CONCLUSION

A careful perusal of the foregoing chapters has made us to reach to certain general conclusions. The origin and the subsequent establishment of the \textit{Nirgun bhakti} in the Indian soil was the consequence of the great social, cultural and religious upheaval prevalent in the system. It certainly formed the basis and provided impetus to \textit{Nirgun bhakti} cult to acquire strength so much so that it had brought a large number of people in its fold and gave the most needed support and strength to the general masses.

There had been a continuous living tradition of \textit{Nirgun bhakti} from the ancient to the medieval times. It was rooted in the monotheistic stream of \textit{Vedic} and \textit{Upanishadic} thought. Monotheism in \textit{Vedas} did not rest on the denial of other gods for any one personal God. In the many hymns the plurality of \textit{Vedic} gods is reduced to one through the philosophic abstraction and impersonalisation of God and the understanding of Him as the one cosmic Reality. Monotheism is also evident in some of the hymns of \textit{Samveda}. The idea of one impersonal God was developed more fully in the \textit{Upanishads}, resulting in a more positive explanation of the oneness of ultimate Reality in terms of the \textit{Brahman} and the \textit{Atman}. His \textit{Nirgun} character is also clearly evident in the \textit{Svetasvara Upanishad}. The \textit{Bhagavad Gita} and the \textit{Bhakti Sutra} of Shandilya did not only speak of the \textit{Nirgun bhakti} but along with it also embarked upon \textit{Saguna bhakti} also. They described it as a superior form of devotion. In the \textit{Puranas} also both the
Saguna and the Nirgun ideologies are expounded. Even in the Bhagavata Purana which is a Vaishnava text and deals with the incarnations of Vishnu, both the Saguna and Nirgun traditions are represented simultaneously. Shankaracharya, the formulator of Advaita Vedanta spoke of this form of bhakti in his different works. Gorakhnath the founder of Nath Sampradaya strictly recognized the nature of Brahma as Nirgun and his firm belief leaves no room for the idea of any personal deity.

During the medieval period poet-saints viz. Kabir, Jambhoji, Nanak and Dadu Dayal had heralded a popular movement for the propagation of Nirgun bhakti to the total exclusion of Saguna. They had opposed the worship of all personal deities and had made it very clear that their bhakti was for the Nirgun Brahma. However, to make the Nirgun ideology acceptable to all they did use various other names like Atma, Ram, Vishnu, Allah, Rahman, Vasudeva etc in the sense of ultimate Reality, i.e. one supreme God.

In this sense it can be safely argued that they adopted a distinctive way of devotional practice and believed in the idea of universal toleration and love as against the rigidity, misbeliefs and social hatred which were prevalent in their contemporary period. Jambhoji, Nanak and Dadu established their own sects viz. Bishnoi Panth, Nanak Panth and Dadu Panth. So far as Kabir Panth is concerned it was established by Kabir’s followers after his demise.

All the Nirgun bhakti saints were gifted poets and composed verses of religious appeal which formed a vast Nirgun bhakti
literature. For their compositions they used the languages of their native land e.g. the language of Kabir’s verses was old Avadhi, a dialect of Eastern Hindi (Purbi Hindi), the language of the compositions of Jambhoji and his followers was mainly Rajasthani-Marwari, the hymns of Sikh Gurus were composed in Punjabi language and compiled in Adi Granth in Gurumukhi script and the language of Dadu and his followers compositions is mainly Rajasthani-Hindi.

The use of vernacular languages instead of pure Sanskrit for religious teachings made it possible to popularize the Nirgun tradition among the masses. The thought which had remained enshrined in the scholarly Sanskrit works was transmitted by them through simple language which could be easily understood. These compositions did not only convey religious message but also constituted invaluable source for constructing India’s socio-religious history of the contemporary period.

