient India was Buddhism, which revolted against the oppression of caste and preached equality for all.

Furthermore, second was the Bhakti movement in the medieval period. Finally, Phule, Dr Ambedkar, and Periyar, the third modern social thinker, advocated equality irrespective of caste, class and gender. Let us have a brief discussion about Buddhism.

The Emergence of Emancipatory Approach

Buddhism

In the Indian context, a social reformer revolted against the established religion of Hinduism. However, it was eminent movements like Buddhism which revolted against Brahmanical Hinduism. During Buddhism, Indian society was agriculturally based in that animals played a vital role. So, there was hugely sacrifice of the animal in the name of the ritual. So, Buddha revolted against Vedic sacrifice, eager pity for the safeguard of the animal agriculture economy.

Further, they also called for social force to their aid. Buddha condemned animal sacrifices and Vedic ritualism. He extended the thought of the kindness of humanity suffering from the bondage of birth, old age, sickness, and death. The Buddha preached in ordinary men's language and asserted an everyday spirituality of all men, irrespective of caste, class, gender, and high and low. He rejected all kinds of superstition, rituals, and Brahmins' authority dividing the society into high and low.

"Buddha argued that the world is better for the triumph of natural law over supernaturalism. By announcing a religion which proclaimed that each man could gain salvation for himself without the mediation of a priest or reference to God, he increases the respect for human nature and raises the tone of morality" (Radhakrishnan, 2019:298-99)

For Buddha, Dhamma means the purity of body, speech, and purity of mind. Dhamma means living in Nibbana or practising self-control over passions to enable one to walk

on the path of righteousness. Buddha had no faith in inequality based on caste, creed, or sex and believed that worth, not birth, is the man's measure. Therefore, he gives liberty to each and everyone for their entire development. When there is equality and liberty, there will be fraternity.

Buddha denounced the caste system, which was the tool of the division of labour in society and did not consider divinity in the sense of purity and impurity. Under Buddhism, the elevated position of Shudra and women was higher than in the Vedic period. In this context, Ambedkar observed:

"To put it briefly, a Shudra under the Buddhist regime could acquire property, learn, and even become a king. May, he could even rise to the highest rung of the social ladder occupied by the Brahmin in the Vedic Regime. The Buddhist order of Bhikshus was the counterpart of the Vedic order of Brahmins. The Shudra could never aspire to be a Brahmin in the Vedic regime but could become a Bhikshu and occupy the same status and dignity as the Brahmin. The elevation of the status of the Shudra and women was so much the result of the gospel of Buddhism that Buddhism was called its enemies as the Shudra religion (i.e. the religion of the low classes)" (Ambedkar, 1979:309-10).

On the other hand, Ambedkar also found a significant change in the status of women under Buddhism. Buddha was an apostle of love and compassion. The compassionate Buddha stood for sex equality. He said to Ananda, *"I hold that women are as capable as men in reaching Nibbana. I am not an upholder of the doctrine of sex inequality"* (Ambedkar, 2011:136). The Hindu Code Bill proposed by Ambedkar is the testimony to the fact that he was an active supporter of gender equality

"Similar change is noticeable in the case of women. Under the Buddhist regimes, she becomes a free person. The marriage did not make her a slave. Marriage under the

Buddhist was a contract. Under the Buddhist regime, she could acquire property, she could acquire learning, and what was unique, she could become a member of the Buddhist order of Nuns and reach the same status and dignity as a Brahmin” (Ambedkar, 1979:310).

Similarly, Gail Omvedt stated that Buddhism was the first movement to attack Hinduism's malpractice and challenge caste practices in the dominant religion. There was tremendous exploitation of Hinduism in the Varna system. Buddha transformed society, provided new alternatives to the lower strata of society, and preached equality and liberation from suffering. Furthermore, put original Utopia was a society of equalitarianism, even communism. The emphasis was on seeking transformation of the individuals; there was constant stress on the effort of the empirical self (Omvedt, 2008:16). Therefore, it can be said that Buddha emphasised action and did not give importance to birth.

Over a period, Buddhism weakened due to socio-political, and society got stuck into malpractices in terms of purity and pollution. Therefore, the lower section of society, particularly Shudra, was untouchable, and women were forced to live in miserable conditions. Once again, Varna and the caste system become deciding factors of individual fate. At a later stage, Islam invaded India and became ruler of India, Brahmanism lost its religious power, and Kshatriya lost its ruling power. So, the lower strata of the society got an opportunity to revolt against caste discrimination as Krishna Sharma (1987) argued that caste discrimination had strongly played a role in the emergence of the Bhakti movement. This Bhakti movement had attracted large-scale participation of the masses in the emergent sects. Let us have a brief discussion about the Bhakti movement.

Bhakti Movement

Bhakti provided the path to eliminate the cycle of birth and death and achieve salvation in much holy Hindu scripture. Nevertheless, this form of Bhakti was limited to specific sections of society and excluded society's lower strata. Later the nature of the Bhakti movement differed from its early form, which talks about in Hindu sacred texts. Bhakti saints come from different social groups and have diverse backgrounds. Some of the dominant figures in the bhakti tradition were Ravidas, Ghasi das, Mahima Swami, and Kabir, who revolted against the oppressive form of the Brahmanical order and advocated equality. They believed in equality, preached brotherhood, and professed that everybody achieves salvation by Bhakti. They were against meaningless rituals, superstition, and orthodoxy and criticised idol worship and caste distinction. Their criticism was not confined only to Hinduism but also to Muslims. The form of devotion was not confined to a particular form of worship. It spreads across multiple faiths and dialects and expresses mystical and phenomenological language. They believe that salvation was the ultimate goal of human life that Bhakti could achieve.

