Chapter 1
Holism and Sikhism

1.0 Introduction

The progress of philosophy is based on reasoning. In another way, it can be stated that the dialectical reasoning can function as a tool for the progress of philosophy because wherever two different ideas meet and enter into an intellectual discourse, it is sure that the outcome will be different from that of the two. So it can be said that dialectical method leads to the progress of philosophy and such a process is unending because whenever dialectical process ends then reasoning too ends and consequently philosophy also ends. An examination of the history of philosophy shows that philosophy never ends, but only progresses. It happens due to the dialectical process and that is the fountain-head of new ideas in philosophy. We come across this approach in different schools of thought with different patterns and different thinkers with arguments and counter arguments. Even within a school, differences are seen. For example, Buddhism gets separated as Hinayana and Mahayana. In the Western tradition, Hegelian school gets separated as Left and Right wings. So there are different schools of thought with different perceptions and that is the beauty of Philosophy.

The study of philosophy is very vast. It can be seen that different trends and schools make up the study of philosophy. Among the various trends of philosophy, it will be interesting to take up the holistic trend in philosophy that developed in the modern period and rooted in the late medieval period in India as
well as in Europe. For the present study, this aspect is taken up in a comparative perspective.

1.1 The Meaning of Holism

Humans experience different aspects of reality. Religiously speaking the ultimate reality is called God and the world related with God either as real or unreal entity. One of the trends in Indian traditions called Vedanta, undermines the relationship between God and the world and keeps the world away from God and maintains that the world is illusory. So Moksha is possible through the rejection of the world. Such a trend has gained momentum in Indian philosophy. Advaita Vedanta of Sankara conceives the world to be Maya and Brahman to be real.

Parallel to Indian tradition, similar traditions can be witnessed in the Western tradition also. For example, Kant finds ‘Phenomena’ and ‘Noumena’ as two separate categories. The idea of Phenomena says about the world of objects and the idea of Noumena stands to mean the supreme reality, which is unrelated to the world of objects. The contention is that, Noumena stands for transcendental reality and phenomena means the lower reality, which includes all the worldly aspects. This trend tries to prove that the objects that we perceive are unrelated to transcendental reality.

The notion of separation, which is discussed above, shows that some ideas move in an excluvistic way. Such ideas keep transcendental reality away from the ever-changing realm of existence. Though, in actuality, there is always interplay of binaries, and the realm of existence lies in between the binaries, the notion of separation or exclusion may not hold good to explain
the actuality. At this juncture the notion of holism enters into the field of philosophy.

The meaning of holism can be described as an idea, which considers everything to be related into a whole. It means that nothing is separated absolutely. It explains the idea of inclusion. Human mind is always attracted by two different aspects of reality, namely inclusion and exclusion. Between these categories the aspect of inclusion paves the way for holism, whereas the aspect of exclusion leads to polarized understanding of reality.

Literally holism means “The theory that the whole entities of reality have an existence greater than the mere sum of their parts. The principle is that a part is understandable only in its relationship to the whole”.\(^1\) A relationship exists only when the parts are viewed in the whole. In this process the whole and the parts have a common nature. In this position the parts show the character of the whole that makes its relationship with the whole. Certainly the whole is greater than its parts because the evolution of the parts are from the whole, but one cannot see the whole as an absolute reality and part as the secondary reality because the parts emerge from the whole with similar qualities. Here an absolute separation is denied between the whole and its parts. This idea of togetherness can be called Holism.

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy defines holism in a precise manner “Any of a wide variety of theses that in one way or another affirms the equal or greater reality or the explanatory necessity of the whole of some system in relation to its parts”.\(^2\) The

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reading of the above definition of holism reveals the inevitable relation between the whole and its parts. In a holistic system the explanation of parts is possible only through their relation with the whole. In another way it seems to be that all the varieties are the different reflections of the whole. For example, one can consider the wristwatch. The wristwatch is made up of tiny parts. The parts of the watch combine to make the watch as a whole. Here, the parts imbibe the qualities necessary for making a watch. So, the watch and its parts make the object an inseparable one from the other. The idea of holism can be seen here.

While discussing the idea of holism, it is to be noted that whether parts are related with each other as they are different from one another. If a relation is made between the two different parts, a novelty may appear out of it, and the individual identity of the parts may be lost in the novelty. In order to concretize the reality of the parts, their identity should also be retained. Moreover, if the parts are similar then the variety, which makes the holistic system dynamic, will also be lost, consequently the movement of the system will become passive.