On the basis of the information provided by Nirgun bhakti literature it can be said that the traditional division of the Hindu division into four varna viz. Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra was quite effective during the 16th and 17th centuries as a broad basis of status determination and the distribution of general duties and privileges. Besides, there was great complexity created by a number of sub-sections and small groups with varying degrees of social status. These sections or groups originated and developed mainly on the basis of various professions and functional specialization and had turned into castes due to their hereditary nature. They were Kayastha, Sunar, Jauhari and Sarraf,
Luhar, Badai, Kumhar, Julaha, Dhunia or Pinjara, Teli, Dhobi, Mali, Nai, Kalwar, Tamboli, Darji, Dheemer or Jheevar, Kevat, Kahar, Banjara, Rangrej, Manihar, Sikligar, Kasai, Ahir and Gujar, Chamar. Besides this, there were different groups of professions which though cannot be specified as castes yet they formed a large chunk of the society. For instance, Vaidh and Hakim, Garuri and Marjeeva.

Untouchability as a social stigma did thrive in the society and was the significant tool of exploitation in the hands of upper classes. Perhaps this is the reason why Nirgun bhakti saints on many occasion did make scathing attack on the existing system. There were slaves in the royal and well to do households, both male and female who were brought as presents or were bought in the markets and utilized for any and every work.

Food during this period did not suffer from lack of variety of quality and was chiefly in keeping with the socio-economic status of the different classes amongst the Hindus and Muslims.

The richer and the well to do classes relished a variety of delicious dishes vegetarian or non-vegetarian prepared with different kinds of grain, vegetables, animal flesh, fishes, spices, ghee and oil. On the other hand, the food of the commoners was characterized by the lack of variety and quality. Milk and milk products, sweets and fruits were abundant in India and were consumed on large scale by all classes. Besides, the use of wine and other intoxicants were very common especially among the well to do Hindu classes and lower sections of the society.
Different kinds of dresses were worn by the people according to their socio-economic status. Dresses were made with a large variety of material such as cotton silk, wool, golden stuff etc. From cotton alone various types of clothes were produced. The costumes of the aristocrats differed almost radically from those of common men who tried their utmost to reduce their cloth requirements to the minimum. The women were fond of dresses of different cuts, designs and colours. People of the upper classes followed various devices and made elaborate arrangements to augment their physical charm and attractiveness. They had a very high standard of toilets and cosmetics. Women both Hindu and Muslim were fond of ornaments of different metals especially of gold. The women in general and of the higher classes in particular were loaded with ornaments of different varieties from the top to the toe.

Various kinds of games, amusements and other pastimes were in vogue in those days. Some of the games and sports like Chaugan (Polo), Shikar (Hunting) etc. were influenced by the military and adventurous characteristics of the age and were generally the monopoly of the rulers and the aristocrats of both Hindus and Muslims. On the other hand the games like Chaupar, dice or gambling, kite-flying, wrestling etc. were accessible to the rich and poor alike.

The Kathputali players, acrobats, Jugglers or magicians, professional jesters, buffoons, bards etc. were all source of recreation to the people particularly to the rural folks. Besides, numerous Hindu and Muslim festivals which were celebrated with
great joy and social ceremonies were other means of amusement and social interactions.

Various ceremonies related to the Hindu marriage performed during those days. On the day of the marriage elaborate preparations would take place at the house of bride and bridegroom. Women used to sing marriage songs. Bride was beautifully dressed with cloths and ornaments. Similarly bridegroom was also adorned with the new cloths and jewels. After making all necessary preparations bridegroom would go to the bride’s house in the form of procession. They were welcomed at the house of bride. A Mandap was prepared for the setting of bride and bridegroom. Here various ceremonies were performed. Father of the bride gives his daughter to the bridegroom as a gift. After completing all the ceremonies, bride was departed to house of her husband. Some ceremonies were also performed when she arrived at the house of her husband.

Educated or non-educated people of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities were highly superstitious. They believed in astrology to such an extent that in every enterprise they consulted astrologers. Besides, they believed in ghosts and practiced witchcraft.

People especially of the upper classes both Hindu and Muslim possessed a fair degree of literacy. In the Nirgun bhakti literature references of Hindu education are found. They had their own educational institutions which imparted primary, secondary and higher education to them. The most famous centres for the
Hindu learning in this period were Banaras, Nadia, Mithila, Multan etc.

