CHAP TER. 3.

POLITICAL, SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS
AND HISTORICAL MYTHOLOGICAL EVENTS REFLECTED IN GARIB DAS' POETRY.

(A) POLITICAL, SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS
AS DEPICTED IN GARIB DAS' POETRY.

Apart from the Sikh Gurus and for a short period the Satnamis, very few medieval Saints took part in political movements of the time. They accepted Mughal Rule and its despotism as an individual accepts fate. They no doubt did a lot to bring moral and spiritual awakening among the people, but for fear of being persecuted as political rebels, they did not criticise or condemn the evil acts of the rulers.

As Wilbur S. Deming puts it, "the Hindus had become demoralised and to a certain extent denationalised. In the narrow sense it is possible that Bhakti poets taught many religious themes, that had little to do with the political regeneration of the country, themes which seemed to oppose such regeneration like that of renunciation and turning away from the things of the world."

No doubt there were great political and social upheavals throughout the 18th Century, but it is a tragic fact that most of the Hindu Saints of India did not utter a word of protest against the despotism and cruelty, that prevailed during their life time.

Sant Garib Das lived all his life only about 30 miles away from Delhi. We have to see the political conditions were at different stages of his life and whether he reacted towards them.

1. W.S. Deming: Ramdas and Ramdas, p 16.
or not. We will also study whether the political situation of a particular period warranted any comments or reactions from a religious and social reformer. We will base our comments and conclusions on Garib Das' political thinking on these findings.

Bahadur Shah (Shah Alam I) died in 1712 A.D. a few years before the birth of Garib Das. "After him, "says S.R. Sharma, came the fall of the Empire, and the rule of "her sister chaos" Shah Alam's rule was marked by a sanity and liberalism not unworthy of the descendents of the great Akbar. His successors were definitely caste in an inferior mould and were undoubtedly of poor clay."

The following were the Emperors who ruled in Delhi during the lifetime of Garib Das (A.D. 1717-1774).

1. Farrukhsiyar 1713-19 A.D
2. Rafiuddarajat and Rafiuddaula 1719 A.D
4. Ahmad Shah 1748-54 A.D
5. Alamgir II 1754-9 A.D
6. Shah Alam 1759-1806 A.D

Two Sayyid brothers, Hwsain Ali and Abdulla were the real King Makers and dictators for some decades. The treatment that Farruksiyar received from the Sayyids was in no way more harsh, then what he had meted out to his possible rivals. His worthlessness, intrigues and ingratitude made his removal almost necessary for his ministers.4

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2. S.R. Sharma: The Crescent in India p.637-88
3. R.C. Mujumdar and Others: "The Advanced History of India" p 629
4. S.R. Sharma: The Crescent in India p 698
The King was imprisoned, blinded and killed in an ignominous manner. Garib Das was quite young at that time and we should not expect him to have taken note of the political events of this period.

Muhammad Shah became the Emperor in 1719 A.D. "Although a mere cypher in respect of his public duties, says J.N. Sarkar, there were some redeeming traits in his character. Naturally timid and wavering, he was also free from insolent pride, caprice and love of wanton cruelty. He never gave consent to shedding blood or doing harm to God's creatures. In his reign the people passed their lives in ease, and the empire outwardly retained its dignity and prestige. The foundations of Delhi Monarchy were really rotten but Muhammad Shah by his cleverness kept them standing."

We find some references to Muhammad Shah and his reign in the writings of Sant Garib Das. Garib Das did not believe in hobnobbing with Kings and Courtiers or going to the Royal Courts for favours and patronage. He says in his writings: "One should not go to the Royal Courts as it disturbs the contemplative life of a Saint and whatever alms are received from the Court are like drinking blood." "It is a grievous sin to go to the Royal Courts.

5. J.N. Sarkar quoted by S.R. Sharma "The Crescent in India" p 698

6. Garib sermonises to a Shah (Emperor) in his writings which his biographers believe was Muhammad Shah, whom he is said to have met. Swami Yogendrananda writes: "Delhi darbar me Mohammad Shah (1720-1740) ki biseo prarthna par ap padhare; ap ke updeson ke puran prabhav badshah par pada the

7. Garib raj duar na jaiai, sun cela ya sikh;
   khat bhajan mai bhang hoe rat sarupi bikh
   G.G.S. p 143;
The religious life of the Saint is poisoned just as human body
duffers from snake bite."

When Garib Das received pressing invitation from the
Emperor, the meeting was quite cordial. The historical
description of the meeting shows that the Emperor showed great
respect for the Saint and the Saint fearlessly asked the
Emperor to be genial and tolerant towards the Hindus. But
the Emperor was a mere puppet in the hands of his bigoted
ministers who were even thinking of re-imposing jizya.

So although the meeting between the Saint and the Emperor
was very cordial, the overbearing ministers tried to harass
the Saint, who escaped being molested by the intervention of
the Emperor, although legend attributes to a miracle by the
Saint.

In the writings of Garib Das there is a vague reference
to Delhi kingdom as "dilli maandal pap ki bhumi" Delhi is the
den of sin. There are also vague references to the inevitable
fall of despotic empire and the ultimate victory of Good.

8. raj dur na jalaai lagaai mota pap
   khat bhajan mai bhang hoe jiohn daik maritya sahp.  
   ibid

9. Dilli maandal pap ki nagri dharti nai jagauh suman
   hasti ghorah katak singhahem driyst parai asuram dal marvah.
   G.G.S. Asur-nikandan p 490

10. Dilli ke takhat chatar pjabhi phiraesi
    khetat gupat sain bhajan sabh phokat phain,
    mahiyal raj bala purus satgur diklaesi;
    avaiga dakhan se divana Kabul ka
    kal kil kilya gal hai turkanah.
    kil kil kilya autar kalah,
    jitan jaish hujhmalai aisa purus aya
    kehta hai Garib Das Dilli maandal hoe bilas nihklaik rayah.
    ibid p 491

The above quotation shows that Garib Das like most Hindus was
a futurist expecting the great Kalki Avatar to be born. He hopes
that a time will come when the Great Reformer Avatar will be born
and he will destroy root and branch the evil forces that were
dominant at Delhi.
There are, however, no direct references or vivid descriptions of the terrible state of affairs that prevailed throughout the country. The whole of the Punjab was in revolt. The Marhattas were at the gates of Delhi. The economic and political conditions were deplorable. Public business was dealt with as if it were a child's toy, revenue business was disposed of by the heads of the army, and night watchman decided cases instead of the Qazi. The Emperor was immersed in pleasure, the nobles drank with envy and the servants of the state were starving.