Relationship is also possible between parts if their essence is comparable. White cloth and white paper can be compared in the frame of white colour and the difference between cloth and paper can be understood. A conclusion can be drawn here that the nature of parts shows two characteristics that is ‘relatedness’ and ‘unrelatedness’. But in a holistic view, all the parts whether related or unrelated have no existence apart from the whole. So the parts and the whole are necessarily connected.

In holism, the variety of objects derives from a single entity. In another way the idea of one becomes the many or the whole
becomes parts and the many or the parts are real but have no independent status apart from the ‘one’ or the ‘whole.’ Such an idea represents the relationship of everything into a whole.

To clarify the meaning of holism further, it is essential to enquire the areas where the holism is discussed. The idea of holism is discussed in the following areas.

1.2 Holism in Social Philosophy

Holism has been used in the past by different ideological strands with the idea that evidence can confirm only a whole theory. Individualism is against holism. The perceptive of holism in social philosophy is discussed below.

One of the most startling features of the social world is its variety. The individual is an important part of the social world. Besides, there are laws, institutions and kinship system. Among the various social elements an individual emerges as an important factor because it is he who makes the society active. An individual is not different from the society or from a social whole. If a society is regarded as forming some sort of unit or whole then individuals are among its parts. Here lies the content of social holism. Susan James argues “Holism is defined as the view that social phenomena are to be explained by appealing primarily to the properties of social wholes, since the latter are the causal factors which shape the characteristic of the individual members of the society”.³ Holistic idea in society reflects the relationship between individuals and the society. “Individual and the society stand in a particular relation to one another: that of parts to wholes.”⁴

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³ Susan James, *The Content of Social Explanation*, p.79.
how individuals are related to the rules, institutions and so forth give rise to a view of social explanation which can be termed as holism in social philosophy.

The area of holism in social philosophy consists of the social aspects of the world. The individual as a social being is the centre of the theme in relation with the social aspects of the world as a whole. From the whole, individual has no separate identity. If the individual tries to construct his own supremacy in the whole, then he will be alienated from society. This idea is against the view of societal living. From the point of view of the society, separation from the whole is denied. In such a position it is not proper to consider the whole and parts as independent of one another. “On the one hand there are holists who believe that parts and wholes can be identified independently of one another, and that as it happens, the properties of wholes yield more powerful explanations than do those of individual parts. This stand is usually accompanied by the further claim that theories about the wholes are irreducible to theories about individuals. So that an appeal to the whole is more than a convenience - it is an essential condition of understanding the social world. On the other hand there are holists who argue that the properties of individuals must be seen as a function of their place in the societies. There, theories are necessarily holist as to content, in the sense that they appeal to the properties of wholes, but they attack the dichotomy between parts and whole” says Susan James.

From the statement the relationship between the whole and the parts is acceptable rather than the dichotomy because the relationship can be achieved through social norms. Here an

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5 Ibid., p.3.
individual cannot formulate his own law. Dictionary of Philosophy defines holism in social science as follows “A theory that claims that society may, or should be studied in terms of social wholes: that is, that the fundamental data of social analysis are not individual or individual manifestations but rather social laws, dispositions and movements”.6

1.3 Materialistic Holism

Materialism is an important field of study in philosophy. Materialism conceives everything as a derivative of matter that means matter forms the basis for explaining the moments of reality. The variety of elements constitutes the essence of the matter. Matter has a universal form and its parts maintain particular forms. From ancient philosophy onwards, this idea has been nurtured. Atomism of Democritus created a wave in Greek philosophy. Karl Marx theoretically applied the idea of dialectical materialism, which is considered as the most advanced materialistic philosophy because it stormed Europe in the early nineteenth century. Since the study of materialism has a value, a look into the idea of holism in the materialistic philosophy is significant.

“Materialism, in its philosophical sense is the view that all that exists in material or wholly dependent upon matter for its existence. This view comprises (a) the general metaphysical thesis that there is only one fundamental kind of reality and that this is material and (b) the more specific thesis that human beings and other living creatures are not dual beings composed of a material

6 Antony Flew, A Dictionary of Philosophy, p.152.
body and an immaterial soul, but are fundamentally bodily in nature”.

When the reality is dichotomized, it cannot be called holistic. In non-holistic philosophical thinking the soul and body or mind and matter or the God and the world are dichotomized, saying one as material and other as immaterial. They are totally unrelated entities. But materialism takes this issue in a holistic way and denies the existence of what is beyond materiality but affirms everything as fundamentally material in nature.

