The poetry of Garib Das, as our study shows, occupies a fairly prominent place in the history of Medieval literature and is no doubt an outstanding contribution to the eighteenth century religious literature of the Punjab and Haryana. It has enriched both Punjabi and Western Hindi literature.

The first and most important contribution of Garib Das to Indian thought is his universalism. Like his predecessors he thinks of mankind not as Hindus or Muslims, Kafirs or Mahajans, but as human brotherhood. There is one and the same God everywhere and he judged the sins and virtues of all men and women impartially. No creed had exclusive access to God and no prophet was final or the only one to realize God. The divisions of race, nationality and caste are artificial divisions made by society, and it is the duty of all truth-loving saints to remove these differences. Although creeds divide man from man the love of God and the love of virtues unites all men.

In the eighteenth century, when terrible conflicts were going on between Mughals and Pathans, between Hindus and Muslims and between Sikhs, Muslims and Maharathas at the political level and between Yogis, Sannyasis, Jains, Buddhists, Shalwas and Vaishnavas, Sunnis and Shias at religious level the poetry of Garib Das was a great integrating force, though we admit that the sphere of its influence was limited. The Saint did not lose heart in his mission although the religious, cultural and political conflicts around him were violent. He fearlessly asserted his stand of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He strongly condemned hatred, bitterness and pride on religious grounds. Like an inspired saint-poet, he continued to
exert his moral and spiritual influence on society as a whole. He restlessly preached unity and cultural understanding between the divergent creeds like Hinduism and Islam and unity and equality between the rich and the poor, the high and the low.

The thoughts of Garib Das, like those of Kabir, can be called a healthy synthesis of progressive elements of Hinduism and Islam. After making a deep study of both, they criticised unhealthy elements in Hinduism and Islam and tried to find a common meeting ground for both the schools of thoughts. Thus they found ready followers among both Hindus and Muslims. The orthodox sections of both Islam and Hinduism resented this new approach but these great saints disregarded their orthodoxy and gave progressive inspiration to Indian thought and religion.

Although Garib Das had a distinct philosophy of life, he did not write any philosophical treatise. His approach to the problems of life was that a mystic poet who gives spiritual but practical solutions of the moral degradation that had overtaken his society. His effort was to give a practical way for the attainment of the highest spiritual state.

We find that Garib Das is a very clear thinker. He can even be said to be an independent-minded thinker. He accepted the best that was in his predecessors, and although he impresses us with his spiritual debt to Kabir, he differed almost as much from Kabir as Kabir differed from Ramanand. Although like Kabir he rejected the authority of Vedas and Katabas, he accepted Hindu traditions and cultural influences much more than Kabir ever did. While the influence of Kabir spread beyond his provincial sphere to the Hindus and Muslims and later on to Sikhs, his influence was mainly confined to a group of disciples in Haryana and Punjab. Kabir’s influence was accepted by Muslims as well as Hindus but Garib Das exercised
practically no influence on Muslim society of his days except a few individuals.

Like all medieval mystics Garib Das was cosmopolitan. He stood for what has been described by Prof. R.D. Ranade and Prof. W.B. Patwardhan as the spiritual democracy of the Bhakti Schoo. "The gates of Bhakti school were ever open. Whoever entered was hailed as a brother, may more, was honoured as a saint. He was addressed as a Sañt. The very atmosphere was sacred and holy. The breath of heaven played freely, and all were equal there. Love - true- genuine- pure love admits not of high and low, rich and poor; all is one and equal. All separatist tendencies vanished; the haughty isolation of pride, of heredity, of tradition melted away, and all men, women, weak, frail, lame and blind were calling on the same strength, seeking the same line, hoping the same hope, dreaming the same dream, and seeing the same vision."

Such was the world which Saints like Garib Das wanted to create around them that age and sex, caste and class, breathed in equalising air. In the joy of love, in the bliss of the service of the Lord, all were inspired by the same light of true wisdom.