The bhakti movement provided an opportunity for the lower section of the society with an association with God but denied in other social, political, and economic spheres. With the British coming, modern education was open to all, including *Shudra*, *Ati-shudra*, and women. Some people got an opportunity to get educated; among them was Phule. He understands discourse of the Brahminism. He revolted against discrimination and caste practices and deconstructed the mythology of Hinduism. He wanted to know the reason for the backwardness of the lower section of society.

Phule

During his study, Phule found reasons for the backwardness and poverty of the *Shudra* and *Ati-Shudras* in Hinduism and saw massive exploitation in the name of religion, such as *karmakand*, superstition, and countless myths. Scriptures, texts such as Vedas, Puranas, and epic myths were the primary sources of superstition, the ritual of the Brahmin's superiority, and their privileges. So, in this system, the Brahman was at the top of the religious hierarchy; henceforth, 'Kshatriya do not have the right to kill Brahmans, conveys nothing at all about those two groups; whereas 'Rulers do not have the right to kill priest (Doniger & smith, 2000 xxvi). So, there was a need to deconstruct the myths and the stories that justified hierarchical Hindu social order and make aware and conscious of the Shudra and AtiShudras about their indigenous and prowess. So, it can be said that Phule's attempt was not to write history but to make them realise their condition and its roots; as G.P. Deshpande observed,

Phule attacks the Avatara Kalpana. He heaps utter scorn on the various godheads. However, his analysis of the various avatars may not stand the scrutiny of either history or even plain reason. But that is perhaps not the issue. He attempted to subvert the Brahmanical structure of ideas and beliefs to emerge a new, more equitable order. His is a Shudra-AtiShudra rewriting of history. That is its purpose: subversion and destruction. His writings on the Brahmanical gods and the history of the Aryan race have to be understood in terms of their purpose. Whether the Aryans constitute a race at all or came from Iran or anywhere else is beside the point. Phule was not writing history. He rejected Brahminical history from a Shudra-AtiShudra perspective (Deshpande, 2010:7).

On the other hand, In Gulamgiri, *Phule begins his historical analysis with Hindu legends of creation and incarnation as recounted in the Bhagwat and Purana and*

attempts to analyse these stories and retell them as 'they are, as historical stories of power, control and domination (Devare, 2011:65).

Phule attempts to construct in a similar vein unity, such as Brahmins and Shudras moving through history within such a secular cylindrical time. Through history, his objective is to show that Brahmins have exploited Shudras and Ati-Shudras by fabricating their holy books and that there is no natural or divine basis for this exploitation. He believed this would open the Shudra's eyes and break their shackles; hence his effort to historical famous Hindu legends which form a part of the everyday world of the Shudras and Ati Shudras, who constitute the mass of society (Davare, 2011:55).

Suppose one wanted to deconstruct their history and its social structure. Hence, there was a need to be skeptical about their truth and reality, which was prevalent in society. So, Descartes decided to become so; in this context, it can be said that Phule became skeptical about Hinduism's sacred text, which justified the suffering and pain of the people. So, to overcome the pain and agony of the hierarchical Hindu social order yoke. So, Phule questioned ideology, religious practice, and the myth of Hinduism in his writings seen. Omvedt translated Phule's work:

*All ideologies have decayed,
No one views comprehensively.
What is trivial, what is great,
cannot be understood.
Philosophies fill the market,
Gods have become a cacophony.
to the enticements of desire
All, everywhere, it has decayed.*

truth and untruth cannot be assayed.

this is how people have become one

everywhere.

There is a cacophony of opinions,

no one heeds another.

each one thinks the opinion

he has found is great.

Pride in untruth

Dooms them to destruction-

so, the wise people say,

seek truth.

(Phule, 1990:440; translated by Omvedt and Bharat Patankar) (as cited Omvedt, 2011:29)

Therefore, rejection of history was a primary objective of Phule's work. Consequently, he wanted to rewrite history, which could give esteem and freedom to the Shudra *Ati-Shudra*. So, in this context, *Phule radically reinterprets puranic mythology, seeing the various avatars of Vishnu as stages in the conquest of India while taking the rakshas as the hero of the people. Central to this interpretation was the figure of Bali Raja. In Phule's reconfiguration of the Bali Raja was, original Maharashtra regaining over an ideal state of beneficence casteless and prosperity, with the popular gods of the regions.* (Omvedt, 2011:25)

So, Phule took the initiative to deconstruct the history of Brahminism and reconstruct society based on dignity and an egalitarian society. Phule criticised the inherent hypocrisies of Hindu society. *Phule felt the need to establish a religious alternative. His last in his book sarvajanic Satya Dharma, where noble-minded equalitarian theism*

also projects strong male-female equality (Omvedt, 2011:27), which becomes the source of inspiration for the common masses. He saw the Hindu social order as exploitative, and Ram symbolised Brahmanism. He wanted to deconstruct Ram Rajya and replace him with Bali Rajya. Jyotirao Phule talked about the alternate religion close to deism and questioned Brahmanical orthodoxy. Phule also began to critique the caste system and attack Vedas and the introductory text of Hinduism. He considered Vedas as a form of false consciousness. After the Phule, his legacy was carried by Periyar and Dr B.R Ambedkar.

E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker

Periyar conflicted Hinduism with Aryanism and Brahminism by using the prevailing narrative of Hinduism as created by Orientalist academia and native Brahmin intellectuals. He accused Hinduism of degrading women, lower castes, and Dalits and providing barriers to their emancipation (Pandian, 2007:196–205). He maintained that self-willed reason alone might restore the true worth of individuals oppressed by religion by establishing rationality and religion as opposed. He used his rationalism to religious texts and mythology, reading them literally to expose them as fantasy tales. He disproved religious rites, festivals, and behaviours. In short, Ramasamy engaged with Hinduism as a unified field of false beliefs (Pandian, 2007:197). He considered the rationalist campaign critical in confronting Hindu religionists and empowering the lower castes. As he puts it, *“What I am doing is not political work—but work for rationalism! Rationalism must spread among the people. Rationalism must be taught to those who have been brutally oppressed and must be humanized”* (Ramaswamy, 2013:265). Rationalism was humanity's life, and the Brahmins, god, religion, and the texts denied it to the lower castes. (ibid, 290).