The question of mind in materialism has been answered in two ways without denying the matter as fundamental. Dialectical materialism holds that “Mind is a new and distinct type of being that has emerged from matter”.

Physicalism, a form of materialism derived in the logical positivist movement, perceives that the feeling of an object which is beyond materiality as the private experience of the individual expressed through physical occurrences. When man says, he feels pain, no one else can test this but through his movements and utterances one can experience. The physicalists conclude “Nothing can be verified publicly by more than one observer except physical occurrences. From this the physicalists concluded that the only meaningful statements about mind must refer to bodily behavior of some sort, it was therefore their view that psychology was, in a broad sense a part of physics”.

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8 Ibid., p.254.
9 Ibid.
Materialism tries to understand every phenomenon of the reality as different expressions of matter. The meaning of holism lies here in the sense that the matter exists as a whole and its parts have no independent existence apart from the matter.

1.4 Spiritualistic Holism

Spiritualism considers that everything emerges from spirituality, which is against the idea of materialism. In a holistic view it can be said that everything is spiritual in nature. Before making an elaborate study on spiritualistic holism, the meaning of spiritualism should be discussed. Spiritualism is inseparably connected with the ultimate reality, what we call God and the conception of God is portrayed as the ultimate independent substance.

The nature of ultimate independent substance is viewed as independent in itself without any relation to the world of objects, and it is said to be beyond human comprehension. Such substance shows the character of aloneness and unrelatedness. Advaitic idea of Brahman reflects such a character because that is totally aloof from the worldly objects. This tendency of spiritualism separates the material world from God. The Advaitic idea of Brahman denies the relationship between God and World. So the question of creation and the aspect of change become irrelevant. On the other hand, the spiritualistic trend like Bhakti tradition conjoins the idea of God and matter. The Bhakti tradition considers the world and its objects as the manifestation of God. In this way, the one and the many get related to form a whole. This relationship is a holistic one because the whole is related to its parts, which have no independent existence apart from the whole.
Spiritualism conveys its idea in two different angles as God is absolutely independent in itself without any relation to the material world and the other idea is that God is in relation. The later idea shows its relation to the material world. The former view cannot be holistic because it rejects the relationship with the world.

Often philosophy uses the term ‘spirit’ to denote the idea of non-material. “Spirit, a concept broadly associated with the concept of ideal and of consciousness, the non-material entity, is distinguished from the material one”.\(^{10}\)

It can be said that the idea of spiritualism is derived from the idea of spirit. Spiritualism argues that the absolute reality is beyond our comprehension and that is non-material in nature. In examining the idea of spiritualism, Frolov says “Spiritualism is an idealist teaching asserting the spiritual origin of the world. For some spiritualists, the material world is a medium for the manifestation of God and his attributes, while for others it is an illusion of human consciousness”.\(^{11}\) Spiritualism categorically states that the origin of the world is spiritual and such a spiritual element is God. Here it is understood that spiritualism deals with the idea of God but regarding the relation between God and the world, spiritualists differ. One group of spiritualists admits the origin of the world from God. Other group of spiritualists objects to this idea stating that the origin of the world is an illusion of human consciousness. While discussing the idea of holism the idea of illusion should be omitted because that is against the holistic attitude and it places spiritualism without any relation to the material world. But Spiritualistic holism holds the idea that God


created the material world and that God represents the idea of whole and that material world represents the idea of parts. Here the part is not a separate entity from God.

The whole is an absolute independent substance from which the dependent entities emerge. This point justifies the creator, the creation and its relationship. Here the created elements have no independent status apart from the creator because the creator is the absolute independent substance. Another point we can experience here is the essence of God by which the world is made. That means the parts get the status of reality through God. With this idea, the spiritualistic holism advances further stating that God is Nature.

As the concluding point spiritualistic holism can be defined as a trend in philosophy which tries to relate the God with material world or it can be said that spirituality and worldliness go together. In it, worldliness exists as a part of spirituality.