Garib Das points out that God could be realized in any walk of life. The tailor, the barber, the maid servant, the gardener, the sweeper, the potter, the goldsmith, even the prostitute could all realize God in their different stations of life. It was not at all necessary to renounce householders life and go to the forests in search of god.

In the poetry of Garib Das we find a unique reconciliation of worldly and spiritual life. He did not extricate himself from worldly life. He himself had a family. His teachings were such

which attracted the educated and the populace.

A signal contribution of Garib Das is his enrichment of the Punjabi as well as Western Hindi languages. He spent all his life near Delhi where Punjabi and Western Hindi meet. He enriched each of these languages separately and brought them close to each other in a healthy synthesis of simple 'Sant Bhakha'. The partisans of Sanskrit were still very powerful and the contempt for the simple language of the people was still rank and rampant. But saints like Garib Das never wrote for name and fame among the learned Pundits. They wrote for diffusion of light among the common people and even among women and Sudras. They scorned the scorn of the learned and championed the voiceless millions espousing the cause of the provincial languages. They had to fight for upholding the language and literature of the people and this fight has continued into our own times. The view of the learned during these days was that Punjabi and Hindi were the language of the illiterate and the vulgar. Those versed in Sanskrit had nothing to do with it. It was a degradation. That was the view of the learned in those days. Garib Das like other mystic saints of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fought against these tendencies and championed the language of the people. Garib Das strongly held to the view that the word of God is holy in each and every language.

Following closely the literary traditions of Kabir, Dadu and Nanak, Garib Das has contributed much more in bulk than any Punjabi poet of his times. Its linguistic and literary importance has been neglected because he belonged to a region the thought and literature of which has unfortunately been neglected both by Punjabi and Hindi literary critics. Another main reason for this was also the fact that until recently the writings of Garib Das were not easily available either in Hindi or in Punjabi. Only a small circle of Garib Dasi
kept the printed volumes strictly to themselves. They still do not show the manuscript copies of the writings of Garib Das and the errors of copyists and printers still cannot be eradicated.

The question that now arises is as to why did not the mission and writings of Garib Das become popular. The reasons are many. Firstly in the struggle between orthodox and liberal forces, the orthodox forces were ultimately victorious. The mission of Namdev, Ravidas, Kabir and Ramnand weakened so much that they have left now only a handful of followers. Research scholars have only recently started taking linguistic interest in the writings of medieval Saints. Sufi literature is studied with great interest but Sufism is waning. Similarly Kabirism and Namdevism are practically subsided. Garib Das’ popularity has suffered the same fate. Garib Panthis have built a narrow, sectarian superstructure about the Panth, and its present form and features are such that very few people can accept it. There is lack of inspired men, and idealists like Garib Das, and they have failed to move forward with the times. Garib Das’ ideas were so liberal that they could be adjusted to the social needs of the times. The active link with society is lost as the work of propagation of this faith is done mostly by ochre robe sadhus.

Proper linguistic and literary studies of the writings of Garib Das are bound to have a regenerating influence on the future, if they are properly presented to the younger generation. The study of the writings of Garib Das should be taken up as seriously as those of Kabir and Nanak. Their linguistic and cultural importance is very great. It is what may be termed as the representative poetry of the Haryana region in which Punjabi, Braj, Persian or Khadi boli have mingled together into a truly national language.

Garib Das is a revivalist of the Kabirpanth. Like Dadu he did
it in his own way. He was proud of being called upon to carry
the message of Kabir. So in my opinion, the writings of Garib
Das should be considered an important phase in the evolution
and development of Kabirparth. The sectarian followers of Garib
Das have narrowed the scope of the spread of the ideas of Garib
Das. Their methods of propagation and preaching have limited
the knowledge of his writings to a few of his devotees, mostly
Hindus. With the creation of Hariyana as an independent state,
it is earnestly hoped that, the study of the writings of Garib
Das will be taken up seriously as he is the most outstanding
national poet of Hariyana State. He was bitterly against all
types of hypocrisy and shame. He did not believe that religion
lies in outward show of piety. Religion was an inward urge. He
also believed in non-injury and ahimsa. He was against all
types of violence in social life.