Periyar was a harsh critic of both Brahmins and non-Brahmins who upheld Hinduism. He claimed that imitating Brahmin habits was harmful to women because they lost their economic independence (Ramaswamy, 1992:97). He frequently condemned Hindu epics.

It is worth noting that the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita were at the heart of M.K. Gandhi's Indian national imagination. Still, other more conservative Hindu leaders considered the Manu Smriti and its stringent social code as a guidebook for an ideal social order. Ambedkar took a hard line against these scriptures, particularly the Manu Smriti and the Bhagavad Gita, and his work influenced Periyar. On the other hand, Periyar became well-known for his radical re-reading of the Ramayana, which saw the *Asura Ravana* transformed into a lower-caste hero (Richman, 2008:12-15).

Periyar questioned Ramraj's portrayal as an ideal state. Ramraj represented the superiority of Brahminism over the interests of the lower castes, North Indian-Aryans over South Indian-Dravidians, patriarchy over women's freedom, and hierarchy over equality. According to Paula Richman, Ramraj was a 'pernicious Brahminic fabrication devised to deter non-brahmins from challenging the status quo' (Richman, 1995:633). Periyar read the Ramayana 'as a dramatised depiction of the real Aryan attack on and subjugation of Dravidians and 'sought to demythologise and denigrate the epic,' challenging both liberal and conservative Hindu leaders (ibid, 634). If Periyar did not believe in the Ramayana, one would wonder why he would engage with it and its principles in such depth. Periyar maintained that the Ramayana, in both Valmiki's Sanskrit and Kamban's Tamil versions, continued to have moral and social influence among Tamils of his time and was thus the rationalists' responsibility to uncover the actual character of these books (Periyar, 2012:iv-v). Ramraj, in Periyar's opinion, symbolised a Hindu dystopia that benefited the few at the expense of the masses.

Periyar and his supporters saw opposition to the Ramayana as crucial, as Richman neatly summarises:

According to Ramaswami, “outsider oppression was a historical occurrence, but the oppressors were from the Aryan north, not beyond the subcontinent. Rama and his army were the imperial powers, as they assassinated Dravidian leaders and imposed a Brahminic social system. In addition, Rama's Aryan descendants were still working in New Delhi, legitimising caste privilege to keep Dravidians in slavery. While others rejoiced in their liberation, Ramaswami considered himself still fighting Aryan oppression” (Richman, 1995:650).

Periyar's objective was to create a rational, casteless society; he wanted emancipated humans from suffering. In his struggle, he enlisted the help of the *Asura Ravana*. Periyar praises Ravana's good attributes, like as courage, heroism, strength, knowledge, and compassion, in the Valmiki Ramayana (incidentally, he utilises the same scripture to highlight Rama's negative qualities! (Periyar, 2018:49). According to Periyar, Ravana was opposed by the Devas and priests because they performed sacrifices of live beings. However, he governed in a much-civilised manner.

According to Periyar, Rama symbolised an invading Aryan force that represented Brahminism and the subjection of the lower castes, whereas Ravana was a Dravidian native who fought the invasion. Periyar engages in a blend of literal and metaphorical reading here. Both Rama and Ravana are North Indian rulers in Valmiki's Ramayana, whereas Rama and Ravana are Tamil-speaking kings in Kamba Ramayana. While Rama is represented to support the Brahminical order in both scriptures, neither implies that Ravana stood for anticaste egalitarianism. Periyar attempts to portray Ravana as a man who defied divinely sanctioned rule. Periyar's support of Ravana should not be seen as a belief in the historical presence of this mythological figure. Periyar

strategically appropriates Ravana to counteract an Aryan icon, which he associates with the illegitimate exercise of high-caste social and political authority. Ravana, the noble Asura, was nothing more to Periyar than a handy tool from mythological sources to oppose the Hindu God's and Hindu State's hegemonic claims.

Periyar considered the Buddha an inspiration for the Dravidar Kazhagam's rationalist, atheist, and anticaste politics. Periyar maintained that Buddhism was established on the notion that there was no god, no soul, and no belief in the permanency of anything. Therefore, it could not be called a religion in the usual sense because it was based on research and reason (Ramasamy, 2005:19–20). He considered Buddhism “*an atom bomb to Aryanism*” and backed Ambedkar's denial of Hindu gods and departure from Hinduism. (ibid: 22). Periyar saw Buddhism as an emancipatory choice for Dalits and lower castes and a scientific, rationalist approach to life, inspired by Dalit leaders like Narasu, Thass, and Ambedkar. “*I am a Buddha without a doubt.*” *Why, not only me, but all of us who utilise logic are Buddhas,*” Periyar declared (ibid, 27). However, his insistence on rationalism's supremacy and his contempt for religious authority moved him closer to Buddhism, which he considered a philosophy of reason that foreshadowed his thought. Despite his admiration for Buddhism, he refused to legally convert since he believed having no religion was preferable to practising the best faith.

B. R Ambedkar

However, Babasaheb Ambedkar was not a traditional believer in religion. His approach toward religion was rational, social, and utilitarian. He denounced Hinduism and accepted Buddhism. In his view, Buddhism consists of Pragya and Karuna. Pragya was understanding of actual knowledge, and Karuna was love and compassion. It was believed that Pragya and Karuna, the 'cornerstone' of the dhamma, were propounded by Lord Buddha. Therefore, he defines dhamma in terms of Pragya and Karuna.

The question arose why did Ambedkar reject Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. It was, however, a fact that he had to suffer a lot during his childhood because of his birth in a so-called untouchable Mahar Caste. Nevertheless, he continued his education despite many odds and obstacles. At this juncture, only he must have become determined to wage war against the inhuman institution of untouchability and humiliating cast system based on Hinduism.