The Hindus probably felt that nemesis was overtaking the Mughal Empire, and the events leading to its fall probably would bring a more tolerant government. But then came two disastrous invasions. The invasion of Nadir Shah and the repeated invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali. These two political upheavals shook from the very foundation the whole of the empire, but the saint makes no reference to them. Staying only thirty miles away from Delhi Garib Das was almost an eye witness to these events.

Like most of the medieval Saints Garib Das showed almost complete indifference to the political oppression, misery and degradation of the time. The horrors perpetrated by the King Makers, the Nadir Shah invasion and the attacks of Ahmad Shah Abdali did not invoke any direct comments from Garib Das. He seems to have confined himself and his activities only to the religious sphere and as men around him were unarmed, weak and poor and destitute, the Saint perhaps considered silence and fatalistic acceptance of the happenings to be the best attitude.

11. S. R. Sharma: The Crescent over India p 724
The Hindu idea of a Saint, fundamentally was, one who has renounced the world and worldly desires. From this spirit of escapist renunciation stemmed the apathy of the Hindu Saints towards all political and economic upheavals of the country. It is because of this outlook that apart from the Sikh Gurus in the north and Swami Ram Das (Shivaji's Guru) in the South, very few Saints were able to give national lead to the country.

Thus it would not be unreasonable to conclude that Garib Das maintained an unconcerned and indifferent attitude towards the political situation in his country during his lifetime.

There is not a word of condemnation of the atrocities perpetrated by the rulers and the misery heaped upon his countrymen by the inhuman cruelty of the invaders and rulers. There is an implied reference to Kali Yuga the dark age in which the poet says there is utter demoralisation.

The Pandits have become tigers and swallow raw meat. The Brahmin brews wine and drinks it with roasted mutton. The Hindus and Muslims drink wine from the same cup and have lost their distinction in participation of evil. Women are not loyal to their husbands and no one mourns the dead. The whole world is full of cheats.

12. Pundit Vyas gr hoc kak ha gos bhahve Garib baman ke ghar bhathi dharu bakre taliai Hindu Turk ná bhin, nivale pyale raline Garib panc bhartari nár patí vartā nahi koe Muse purus ná moq, dige ghar anand hoe Garib thagirā sabh saṃsār ....... (R.S. P 128)
II
SOCIAL CONDITIONS AS REFLECTED IN GARIB DAS

Garib Das lived in the Hindu Society of eighteenth Century Hariyana. Although serious attempts have been made to reform the age old Brahmanical Structure of the Society, which might have proved useful in remote times, but was the cause of immense set-back in the face of Islam, the general structure of the Hindu Society of the times of Garib Das still remained the same and was traditionally based on Simrities. The four-fold Order of the society and the Varnaashrama Caste system were still prevalent against which Saints like Garib Das were fighting vigorously. Brahmanism still dominated and was the object of severe attacks from Garib Das:

"If thou O Brahmin claim to be of highest birth,
Why did you not come out by a different way.
You wear the Sacred thread on your body,
You have forgotten the real path.
Every one is made of the same flesh and bones,
Be it a Brahmin or a Sudra 13

G.G.S. Rag Hori p 644.

The social life of the people as reflected in Garib Das' poetry was built around the village, where there was a clearly defined system of organisation, each member of the community contributing his or her share to the well-being of the group.

13. Je tūn bāhman bāhmī jāya,
 tān an bāt kīōn na ayaḥ
 tāiṁ ghāḷyā kāṇḍh jānev,
 tūṁ brūḷya bāt bateu,
 hai sath had cma ml gūḍa
 ya mai ko brāhman ko sūda.

G.G.S. Rag Hori p 144
The joint family system prevailed and the family bond was a strong one, the sons bringing the bride home to live under the paternal roof and every member of the family was surrounded by social and religious obligations which followed him or her from birth to death. The women performed practically all the manual work in connection with the household and shared in the discipline and training of the children. Muslim influence was far less predominant in villages than in towns. These things are also quite apparent from the life and surroundings of Garib Das discussed in the chapter on his biography.

The impact of Militant Islam and of the gentle influence of Sufism was strongly felt by the Hindu Society and leaders of this period. Garib Das' writings show the existence of both the orthodox Hindu views and the liberal trends which tried to liberate the Hindu mind from the shackles of closed and static society.

The Hindus & Muslims know not the true values
They keep fasts which are wasteful.
Both religions do not have real faith in God
The Hindus bow to the East & the Muslims to the West
Garib says, I know it for certain that God is there in all directions 14
B.S. Satin bar ki Ramauni
P 289

Although caste system prevailed in the old traditional manner, its hold on the mind of the masses was loosening. Each caste was still performing the function accorded to it, but the Bhakti movement culminating had given the lower castes equal opportunity to pray and worship. The saints of the

14. Hindi Yurk Kadar nahi jane, rajya gyaas kare dhingtanai
donyu din yakin na asa ve purab ve pasram wivasai
dhun din ka chadya leka, utar dakhan main nem dekha
Garib Das ham hishe jani re caron kut dason dis dhyan
Bhakti Movement created new scriptures, new temples and new prayers and congregations, the study and use of which was open to all castes and creeds.

God's realm is a wonderful place,
It is a place for the liberated souls;
It is congregation of the intoxicated ones,
There are no differences of caste and creed. 15

G.G.S. Parcha ka ang p 28

Although Kabir, Guru Nanak and later on Garib Das tried their best to bridge the religious differences between the Hindus and the Muslims, they were not able to do much in that direction except that they set up some schools of thought which continued to stand in between the two communities as integrating forces. Dr. R.C. Majumdar says: "It is noteworthy, that neither the Hindus nor the Muslims, even to the least degree, the chief characteristic features of the other's culture which may be regarded as their greatest contribution to human civilization. The ultra-democratic social ideas of the Muslims, though strictly confined to their own religious community were an object-lesson of equality and fraternity which Europe, and through her the world, learnt at a great cost only in the nineteenth century. The liberal spirit of toleration and reverence for all religions, preached and practised by the Hindus, is still an idea and despair of the civilized mankind. The Hindus, even with the living example of the Muslim community before their very eyes, did not relax in the least their social rigidity and inequality of men exemplified in caste system and

15. ajab khub khala jahan
muki muhalla mokh
majlis matwale mahal
jat pat teh ev...