1.5 Holism and Monism

Holism argues that the parts are the manifestation of a whole. So every part is dependent to that whole. In this way ultimately no dichotomy is possible because in holism everything is related with the idea of the whole. With this argument it can be doubted that why it can’t be monism. In order to understand this problem, the idea of monism has to be deciphered. “Monism is a philosophical doctrine which holds that the underlying basis of all existence is one source. The materialist considers matter to be the foundation of the world while the idealist considers it to be the spirit”.  

12 Ibid., p.274.
of all existence is derived from a single entity that means from one to many and the many is unanswerable without the one.

Another definition of monism says, “Monism is any doctrine that there is only one substance or one world, or that reality is in some sense one, that is, unchanging or indivisible or undifferentiated”.¹³

Monism advances the theory of one as the absolute reality without a second. The one reality becomes many only in a uniformed pattern which means that if the absolute reality is spiritual then the many will also be spiritual. Here the material objects are unreal. From the second reading of the definition of monism, the indivisibility of the one reality can be understood. So the idea of many becomes invalid. For example, Advaita philosophy of Indian tradition holds that the Brahman is one without a second. It is a spiritual idea which considers the world as illusion and the realization leads to the idea that Brahman alone exists. Here one can understand the total denial of materiality.

The monistic idea of materialism denies the existence of spirituality stating the world as the one absolute reality made of matter. So in monism a togetherness of spirituality and worldliness becomes unimportant or matter and mind are considered as two separate entities. Either matter or mind exists and not both. In another way either spirituality or materiality exists not both. Here holism differs with monism. Holism emphasizes the importance of spirituality and materiality. In that way only it can be said that a system is holistic where the one and many are united as the whole and parts are united.

1.6 Static and Dynamic Holism

Holism gives justification to all the existing phenomena that one can perceive. In reality, one differs from the other in some respect, which is different from another means that diversity exists everywhere. Wherever diversity exists, there is a possibility for conflict or from a social point of view there will be a struggle for recognition. With regard to the diversified nature of reality, there can be two types of holism, namely static holism and dynamic holism.

1.6.1 Static Holism

The term static is meant to indicate a state of passive nature. From the religious point of view, static holism holds the view that ultimate reality is static and changeless. The necessary corollary that follows the static holism is that it presupposes a passive and changeless society. The problem with this idea is that, one cannot deal with the existing social problems because the idea of static holism is closely related to negation and asceticism. The problem of the society will make a dent on asceticism. So asceticism is not a remedy for social imbalance but dynamism and action could alone pave way to remedial measures. Here the system never moves actively but moves passively giving emphasis to spiritualism consciously setting aside the social phenomenon. In such a system, change and the idea of negation to negate the social evils are not appreciated. This is the idea of static holism.

1.6.2 Dynamic Holism

The term dynamism represents the meaning of activism. Activity is not chaotic but an ordered movement. It is not false to state that order is attained only through differences. Society is set
in motion by solving or adjusting to the difference because it is multi-polar. When the opposites make a system in dialectical movement, such system can be called a dynamic system.

In dynamic holism, the nature of reality is viewed as dynamic in the sense that it approves the multiplicity of elements. The dialectics of change is immanent in such a system. This dialectical process can be experienced in the society. When this type of occurrence is found in a society, the solution to the conflict of interests does not lie in asceticism but social action is preferred. When social action gets momentum then the hierarchical structure of society will undergo a change of order. Social reconstruction is not the by product of asceticism or pure spiritualism but the product of social action. Social action endorses the ways of opposition, negation and the moment of change for the effective deconstruction of the existing social order and for the reconstruction of the same. In this way dynamic holism not only emphasizes the aspects of spiritualism but also the worldly activities. Dynamic holism can be identified as the unity of spirituality and worldliness.

Dynamic holism accepts the existence of God as a justification to all natural phenomena. It is the duty of human being to reconstruct the nature by eradicating the social evils. To eradicate social evils, the aspects of dynamism are necessary. The dynamic action against social evil is compared to the service of God. This is the viewpoint of the dynamic holism.

1.7 Non-Holism

The enquiry into the nature of reality in philosophy has assumed different dimensions. The present chapter has done an
elaborate discussion on holism and its different forms. As a continuation of the discussion on holism to get more clarity, it is essential to have a look into the idea of non-holism.