Aruna Gnanadason (1997) stated that spirituality within Buddhism through conversion resorted by Ambedkar was a political and religious protest that sustains the Dalit struggle even today for an egalitarian society. It provided 'inner life' to the Dalit Buddhists out of hierarchical ideas of Hinduism. Such spiritual quest has strengthened the oppressed groups (Gnanadason, 1997:465). Thus, the lower strata use spirituality in their struggle for emancipation from the hierarchical social order of Hinduism and justice in the larger view. Mark Juergensmeyer (1982) discussed that religious movement could promote social change successfully. It also coincides with political movements. In other words, religion offers a strong sense of community and a religious utopia. Which helped oppressed groups resort to religion for social upliftment. So, in this context, it can be said that Buddhism was a 'political religion' offered to the untouchables of India to counter the classic Hindu caste system to fight religion with religion. In other words, Cosimo Zene (2016) treats 'spirituality' as parallel to 'inner life'. They question the availability of spirituality of subalterns and Dalits....the idea of "*inner life*" or "*spirituality*" has hardly been considered as part of the process through which subalterns express their agony to attain recognition of their '*full humanity*' (Zene, 2016:540). So, Buddhism provided two kinds of freedom to the subaltern group such as social and political freedom.

According to Ambedkar, the issue of conversion should be viewed through two aspects- firstly, social and religious; second, material and spiritual (Ambedkar, 1979:117). He did not consider religion as the end, but it is imbibed holistically as a means of a larger goal, including brotherhood and humanism. He shows that the Hindu order is entrenched in the caste system, which is deeply rooted in the Hindu religious order. He further argued that not only spiritual or religious matters but whole aspects of human life are governed by the unequal system, graded inequality by nature. Therefore, all aspects of life are bounded by Hinduism, including economic, political, social, and psychological. It is impossible to make an equal and genuinely egalitarian society without abolishing the Hindu religion based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. In other words, Ambedkar is like those religions which have bounded by core values of liberty, equality, and fraternity; further, Ambedkar argued that the annihilation of caste is impossible because the dominant section does not want it; hence there is no alternative to bring equality instead to leave the religion. Ambedkar saw that Indian society was full of contradictions. On the one hand, our constitution granted liberty, equality, and fraternity. On the other hand, the existing social order is unequal in the political sphere. Ambedkar, through his conversion to Buddhism, provided a secular spirituality. 'What is called Religion by the Hindus is nothing but many commands and prohibitions. Religion, in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times, is not to be found in them, and if it is, it does not form the governing part of a Hindu's life (Ambedkar, 1987:125). Buddhism calls for the equality of all human beings and egalitarian philosophy. Buddhism reflects the historical experience of the Dalits and the rejection of spirituality offered by the Gandhi or Hindu religion. Dr Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a spiritual force (Omvedt, 2001).

Dr Ambedkar was thus only antagonistic to Hinduism, favouring, among others, inequality among human beings based on fictitious caste. Eventually, he declared in 1935 that he would not die as a Hindu. He discarded Hinduism and embraced Buddhism, which is rational and believes in liberty, equality, and fraternity. It is not a mere change from one religion to another. Still, it implies a protest against the religious myths like God, soul, heaven, superstitious, and all humbug, and acceptance of a way of life based on rationalism. Ambedkar was a keen student of religion but not a blind believer. He said that religion must be following reason, another name for science. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Religion as a social force should always be taken into consideration. Every religion has to be judged in terms of the tenets of '*justice*' and '*utility*'. Justice is another name for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Alternative Emerged

Lower strata of the society were notably untouchable, and Shudra wanted to overcome the burden of untouchability, unapproachability, and other oppression of the Hindu social order. For them, Hinduism was a bunch of inhuman treatment. They never realised democratic and religious freedom within Hinduism; in other words, they never attained their humanity in the Hindu Dharma. Therefore, they started looking for alternative religious identities. The search for new identity subaltern strata took the form of two types of cultural movements aimed at freedom from oppression. The first was a reformative movement that sought change within Hinduism, such as the bhakti movement, Sanskritization, and the Non-Vedantic movement carried by lower strata of the society, particularly Shudra and Atishudra. It started Alwar bhakti from Tamilnadu, Maharashtra and in North India. (See Fernandes, 1996:15) In North India, Bhakti was

brought by Ramanand and was spread and popularised by Sant Kabir. The second movement was to seek an alternative religious identity to Hinduism. Regarding conversion from Hinduism to Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and other religions preached equality (Sharma, 1976:219).

The conversion movements among the Dalit and tribal have shown the potential for social change in religion. However, the religious movements initiated by the dominant communities like The Arya Samaj, *“Brahmo Samaj, and Theosophy, to mention only the most prominent ones, were intended to revitalise the traditional ideology -religion, effecting the necessary minimal modification to make it an effective vehicle for hegemony and a weapon for dominance under the changed circumstances. The lower caste, on the other hand, with continuity of their pre-modern egalitarian scruples, stood for abolishing the principle and practice of hierarchically, altogether within society as a whole, failing at least to carve out a respectable niche for themselves in society. In this context, their new religious symbolism was a vehicle of social protest and a protecting shield in struggles towards emancipation”* (Aloysius, 1998:15).

The Dalit and tribal have sought a religious response of conversion as a mode of upward social mobility. In that sense, conversion was not merely a religious act but also a search for a new social identity. In other words, religious conversions are a complex phenomenon linked to social, cultural, psychological and religious factors. Viewing conversion from any of the factors will distort the true nature of religious conversions. Several theories have been proposed to understand this phenomenon. In this context, Kabir Panth contextualised.