G.G.S. Parcha ka ang p 128
untouchability. Nor did the Muslims moderate their zeal to destroy ruthlessly, the Hindu temples and images of gods, and their attitude in this respect remained unchanged, from the day when Muhammed bin Qasim set foot on the soil of India till the eighteenth century A.D., when they lost all political power. The Hindus combined catholicity in religious outlook with bigotry in social ethics, while the Muslims displayed an equal bigotry in religious ideas with catholicity in social behaviour."

While the political status of the Hindus was not such as to inspire their love and good will towards the Muslims, the social and religious differences were so acute and fundamental that they raised a Chinese wall between the two communities. Religion which formed the very basis of culture and the keynote of life both among the Muslims and Hindus, kept them apart like two poles in the cultural sphere. The movement started by Ramananda, Kabir, Guru Nanak to lessen the gap was carried further by Garib Das in a number of ways. Garib Das being a staunch Kabirpanthi, carried the mission of his Master as far as the times and the society in which he lived, allowed. He deplored the artificial differences created by Hindu and Muslim fanatics and pointed out that both worshipped the same God and aspired after the same spiritual Truth,

What of the Hindus and what of the Muslims,
All seek the One Door of God;
What of the Brahmin and what of the Sudra;

15 (a). R.C. Majumder and Others: The History and Culture of the Indian People Vol VI p 616-17
They are all made of the same flesh and blood.

G.G.G. Patibreta Ramaini p 494

Gerib Das even broke down the linguistic barriers between the Hindus and Muslims. He frequently used Persian, Hindi, Rajasthani, Punjabi and mingled Sanskrit and Sufi religious terminology to remove all narrow sanctity attached to any language. Thus he broke the barriers and prejudices of language fanaticalism which have cropped up again in free India today in equally ugly forms. The spoken languages became as important as the classical and court languages. People could now read the Writings of the Saints in popular language and enter religious life without the aid of priests and Pandits. It is in view of this grand mastery of the modern languages that Dr. Mohan Singh says that Gerib Das' knowledge of other Indian languages was greater than that of any other Indian poet of medieval India, the only poet who comes near to him being Shah Qayem Dih Chisti.

Gerib Das pointed out the errors of both the Hindus and Muslims. This shows that the medieval saints were making a searching criticism of both Hinduism and Islam. They were imbibing the best that was in both. They were trying to synthesise the social structure of Hinduism and Islam into a well integrated Indian Culture that we are still trying hard to achieve. The path of righteousness, love of God, spirituality was the common ground for meeting of both the Societies,
0 Garib Das, the mother does not know about the womb, 
Both the Hindus and Muslims fight between each other. 18

Gerib Das writings show that idolatry and image worship 
was still rampant in north India and like his predecessors he 
tried his best to fight it. His intense monism inspired him to 
preach vehemently against idolatry and image worship. People 
were responding to these healthy ideals with great enthusiasm.

Leaving the Supreme God, they worship stones, 
They turn their back to the Living Spirit 
And worship dead Matter. 
They love the dead stone 
And turn away from the Living God. 19

They call a stone God. 
Utterly blind is this world. 
They serve not the true Lord. 20 
Where will this worship lead them? 

Socially the Hindus were demoralised and down-trodden.

J. N. Sarker says, "the only life that the Hindus could lead was 
a life deprived of the consolations of religion, deprived of 
social union and public rejoicing, of wealth and confidence that

18. Garib Das seti garb ki kaahu, lekhe na met, 
dohin din bhid bhid maran, voh bidhate. 
G.G.S Reg Bilawal p 601

19. Garib perbrahm ku chad kar, pujein en anit, 
setan seti olne, jad seti hai prit. 
Garib pahan seti priti, setan seti dos 
dozak dhara jahinaa, ka di na pawei mokh 
G.G.S.chansak ka ang p 88

20. Garib pather permeswar kaein, yoh jag andha ghor, 
Sahib per setu nehi, pahunege kis thaur. 
Garib pather permeswar kaein, bade andesah mohe 
peras seii bhetia nehi, kaise palte loh. 
G.G.S. chansak ka ang p 88
is begotten by the free exercise of natural activities and use of opportunities. In short, the life exposed to constant public humiliation and political disabilities. Heaven and earth alike were closed to him as long as he remained a Hindu."

Apart from the restrictions about food, differences of religious doctrines and rituals, rules forbidding inter-marriages etc. this polar difference in their outlook upon life made a fission between Hindus and Muslims impossible. In addition to these the Quranic polity made life intolerable for the Hindus under orthodox Muhammadan rule.

Under these conditions Saints like Garib Das were trying the break down the social barriers and build a spiritual unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. They deemed the two Hindus and Muslims alike in the eyes of God. They also pointed out that cultural differences between the two were the artificial creation of different religious orders. He advised Hindus and Muslims to respect each other's sentiments about the cow and the swine. The saint perhaps did not realise that the cow was worshipped by the Hindus while the swine was hated by the Muslims.

Garib Das says, both Muslims & Hindus eat the Cow & Swine Both religions which indulge in cruelty will go to hell R.S. p 66

Thus we see that in the 18th century Indian society there was mighty effort to understand each other's culture. The medieval

22. ibid.
23. Garib sūr gan kā khēt hai, bismāl kare hāmās dukhāī din dosakh gēe, jam kū pēkās kēs. R.S. p66
Saints emphasised that the true ideals of both Islam and Hinduism were the same, namely the worship of one supreme Being, abstinence from earthly joys, mercy to all creatures. Yet the fanatics on both sides created a great barrier between the two. The Muslims addressed the Hindus as kafirs while Hindus addressed them as malechhas. Under the influence of Saints like Gerib Des people were trying to understand these words differently. Gerib Des has given a remarkable exposition of the word kafir as follows:

Listen to the interpretation of Kafir,
In both the Creeds there is Ram and Khanda,
Kafir is one who gives no charity,
Kafir is one who quarrels with the Saints,
Kafir is one who disobeys his father,
Such a Kafir goes to hell.
He is a kafir who kills his daughter,
He is a kafir who carries hidden dagger
He is a kafir who worships idols.
He is a kafir who steals crops
Kafir is one who takes intoxicants,
Kafir is one who smokes tobacco. 24

So a heretic ( kafir or malechha ) was to be judged by his character and not by race, caste or creed. A heretic was one who was devoid of moral and spiritual qualities and indulged in vice. Thus there were kafirs and malechhas among Hindus and Muslims. There were saintly and holy persons both among Hindus and Muslims, and these saintly persons were universally respected.