The social status of women during the period under review was generally not very much different from what is today. *Purdah* had become the characteristic feature of the contemporary Indian social life, particularly among the upper and well to do classes. *Purdah* was more strictly observed by the Muslim women than by the Hindu ones. There was prosperous class of courtesans and public women who reaped very good harvest inspite of the efforts of Akbar to ban their profession. The condition of the Hindu widows was pitiable and the practice of *Sati* had become universal and obligatory among the Hindus.

The common women and those who belonged to the rural areas and lower sections of the society not only looked after their households but also worked in different other capacities and contributed to the livelihood of their families.

Religious beliefs and practices followed by the people in the period under review were not very much different from what are prevalent today. Hinduism was followed by the majority of people. They believed in many gods and goddesses whose legends are included in the Hindu mythology from centuries. Among them the triple deity viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were regarded as the creator, protector and the destroyer of the world and their respective wives namely Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati were most revered. Different incarnations especially of Vishnu were worshipped with great devotion. Besides, every creation of God
like various forces of nature, animals, plants, rivers, mountains etc. were considered sacred and holy.

Hindu rites consisted of idol worship, sacrifice (yajna), animal sacrifice etc. Since the Hindu believed in rebirth and transmigration of the soul, various rituals and ceremonies were performed by them in life time to secure not only their present birth but also their last journey and next birth. These rituals included different kinds of Dana (Alms), Vrat (Fast), Tirtha-yatra (Pilgrimage) etc. It was believed that these rituals performed with faith destroyed sins and will to lead moral elevation, mental discipline, happiness and even salvation. Similarly after the death of a Hindu a number of differing rites and rituals like the ceremony of Diya, Pindadana, Shradh etc. were performed with the belief that after the conclusion of these ceremonies the soul of the deceased abandons the ‘Preta’ form and assumes another fitted for paradise. Besides, these rites were also performed as the nourishment to the new body of the deceased. The practice of self immolation or religious suicide was also the result of the wish to acquire easy way to heaven.

In this period there were people who followed different Saiva and Vaishnava sects such as the Kanphata Yogis of Nath Sampradaya or Yoga Marga founded by Gorakhnath. They practiced ‘Hathayoga’ expounded by the founder of the sect and were found in all parts of the country like Jodhpur, Jaipur, Nauhar Tai, Mahamandir in Rajasthan.

Kadrimath in Karnataka and Gorakhhattri in Peshawar were among their famous centers in the period under review. Kapalikas
who performed some disgusting practices were also included in the *Nath Sampradaya*.

*Lingayats* or *Jangamas* were other Saiva mendicants and were recognized by the Siva *Linga* which they wore generally in their necks. *Aghoris* were known for their horrible and filthy practices which included human sacrifices, to smear their bodies with excrement etc. while *Sanyasis* were those who abandoned the worldly ties after entering into the stage of *Sanyasa*, the fourth stage or *Ashrama* in the life of any Hindu of first three classes. They were also called *Dasnamis* since their sect was divided into ten branches.

*Bairagis* were the Vaishnava mendicants of the Ramanandi class. The followers of Ramananda, addressed their devotions to Lord Vishnu and revered all of his incarnations especially Rama.

In this period Jainism had a large number of followers in many regions of Gujarat, Rajasthan, modern Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. They belonged to the merchant and banker (*Vaishya*) class who formed a very opulent portion of the society. Their basic principles and practices were altogether same as they follow today.

Basic principles of Islam have always been of great importance in the life of a follower of Islam. Their beliefs and practices were instituted by the Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.) and are enshrined in the holy *Quran*. Muslims performed their various religious practices during this period which is hither to prevalent.
Their important practices were to recite *Kalima* (Witness to faith) *Salat* (Prayer), *Roja* (Fast) and *Haj* (Pilgrimage).

During medieval period an another important sect called *Sufis* got organized themselves in the form of religious orders for the propagation of the spiritual mission of Islam and through these orders they made the teachings and practices of mysticism popular in the Muslim society. During 16th and 17th centuries well known *Sufi* saints had existed. *Sufis* used to perform various types of practices to reach the God and had exercised great control on the general masses. Their ascetic outfit and practices made the people realize of their ingenuity.