CHAPTER I

Social, Historical and Religious Background in India at the time of Guru Nanak and in Germany at the time of Martin Luther.

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 and Luther in 1483. Nanak died in 1538 and Luther in 1546. Hence it is roughly the 100 years from 1450 to 1550 that we have under consideration. If we look at world history during this particular period, then we find that East and West were passing through the same turbulence and disorder in social as well as in religious fields of life.

In most parts of Europe, the movement known as the Renaissance was in full swing. The unfolding of the antique world of Greece and Rome led to a rebirth of the spirit that manifested itself in a new attitude to life and liberated man from the shackles of medieval superstitions and dogmatism and found triumphant expression in art and literature. One has only to recall such names as Giotto, Filippo Lippi of the early Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raffael of the later Renaissance in Italy and Albrecht Durer (1471-1528), Ulrich von Hutten (1428-1523) etc. in Germany. Hutten sums up this resurgence in the following words:

"O Jahrhundert, O Wissenschaften! Es ist eine Zeit zu leben... die Studien regen sich; die Geister blühen auf." (16)

16. Quoted from W. Grabert und A. Mulot; Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, München, 1965, P. 82.
Science, especially astronomy was studied with great enthusiasm, and with a scientific approach despite the strong opposition of the church which denounced Galileo for holding views different from its. But nothing could dampen the quest for truth and knowledge which was sweeping across Europe. In the physical and material sphere came the discovery of America and of the East Indies that opened up vast new horizons for man's adventurous and inquisitive spirit. Music began to develop from the medieval plain songs of the monasteries and the simple ballads of the country folk towards the more refined madrigals. The invention which had the greatest impact on Western World was however printing. It helped in the dissemination of knowledge and learning and prepared the ground for new ideas in social and religious life.

India, however could not boast of such a vast explosion of arts or popular learning. Throughout the Middle Ages India, particularly the Northern part of India, was kept in a constant state of turmoil through a long series of invasions and struggle for power between rival factions of Turks, Afghans and Moghuls. The common people of North India, whatever their religion, suffered a lot, time after time, from these invasions. There was therefore no revival of learning such as Europe was experiencing. Learning was the monopoly of a few, the
Brahmins, and was based mainly on religious books in Sanskrit. The influence of Islam promoted numerology, medicine, astronomy etc., but the study of religious texts remained of primary importance. However despite the enormous difference in the intellectual climate between Europe, particularly Germany, at the time of Luther and India at the time of Guru Nanak, there were important similarities too in the development of historical, social and religious changes, which took place in both the countries. No doubt there was a growing awakening intellectually as well as spiritually both in India and Germany.

A brief survey of the historical, social and religious background of Luther and Guru Nanak would help us to understand these similarities (and dissimilarities) better.

Guru Nanak.

Historical background at the time of Guru Nanak.

In 1469, when Nanak was born, the kingdom of Delhi to which Panjab belonged was ruled by Bahlol Lodhi (1451-1489). Bahlol Lodhi was the founder of the Lodhi dynasty. He had overthrown the Sayyid dynasty and occupied Delhi Sultanate which included in addition to Panjab, the Doab, Jaunpur, Oudh, a part of Bihar, Tirhut and the part that lies between the Sutlej and Bundelkhand. Bahlol Lodhi was a wise and intelligent ruler. In his unofficial social meetings, it is said, he never sat
on a throne and never let his nobles stand before him. After Bahlol Lodhi his son Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517) came to power. Sikandar Lodhi's intolerance to the Hindus figured prominently in history. Guru Nanak was out of his teens when Sikandar Lodhi became Sultan. There were countless examples of his cruelty and brutality against the Hindus and their religion. It is said that wherever he went, Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques were erected on those very places. His hatred for Hindu religion can be understood from the words of A.C. Banerjee:

"At Mathura, for instance, all the celebrated Hindu temples were destroyed, their stone images were given to the butchers to serve as meat weights and Hindus were prohibited from shaving their heads and performing their ablutions in the sacred river Jamuna." (17)


There are differences of opinion on this point. eg., Dr. S.S. Dosanj, holds that atrocities against the Hindus were not so much due to religious as to political reasons; "Tracing the history back to Guru Nanak's time, we get the feeling that Muslim rulers were very cruel to the Hindu subjects. But studying the Panjab of Guru Nanak in the context of that time, it becomes very clear that atrocities of the time were not due to the religious differences but were politically motivated and were for territorial and pecuniary gains. For these ends, even the kith and kin of the rulers were not spared and were tortured or killed. Muslim rulers in their fights against each other took the help of Hindu Kings. It is a historical fact that Hindus held responsible positions during the Muslim rule." Dosanj, S.S.; Guru Nanak's Panjab, in: Guru Nanak a Homage, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1973, P. 77.
After Sikandar Lodhi, Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526) came to the throne. He was rather a weak Sultan. He was only the titular Head of the State. The Zamindars and Jagirdars were the real rulers. In the words of W. Erskine:

"The monarchy was a congeries of nearly independent principalities, jagirs and provinces, each ruled by a hereditary Chief, or by a Zamindar or a delegate from Delhi; and the inhabitants looked more to their immediate governors, who had absolute power in the province, and in whose hands, consequently lay their happiness or misery, than to a distant and little known sovereign." (18)

So the people of his kingdom were actually ruled by their immediate Governors rather than by a distant and little known sovereign. Some Governors took advantage of his weakness; for example, the Governor of Panjab Daulat Khan Lodhi began his conspiracy with Babar against Ibrahim Lodhi. On the invitation of Daulat Khan Lodhi, Babar attacked India from Panipat (1526). Ibrahim Lodhi was defeated and killed in the battle of Panipat and Babar established the Moghul rule in India in 1526.

Guru Nanak was an eye witness of the destruction carried out in Panjab by Babar's invasion. He expresses his pain and anguish in these words:

"God has protected Khurasan, and brought terror to Hindustan. But our Creator-Lord takes not..."

the blame upon Himself and so has made the Mogul the Angel of Death."(19) 

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Babar's invasion brought disaster and destruction both for Hindus and Muslims (Afghans). Nanak has depicted in the following verses the misery of both Hindus and Muslims:

"Some (were) Hindu Women, and (some) were Turk Women, (some) the women of Bhat's and Thakurs.

The robes of some were torn from head to foot, the dwelling of some was the burning place."(20)

Nanak himself suffered imprisonment and experienced in full the ferocity that characterised military invasion and occupation in those days. He calls the rulers of his time butchers and their officials dogs.