It is easy to understand that non-holism is a philosophical thought which is opposite to holism. Already it is discussed what holism says about the relationship between the whole and parts. From the spiritualistic point of view it is the relation between God and World. Here the ‘one’ become ‘many’ or the ‘whole’ becomes ‘parts’. The parts are not absolutely independent but its existence is possible only in relation to the whole. So holism becomes the idea of oneness and categorically rejects the idea of dichotomy.

Non-holism advances a theory, which is against the oneness of reality. Non-holism advances the idea of dichotomy where reality cannot be oneness but individualistic, dualistic or pluralistic in an unrelated manner. According to non-holism, the reality is not the inter-relationship of all but dualistic or pluralistic in nature. In a non-holistic system, the absolute independent entities move in different path. As Descartes puts, mind and body are relative substances which are diametrically opposite in their nature. It is a dualistic idea and also non-holistic. So non-holistic philosophy propounds the existence of absolute independent categories, which are absolute in themselves but unrelated. Now an examination of non-holistic trends, such as individualism, dualism and pluralism are discussed below.

1.7.1 Individualism

Individualism refers to the question of individual freedom. It is an outlook which concurs with the primacy of human beings. Ontologically, individualism presupposes that the individuals are
real and it suggests that the social groups have no independent reality than that of its components, that is, individuals. In this way the individual subjects precede the essence of the whole society. "The theoretical foundation of individualism is the recognition of the autonomy and the absolute right of the individual in society".\textsuperscript{14} This definition emphasizes the right of the individual in the society. But the right of the individual is not the right to realize a society after his image, by way of keeping other members away or by alienating himself from the society. To put this idea in a philosophical way, the non-holistic individualism surpasses the social reality where commonality prevails. Individuality or estrangement will not make a social system dynamic. The result of individualism from the social point of view is eternal conflict among individuals.

From the philosophical point view, Advaita philosophy advances the idea of individualism. Advaita says the reality is non-dual. The question of whether the reality is one, is not properly answered in Advaita. Sankara argues that Brahman alone exists and the nature of Brahman is without quality or Nirguna. In order to explain the nature of Brahman he uses the method of ‘Neti, Neti’ or ‘it is not, it is not’. That means a definition cannot be given to Brahman because if a definition is given, then Brahman becomes a limited entity. Whether the Brahman is universal or particular is also in doubt. If it is universal, then the idea that ‘Aham Brahmasmi’ or ‘I am Brahman’ will become self-contradictory because ‘Aham Brahmasmi’ represents the idea of individualism. In Sankara’s terms, atman realizes itself as 'Brahman', it suggests that every individual self can become Brahman. When the self

becomes Brahman, it assumes the non-qualitative form or nirguna because it is the nature of Brahman. S.Radhakrishnan comments on the nature of individual soul, thus: “The empirical self is the agent of all activities. If activities were the essential nature of the soul there would be no delivery from it – any more than of fire from heat – and as long as man has not freed himself from activity, he has failed to attain his highest end since activity is essentially painful”.¹⁵

Advaita philosophy formulates every individual as Brahman through inaction that means Advaita emphasizes the idea of individualism, which gives importance to aloneness and complete withdrawal from worldly activities. Here there is no holistic approach as every individual is Brahman in itself. So Advaita ends with the idea of individuality, which is non-holistic.

1.7.2 Dualism

Dualism is a philosophical doctrine, which is in contrast to holistic idea Dualism, a philosophical doctrine which is in contrast to monism regards material and spiritual, and advances of the theory of two equal principles as the base of reality. These two principles are parallel and unrelated. Dualism accepts the existence of materiality and spirituality, but denies the togetherness of these two.

Descartes, the father of rationalism, advances the idea of dualism. His doctrine of human is dualistic. He contends that body and soul are heterogeneous. Descartes says about two relative substances. They are mind and body which are diametrically opposite in nature and which never affect each other.

or never interact. Without the interaction of these two, human cannot be a whole entity. So functioning of humans is possible only through the mutuality of these two. Descartes holds that “I correctly conclude that my essence consists only in this one thing, that I am a thinking thing. And although perhaps (or rather as I shall fervently say for certain), I have a body, which is very closely conformed with me, still because, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing and non-extended and on the other hand, I have a distinct idea of body in so far as it is merely a non-thinking extended thing I am certain that I am truly distinct from my body and could exist without it”.  