Kabir Panth and Emancipation of Marginalised

Emancipation has diverse meanings, but it does restrict to only the marginal section of society regarding their spiritual, social, and Democratic rights in this study. The Bhakti movement was an opportunity to lower strata of society to access spiritual, social, and Democratic rights. The Bhakti movement started in south India while coming into the north became radical. The position the much more radical adopted by northern saints, particularly Kabir, than other bhakti saints. "The northern Saints seem to have gone a step further than even the most liberal of ancient Bhagavata and the southern Sants by breaking the Brahminical tradition altogether" (Vaudeville, 1987:38).

Bhakti is the "*democratic doctrine which consolidates all people without distinction of caste, community, nationally, or sex (Ragavan, 1966:32). Similarly, Gail Omvedt discusses the radical bhakti movement that had swept over northern and western India, bringing together women and men of low caste to proclaim equality and reject Brahmanical ritualism and caste hierarchy*" (Omvedt, 2003:277). Rohini Mokashi-Punekar described Bhakti As a "*deeply spiritual and democratising movement*" which is characteristically "*revolutionary in spirit*", and the focal point was "questing of the orthodox and repressive Brahminical understanding of Hinduism, that makes possible for the lower castes and women to give their religious aspirations, emphasising devotion and love, not knowledge as a means of salvation" (Punekar, 2005:123-24). So, in this context, it can be said that Kabir liberated people through his philosophy.

He further argued that the current idea of rationality is a universal intellectual premise shared by all humanity. Gail Omvedt (2008) dates the development of modernism in India back to the Bhakti period. She claims that the Bhakti movement, which began as a protest against an unjust society, existed long before colonial modernity arrived. All around India,

Bhakti saints cried out against hierarchical social order, marginalisation, and meaningless rituals. There were also spotlights on society's current socioeconomic situation.

Dipankar Gupta (2000) argues that inter-subjectivity is the core of modernity using Rawls's idea. It stands for participating in each other's lives and sharing their fate. Further, he opines that modernity is an unending project. So the religious sphere is also one of the most important sites. As modernity stands for the ideas of egalitarianism, rationality, and reasoning, the Kabir and Kabir Panth as a religious sphere emerged, critiquing the existing religious practices that were exclusionary and discriminatory. Kabir Panth critiqued undemocratic and exclusionary religious spheres and argued for inclusiveness and democratisation.

The Bhakti movement has transformed many things, including faith, belief, ritual and symbol, and priesthood. Discourses of the entire Bhakti movement were Guru centred. Guru propagated the ideas of Bhakti with the notion of equality in the commoner's language. The non-natural division of men into caste and creed was deprecated. The Bhakti movement's attack on hypocritical practices such as superstitions, animal sacrifices and inhuman activities were denounced, substituting by the ideals of Truth, Nonviolence, forgiveness, and compassion. They created new symbols and signs or transformed the place of existing ones. For example, the sacred thread was replaced by 'Kanthi' (rosary of basil bead); Animal sacrifice was transformed by coconut sacrifice, the diacritical mark was modified; monasteries or Gurudwara transformed temples challenged myth. Instead of believing in other myths, they created their myth, ritual practice, and lifestyle (Kumar, 2018:89-90).

The devotion to Kabir and the Bhakti cult that arose around him became prominent in India. After the death of Kabir, the formation of Kabir Panth took place. Followers of Kabir Panth were drawn from the lower section of society. The teachings of Kabir

gained immense popularity. His teachings advocated for freedom from oppression like caste, untouchability, and gender discrimination, among other things.

Kabir's teachings were later institutionalised with the formation of the Kabir Panth. The formation of Kabir Panth entails the process Max Weber calls '*Routinization of Charisma*' in which the pristine teachings of the Saint were safeguarded by giving it an institutional form. Kabir Panth gained widespread popularity as it rejected the domination of Brahmanism, priesthood, scripture and idolatry, which helped him to distinguish from *Saguni* like Ramanadi Panth, which was dominant during that time. Its followers were mainly drawn from the upper caste. The *Purohit* dominated the *Saguni Panth*. Dalits, women, and society's lower section had no space in their Panth. Kabir Panth called for the formation of a caste-ridden structure of society. Kabir Panth initially had strong competition with the *Saguni* sect. However, later on, Kabir Panth grew in prominence among the masses. It believed in egalitarian values. In large numbers, Dalits, women, and the lower sections joined the Kabir Panth. Many local kings and Zamindars were also influenced by its philosophy, which was based on equality and was free from ritual bondage.

In the context of Kabir-panth, David N Lorenzen (2004) argues that there has been a strong element of social and religious dissent in Kabir's teachings. These teachings were followed mainly by the marginal groups such as Sudras, Untouchables, and Tribals-to express their rejection of certain aspects of hierarchical caste ideology. At the same time, their membership in the Kabir-Panth has fostered their actual assimilation within that same society. It also helped them to raise their social status and positive self-image. He cites Jayant Lele's words, "*the liberating moments of Bhakti tradition*" (Lorenzen, 2004:268). It challenges the orthodox exploitative tradition and raises hope for the disadvantaged masses. Nevertheless, the protest of the oppressed

and resistance should not be underestimated. Therefore, in this context, the Emancipator vision must be considered, and there should be an evolution of these kinds of initiatives.

Discussing modernity as an idea or project, especially in the Indian context, is essential to focus on modernity's values or principles. So, can modernity as an emancipatory project be rescued from the various other values? What about the modernity project, which stands for rationality, democracy, egalitarianism, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity as values? What do we make of the modernity project, which challenges existing power relations and promises a more just society? As Aloysius (2009) argues that

“The precious core of modernity, its Emancipatory thrust has been through formulated variously centred around the correlated concepts of rationality, rationalism and rationalisation” (Aloysius, 2009:117).