Even after Babar's victory and the founding of the Moghul empire, matters did not improve, because Babar's eldest son Humayun, who succeeded him on his death after five years was defeated by the Afghan hero Sher Shah in 1540 and had to take refuge in Persia, and Panjab became a part of Sher Shah's empire. This was in the last years of Guru Nanak's life. One can say that his death almost coincided with the final victory of Sher Shah over Humayun. Sher Shah pursued Humayun across Panjab and compelled him to cross the


Mahala: The explanation given by Dr. Gopal Singh: "According to traditional scholars the word in the text is to be pronounced as 'Mehla' literary meaning the (Lord's) Bride. (According to others) it should be pronounced as 'Mohalla' (which, in its origin being Arabic, would mean, he on whom God has descended). The figures 1, 2, etc. signify whether it is the composition of the 1st Master (Nanak) or 2nd (Angad), the 3rd (Amar Das) (...). Sri Guru Granth Sahib, loc. cit., Vol. II, P. 337.
Bias near Sultanpur and the Ravi during the flight to Sind. This transition period of uncertainty and insecurity left ugly scars on all aspects of people's life.

Since Panjab was frontier province, it was one of the worst hit regions. The periodic fightings, ravaging and plundering resulted in general disorder and lawlessness; the cleavage into Hindu and Muslim especially increased the tension because of the fact that substantial portions of the Indian subcontinent still remained under Hindu rule, despite Muslim attempts to conquer India.

These are some of the factors that constituted the political and historical background of Nanak's time.

Social Background.

Since the political situation of the country was unstable and chaotic, the social situation could not be better, as the social situation of a country is very much dependent on its political stability. There was no stability and security in the social life of that time. Muslims were the rulers and had the upper hand. Many of them led a luxurious and licentious life. The Muslims were divided into more than 74 sects. Hindus were treated as second rate citizens and were crushed at every step. Different types of taxes were imposed
on them on account of their religion. Not only did they have to pay Jazia, but also a pilgrimage tax for visiting Hindu religious shrines. They were debarred from building new temples or even getting old temples repaired:

"There were galling restrictions on the personal dress and movement of Hindus as also on their social ceremonies. ... the crippling influence of foreign rule had weakened the moral fibre of the Hindus." (21)

The humiliated Hindus hated their Muslim rulers. Their hostility to their Muslim conquerors, who had deprived them of material, social and moral hegemony matched the equally strong will of the Muslim usurpers to curb them for ever. The Hindus called the Muslims untouchables and Mlechas and the Muslims called the Hindus Kafirs.

The result was the constant fear of confrontation and mutual distrust and disdain. The anti-Muslim resentment and anti-Hindu vandalism frequently led to bloody conflicts in which the very essence of Humanity was throttled in the name of religion. Consequently there was complete isolation of one community from the other. So complete was this segregation between the major religions that the Sufis among the Muslims and the Hindu Mystics of the Bhakti movement, who had much

in common, never freed themselves from the shackles of their religions, never met on common ground.

The Hindus were further divided among themselves because of the caste-system. They were divided not only into the four main castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) but also into hundreds of sub-castes, which never mingled with each other and had completely different standards of morality, mode of living, dress and behaviour. This divided community was not in a position to put up a common defence against the invaders.

While most Hindus took up an uncompromising attitude towards the Muslims, there were some from among Kshatriyas and Brahmans who compromised and entered into the service of the Muslims. They collected the Jazia imposed on their co-religionists, were servile towards the rulers and overbearing to the down-trodden. There were also converts to Islam, converted not at the point of sword as in most cases, but under the influence of the Sufis or due to economic reasons or alienation from the higher classes of Hindus. These Hindu-Muslims did not however help to cement relationship between the two communities.

Guru Nanak had no praise, only strong words of criticism, for both Hindus and Muslims. He condemned
the Muslims for their licentious life:

"The Kings had lost their heads and revelled in revelries."(22)

their greed and corruption:

"The Quazi sitteth in judgement upon others, and telleth the rosary and mutters the name of Allah. But he doeth injustice, for his palm is greased."(23)

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He condemns the Kshatriyas for neglecting their own religion and accepting a foreign tongue. He expresses his anger in the following words:

"The Kshatriyas have given up their moral duty and taken to the foreign tongue."(24)

He also criticises the Hindu-Muslims about whom he says:

"They tax the cow and the brahmins and with cow-dung they hope to save themselves: they wear the Dhoti, the frontal-mark and the rosary (like the Hindus), but they eat the barbarian's grains. Within, they worship (their idols); (outside) they read the Quoran, and observe the code of the Turks."(25)

And the class-conscious, ritual-obsessed Hindus he calls the butchers of the world. Nanak feels that the people who are false from within cannot get

23. Ibid., P. 908.
25. Ibid., P. 465.
rid of their sins even if they take bath in holy waters.

"False from within, honourable from without,
if such Deceit be one's way in the world,
His Dirt goes not even if he bathes in all
the holy waters."(26)

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of both Hindus and Muslims he can only say:

"The darkness of the age has made demons of man"

and lament:

"All around, it is the dark night of falsehood,
And Truth ? O where is the moon of Truth ?
The vain search has made me mad, And I see not
my path in the dark."(27)

Repeatedly he bewoans the degeneration of morals,
the oppression of the poor by the rich, the ill treatment
of women, the corruption and bribery that tainted
justice and government. The purdah system and early
marriage of women were two indirect effects of the
Muslim conquest and contributed to women's degradation
which he attacks when he says:

"Why should we consider woman cursed and
condemned, when from woman are born leaders
and rulers ?"(28)

In fact as N.V. Gadgil says;

"The social and economic conditions, which
prevailed when Nanak was born are described
in Nanak's hymns and songs by Guru Nanak
himself."(29)

26. Ibid., P.468.
27. Ibid., P.137.
28. Sadarangani, H.I.; Guru Nanak and the movement of Sikhism
Iyengar, New Delhi, 1972, P-87.
29. Gadgil, N.V.; Introduction to Shri Guru Granth Sahib,
Translated by Dr. Gopal Singh, Chandigarh, 1978, P-XI.
The Maulavis, Mullahs, Quazis, the Sadhus, Sidhs and Yogis, the traders and the handicraftsmen, the Jats and the Brahmins live and talk in his hymns and help to recreate the life of the times, as well as to underline the fact that inspite of war and persecution and strife, common people quietly continued with the business of living. We hear in the hymns of Bhai Lalo, the carpenter, Duni Chand, a businessman and Jai Ram, a Government servant. Guru Nanak himself in his last days lived at Kartarpur and ploughed his fields.