24. Kafir bodh sumo re bhai
    dohun din bie Ram Khndeji
    Kafir de jaye neh kahi,
    Kafir Sdnim Snt se arhi,
    Kafir pita becen utte
    itne jee.
Ve kafir jo kanyd meer
Ve kafir jo bknhd jare
Ve kafir jo aiter kati
Ve kafir jo dewel jati
Ve kafir jo khti core.

G.G.S. Kafir Bodh p 397
Gerib Das did not travel much. His contacts and influence were confined to Hariyana, Punjab, Rajastan and a part of Uttar Pradesh. His writings portray the social and cultural conditions mainly of Hariyana and the neighbouring regions. His writings are humming with the rural and social culture of this region. The cow and the spinning wheel, the two main props of Indian economy dominated the minds of Indian thinkers from the ancient times to the modern times of Gandhi period. The word spinning wheel occurs frequently in his poetry.

My spinning wheel is beautiful and colourful,
It gives the sound of Soham. 25

G.G.S. Reg Kafi p 659

Gerib Das refers to a few famines also which took place during his life time. Mughal History has recorded some famines up to the time of Aurangzeb. This famine possibly occurred either after the invasion of Nader Shah or after the invasion of Abdali. The exact date is not known. The Saint showed considerable concern about it.

"The Princes and the nobles of Delhi go about begging, who lived on māna and pało, but they do not get any bread now."

Tobacco was introduced in India during the time of Jahanīr. As the habit of smoking was spreading Emperors, Jahanīr, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb issued edicts prohibiting smoking but still this evil was spreading. Guru Gobind Singh made smoking a taboo for the Sikhs. He thought of nipping this evil in the bud. The use of other intoxicants was also common. The Saint

25. carkhā qab rangīla vo, soham jaṅkērat āi tēr
26. Gerīb Sehsāde maṅgat phireṅ Dilli ka Umēē ek rotī paṅi nēhi khoṭē nēn plē
g.G.S. Pareskh ka eng p 189
wrote very strongly against smoking and taking intoxicants.

Those who drink wine and eat meat
And commit adultery; their head is cut off
Seventy times in different births. 27

R.S. Mans Madr: Nised p 210

Tobacco invites death, my men;
Characterless people smoke hukkā. 28

G.G.S p 462

He points out that people, particularly Sadhus were in
the habit of taking tobacco, intoxicants and indulged in
adultery. Thus there was strong feeling against drinking wine
and smoking tobacco, although these habits have unfortunately
been on the increase and have even been made attractive by
commercial firms trading in tobacco and wine.

Women were highly respected in society. A Faithful wife
became a symbol of a faithful devotee or Bhakta.

Women also played a great part in helping men in the fields
and in their manual labour. The cottage Industry of spinning or
preparing other household necessities was done mainly by women.
Sita & Savitri formed their ideal of womanhood which maintained
family ties so strongly that there were no divorces. Pious women
went to the temples regularly and led an extremely religious life
at home & in public. They shared the joys & sorrows of life with
men. The Saint's writings also indicate that women wore ornaments
and colourful dresses. Ornaments and toilet was used not only to

27. surepēn med mēs aharēi, gēmēn kērei bhogein perrēri
ṣṭār jēhm kētē hēi aīsēm, sēkhi sēhīb hēi ājādīsēm.
R.S. ath Mēs madērē p 210

28. temēkū talabdēr jām kē jēmān
hukā hukēm nēs pīvēn hīvēn.

G.G.S temēkū ki bēint p 462
look smart but to attract people and mislead them. "Women put on collyrium in their eyes and colour their hands and fingers to fascinate people." Women as a devout wife was highly respected while women as physical attraction for men was condemned.

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

Saint Gerib Das was primarily a religious teacher. We get a vivid picture of the religious conditions of his times from his writings. One of the most striking features of the religious condition of the time is that in spite of the bigoted policy and forced conversion by Aurangzeb and some of his successors, this area, so close to Delhi preserved its ancient Hindu piety, traditions and faith almost un molested.

As it appears from the writings of Gerib Das, people were still inspired and guided by the historical figures of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagvata Purana. The Vaishnava piety preached by Bhagvatam and the ascetic ideals which made Sadas beggers and mendicants, were still popular and the Saint makes strong comments about them. He says

"The Udësi (ascetic) wanders from one home to another begging for simple food. Why should a saint beg for his food, if his mind is fixed on God."

G.G.S Veirag ka eng p 265

29. Gerib maino kejãr bahi kar kêr kêr lie hain bêmas
Hetôn mehdi lêg kar dob die kul bênas
Ulti mëng bhae kar mënjän kar hei get
mithi bhole megan hoc lawai bôhu bûnghât

G.G.S Kami nev ka eng P 104

30. Gerib përë bhëd hei ek menli ek pek
Këmen këmen bhëd hei ek ujel ek gëndëh

G.G.S. Këminer ka eng P 105

31. Gerib rûkhe sukhe bikhe mange
ghar ghar phire udësi
so bhîkhã ku mëngên jëvei
jin ke brît-akësi

G.G.S Beirag ka eng p 265
Saiva Sidhante and Nathpenththi Yoga still prevailed in their medieval pattern. The influence of Yoga was still quite strong. To attend to the emotional needs of these schools of thought Bhakta Gerib Des has written, Krishna Stotra. Shiva Stotra and has referred frequently to the stories of Mahabharata. For Gerib Des God alone was Krishna and God alone was Shiva. People in this area stuck tenaciously to age old Hindu practices.