Hence modernity offered equality and emancipation to people to form their social bandages. The Bhakti movement gave people the opportunity for their social, religious, and political emancipation from the marginal section of society. Apart from Bhakti, there is some way to overcome caste oppression. At the same time, Dr Ambedkar observes the bhakti tradition, *“The saints have never carried on a campaign against Caste and Untouchability. The saints were not concerned with the struggle of men. They were concerned with the relationship between man and God. They did not preach that all men were equal”*. *They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God, a very different and innocuous proposition that nobody can find difficult to preach or dangerous to believe in* (Ambedkar, 1979:87-88). Dr Ambedkar stated that a saint never becomes an example to follow liberation suffering of this worldliness. He always remained a pious man to be honoured. The messages remained staunch believers in

caste and untouchability, showing that the saints' pious lives and noble sermons have had no effect on their lives and conduct against the teaching of the Shastras (ibid). So, it can be said that the bhakti saints sought that all are equal before God in their gospel (songs). The Bhakti tradition sought only personal salvation. Their tradition was to protest, but the Bhakti ethos became a supplement to Brahmanism over time.

Conclusion

The discourse on religion has undergone massive changes with the coming of modernity. Now religion is no more sacrosanct in sociological views; it de-emphasized otherworldliness and focused on this-worldly as Max Weber discussed the religion of the non-privileged, which revolted against the established religion. In this sense, many saints from Shudra and *Ati-Shudra* revolted against Brahminism. So, the protest of the lower caste communities or marginal must be looked into three directions in India. First, it is a creation of a new religion from out of the earlier non-Brahminic traditions; Second, the selective refashioning of one of the numerous Brahminical Hindu traditions; and third, appropriation of a religious tradition of non-Indian origin. So, in this regard, Kabir Panth established itself as a significant socio-religious movement and came to challenge the domination of Brahmanism. The Kabir and Kabir Panth has advocated dissent from the more dominant socio-religious ideology of Hinduism. Kabir Panthies followed the teaching of Kabir in their day-to-day affairs. Which liberated lower section of the society in terms of socio-religious affairs.

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Chapter-6
Conclusion



Chapter-6

Conclusion

Kabir was one of the great social reformers and teachers who showed people the right path to attain God through Bhakti. Although Kabir was born an ordinary person, they aimed at society's reform. In addition, their idea of establishing non-violence and introducing Bhakti Dharma as opposed to religious malpractices observed during that time made them rise to the position of the saint and a part of a glorious history of revival and reform of religion in India in the middle Ages. Though it is a matter of great concern that those who tried to input the spirit of humanism within the society, the work of that great saint is yet to be evaluated in the true sense. In the present social setup and times, the teachings and ideology of Kabir have much relevance. The humanistic appeal of his ideology needs to be evaluated accordingly. This is praiseworthy, but there is a lot more to do. The world community has much more to learn about Kabir. He was a great social reformer, philosopher, and literature. He has been such an impressive personality who brought revolutionary changes to society.

Today's age is an age of science and technology.' Still, the teachings of Kabir have much relevance even today. The relevance of Kabir s '*Tera Mera manua Ek Kaise hoi re, Tu kahta kagad lekhi, mai kahat Akhan deki*'. The twenty-first century is due to its scientific outlook. From the general point of view, science aims to enhance the lifestyle of human beings. The objective of the overall welfare of humanity has been there in the ideals of Kabir. They introduced the people to an elevated spiritual life through their preachings of the Bhakti Dharma so that the common people may get relief from worldly pain and suffering. It also helped in the enhancement of moral as well as ethical values among people of different caste, creeds, and sects to bring harmony and unity

among all in society. The truth was the guiding light that enlightened their souls, and this divine source of power helped them in their spiritual endeavour for the welfare of humankind. They were individuals with extraordinary qualities. They acquired these qualities by staying in the company of pious-minded beings (Satsanga), Guru (teacher) and their numerous pilgrimages to other places. Both aimed at establishing goodwill and harmony among different sects of people, different cultural thoughts, and different communities. The life of the saint is an admirable example of selfless service. Even in their teachings, one can find the example of selfless service. There is a need for such a saint in today's world. Saints Kabirdas can reinstate the society after having delivered the society of moral degradation and reassuring that the people in society will preserve human values. They can do this because they can realise the true meaning of religion. They can relate spirituality with genuineness. They can rise above petty thoughts and think for the welfare of one all in society. In addition to this, they can perceive the presence of God in every living being. They dedicate their lives to the well-being of all living beings. He has confidence that the only way to achieve God is through non-violence, love, and devotion. They feel that through self-realisation', the idea of humanism gets implanted in man. After fulfilling such a realisation in man, man forgets the difference of caste, religion, etc. and unites to contribute towards a strong foundation of a healthy society-healthy mind (spirituality) and body (materialistic). This was the ideology of the Bhakti Dharma propagated by Kabir. These dignified personalities assimilated man's practical, mental, moral, and spiritual factors and worked for its overall upliftment. That religion that cannot well balance or assimilate all these factors can not be wholly perfect. As the Bhakti Dharma propagated by Kabir was whole, it has a universal appeal and is acceptable for all. Due to time, Kabir's teachings were later institutionalised with the formation of the Kabir Panth. The formation of Kabir Panth entails the process Max Weber calls 'Routinization of

Charisma' in which the pristine teachings of the saint were safeguarded by giving it an institutional form by his disciple.

The Kabir Panth had emerged against the exploitative social order of Hinduism. It challenged the orthodoxy of the religious dogmas, extreme caste practices, and supremacy of the priestly classes. They denounced the established social system built on oppression, suffering, and exploitation. At the same time, they offered an alternative envisioned with the establishment of an egalitarian, democratic, and humanist society. In this thesis, an attempt has been made to put people's resistance in the form of Kabir Panth. Three key elements contributed to its development: bhakti, Tantrism and Sufism; each played a significant role in the synthesis, known as the Saint tradition. All three have similar traditions, emphasising "inner religion". These movements generally gave emphasis to a personal relationship with God without mediation, a lack of concern for orthodox ritual purity, and the insignificance of caste (and sometimes sex) for spiritual attainment. The Sant tradition might be seen as a late of manifestation these movements, some of which were primarily Bhakti and others tantric.