**Religious Background.**

In our survey of the historical and social conditions, we have seen that Religion had become the bone of contention in the country. In its most harmless form it segregated people into water-tight compartments, at its most harmful, it unleashed terror and massacre and bloodshed. The monotheism and brotherhood of man that Mohammedanism preached, never seem to have made a mark in its conquest of Hindu India. In fact its message of social equality was forgotten. Bigotry, fanaticism and ferocity were its dominant traits and the result was, as we have already pointed out, the evolving of one of the bloodiest chapters in the history of the world. One can see the clear picture of those days in one of Nanak’s hymns:

"This world is Thine; O Lord of the earth. In one ghari Thou establishest and disestablishest; Thou distributest wealth as Thou pleasest."
Where are those houses, those mansions and those palaces?
Where those beautiful seragios?
Where are those easy couches and those women a sight of whom banished sleep?
Where is that betel, those betel sellers, and those fair ones? They have vanished.***(30)

If Islam had lost its purity and glory, Hinduism had also become corrupt and degraded. The Vedas and other sacred texts had become unintelligible to the people. Superstitions had replaced true knowledge and the rigidity of the caste system eclipsed the true spirit of Hinduism.

There was very little awareness among the people about higher spiritual and moral values. Religion had become a matter purely of ritual formality and observance of empty forms:

"The worship of idols wherever they were permitted, pilgrimages to the Ganges and other sacred places, whenever they were allowed, the observance of certain ceremonies like the marital and funeral rites, the obedience of the mandates of the Brahmans and lavish charitable gifts upon them constituted almost the whole Hinduism, that was then current among the masses."***(31)

This ritual-ridden and caste-ridden religion benefitted only the Brahmin and established one of the curses of Hindu religion and society, namely priestly supremacy. The rigidity of caste system and perpetuation of

of untouchability were the main features of this time:

"The priests alone could study the scriptures and to them alone were accessible the higher truths and consolations of Hindu Philosophy. Even they, however had fallen to the dead level of Scribes and Pharisees. Some of them still had the scriptures by heart but in their practical life they were mostly opposite of what they were required to be by their scriptures." (32)

It was against the bigotry of the Muslims and the blindness of the Hindus that Guru Nanak raised his cry:

"There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman." (33)

This sentence he repeated several times after a mystic experience. There was no true Hindu and no true Mussalman; he might have meant, as many interpret it. But also the fact that one is a human being first and then only Hindu or Muslim cannot be expressed more clearly. One can say that he waged a crusade against religious bigotry and narrowness, against ritualism and purely external observance of religion. His hymns are filled with criticism of these malpractices and against it he preached the name of the one and only God.

Nanak was naturally not the only one who thought in this manner. He had been influenced by the Sufi and

32. Ibid., P. 20.
the Bhakthi movements. Religious leaders in various parts of the country had already tried to revive the purity, simplicity and fervour of religious experiences. Ramañand (1458-1525) and Kabir (1440-1518) in Uttar Pradesh, Namdev (1427-1521) and Eknath (1532-1599) in Maharashtra, had given to the people their message of the one God and of love and peace.

Among Nanak's contemporaries we can mention Vallabhacharya (1469-1530) with many followers in Gujarat and Rajasthan, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533), a great saint of Bengal whose devotion to God inspired among his people great religious fervour and Mirabai, a Rajput Princess (1504-1563), a great composer and singer of devotional songs of Lord Krishna.

The Muslim Sufi Saints also have to be mentioned in this connection. The Sufis had, like the mystics of the Bhakthi movement, tried to bring to the people a religion of simplicity and sincerity and spoke of the love of the true God in whose eyes there was no person high or low, rich or poor, Mussalman or Hindu. In order to reach the hearts of the people the sufis and the saints of the Bhakti cult had used the common language and some of them had sung songs as a device to appeal to the people. Even in the early phase of Sufism represented by Khwaja-Muin-ud-din Chishti, Khwaja Qutib-ud-din-Bhaktiyar,
Kabir, Baba Farid and Baba-ud-din Zakariya, the language of the people was used to preach the message of love and equality of man in the sight of God. Ramanand, Kabir and Namdev also used the people's language to convey their message to the masses.

"Indeed, all over India Loka-Bhasa was replacing Deva-Bhasa, so as to bring religion to the heart of the masses." (34)

Guru Nanak was influenced by them, most of all by Kabir, who occupies a place of honour in the Adi Granth. The English translation of his verses comes to 115 pages in Macauliffe's last volume. Kabir was a Muslim by birth, but stood above sects and called himself 'the son of Allah and Rama'. In his words:

"the religion of those who understand is one whether they are Pandits or Shaikhs." (35)

For him as for Guru Nanak, love of God was the crucial factor in religion.

These pre-Nanak reformers however failed to have any lasting effect and their followers became sectarian. Ramanand for example,

"added to the number of existing sects by paying his homage to Rama. Nor were his followers freed from the bondage to external form." (36)


Loka-Bhasa means language of men and Deva-Bhasa the language of Gods.

35. Ibid., P. 19.

The harshness of Muslim rule evoked also a withdrawal from life. Gorakh Nath, variously assigned to the 11th, 12th and even the 15th century, founded the occult science of Yoga and his followers as well as Sidhs and Sadhus and Bhairagis renounced the world and lived as ascetics. In the hymns we read of the Guru meeting them at Gorakhmata, at Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh, at Mount Sumeru etc. and expressing his disapproval of their way of life. The Sidhs on Mount Sumeru ask him: Nanak, what is happening in Hindustan. In his reply Nanak describes the true condition of Hindustan at his time:

"The Kal age is a knife, kings are butchers; justice hath taken wings and fled.
In this completely dark night of falsehood the moon of truth is never seen to rise.
I have become perplexed in my search:
In the darkness I find no way.
Devoted to pride, I weep in sorrow:
Saith Nanak, how shall deliverance be obtained."(37)

Nanak feels that the Sidhs sit silent on the mountains; who then will save the world? He is of the opinion that they cannot do anything from their spiritual heights, since they are isolated from life. He held the same view about Yogis, who played a prominent role in

the religious life of North Western India in those days. The religious order to which the Yogis belonged was known by different names: Gorakhpanthi, Nath, Kanphata (split-eared). This last name was derived from their practice of splitting their ears. A novice who had not reached the stage of having his ears split was known as Aughat. The yogis themselves followed a hierarchy. A Sidh was a Yogi who had attained the stage of perfection through the practice of Hathayoga, to which Nanak makes a reference in one of his hymns:

"I restrain my five senses and abide apart from the world; I close my eyes and my mind hath ceased to wander. I have locked up the ten gates of my body. And I sit in contemplation in its sixty eight chambers."(38)

There were, according to tradition, 84 Sidha. The Yogis who aspired to be Sidhs were termed Sidhik (Striver). Guru Nanak says of them all, that all yogis, sanyasis, prophets, spiritual leaders dwell at God's gate.