Descartes finds two relative substances that do not have a common character. So according to him no relation is possible between them. He considers that one could exist without body and that a thinking thing has nothing to do with the body. The assumption here is that body and mind have different purposes which work in man differently. The question here is how man can function without the interaction of these two. Here Descartes' dualistic idea seems to have no answer. Realizing the problematic of his thesis, he later modified his idea that man cannot function without the interaction of these two distinct elements, which have no commoners in between them. Even though, he says later that these two elements interact, he cannot explain it in a constructive manner. Realizing this mistake the later rationalist philosophers consciously avoided the status of dualism. Spinoza says about only one substance that is God, which has innumerable attributes. Among the innumerable attributes, mind and body are known and by the nature they are

parallel and they come together as humans have extension as well as thinking.

The problem with dualism is that the mind and the body, which are the two universal concepts, are said to be the unrelated elements. In the same way, God and the world are unrelated elements. Even if it is related, that will end in paradox. In Indian context, Samkhya philosophy holds the idea of dualism of prakrti and purusha. Prakrti is the cause of the world and purusha is the cause of consciousness. Prakrti is unconscious but active. Purusha is conscious but inactive. In such a position there is no meeting point of interaction. Here the theory of evolution cannot be defined logically because there is no common aspect between the two entities. On the other hand, holism provides a common link among the various parts of the whole through the manifestation of the whole in them. In dualism, such a unificatory movement is not possible because the two absolute independent elements are filled with different qualities. So a common element for the unity is lacking in dualism.

1.7.3 Pluralism

The rationalist philosopher Leibniz advances the idea of monads. The idea of monad is an example of pluralism. Leibniz understands that a monad must be a simple substance without parts. There are numberless monads but each monad has no parts. He describes monads as windowless. He sees that all monads are of the same kind that means each monad is highly potential in itself and its properties are the same. But according to its actions, Leibniz sees variation in monads “The proper description connected with the appearance of different kinds of things is of monads as varying in their degree of activity. There is an infinite series of
monads ranging from the completely active to the almost inert. No created monad is completely inactive and none is completely active, but those at the lower end of the scale would be mere matter, if there is any such thing. God is the only active monad, but it is not quite clear whether he is to be looked as the chief monad”.17

The philosophy of Leibniz is called pluralism because of the existence of numberless monads of the same kind. God may be the highest monad, that is, in his own word the God would be the monad of monads, but there is no connecting link between monads because they are windowless. The problem of pluralism arises here that, if the plural substances are windowless, will be in an individualized manner. There, the relatedness among them will be lacking. So they will become directionless because the parts are neither interrelated among them nor related with the whole. In this philosophy every monad is a whole without parts.

It can be understood that pluralism is non-holistic. Here particularity is given importance. Compared to the movement of philosophy, non-holism serves a negative signal. When non-holistic trend is taken, dichotomy can be experienced through percept and concept. In that sense non-holism is a negative approach in which the parts and the whole are unrelated.

1.8 Why Non-Holism is a Negative Approach

The non-holistic approach enhances the idea of unrelatedness among the plural objects of reality. Instead of paving way for interaction, the non-holistic approaches lead to rigid compartmentalization. While examining the problem of dualism, it is found that mind and body stand unrelated, resulting in the idea

of non-relatedness. The dualistic approach, thus, furthers the unrelatedness rather than actualizing the interaction between the binaries.

The individualism and pluralism keep the individuality of the substance unaffected by other substances. Earlier it was discussed that, in Advaitic tradition, individual self strives to become Brahman by considering the other as 'Maya' and seeks the progress of its own self. That means an individual tries to alienate from the day-to-day social movements conceiving it as Maya. Here the Advaitic individual self denies two aspects; they are physical and social phenomena. Because Advaita presupposes that attachment towards these two prevent one from becoming a Brahman. So individualism as a non-holistic trend is a negative approach.

Monadic pluralism hardly gives any scope for interrelationship. The independent categories are said to be the basis of reality, according to this approach. But how these independent categories become related with each other is the question for which pluralism answers in a non-holistic way.

The non-holistic trend gives emphasis to the absolute independence of the substances. Consequently it denies the scope for togetherness or interrelationship. Without the interrelationship, a system cannot be holistic. A machine cannot function if its parts do not correlate with the whole. It is true that the parts are different in nature but beyond that the interrelationship among them is always there. In non-holism, such relatedness is very difficult to find. That is why non-holism is called a negative approach.
In the case of holism, the interrelationship is the main feature. The idea of opposites may be there in it but beyond that a complete unity is possible. The parts may be different in character but the essence of the whole holds them together. In this way holism is a positive approach.