The formal worship of various gods and goddesses still continued. The priests and Pandits and the mulles dominated the village society. The reformist leaders had introduced new forms of worship in which formal Hindu dieties and priests had no share. The musical services like bhajan katha and kirtan and such open air sermons were popular in which people could enjoy the prayer and worship of God without the aid of idols or priests. "A bhajan" is a choral service in which all those who are present, have a share. A kirtan is a service in which a leading singer expounds a theme and invites a group of attendants or the audience to join in a refrain; a kathē is interpreted in two ways: In the Punjab kathē simply means the interpretation or explanation of scriptures. In Maharashtra and some other provinces katha seeks to arouse patriotic and religious fervour by the musical narration of the exploits of heroes and gods.

The writings of Garib Des show that the influence of Mulles Qazis and Brahmins was destructive and on the wane. There was a strong Brehminical reaction against sacredotilism which lifted religion from formal and outward piety to an inward discipline. Garib Des, like Guru Nanak, even attacked the sacred thread.

32. W.S. Doming: Ram Des and Ramdasis p 10
"There who have worshipped the stone and Saligram, They have wasted their time in offering milk to a lifeless stone. Rethers was dear to God than those Brahmins who wore the sacred thread. We are sacred thread is useless. It will be destroyed. It lasts only a few months. Of what earthly use is this sacred thread? 33

G.G.S Reg Soreth p 535

The Yoga of the Nath panthis and all the hypocrisy that prevailed is vividly brought out in the criticism levelled against it by Garib Des.

These people have put on a religious garb and left their homes. Their mind is not in their control. They have put on ashes on their body and make many pretentions. They know not their real home while they misled people by various formal practices. They have split their ears and have become Yogis. They appear to be happy from outside but at heart they are suffering and in sorrow. They worship idol, which is utterly lifeless. They know not the Anhad Sabad, Celestial Music. The idol which they worship is made by the potter, or the sculptor. He chisels the face with his hammer. Worship of such stone gods is a life in darkness. Give up the worship of the stone. Devote your mind to the Word of God. 34

G.G.S. Bhavak Chitran p 482

Notwithstanding a more realistic and practical approach to religion introduced by the Nirgun school of poetry the spiritual

33. Jin Sélig silé huléi, jad péhan dudh piléi jake kané jangé béné Reí Dasbiprié ham jéna gai sut jangé dhéga so dehi seng jága yo célé hain sat mása is dhéga ki kyá ása.

G.G.S Reg Soreth p 535

34. BHEK BANAI DAI HAI TIKI. j indri men mensé nahi jitéi bahm bidh bhant kio aséra, kahan bheya ten lei therei jút rakhe, bhándh bhe a bhe, njí gher ki koí khabe rá né péi; kan círe bhe hain jogi, bábhar mukhi hai ríd ke rogi, c’étam mureát jad ku pujá, anhad sébad na murek bhuñjá, ya jad mureát ghédhi théthare, matha phor már sádhére.

G.G.S. Bhavak Chitraní p 482
hunger of the common people still maintained the traditional forms of worship. The emotional expression of religion continued to manifest itself among them, chiefly in the form of poetry and legend. The epical stories and the legends of Mahabharata, Ramayana and the popular Puranas, like the stories of Prehlada, Dronap, Harish Chander, Sit and Rama, Krishna and Gopis still fascinated the minds of the people and we find Gerib referring to them frequently.

"See Pendon ki katha, Ambrik ki katha, Raja Mordhwaj ki katha, Harish Chander ki katha."

Dr. Farquher in his "Outline of Religious Literature of India" points out that there were three distinct stages in the theistic movements which had Vishnu as its centre. The first stage was represented by the original heroic poems called the Mahabharata and Ramayana which narrated historical legends without any attempt at transformation or enlargement. In this stage, for example, there was no attempt to gloss over the faults of the heroes. In the second stage the two heroes Rama and Krishna were identified with Vishnu. Thirdly, the Bhagavad Gita carries the process a step further when it identified not merely with Krishna, the hero of the epic but also with great Brahma-Atma of the Upanisads. Krishna here becomes the Absolute, the one without a second, the source of all things and all beings. In the poetry of the Saint Gerib Das we find the indication of the prevalence of all these types of Krishna or Rama worship side by side although Gerib Das himself accepted these heroes only as historical figures and not the manifestations of God. For Him God was all in all. In Him he saw Krishna, Rama and Siva.

35. See Krishna Stotra and Shiva Stotra in G.C.S.
It appears from the writings of Gerib Des that the Bhakti practised in Haryana under the influence of Kabirpanthi and Dedupanthi Saints was wholesome and restrained. It was neither as hysterically emotional as the Bhakti Movement of Sri Chaitanya nor so deeply intellectual as the Bhakti cult of Gyanadeva in Maharashtra. The Nirgun Bhakti tradition repeatedly mentioned in the Granthhoof Gerib Des shows that it had taken quite deep roots in Haryana.

Inspite of the fact that Gerib Des preached against asceticism and self-mortification, ascetic tendencies were still quite strong in Haryana. Gerib Des' own son became a sanyasi. The Yogis and Sadhus moved in the society and are frequently mentioned in the songs of Gerib Des. The Shakti Cult, condemned for its degenerate practices known as vamacaara (left-hand practices) is severly criticised as the Saka Cult, Atheists, materialists and black magic occultists are generally called Sakta.

The association of Saka is like association with Ravana, Kans, and Hirnaksha.

Yet the basic philosophy of Seiva Siddhanta Tantra cult was present in a new adapted form in Gerib Des' Bhakti and mysticism also which shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter. (The words sabda, Siva Sakti occur frequently in the writings of Gerib Des.)

36. See Bhakta Mall in G.G.S and in R.S.

37. Garib Sakaat seti sakhi kyaa, Reven kenso bujhe Hirnaksh sur bele se, mera pargat gujj

G.G.S Chanik ka eng p 89
A very healthy feature of the religious situation of this period was that there was an attempt to synthesise and lessen the ideological gap between Saivism and Vaishnavism. The synthesis of Hinduism and Islam was also accompanied by a synthesis of the divergent schools of Indian religions and creeds. A unity of spirit was developed in a diversity of expression. An attempt was made to bind the Hindus in the spiritual bond of Universal religion.

HISTORICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL: EVENTS REFLECTED IN GARIB DAS.