"Thousands upon thousands of celibates, true men, and Sanyasis; Thousands upon thousands of Gorakhs, Thousands upon thousands of superior s of Jogis."(39)

And he adds, all were impure without meditating

38. Ibid., P.54.
39. Ibid., P.41.
on the word of the true guru. He criticises their ritualism and asceticism.

"Thou appliest ashes to thy body and practiseth hypocrisy."\(^{(40)}\)

In addition to these ascetics there were also secular Yogis called Rawals, who earned their living by begging, fortune-telling, singing etc. The two principal vows taken by the Yogis were to live by begging and to observe celibacy. This second vow was broken by many as Nanak’s references in his hymns show:

"Yogis with long hair and ashes on their bodies keep wives,
Children scream before and behind them,
They miss the right road and obtain not union with God."\(^{(41)}\)

Without piety and faith and renunciation, all emblems of religion were unavailing. He lashed out at the Muslim quazis and Hindu Yogis alike whenever he found mere words divorced from good works. He told the Yogis the right way to attain God:

"The contented who meditate on God, the Truest of the true do real service.
They place not their foot in sin, do good deeds and practise piety.
they burst the worldly bonds and live on a little corn and water
Thou art a great Bestower and ever givest

\(^{40}\) Hymns of Guru Nanak, Translated by Manmohan Singh, loc.cit., P. 544.

\(^{41}\) Quoted from: Macauliffe, M. A.; The Sikh Religion, loc.cit., P. 356.
gifts, which increase day by day. 
By the praise of the Great God,
man attains to Him."(42)

The moral decline of Yogis reminds us of a similar decline of the monks in medieval Europe and the many jokes about their addiction to wine and women.

There were also Tantric Yogis. In Dabistan an account of some of their hateful practices is given:

"They know no prohibited food (...) as they also kill and eat man... There are some of this sect who having mixed their excretions and filtered them through a piece of cloth, drink them and say that such an act renders a man capable of great affairs, and they pretend to know strange things... They have all originated from Gorakhnath. The author of this work saw a man, who singing the customary song, sat upon a corpse, which he kept unburied until it came into a state of dissolution and then ate the flesh of it; this act they hold to be extremely meritorious."(43)

Ai Panth seems to have been important during the lifetime of Guru Nanak as he has referred to it in the Japji XXVIII.

"Make association with men thine Ai Panth,

43. Dabstan-Tr-Trayer and Shea II, P-129.

'Tantric rites' are the rites based on the worship of Kali or Durga. Tantric yogis worship the Goddess Kali or Durga the wife of Shiva and Goddess of power through mystical sexual rites symbolising the union of Shiva and Sakthi, Prakrithi and purusha.

'Ai Panth' is a sect of Yogis.
and the conquest of thy heart the conquest of the world.”(44)

‘Ai’ is a corrupt form of ‘Mai’ (Mother) the form of address of the first spiritual guide of this order, a female disciple of Gorakhnath, named Bimla Devi. The Mother Goddess was the supreme deity. This is evidently an indication of Tantric influence. The Ai Panth is mentioned in the Dabistan, as one of the twelve Panths of Kanphatas. Panjab was probably the principal area of Ai Panth activities.

In spite of stray Tantric influences the Yogis were primarily devotees of Shiva in the Bhairaga form.

There are many references to the Yogis in the Adi-Granth. Sidh Gosht compares the doctrines of the Yogis with the teachings of Guru Nanak. They must have been a familiar sight in India at the time, calling forth both derision and respect. Sir Gokul Chand Narang says of them:

"Hundreds of monks in ochre robes, with large glass rings in their ears, long winding horns under their arms and a sharp burnished pair of tongues in their hands were seen infesting the road and places of pilgrimage. The mass of the nation was as little moved by the blasts from their trumpets as they were themselves"

44. The Japji, XXVIII, Macauliffe, M.A.; The Sikh Religion, loc. cit., P. 212.
made holier by the white ashes on their bodies or the glass rings in their ears."(45)

Even today the Yogic tradition remains strong in India. Guru Nanak raised his banner against them all by turning his back on asceticism and becoming a householder who tilled and cultivated his own land at Kartarpur. The Yogic orders were sectarian and narrowminded and hence could not reform the religion of the masses. The reformers like Kabir did not take their stand firmly in the world and in life as Nanak did.

"They (the reformers) aimed chiefly at emancipation from priestcraft or from the grossness of idolatry and polytheism. They perfected a form of dissent rather then planted the germ of nations and their sects remain to this day as they left them."(46)

Narang adds quoting from Cunningham:

"It was reserved for Nanak to perceive true principles of reform and to lay those foundations on which Gobind built a new nationality and gave a practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes."(47)

47. Narang, Gokul Chand; Transformation of Sikhism, loc. cit., P.22.
MARTIN LUTHER-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations, after the fall of the Hohenstauffens was a patch-work of loosely knit territories and duchies, free cities (freie Reichsstadte) etc. extending from Flanders to Steiermark. At the time of Luther's birth, it was ruled by Emperor Frederick III (1444-1493). His long reign proved disastrous for Germany in many respects. He freely bartered away German territory, and thus, for example, allowed the Duke of Burgundy to extend his territories. He showed no interest in supervising the administration of Germany. He hardly attended any meeting of the imperial diet, and never left his homeland Austria, except for a single journey to Italy in twenty-seven years of reign. He was always busy with plans for extending the territories and increasing the power of his dynasty. Though he could achieve much success in promoting the fortunes of his dynasty during his life time, he could not retain Bohemia and Hungary, he could not exercise complete control even over his hereditary lands. But his policies bore fruits later. By taking the side of the papacy and assuring himself of the Church's support for Habsburg policies and above all by marriage arrangements he laid the foundation that made the Habsburgs within the next two generations
the most powerful dynasty of Western Europe. But Germany, ruled by a ruler, who was not interested in the affairs of the country, moved rapidly towards disintegration. Princes and knights started ruling their lands according to their own wish. The Kaiser showed no intention to end the constant civil wars among the princes. He did not even try to stop the territorial lords from making inroads on the independence of free cities. A clear picture of the political situation of that time is drawn by Richard Friedenthal in the following words:

"In dem von seinen Titularkaisern gänzlich vernachlässigten Deutschland regierten in Wirklichkeit seit langem die Landfürsten weltlicher und geistlicher Observanz, die Kurfürsten, Erzbischöfe, Herzöge, Fürsten, Grafen und noch kleinere Herren. Im Gebiet eines dieser Ministerpotentaten in der Grafschaft Mansfeld am Südrand des Harzes zu Eisleben kam Martin Luther am 10 November 1483 zur Welt. Der ganze politische deutsche Jammer, der nicht von gestern stammte, sondern aus Jahrhunderten und sich auf Jahrhunderte vererben sollte, tritt uns in diesem Zwerggebilde entgegen und es ist von höchster Bedeutung für Luther und das Schicksal der Bewegung, die er entfesselte, daß er gerade in so unheilbar verstrickte und
During his rule the demands for reforming the political and administrative structure were increasing. Some princes wanted to make the diet the supreme authority and talked of an imperial ministry to govern Germany. But Fredrick III evaded their demands by dispensing lavish bribes and by relying on the support of the Church. Thus the political reform movement suffered a great setback as the Emperor showed not the least sympathy for it.