The significant influence of Tantrism on Kabir and the Saint tradition, in general, was a second major aspect that needed to be emphasised, as the Sant tradition is often regarded as a Bhakti cult. The few researchers who observed the connections between Tantra and Santism have presented a compelling argument for incorporating solid tantric components into Saint Philosophy. It is interesting because Kabir was a low-caste weaver sceptical of Hindu and Muslim elites.

The Kabir Panth is likely the essential aspect of the research, but it was also the most difficult to situate in context. It is hard to create a continuous connection between Kabir, who had no institutional affiliations and the Kabir Panth, a well-organised sect. Perhaps some texts that deal with Kabir's initial disciple and how the Kabir Panth came to have

yet to be discovered. The Kabir Panth is known for its devotion to Kabir, regarded as the Supreme Being, its observance of particular ethical and ritual standards, and its theoretical tolerance for individuals of all castes and religions. Although the two major divisions of the Panth are similar in philosophy and ritual, they differ in terms of social dimensions and overall emphasis.

Banaras math is predominantly ascetic, while the Chhattisgarh section is predominantly householder. The leadership of the Banaras section is dominated by Brahmins, whereas low castes dominate the leadership of the Chhattisgarh section. The Banaras section attracts a wide range of castes, but the Chhattisgarh section mostly appeals to a single weaving caste. A relatively large amount of literature has been produced by the Kabir Panthies, much of it divergent from the original teachings of Kabir. The Kabir Panthies have devised a complex cosmological scheme that extends and mythologises Kabir's concepts of God and Maya. They have also developed an elaborate system of soteriology, which involves ten steps to salvation. Although a separate group, the Kabir Panthies do not differ substantially from other Hindus.

Kabir rejected the establishment's stability and the "anti-establishment" of his time, regarding all as hypocritical and laden with structure. Instead, he preferred a direct experience of God with no mediation.

After Kabir's death, a Kabir Panth formed, which dedicated itself to his teachings. Although preaching the ideals of spontaneity, equality, and God's direct experience, the Kabir Panth is developing ritual, theology, and hierarchies, which Kabir criticised in the movements of his time.

Kabir Panthies have formed a new counter-structure. Despite Kabir's criticism of ceremony, they have devised their own. Unlike Kabir, who was opposed to caste and

any form of social hierarchy, the Kabir Panthies have not only embraced some aspects of the Hindu social system but have also established their hierarchies.

The Kabir Panthies have created complex mythology with Kabir as its principal figure, but Kabir was opposed to all mythologisation of God. Some legends claimed Kabir was the son of a Brahmin widow rather than the humble weaver probably he was. However, the Kabir Panthies are not the only ones to blame for this. Kabir has been welcomed as a member of the Hindu community and Muslim.

This type of process is very noticeable in the Indian context regarding religion. Several sects have sprung out in response to Hinduism's current context. However, due to Hinduism's vast and flexible nature, many of these sects become conservative and institutionalised, becoming more and more like the Hinduism they claimed to criticise.

Guru Nanak, a junior contemporary of Kabir, created Sikhism. The group has risen in size and is immediately recognisable by distinguishing emblems. Dadu Panth was founded by Dadu, a sixteenth-century Nirguni Bhakta, and is similar to the Kabir Panth in many ways. Finally, in the eighteenth century, Ghasidas created the Satnamis, a Chamar sect known for their political activism.

These sects have in common that they were founded on the ideas of an anti-structure foundation, but that they constructed their counter-structures and ultimately gained acceptance among the non-sectarian majority, albeit to varying degrees. Weber talks about the institutionalisation of the prophet; according to Weber, the institutionalisation of the prophet was a natural development in the course of religious transformation. He coined the term routinisation of charisma to describe this phenomenon. The creation of a counter structure occurs from this process.

In conclusion, it can be said that similar to the social condition before Kabirdas, the present society, too, faces a chaotic scenario. Therefore, there is a need for the teachings of Kabir which are evaluated in a new light and the prevailing social situation of today. Therefore, Kabirdas are not only the most distinguished religious preachers of all time but the most prominent social reformers in the history of human civilization.

Major Findings

1. The social philosophy of Kabir is ‘the religion of love, having no distinction of caste and creed and a firm belief in humanism. Kabir tried to reform society through Bhakti and religion, which is acceptable to people of different faiths and beliefs.
2. Kabir's philosophy is very significant and relevant in the contemporary world. Kabir's relevance is evident in contemporary discourse through economy, polity, environment, sustainable development, language, education, caste, gender, religion, superstitions, ritualism, monotheism, and Hindu-Muslim unity. Moreover, the worldwide changes discussed in contemporary discourses bring Kabir to the forefront of relevance in the changing era.
3. The social vision and social order of Kabir were to construct a society in an egalitarian way without any distinction of caste, class, religion and creed. Therefore, his teaching is based on love and compassion. However, after the Kabir, Kabir Panthies went against the social philosophy of Kabir and formed different sects and sub-sects according to their interests, interpretation and requirements to protect their concern.
4. Though Kabir Panthies interpreted Kabir differently and formed Math in their way, the commonality can be seen among the Kabir Panthies during the Sammelan, appointing Observer from the different Math during the election of

the Mahant. The Banaras are primarily ascetic, while the Chhattisgarh section is predominantly householder. The leadership of the Banaras and sub-section of Maghar is dominated by Brahmins, whereas low castes dominate the leadership of the Chhattisgarh section. The Banaras section attracts many castes, but the Chhattisgarh section mostly appeals to a single weaving caste. A relatively large amount of literature has been produced by the Kabir Panthies, much of it divergent from the original teachings of Kabir. Further, the sect is divided into subsects, i.e. based on caste, ritual and successor.