Garib Das was primarily a mystic poet and not a historian. As a Nirgun Saint he was keenly interested in the Bhakti Saints of the past and his writings throw a good deal of light on the life of Jai Dev, Namdev, Kabir, Sancha and others. He also refers to Guru Nanak, Gorekh and some historical figures of Mahabharata times. Many of the stories related by him depicting the spiritual powers and miracles of Saints may not be believed now-a-days but they were considered to be true in those days and are still deemed true. Fortunately for us Garib Das has written a Bhakta Mal of his own. We find the following historical comments on medieval Saints:

GORAKH.

Gorekh Nath has been considered a historical figure by some writers but has been treated as a mythological figure by many others. Dr. Sukumër Sen says: "Historicity can be safely postulated for almost all the early Natha Sidhas except Gorekh Nath, the most important figure of them all. Dr. Mohan Singh treats him merely as a mythological figure in his "Gorekh Nath and Medieval Mystics" but in his later writings on History of Punjabi Literature he treats him as a historical figure. Garib Das considers him a historical figure like Duttatreya and Jullundher Nath. Gopi Chand and Bhartri
Hari are also mentioned:

Gorakh Dattya jugédi jogi, nám Jullundher lijíśi,
Gopi Chańd Darthari jogi níce reř birëje.

The great Yogis are mentioned with respect though their creed, particularly its formalism is not accepted.

JAIDEV

Jaidev is the next poet mentioned with great admiration as one who achieved perfection and the grace of God. "Jaidev was once entertained by a King who honoured him for his saintliness and scholarship. When he took leave of him after a year, he met a group of thugs on the way who robbed him of everything and threw him into a well. There came a caravan of traders who rescued him from the well, and took him to the next large city. The ruler of the state came to meet him and honoured him by making him his minister. After twelve years three men came there disguised as Sadhus. Jaidev recognised them as the three robbers, but did not disclose it to anyone. He entertained them as friendly Sadhus. The King honoured them and even worshipped them. But these thugs wanted to cheat once more. But knowing their lust for wealth Jaidev asked the King to give them some wealth. Knowing them to be Jaidev's friends the King gave them a good load of wealth and two men to guard them on their way through the forest. On the way the King's men asked them how the friendship developed between them and Saint Jaidev. They told a lie and said Jaidev was a gangster who had committed many crimes and only they knew it. Jaidev had bribed them lest they may not reveal his true identity. It is said that a big stone came from the sky and they fell dead. Jaidev felt extremely
The name of Guru Nanak is mentioned with utmost respect throughout the Gurmukh of Gerib Des. His name occurs along with Dadu and Kabir. In one place he says that Guru Nanak was avatar of Janak. This theory was first introduced by Maharban nephew of Guru Arjan and was much resented and criticised by Guru Arjan. Guru Arjan calls Guru Nanak "Gobind rup" Embodiment of the Supreme Spirit. Bhai Gurdas also calls him Mirekari. In Bhai

38. Gerib Jeidev dēre kup mai, lei mētra maṅg,
belad utri akar, benjairiṁ kī deṅg;
Gerib Jeidev kadiyā kup se nāyak bujhi bēt,
keho jahan pahuneśe de susākōli hai bēth.
Gerib Jeidev myena baith kar, gae nēgar us dham,
Rējē aṅg hi mile, sunya saṁt kē nam.

Gerib bite duādes beras jēd, pare tin durbhikh
ve thung mēṅgēt bēyā, Jeidev dēre saṁhā.
Gerib Jeidev ku ādēr kī, thung bethai pēs,
kahe adhīnī bāndgi, ve thung bhae udēs.
Gerib rējē sein Jeidev kahēyā, ye do nīter hamēr,
in kī puja kijēi, le apnē jēnam sudhār.

Gerib ek beras rakhe tabēn, chapān bhog khāvē,
sēlē jāb puja kēri, dēmēl ladēs,
Gerib had seti behēr bhae, kīna thugēn jūbē
Jeidev tumē kēyē lāge, ham soṁ kēho bīcēr.
Gerib jhuni mē pē kēr thung kritghani kai māh,
Jeidev kī nīndē kēri, saṁhī soce nāh.

Gerib sīlē chitī samēn saṁī, se sēmpēt bīc,
āhēti mai gērēt gēe, ve thung dōnē nīc.
Gerib cōkē cāvva dēr saṁb se rējē pēs
Kērē vō dōnē mūcē, ham saṁ kēhi sūbēs.

Gerib swārī kī nīndē kēri, kāde sv subēb,
sīlē pari ajghalē se, ayē nāhi jābēb.
Gerib Rējē kāhe Jeidev sīcē, kērēn kauṇ dyēl,
bēdēn tumērē nur kē, ve bhakhan kēre kāl.

G.G.S. Ashle ka ang p 259

39. Aēs autēr sein Janak Nanak bhae,
Gorekh Prahład ki paṅg rēkhi,

G.G.S p 578
Mani Singh’s Sukhandi Bhakta Mala, a story is told that some Sikhs asked Guru Arjan whether Guru Nanak was really avater of Janak. Guru Arjan severely criticised this theory.

Other Bhaktas whose details are not given mentioned are: Trilochan of Meherashtre, Bajid and Ferid, the two well known Sufi Saints. There are a few references to the ascetic temperament of Sheikh Ferid; Tukaram of Gurjrat is also mentioned, with great respect. Trilochan became very popular for his pietie and Saintliness. Tuka Ram’s great faith in God even during trials and tribulations is also mentioned. Sadhana the butcher, it is said, was bricked alive and he died fearlessly. Although he was a butcher by profession yet his mind was always attached to God.

NAMDEV

Some of the stories of Namdev which we find also in the autobiographical hymns of the Saint in the Adi Granth are recorded by Gerib Das in his Bhakta Mal. The name of Namdev occurs in many places. The following stories are told in the Bhakta Mal of Gerib Das. It is said one day Namdev’s father asked him to offer

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40. Bhai Mani Singh: Sikhan di Bhaktmala. p 89

41. Trilochan ke bhaye pritya, sisb hakt masa santu kei to nul phirei, sur tin lok thukrei;

Sultani Bajid Farid, Dattya tat galtan.

G.G.S. I. Nische ka ang p 269

42. Gerib Tuká púra all mei, sac padí bad bir dharti ke khodan layá, meti jan ki pír.

ibid p 270

43. Sadhna sarikat gála kát khae
Setgur ñutseí surah beindh gae

G.G.S Bhaktamal p 310
milk to the god in his absence. Namdev took this duty seriously and begged and prayed to god to drink milk. Moved by the innocent prayers of Namdev the Divine Spirit appeared in the form of the deity and drank the milk.