Meanwhile Germany started losing territory and its influence very rapidly. The Teutonic Knights suffered a series of defeats and ultimately lost their independence. After their defeat at Tannenberg the Knights had more and more difficulty in controlling rebellious cities and local nobles and many revolts occurred which they could not crush.

48. Friedenthal, Richard; Luther-sein Leben und seine Zeit, München, 1967, P. 12

49. Teutonic Knights belonged to a semi-military Teutonic order. Prussia, a German territory which did not come in the perview of the empire was ruled by the Teutonic order. The German ruler Fredrick Barbarosa's son had founded the Teutonic Order to protect the Holy Land. This Order consisted of Knights, priests and serving brothers. The members of this Order used to wear a white coat (montle) with a black cross on it and designated themselves the Knights of Christ and of the Hospital of St. Mary of Jerusalem. Their main task was the conversion of heathens to Christianity.
Even the Hanseatic League\(^{50}\) lost all significance during the reign of Fredrick III. Maximilian I, the son of Fredrick III, was elected to the kingship of Germany in 1486. He was very active and enthusiastic in comparison to his lethargic father. Though he was elected as the king during the reign of his father, there was little cooperation between father and son during the remaining seven years in which both shared the government of the empire, the father as emperor and the son as king. After the death of his father he became the emperor (1493-1519) of Germany. He was the first and perhaps the only renaissance king of Germany. He was intelligent and also educated like his English counterpart Henry VIII. But he also was unsuccessful in his attempt to

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\(^{50}\) Hanseatic League: The term Hanse apparently meant a merchant association. This was one of the most important leagues of its time. It was constituted out of the association of German merchants abroad and the league of north German cities especially of Lübeck and Hamburg. The Hanse was organised typically on medieval lines. Its members abroad enjoyed certain prestige and maintained their own German law, manners and customs. This league ensured its members economic protection and security. The aim of the Hanseatic cities was to harmonize the economic and political interests of the individual with the interests of the Hanseatic Organisation. The History of the Baltik from the middle of 14th Century to the beginning of 16th Century is mainly the history of the Hanseatic league.
bring order and stability into his empire. Tenbrock lists his failures:

"He was not able to translate into reality the 'Ewige Landfriede' the Perpetual peace, proclaimed by him at Worms. The partition of the empire into ten regions, and the constitution of the Imperial Chamber (Reichskammergericht) to judge offences against the peace, also achieved no practical result. Not even the imperial tax the 'gemeiner Pfennig' could be collected in all parts of the empire." (51)

In his time he patronized the arts and encouraged scientific investigations. Though he was considered the first modern and cosmopolitan ruler, he still belonged to the medieval period as he enjoyed tournaments and hunting and was devoted to the chivalric courtship of ladies. He ran much of the government himself like an absolute monarch. He also adopted the mercenary system for his armed forces. Although his national feelings appealed to the lower middle class and the intellectual atmosphere of his court delighted the intellectuals and educated class, he annoyed the princes and knights because he did not

introduce political reforms in his empire as desired by these princes and knights. He steadily resisted their attempts to make him into a mere tool in their hands. He also did nothing to satisfy the rich patricians in the cities, who paid the taxes, but did not have a share in the government of the Reich.

In 1519 Charles V was elected as emperor and tried with all the means at his disposal to suppress Protestantism, that had already begun and in the course of it fought the religious wars. He was still at the helm of affairs as Luther died in 1546. The tangible factors relating to the period under study can be summed up as follows. The medieval world was disappearing. Its two central pillars—the papacy and the empire were declining. Germany was split into hundreds of small principalities ruled by ambitious princes, who thought only of their own gains and combined only rarely to make a common cause. In the words of Tenbrock:

"A map of Germany during the 13th to 15th centuries which would attempt to reproduce the multiplicity of the German territories would have to be many-coloured indeed." (52)

For all practical purposes the princes were independent, though they professed allegiance to the

52. Tenbrock, Robert-Hermann; A History of Germany, loc. cit., P. 73.
emperor, who himself thought more of his own family fortunes (Fredrick III and even Maximilian I) or was burdened too much with the cares and worries of a world empire to devote himself to Germany (Charles V). The waning of the imperial power emboldened the princes even more in their selfish pursuit of personal and dynastic power. Medieval institutions that had added to the glory and prestige of the empire (Hanseatic League, The Order of Teutenic Knights) were also declining and Germany was swallowed up in 'Kleinstaaterei'.

At the same time nationalist feelings were emerging especially among the common people, that being one of the reasons for the quick and widespread support Luther found in Germany for his teachings. The same ardent nationalism finds expression in the pages of Ulrich von Hutten also. The warmth of this national

53. Compare: "The twelve million Germans lived in some 350 political entities of varying size. Some were states ruled by princes, who bore various titles (such as archduke, duke, margrave or count), others were bishoprics in which the bishop exercised both ecclesiastical and temporal authority and some territories were governed by the abbots of Monasteries. Besides these rulers of princely rank, there were the free knights, most of whom had no more than a castle and a dominion of a few acres which they governed and farmed."

feeling can be understood in some measure if one reads the reports sent by the papal nuncio Alexander to Cardinal Julius de Medici at Rome.\(^{(54)}\)

The struggle against the Pope and the emperor took on the colouring of national struggle in the imagination of the people:

"In dieser Zeit hat sich die lutherische Reformation recht eigentlich zu einer nationalen Bewegung größten Stils entwickelt. Wer sie beschuldigt, die inneren Spannungen und Gegensätze des deutschen Lebens vermehrt und vertieft zu haben, muß sich darüber klar sein, daß sie ursprünglich ganz und gar von der Hoffnung getragen war, mit einer Reform der deutschen Kirche zugleich eine Reform des Reiches, eine Heilung aller inneren Schäden des deutschen Staates und des deutschen Volkstums durchzusetzen und damit eine ganz neue Einheit des deutschen Wesens zu begründen. Niemals in der ganzen älteren Deutschen Geschichte hat es einen Augenblick gegeben, in dem alle Stände und Landschaften Deutschlands so gewaltig vom Sturmwind einer echten Volksbewegung erfaßt und durchgerüttelt wurden wie damals."\(^{(55)}\)

Cutting across this tide of nationalism came the squabbles for power among the Pope, the Emperor.