5. Kabir Panth established itself as a significant socio-religious movement and came to challenge the domination of Brahmanism. The Kabir and Kabir Panth has advocated dissent from the more dominant socio-religious ideology of Hinduism, taking a way forward from Buddhism, the Bhakti Movement, Phule-Ambedkar, and Periyar alternative path of emancipation.
6. The social and religious dissent that Kabir and his followers have fostered has had significant consequences, and they tried to break the hegemony of upper-caste dominance. Therefore, followers of Kabir Panthies take authority from the Kabir's teachings, reject the orthodoxy of any religion, and try to practice Kabir in their daily life, making the 'Praxis of Kabir'.



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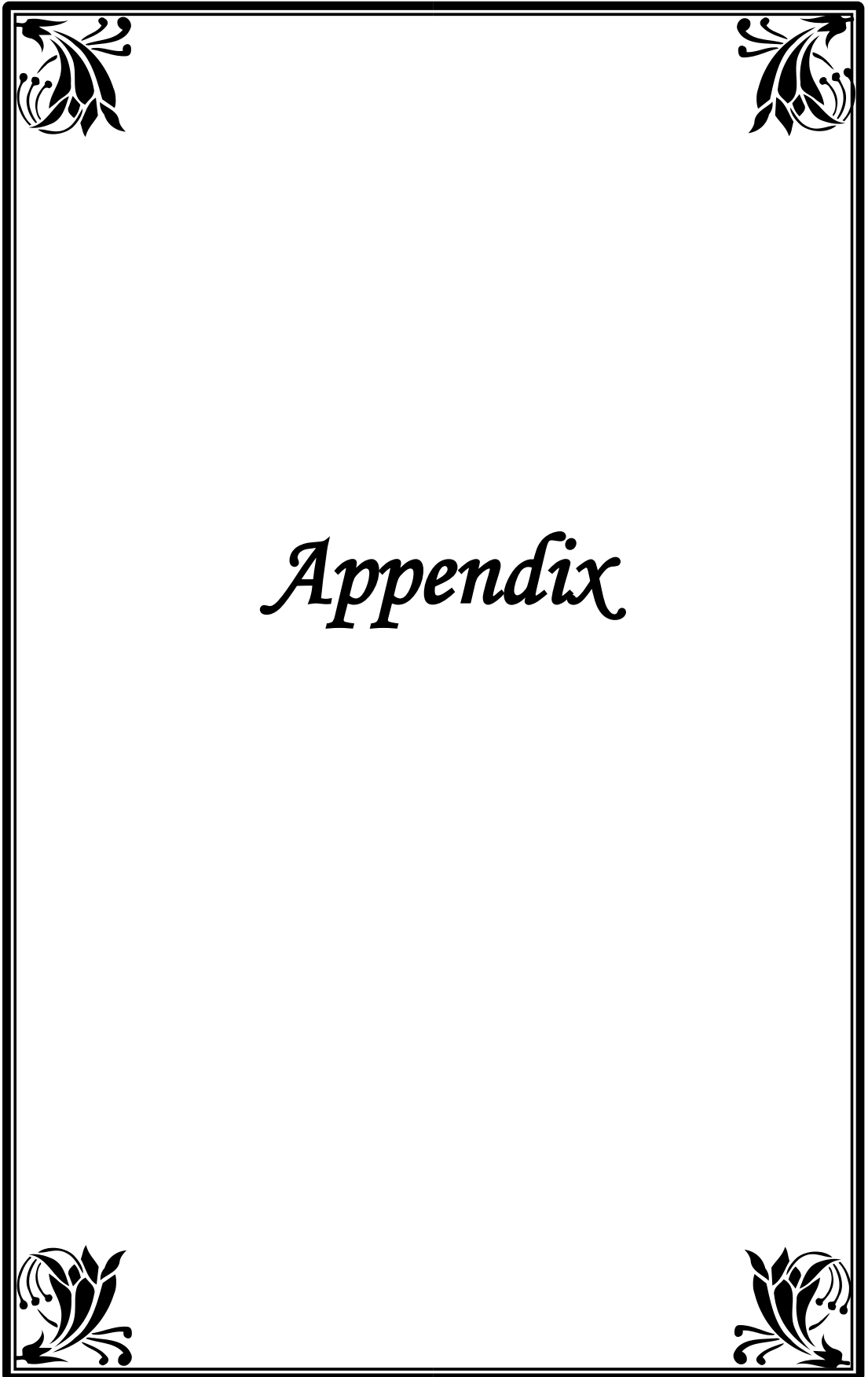
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Appendix

Appendix

Interview Guide

1. What was the role of Kabir in the Bhakti tradition? (Describe)
.....
2. How was Kabir engaged with social issues during his time? (Describe)
.....
3. How do you see Kabir's relevance in the contemporary period? (Describe)
.....
4. What was the view of Kabir on caste class gender? (Describe)
.....
5. How view Hindu-Muslim unity? (Describe)
.....
6. What was the Kabir notion of Bhakti? (Describe)
.....
7. How does Kabir want to liberate human beings from suffering? (Describe)
.....
8. What was the role of the Bhakti movement and Kabir in transforming religion?
(Describe)
.....
9. What was the socio-historical reason for establishing Kabir Panth? (Describe)
.....
10. What was a challenge before Kabir Panth? (Describe)
.....
11. What was the response of the masses to the words Kabir Panth? (Describe)

.....
12. What is the marginal status section of the society Kabir Panth? (Describe)

.....
13. Why is Kabir Panth splitting into many parts? (Describe)

.....
14. Why does Kabir Panth follow a different kind of ideology? (Describe)

.....
15. What is the role of the Kabir Panth at present? (Describe)

.....
16. How does Kabir Panth engage socio-political subalterns? (Describe)

.....
17. Which of the caste joined Kabir Panth? (Describe)

.....

Photographs