KABIR.

A few stories of the life of Kabir are also given. Kabir being the Guru of Garib Das received the attention of Garib Das to a considerable extent. Two interesting anecdotes are (1) the suffering of Kabir at the hands of Sikandar Lodhi (2) His conversation with Sikandar Lodhi when the Emperor was impressed by the spiritual greatness of the Saint.

It appears that when the Mulas and Qasim raised hue and cry against Kabir, the Saint was imprisoned and thrown before the elephant. The elephant would not move and harm the Saint who sat in Samadhi. There is an autobiographical hymn of Kabir in the Adi Granth and Garib Das appears to have taken the historical element from it. But in Kabir's hymn the name of the Emperor is not given. Garib Das clearly gives it as Sikandar Lodhi. When the elephant refused to harm the Saint, the Emperor fell at the Saint's feet.

44. Námá pitá oanee liye bulāe,
pujā karo hari bīthāl rāe,
Hari bīthāl ki Námā kare sev
bolat nahe pāsān ke dev.
dūdh pivo nai Gobindā k Rāe
bin pię mera mān na pītāe
Námā ke dīl maṁ jo dekhi hai sūdh
Hari bīthāl an pię hai dūdh
G.G.S. Bhaktamal p 312

45. jada tank beći gale maṁ jansīr,
Lodhi Sikandar dāi hai jo pīr;
hathi khaṁi beg lānā bulāe,
muśk bandh daryā hathī−jo pāe;
hathi ult mod līnā sahār
kehta Sikandar dhukavo jo phīl
karo beg tād ghad lagavo na dhīl;
dundhar guṇje gale bhag phīl;
dekhya Sikandar daras dhyaṇ ēłl.
corn dhoē pię Sikandar sitāb
tuhi ars makka tuhihain kitāb. G.G.S. Bhakta Mal p 313
Another historical reference is Kabir's Sermon to the Emperor. Garib Das confirms that it was Sikander Lodhi who tortured Kabir. For want of adequate historical evidence many scholars doubted it. As Garib Das lived only about two hundred years after Kabir, his evidence should be taken as conclusive, because he had available much material which is lost today.

Another interesting study is that one day both Kabir and Ravi Das took some holy water of the Ganges in a bottle of wine and paraded the city as if they were drunk. This shocked the whole city. The saints wanted to test their followers. Only a few faithful ones had full confidence that Kabir and Ravidas could never drink wine. They refused to talk ill of the Masters.

There is a controversy amongst scholars who have specialised on the life and writings of Kabir about the place of Shah Taqqi in the Saint's life. "Great interest attaches to the mention of Sheikh Taqqi" says G.H. Welcot in his "Kabir and Kabir Panth". According to the Hindu legends Sheikh Taqqi was a rival and opponent of Kabir, while Muhammadan regard him as his Pir (Guru). From the writings of Garib Das it is clear that he was a rival.

46. din ek das me kiē hai ajāb
bharyē hai gaṅgodak kahai hai sērāb;
vesvē ek bessi hai sunder sarup;
gae pir marshid lai hai snūp;
śāik masuk setgur Kabir,
gale bāhū vēsē dhēre kāun dhir;
bējī jo tēri snēri dūbēnt;
gae bhāg bhandī ju bennīk saṃt.

G.G.S. Bhaktamal p 313

47. G.H. Welcot, Kabir and Kabirpanthi p. 23
of Kabir who was probably jealous of Kabir. Garib Des also makes it clear that Kabir was initiated into spiritual life by Remenanda at the age of five. This is a fact mentioned by very few historians. The meeting is vividly described by Garib Des.

"There is a popular saying attributed to Ramananda that Bhakti arose in the Dravida land; Ramananda brought it to the North; and Kabir spread it to the seven continents and nine divisions of the world. "There is a poem of Gerib Das which says exactly the same thing about Ramananda. He says:

"There was Bhakti only in Dravida Land,
There was not the slightest Bhakti left here;
There was worship of evil here and a lot of hypocrisy.
Ramananda came from Dravida land and stayed at Banaras.

Thus Garib Des believes that Ramananda a great mystic, came from the South and settled at Banaras. He had about fourteen hundred disciples.

48. Shah Taqqi nahi lekhii nirejjan cel re;
ye parce se aage, mohna; javel re;
sarru karm subhban sariket dekhyaa
Sah-Taqqi nirbhag na kages chekya.
G.G.S April p. 448

49. peene berae ke jaai bhaa, kaeni mania Kabir,
Des Kabir ajab kalaa gyaa dhyaa gunbhir;
Remenanda ku gum jihe taaii nahe nilaaat;
Kauc jat kai paaih bea kaun tumaare naaaj;
des Gerib aahin gati, boleet bea bal jaai;
tum mo-men ka paiaa, julhe ke ghar bea;
des Gerib aayam gati eta driid visvasa.
G.G.S Parekh ka ang p 197

50. Gerib Bhakta Drevad des thi, ibaan nahi ek rahe,
Ut Hast ki dhyaa, pakhand sur parpaane;
Gerib Ramenend enaah mei kashi nager manjher;
Desh Drevad chod kar de puri bichar;
G.G.S Parekh ka ang p 197

51. cauda sei cela kia, Kashi nager manjhar.
ibid.
Other Saints discussed by Gerib Das are Ravidas, MireBai, and Narsi Bhakti. The story of Ravi Das, Reni Jhali, who was probably Mire Bai is given briefly. There are stories of lesser known Saints like Tursi and Tepiye.

Gerib Das has also mentioned Sufi Saints like Mansur and Rabiya. As already stated he frequently mentions the stories of Draupdi, Harish Chander and Classical Bhaktas like Prahlad.

**MYTHOLOGICAL REFERENCES IN GARIB DAS**

Mythology with its wonders and marvels admits equally marvellous explanations of them, is the key to modern Hinduism. No Indian writer & no Indian saint up to this day has been able to completely do without it. Gerib Das refers to a number of well-known mythological stories which we will describe here briefly.

Urvasi is a celestial nymph known for her beauty and charms. A sight of her beauty is said to have caused the generation, in a peculiar way, of the sages Agastya and Vasishtha by Mitra and Varuna." She roused the aggrov of these two deities & incurred their curse, through which she came to live upon the earth, and became the wife & mistress of Puruvas. The love of Puruvas, the Vikrama or hero of Urvasi, the nymph are the subject of Kalidas' drama.