\(^{(54)}\) Compare Thulin Oskar (Editor); A life of Luther told in Pictures and Narrative by the Reformer and his contemporaries; Translated by Martin O. Dietrich, Philadelphia, USA, 1966, p. 58-63.

\(^{(55)}\) Ritter Gerhard; Deutsche Geschichte, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, p. 102.
and powerful kings like Francis I of France (1515-1547), Henry VIII of England (1509-1547), squabbles in which the German princes took sides and often let themselves be used as pawns:


Social Background.

In the latter half of the fifteenth century the social structure of Germany also underwent many changes. Many cities were losing their precious political independence. Their inhabitants on the other hand were slowly but steadily becoming wealthier.

and more influential in the cultural, the economic and even in the political life of the land. Important discoveries of mineral wealth specially in silver, copper and coal increased Germany's export, proved a big boost to her financial resources. Above all the accumulation of wealth was helping in the rise of very important banking families, like the Fuggers and die Welsers in the southern part of Germany. The Fugger family owned copper mines in Hungary, salt mines in Siebenbürgen. The Welsers set up a colony in Venezuela and had representatives in Lissabon and India. These patricians formed their own exclusive class and suppressed the lower middle class and the plebians, who sought a change in the constitution and improvement in their situation. Their opposition led to disturbances in towns like Köln, Hamburg, Rostock, Regensburg, Augsburg etc.

The wealth of the merchant class was not shared by the members of the lower nobility, who faced severe economic strain. The petty knights who held a few acres of land were now in great trouble, they were excluded from the progressive vitality of society. On the other hand the territorial lords were doing their best to crush these petty knights and to transform them into their vassals. They could not improve their
financial position by engaging in trade or any other business as they belonged to the nobility for whom such type of work was below status. But due to the inflated prices, the small income earned from their agricultural land was not sufficient to meet their daily needs. Consciousness of their birth also kept them aloof from the common masses. Generally these knights engaged themselves in raiding on neighbouring knights or cities to find a living. By their raids and looting they made the life of the people very insecure. They did not understand the changing times and spoke of their 'Freiheiten' as in the earlier middle ages.

"The insecurity and emotional dilemma of this dying class is well pictured in Goethe's drama Goetz von Berlichingen." (57)

Commercial prosperity opened new avenues of work for the peasants. Numerous new possibilities of earning a livelihood such as finding jobs in growing cities or joining mercenary armies were improving the economic position of the peasants. But on the other hand peasants, workers and other poor people, who remained on the land were bound to do the work for the lord of the manor. These peasants were the bonded labourers or serfs of their lords and formed the lowest

57. Rodes, John E; Germany a history, USA 1964, p. 97.
class in medieval society, which was as class-conscious as the caste-ridden Indian society. The dues they had to pay were very high, but their share in the communal rights was very small.

Sebastian Münster in his cosmographia describes the wretched plight of the peasants:


Such hard life naturally created restlessness, distress and resentment in their hearts. They wanted to achieve social and political independence and also to improve their economic status in society. Because of this resentment against lords, peasant uprisings became very frequent especially in the southern part of Germany, the most important being the one in 1525. The peasants organised

58. Quoted from Landgraf, Wolfgang; Martin Luther Reformator und Rebell, Berlin, 1981, P. 32. 33.
themselves into groups called Bundschuh. Often these groups rose against their lords to reestablish their old rights (Alte Rechte) as they called them, but without any success, because the clergy and aristocracy combined to put them down. The peasants thought not so much of an improvement of their material condition as of their old social equality and justice. In the words of Bruno Gebherdt:


Richard Friedenthal sums up the situation

existing in Germany in the following words:

"Rebellion war überall. Die Fürsten, die Stände waren rebellisch und meuterisch dem Oberhaupt gegenüber, das sie gewählt hatten. Das ganze Land rebellierte gegen die 'römishe Tyrannen', wie die Oberherrschaft der Kirche genannt wurde. Die Städte gegen die Landesfürsten und Bischofe, in den Städten die Plebejer im Kampfe mit den Patrizieren; die Bauern bereit zum Aufstand." (60)

Luther's message provided the spark that set off this keg of gunpowder.

"Die geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen erklären erst seine Wirkung und die geschichtliche Gelegenheiten seiner Zeit bestimmen den weiteren Verlauf." (61)

The spirit of revolt, of questioning long-established conventions and beliefs which was the intellectual counterpart of the external symptoms of disquiet sprang, as already pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, from Renaissance and Humanismus. Without these intellectual movements there would have been no reformation.

Religious Background:

The medieval church that Luther split was one of the most powerful institutions that mankind has ever seen. It had inherited the bureaucracy of the Roman

Empire and with its vast organisation reached down to — —

60. Friedenthal, Richard; Luther Sein Leben und seine Zeit, loc. cit., P. 188.

61. Ibid., P. 188.
each individual, not only watching over his life and death, but also following him into the next world with prayers and services for the dead.


The reasons are not far to seek. A Germany splintered into a hundred principalities big and small, each pulling in different direction and thinking only of its own good and ruled over by an emperor who thought only of his dynastic power, could not develop into a centralized state as England and France had already done, a centralized kingdom that could have changed its church into something like a national church and resisted papal domination.

The papacy fleeced Germany dry. Its collections poured into Rome in the form of Peters penny, contributions for the Turkish wars and the crusades, sale of indulgences etc. Bishoprics and all offices of the Church could be had for a price. Thus Albrecht von Brandenburg, younger brother of Joachim, Markgraf of Brandenburg, became Archbishop of Magdeburg at the age of 23, bishop of Halberstadt and finally Archbishop of Mainz even against canonical rules that forbade the

62. Landgraf, Wolfgang; Martin Luther, loc. cit., P. 49.
holding of more than one church office. But the Fuggers advanced him loans and manipulated matters as in any business deal and even entered all the details in their account books. (63) To repay the Fuggers, Albrecht had to engage Tetzel and to start a vigorous sale of indulgences which brought Luther into the arena with his ninety theses.

What worsened the general impression about the church was the profligate luxurious life led by the popes, bishops, church dignitaries and monks. Popes like Julius II who led armies like a general, Clement VII, Alexander VI etc. who shamelessly paraded their mistresses and children in public brought to the church of Rome such epithets as the "Whore of Babylon" and thereby did the greatest disservice to the church they headed. Alexander VI thus stood on his balcony in public with his arm round his daughter and is said to have died of poison he had meant for someone else. By their indiscriminate use of interdicts and excommunications they made these punishments meaningless for the people. Pius II thus made nonpayment of tolls a mortal sin. (64)

Many bishops followed in the footsteps

63. Friedenthal, Richard; Luther sein Leben und Seine Zeit, loc. cit., P. 179.
of these profligate worldly popes. At Straßburg Geiler von Kaiserberg, one of the most powerful preachers of the time, denounces them.