1.9 Sikhism: A Holistic Philosophy

The theme of holism establishes the truth that a part is not different from the whole and a part cannot be described without the idea of the whole. The idea of holism is employed to speak of the relationship between God and the objects of the world. That means without the existence of God, the worldly objects are not possible. It shows that God is the justification of all worldly objects. Here God is the whole and worldly objects are the parts. From the religious point of view, God creates the world and rules over it. Sikhism says that God is immanent in his creations that are the objects of the world. That is, the essence of God is in the objects of the world. In other words, Sikhism, while accepting the plurality of reality, says that the plurality is related with the One, the concept of God. That is why Sikhism is called a holistic philosophy.

A holistic system is dynamic in the sense that it includes the idea of opposites, negation and the hierarchy of elements. These elements make a system dynamic. It does not cause any disorder but helps to construct a better world order. Sikhism says that, the essence of God is in all elements, which make the system orderly.

In order to substantiate the view that Sikhism is a holistic philosophy, it is essential to look into the main ideas of Sikhism through the holy scripture of Sikhism. The fundamental creed of the scripture starts with an authentic explanation of holism.
“He is the sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation; Creator, immanent Reality; without fear; without Rancour; timeless Form, Unincarnated: Self-Existent; Realized by the grace of holy Preceptor”.18

The above hymn shows the monotheistic vision of Sikhism and its view that God is the creator. An elaborate study of these ideas will make holistic view clear.

1.9.1 Monotheism

Monotheism is the belief in oneness of God; this is the most central and crucial subject of Indian religious philosophy. The term ‘monotheism’ is etymologically coined from two Greek words namely ‘monos’ and ‘theos’ which means the belief in one God.

Sikhism accepts one God who is omnipotent and whose authority and sovereignty cannot be questioned. God is not contradicted both internally and externally. He is absolute in all respects.

Sree Guru Granth Sahib says

“He alone is the Lord, immutable, holy-
Eternal His greatness.
He is the creator,
He ever is, ever shall be;
Never shall He not be”19

Sikhism develops its philosophy, through a monotheistic concept. God stands as the central point of attraction by which

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19 Ibid., p.16.
every movement occurs. God has not only created the universe but also arranged every thing in a systematic and coherent way. Combining water and air, God has infused life in the human body and created earth as a place to live and die. However, God is not aloof from the world but dwells in the midst of it and is anxious about it. Therefore, at several places God is referred to as "Pratipalak". That means, God is nucleus of life. Sikhism says that God ever is and ever shall be, which means God is all pervading, that is all things have their source in One being. The all-pervading God is not many but one. But the essence of God pervades in all the pluralistic forms. That means God appears in many forms.

“Though the ocean; all creation in Thee is contained”.21

Sikhism tries to unite every element under the shade of God because God is eternally manifested. The manifested elements have no separate independence apart from God. It is said in the Holy Scripture “He has created the universe and watches over it”.22 This is a holistic view that the parts, which are manifested from the whole, have no separate identity apart from the whole. In order to understand the position of the parts in their relation to the whole, the status of the world in relation to the concept of God in Sikhism is to be studied

1.9.2 The Status of the World

Holism advances the idea of ‘one and the many’ as real entities and identifies a relationship. Sikhism also goes hand in

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20 Sasi Bala, Sikh Metaphysics, p.18.
20 Ibid., p.16.
22 Ibid., p.18.
hand with this idea. Sikhism admits that the world is real and the hierarchy of elements in the world is also real in the sense that they are the manifestation of the idea of God.

Sikhism denounces Sankara's view of world as Maya. Sikhism identifies that God is the creator of the world and watches over it; therefore this world cannot become an illusion; this is the Sikh answer to Advaitins. From the sociological point of view, when the world is regarded as Maya, then the dignity of physical labour and social movement will get nullified. Muthumohan says: “The social implication of the thesis of non-reality of world is even more horrible. It condemns the human body and together with it an entire race of people, who engage in manual labour and worldly toilings. The pure spirit of Brahman without any earthly characteristics or gunas receives full appreciation in advaita Vedanta. Consequently, a pure intuitive elitism becomes one of the central implications of that type of philosophy”.  