Hidambara. A powerful Ausee& cannibal who had yellow eyes and a horrible aspect dwelt in the forest to which the Pandaves retired after the burning of their house. He had a sister named

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52. Gerib Durvasa ka man caliya teh manjan beirag mal skhadri mohye sune urvasi reig.

G.G.S. P 75
Hidamba, whom he sent to lure the Pandavas to him, but on meeting with Bhima she fell in love with him, and offered to carry him away to safety on her back. Bhima refused and while they were parleying, Hidimba, her brother came up and a terrible fight ensued, in which Bhima killed the Monster. Hidimba was at first much terrified and fled, but she returned and claimed Bhima for her husband. By her mother's desire Bhima married her and by her had a son named Ghatokacha. According to Garib Das one Hidamba also danced naked before Sukdeva, but Sukdev did not lose self-control.

Haris Chandra was the twenty-eighth King of the sola race, and son of Trisankar. He was celebrated for his piety and justice.

There are several legends about him. He once incurred the anger of Visvamitra who demanded the sacrificial gift due to him as a Brahmin, and the King offered him whatever he might choose. Visvamitra stopped him of wealth and Kingdom, leaving him nothing but a garment of bark and his wife and son. In a state of destitution he left the Kingdom.

53. Sukdev age Hirandibha ai, ho nahi hai maangi
Garib bole Sukdev sunri duti, tu hadra kion ai
hanto bal jati bairagi tu hai hamri mai
Garib mai tuari ardhengi nar, tu hadra bharo hain
Svarg Lokasain ham cal ai, dekho nase singara
Garib tuari nasar kutil hai duti, kagye nain katere
Mataka to nata rakho ham hain putar tumare.

54. Garib Visvamitar jai kai ek aisi kinyi
dhar vyahudaka rup, putar jahan praohan thihi,
Garib tehain madhi ek ikant jahan lekar veh pariya
Kukya rai dvar, bipraka rup vicaryya

** ** ** **
Garib peked mini kar bath, kala pragat dhar aa
Mani Harischander mang Visambhanathbedae,
Garib bole Harischander bain, Visambharnath sunve,
Kariya mose bacaan, bahir phir ult na jave.

R.S. P 133, 125.
Ahalya was the beautiful wife of Rishi Gautama. In the Ramayana it is stated that she was the first woman made by Brahma, and that he gave her to Gautama. She was seduced by Indra, who had to suffer for her adultery. It is said Indra assumed the form of her husband, and so deceived her. Another story is that Indra secured the help of the moon, who assumed the form of a cock and crowed at midnight. This roused Gautama to his morning devotions when Indra went in and took his place. Gautama expelled Ahalya from his hermitage and cursed her and made her invisible. She was restored to her natural state by Rama & reconciled to her husband.

According to Mahabharata Gautama's curse impressed upon him a thousand marks resembling the female organ, so he was called sa-yoni but these marks were later changed to eyes so he was called Netrayoni. MordhvaJ was a king known for his charity and virtues. His son was TamardhvaJ. One day god Vishambhar came to test him along with a Tiger. He asked King MordhvaJ to make arrangements for the food of his tiger. He also told him that his tiger would eat either the flesh of the King or his son on his Rani. When MordhvaJ actually offered his son TamardhvaJ, the god was pleased and blessed him. Garib Des has written the whole story to illustrate his idea of self-sacrifice.

55. Gerib surpeti Inder devi paI pihodi ho, kém lubdh kei krmel ahilye men mohi, Gerib Geutem risi ka rup dhar, kiye Ahlye sang, kém lubdh surpet thegye, Geutem risi gae gahgh Gerib Geutem risi puthe phire, de hein grohier Inder sahjir bhag ho gae cafr jogi mrig chfr
56. Gerib ham réval evahet skal ke dušmen mane koi pakaj lyavé pelder siihin hamre nehi khéva Gerib TamardhvaJ ku khba MordhvaJ yé men mani Gaatbe ku nehi bhekla, tisri khat hai Rani

Garib maeng MordhvaJ maeng, tujha viomipeti kar hú cekr dhvaj dal saj, rite ser subhr bhar hami

R.S. P. 111-113
Other popular gods of Hindu trinity like Brahma, Vishnu & Siva are also mentioned many times.

**Garika & Ajemal.**

The story of Garika (prostitute) and Ajemal, a great sinner is told in all Bhakti literature. Garika was a prostitute who was completely changed when a Sadhu visited her and asked her to repeat the name of God. The Sadhu left a parrot with her to remind her of the name of God.

Ajemal was a great sinner, the name of whose son was Nareyan. When he was about to die, he called out the name, "Nareyan" and thus began to think of God. It is believed that because he remembered God at the time of his death, he was saved. All Bhaktas believe that if a man remembers God at the time of his death, he is saved.

**Dur-Vaisag** was a rishi, son of Atri and Anasuya, but according to some authorities, he was an emanation of Siva. He was noted for his irascible temper and many fell under his curse. It was he who cursed Sakuntala for keeping him waiting at the door, and so caused

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57. Garib Brahmi kahoon digyee, aur baaga kaho keun menka mere muni gaye ahbye hari houn.
   Garib Sanchar dig jooh hai joh menki bujh
   Shekhar kahere chalay hardem maa sa bujh
   Garib Vyaan Visvanbhar Mohyt, pekrhu hai bhagyaa
   Anoot kaat dhar avtre, menki gai ne banya. G.G.S. p. 75

58. Chen chivai jau jivai ganika sadhi viman mai seendu bekri khat met mehyaa pahis aen miden mai

59. Ajemal se adham udhure, patit pevan bird tes hai kaso an bheya banjara, khat del kini huu hai

R.S. 143
the separation between her and King Dushyanta, but it was he who blessed Kurunti, so that she became mother of the son. In the Mahabharata it is stated that on one occasion Krishna entertained hospitably, but omitted to wipe the fragments of food from the foot of the sage. At this the latter grew angry and foretold how Krishna should be killed.

60. Garib Amrihi kei Taj seiñ Durbesa dhusant
tin lok bhage phire aisi pedvi sañt

G.G.S. P 253.