"Das ist Bischofs Werk: Mit viel Pferden reiten; große Ehre einnehmen, den Säckel füllen, gute Hühnlein essen und den Huren nachlaufen." (65)

It was true that many of them were generous patrons of art and architecture; but the unchristian lives that they led was a scandal for whole Christendom. The bishop Robert Browning pictures in his poem, "The Bishop Orders his tomb at Saint Praxed's church" (66) is a typical representative of the church dignitaries of that time. What Landgraf says about the popes, applies to the bishops also:

"Die päpstliche Hofhaltung, der verschwenderische Luxus, Zuwendungen, die man den Verwandten macht, prunkvolle Kirchen und Klosterneubauten, nicht zuletzt auch großzügiges Mäzenatentum gegenüber den Künsten und Wissenschaften leeren die Schatullen." (67)

The monasteries only added to the disrepute.

The literature of the time is full of mocking references to the monks' addiction to wine and women.

65. Landgraf, Wolfgang; Luther Reformator and Rebell, loc. cit., P. 50.


67. Landgraf, Wolfgang; Luther Reformator und Rebell, loc. cit., P. 49.
to their laziness and disregard for a religious life, to prayer and contemplation. Moreover there were keen rivalries between the various orders. The dispute over Luther's theses was in fact considered in the beginning a monks' quarrel, as Leo X is said to have called it. A humanist of the time writing from Antwerp to Spain depicts the whole affair as a fresh instance of rivalry among the monks:

"Der Augustiner ist neidisch auf den Dominikaner, der Dominikaner auf den Augustiner und beide auf die Franziskaner—was kann man sich anders als die allerheftigsten Uneinigkeiten versprechen?"(68)

It was also common knowledge that the same easy going monks could be unrelenting and cruel, when it came to dissenters on doctrinal matter among themselves. Luther, for example, in his student days in Eisenach personally knew the case of a Franciscan monk Johannes Hilten who was shut up in the deepest vault of the Franciscan monastery for teaching against the malpractices of the church and died in imprisonment. (69)

It is at the same time true that there were saintly monks and good bishops and that a great

68. Friedenthal, Richard; Luther sein Leben und Seine Zeit, loc. cit., P. 191.

69. Landgraf Wolfgang; Martin Luther, loc. cit., P. 21-22.
majority of people lived in unquestioning faith, celebrating the church feasts, honouring the relics, making pilgrimages, making generous gifts of money and land to the monasteries. This was perhaps natural in an age when pests and plagues and other forms of death devastated towns and man in fear turned to God for help.

"Bußtumel erfaßt das Volk, Die Menschen gebel'n sich, beten, opfern, geloben Wallfahrten." (70)

Naturally they went to superstitious extremes which make one feel that the common people were sunk in blind superstitions. We read of reliques that were carried in procession at Magdeburg during Luther's school days:

"Inmitten der Menge führt man in einem silbernen Sarg kostbare Reliquien—etwas Erde von Acker zu Damaskus, daraus Gott den Menschen schuf; Milch der Jungfrau Maria; das Barett des heiligen Franziskus. Auf dem Domplatz knien die Glaubigen nieder und beten in frommer Andacht." (71)

Luther was deeply impressed by the simple piety of the people as is evident from his description of the Prince of Anhalt who had become a beggar monk

70. Ibid., P. 36.
71. Ibid., P. 19.
of the Franciscan Order.

"Ich habe ihn gesehen mit diesen Augen, da ich vierzehnjährig in Magdeburg zur Schule ging, einen Fürsten zu Anhalt... der ging barfuß auf der breiten Strasse nach Brot und trug den Sack wie ein Esel, daß er sich krummen mußte... hatte sich so zerfetzt, zerwacht und kasteit, daß er aussah wie ein Totenbild, lauter Haut und Knochen. Wer ihn ansah, der schmatzte vor Andacht und mußte sich seines Standes scham.") (72)

Luther was at the same time conscious of the wild superstions of his day and from his pen we have a vivid description of them.

"Von Unheil und Unholden war viel die Rede. Das Bergmannsleben war umlagert von den Gedanken an ückische und boshafte Geister, Dämonen, Teufel, die hinter jedem der zahlreichen Unfallen steckten; der Vater kam nach Hause und erzählte von einem Arbeits-Kameraden, dem die Satansboten den ganzen Rücken zerfleischt hatten, bis er qualvoll sterben mußte. Die Mutter beim Tod eines der Kinder war überzeugt, die Hexe, die Nachbarin, habe das Kind getötet. Von der Kanzel wurde bei jedem Gewitter und Hagel gegen die Hexen geeifert." (73)

Writers like Erasmus wrote in a sarcastic humorous vein about the various failings of the monks,

72. Ibid., P.18.
73. Quoted from: Friedenthal, Richard; 'Luther Sein Leben und Seine Zeit, loc. cit., P.18.
of the church's trading with relics and indulgences and such writings of the humanists played their part in turning the tide of feelings against the church and clergy. Erasmus' 'Gespräche' attacked the beliefs of the middle ages on many points though he himself remained a true son of the church.

"Reliquien und Wallfahrten hat er mit einem überlegenen aber so tödlichen Spott behandelt, daß selbst Luther-äußerlich geurteilt-nicht Schärferes vorbringen konnte." (74)

What the humanists wrote became easily accessible to the people due to the invention of printing.

Erasmus is only one of the many humanists who ushered in the new age. The monks had till then the monopoly of knowledge. This monopoly was broken and a generation of young people like Melanchthon, Eck, Crotus Rubanus, Ulrich von Hutten etc., who became famous even as young men, took possession of the Universities and blasted with their satires, epigrammes and polemical writings medieval scholasticism, dogmatism and intolerance. They fought one of their bitterest battles against the Dominicans (Dunkelmänner) and for Reuchlin, a jurist and philologist, who knew Hebrew and showed some understanding for the Jews for which

74. Liljè, Hanns; Martin Luther, loc.cit., P.22.
he was tried and condemned. This significantly took place on the eve of Luther's own trial and was yet another evidence of the rigidity and inflexibility of the church that forbade investigation into Hebrew originals of Bible texts and approved only of the Latin translation of Hieronymus.

One more undercurrent of the times is represented by the mystics. Since the Church could not satisfy their spiritual cravings, many people turned to mystic practices for direct communion with God. These people lived very quiet lives. Friedenthal calls this mystic school an 'Untergrundbewegung' which had a great significance for German mysticism. The church condemned them and wanted to crush them. Their aloofness, secrecy and refusal to integrate themselves into any big group aroused suspicions. Friedenthal attributes the famous devotional and mystic work 'Imitation of Christ' to them.