Sikhism says

“He created Night and Day, seasons and occasions;
So also air and water, Fire and Nether Regions:
Amidst these has He fixed the earth, the place for Righteous action”

The above hymn proves the existence and the reality of the World. Guru Nanak declares the reality of the world in a way that:

“True are Thy regions and True Thy universe;
True Thy Worlds and true Thy creation”.

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23 N.Muthumohan, Essays on Sikh Philosophy, p.2.
Sikhism fashions the reality of the world in a holistic way that the creator is in the creation which means that the whole has its presence in the parts. This is the relationship between God and the World.

1.9.3 Sikhism is against Individualism

In the previous pages it was discussed that individualism is non holistic because it denies the idea of interrelationship. In order to check individualism, Sikhism uses a term called ‘Haumai’ which means ego-consciousness or the feeling of individuality. Sikhism identifies it as an evil. As a social being, the human consciousness tries to make relation with the other, but due to Haumai, humans try to separate themselves from the other. So individualism is a withdrawal from the unity of being.

“Those that live caught in egoism are variely Dead
Those whose egoism is dead are truly alive”.

The Sikh gurus identify ego as casteism, ritualism, asceticism, despotism, tyranny and exploitation of humans etc. Whenever egoism dominates in a person, his/her involvement in the society declines. He thinks that it will not affect him because of the thought that he has freed himself from the surrounding situation. It means that those who are with Haumai fail to see their relatedness with the others and stand like a rock in the society without any relation. They try to annihilate themselves from the others. Sikhism rejects this idea. Sikhism holds that man is a societal being, not an egoist.

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Sikhism says,

“The egoist loves not truth,  
And keeps stuck up in falsehood  
The egoist is a stone, a rock”.27

The Sikh perception of reality strongly refutes the absolute independence of individual; independence is not separation from the structure of relationships; individual liberation is not possible without universal liberation. When Sikhism stands for universal liberation, then individualism has no role in it. That is why Sikhism says that the egoist is a stone. Such a human has no role in the society for the universal liberation and he/she remains as an impediment to the progress of the society.

1.9.4 The Idea of Miri-Piri in Sikhism

Holism advances the idea of relationship between the whole and parts. The part is given the status of reality because it emerges from the whole. The whole justifies the reality of the part as per holism; a part becomes meaningless without the idea of the whole. The holistic position is that, the part is not absolutely independent, but absolutely dependent on the whole, without which the existence of the part is impossible.

The question of understanding the whole can be answered only through the existence of the part. The actuality of the part only leads us to the idea of the whole. So the whole and the parts are mutually dependent. The position is that the existence of the part is possible only through the whole and the part makes one to

understand the whole through its reality. So holism is a system of togetherness.

Sikhism derives its idea through the pattern of holism. Sikhism conceives God as the originator of all and the world as the place where the truth of God as originator is exposed. The world is absolutely dependent on God and the World exposes God as the absolute independent entity through the worldly activities. So mutuality has been projected in Sikhism. It is obvious that Sikhism considers the objects of the world as a part and God as the whole. Reality is attributed to the world in all aspects.

It is because of the mutuality between God and the world, Sikhism is called a Miri-Piri system. "Miri-Piri", a compound of two words adapted to Sikh tradition to connote the close relationship within it between the temporal and the spiritual. The term represents for the Sikhs a basic principle which has influenced their religious and political thought and governed their social structure and behavior. The word Miri signifies temporal power and Piri, stands for spiritual authority. The idea of Miri-piri shows the togetherness of spirituality and worldliness. Spirituality shows the God's activities and worldliness shows the action of the whole mankind. Sikhism advocates that these two should not be separated but must be united. The unity of spirituality and worldliness that is Miri and Piri is an aspect of holistic outlook in Sikhism.

1.10 Conclusion

The present chapter has taken a view of the existing philosophical trends in order to find the problems within. It has

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addressed the difficulties that prevail in the holistic trend in philosophy such as individualism, dualism and pluralism. The present study projects holism as a counter model to non-holism and finds that holism is the one which can advance the idea of relationship.

It can be said that Sikhism, which stands tall against the non-holistic trends in Indian Philosophical tradition, finds the necessity and importance of holistic idea in Indian context. The Miri-Piri idea advanced by Sikhism has influenced the religious world because that idea propagates the importance of a relationship between God and the World in a holistic way.