"...sie hatten ihre Anhänger in die 'Devotio moderna' des Gerrit Groote und brachten in der 'Nachfolge Christ' die unter den Namen des Thomas von Kempen geht, eines der am weitesten verbreiteten Andachtsbücher hervor, das wegen seiner schwerwütigen und allen kühnen Bildern der anderen Mystiker entsagenden Stimmungslyrik sogar als erlaubt angesehen wurde." (75)

75. Friedenthal, Richard; Luther Sein Leben und Seine Zeit, loc. cit., P. 150.
The imaginative play with God as the lover and the soul as the beloved was carried in certain works to extremes as when a virgin says:

"ich bin siech von minnen / an hertzen und an-sinnen / Es mag nit länger sin geswiegen:/ ich muß sin gar zu bette liegen." (76)

These mystics lived on alms and were accused of too free lives, the women (Beginen) among them being called 'Huren'. Perhaps their Gottbetrunkentheit gave them that sense of release and unrestrained freedom (as in the Tantric rites of India).

"Die These... daß völliges Aufgehen in Gott den Menschen völlig frei mache, der damit keinen eigenen Willen mehr habe und somit auch nicht sündigen könne, selbst wenn er 'Fleischessünde' beginge, hat anscheinend einige ganz wilde Sekten hervorgebracht, die halbnackt umherzogen und blutig verfolgt wurden." (77)

One of their books supposed to be written by the Dominican preacher Tauler fell into Luther's hands. He published it in 1516 and praised it in the highest terms, saying that there was more wisdom in it than in "allen Büchern der Lehrer der Hohen Schulen" (78). The mystic strain was another expression of revolt against

76. Ibid., P. 151.
77. Ibid., P. 151.
78. Ibid., P. 152.
the established church.

One can say that all these manifestations were only the first mutterings of the storm that was soon to descend in full blast upon Germany and Europe.

Comparison:

Certain outstanding points of similarity come to the fore in this short survey. The political situation in the two countries was the same. One dominant feature of the times was the lack of a centralized state. Germany split up into hundreds of independent states and North India divided into many kingdoms presented a picture of chaos and confusion. The Kaiser of the Holy Roman Empire and the ruler of the Kingdom of Delhi that included Panjab were suzerains only in name, real power being in the hands of the regional princes or governors. Intermittent wars between the various rulers as well as foreign invasions created havoc in the lives of the common people and made life and property insecure.

The social set up was more or less similar. Cutting across the political borders was another division, the feudal organisation of society into church, aristocracy, Bürger (Middle Class) and peasants in Germany and Europe, the caste system with the four castes in addition to the great chasm that separated Muslims and Hindus in India. In both societies the rich exploited the poor,
the strong oppressed the weak, the higher strata of society crushed the lower ones. There was wide-spread corruption and brutality. In India the factor of foreign conquest and two warring religions worsened the situation still further.

Perhaps it is in the religious background that the parallels are most striking. Priestly supremacy was the bane of religion in both Germany and India. The pope and the clergy dominated the church, laid down the dogmas, punished all deviators from orthodoxy with interdicts and excommunications, barred all independent and progressive thinking as in the case of Galileo and kept its stranglehold on man's body and soul. The Brahmins, the priestly class of India, kept for themselves the monopoly of knowledge, rigidly maintained the caste system which ensured their own position, made religion into a series of rituals and ceremonies for which they themselves were intermediaries between God and man and had as strong a hold on man's body and soul as the catholic Church in Germany.

"Mahants and Maulvies had made a mockery of religion. They ran 'shops' in its name and 'sold' salvation to the sulky subjects."(79)

The inaccessibility of the common man to religion

was ensured by the use of Latin in Europe and Sanskrit in India. This meant naturally that superstitions flourished among the common people in both countries, filled them with terror before mysterious occurrences and made them abjectly turn to religion and to supernatural powers for help. The selling of indulgences was possible only in a world of superstitions, a fact that becomes clear in the following description of Tetzel’s selling of indulgences.

"Tetzel visited town after town in Germany. On the outskirts of each, the Members of the town council met him and escorted him in a solemn procession down the main street amid waving flags and pealing church bells. In front of him was carried a cross bearing the papal arms and the papal bull (or document) setting out the indulgence resting on a gold-embroidered velvet cushion. The cross was set up in the market place, and Tetzel spoke to the people. He required no evidence of repentance for their sins from those who bought an indulgence for themselves, and he also proclaimed that anyone buying one for a dead relative could obtain the immediate release of his soul from purgatory." (80)

Religion as personal communion with God was lost sight of entirely and became purely a matter of

80. Cowie, Leonard; Luther Father of the Reformation, loc. cit., P. 47.
external observances. This in turn led to a revival of mysticism both in Germany and India. There were also attempts to purify religion of all the evils that infested it. Thus there were Pre-Luther and Pre-Nanak movements in this direction. Luther was influenced not only by mysticism but also by his fore-runners in the struggle against the Church of Rome like John Wycliffe in England and Huss in Bohemia. Nanak was influenced by the Sufi and Bhakti Movements and had fore-runners like Kabir, Ramanand etc.

An over-emphasis on asceticism was typical of both Hindu India and Catholic Europe. The monks of the various religious orders in Europe and Yogis, Sidhs and Sadhus of Hindu India were birds of the same feather, not only in the true asceticism of the few, but also in the lechery of the many. In fact the atmosphere of religious centres in Germany and India must have been essentially the same with the pious offering worship in an orgy of rituals and wandering ascetics crowding the scene especially at the not infrequent church or temple festivals on which the common people relied, not only for spiritual nourishment but also for relieving the dullness and monotony of their life. The burning lights, ringing bells and rising smoke of the incense were typical for both temple service and church service, while the statues
of saints in the church and of the Gods and Goddesses in the temple must have conjured up the same feeling of ardour and fervour in the hearts of their devotees, feelings that rose to a crescendo in the religious processions carrying these same idols.

It was also quite logical that reformers should rise in both countries to fight against the prevalent social and religious evils and excesses. It is also not surprising that those reform movements had many things in common. What K.P. Srinivasa Iyengar says of the two movements is extremely pertinent in this context:

"He (Nanak) was a child of India, specially the Panjab of the 15th Century. It was an age of uncertainty and insecurity, an age of material decadence and moral corruption, an age that acquiesced—indeed gloated—in the letter killing the spirit, the form emptying (not containing) the substance. And contemporaneously, in Europe too, out of similar conditions there was fermenting the double phenomenon of the Renaissance and the reformation. It was one of those ages in earth history when the evolutionary push towards the future was specially and spectacularly active." (81)