Chapter - 4
THE DEPICTION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND INSPIRATIONS
IN THE LITERATURE OF KABIR DAS
The economic structure of the society in Kabir's time was very complex. There was no dearth of wealth in the country. India still maintained its position as a golden bird which drew a number of foreigners. The rulers and the traders were in higher regard. Verni, the writer of "Firoj Shahi" has based his statement on certain affluent families, otherwise it cannot be true that the houses of the subject people were full of cereals, prosperity and horses and fine furniture. Every one had abundance of gold and silver. There was no women who had no ornaments and there was no house without fine cot and comfortable bed. Wealth was in plenty and every body led prosperous life. ¹ Verni may be justified in his opinion that embroidered and silken clothes and other commodities that were required by the royal family, were bought at the market price and their cost was paid in full. ² I think that Mr. P.D. Gupta has more truth when he says, "The distribution of wealth was not in due proportion. Jagirdars and Amirs had collected the major portion of gold and silver of the state, and there was

1. S.R. Sharma- Bharat me muslim shasan ka Itihas page 151.
2. Same- Page 151.
dearth of wealth for common people.¹

The people of the meaner section of the society particularly Hindu shudras were in extremely deplorable condition. The subject people were over-taxed. Hindus were groaning under the heavy load of 'Jajia Tax. Heavy taxes as were imposed on agriculture, trade and other things. A fixed share of the produce was to be sent to the royal store.

Moveable and immovable properties were present, but the land was in full control of the state or the ruler. For the land that was given either in gift or as a reward, a bond or a gift bond was issued by the state. The sovereign power was empowered to confiscate it. Palaces, buildings, temple and houses were included among immovable properties. Besides elephant, horses, cows etc, gold silver and commercial commodities were counted as moveable properties. Slaves and maid slaves treated as moveable property. They, too, were bought and sold.² Accumulated wealth was either in the royal treasury or in the houses of nobles and traders. The

elephants and horses of nobles were treated as royal property. A big share of their wealth was paid as tax to the royal treasury.

Hindu subjects were kept so poor that they could not afford for horses, buy arms and weapons, fine clothes and other things of luxury.¹

State exploitation and natural calamities had scourged the lives of the people severely. Famines caused by heavy rain had put the lives of the people in extremely pitiable condition. They had also got no protection against foreign plunderers. It is not difficult to form an idea of people's misery caused by frequent famines. Village life during Muslim rule was wretched. No development of any kind took place in this age.² In their own country where milk and curd were in plenty people's lives were reduced to the poor state of wood cutters and Bhistis.³

It is quite true that sultans (The rulers) filled their treasury by exacting money and other valueables

1. S.R. Sharma Bharat me Muslim shasan ka Itihas Page 209.
from the ruled. No attempt was made to improve the lives of the people with the money they stored in their treasuries, but they used the exacted money for the enhancement of their own luxuries. Amir Khusaro's remark justifies this thing: "Every Ruby of the crown is made of the blood-drop of farmers." It shows that the money of the perspiring labour of the common people was spent in the luxurious activities of the rulers. 

It is not wrong to say that common people lived from hand to mouth. They were badly stricken with misery and poverty. Perhaps the professional jobs of the common people were not enough to earn their bread and butter. Even Brahmans had move from one royal door to another for livelihood. Several religious too, moved from door to door for alms. This begging was not motivated only by a sense of avarice, but also by the scarcities. Kabir was shocked to see such things. He did not like that the people should live on begging.

The difficult problem of bread and butter was not present in the time of Kabir only, but it also remained

2. K.Gr., p. 330, Pad 216, Pad 7-8.
much later after Kabir. What difficulties of livelihood Tulsidas\(^1\) had shown in his 'Kabitawali' sheds light clearly on the economic disparity of Kabir's time. Loi's complaint about economic crisis of the family life also clears this point\(^2\).

In the absence of the means of subsistence people used to go to royal courts for begging. Royal families bestowed 'Petiye' on Sadhus, Saints and Brahmins. The historical records of the Ranas of Udaipur prove that 'Petiye' from the royal treasury and store was bestowed upon saints like Meera.

Even Kabir had face economic difficulty. It is quite true that being lost devotion Kabir paid no attention to his professional job\(^*\), but it is not worth while to say that he had turned his back upon his professional job. He did his work whatever he could, and in his professional work he also got active support and cooperation of his sincere wife. Despite this he could run his family life anyhow. It makes it clear that to feed the family required indefatigable labour.

\(^{1}\) Tusli Das 'Pat Bhari Sahari, Sakal Sut Bare-Bore' Kabitawali.
\(^{2}\) K.Gr., p. 296-109.
This presents before us a faint picture of the economic state of the period. In such a difficult state Kabir had nothing but to go on begging, but Kabir was not such a man as can run begging job and no propensity to bow down before any power for begging. He clearly expressed what he lacked. But only before his own Lord, the Supreme being, and he felt no kind of humiliation in it.

Generally the people were so poor that they could not afford for rich robes. So those who wore fine clothes formed as quite different section which included mainly the members of the royal family. The following 'Sakhi' indicates towards this:

"Nanhan kanti chitta de, manhge moli bikai. Gahaka raja Rama hai, aur na nera aai."¹

Among the several causes of the economic disparity differences of castes and creeds and the lack of equal opportunity were the main. Capital was mainly centralised either in the houses and palaces of Mahantas, Samantas, Rajas, Rawas, Sultans etc. or big business man and

1. K.Gr., p. 27, Sakh 58.
magnates were the capitalists. High, golden Kalasas of palatial buildings spread the smell of richness. Decorated golden kalasas beautified not only the royal places but they also decorated the residew buildings and temples of the capitalists. Kabir has also clearly mentioned golden 'Kalasas' of high palaces of richmen in the following 'Sakhi':

'Uncha mahal vinaion, sovaran kalas charhai',\(^1\)

Temples, too, were decorated with Kalas as in evident from this line: 'Deval burha kalas su'.\(^2\)

Religious people earned the livelihood with hard labour. There were several ways of earning, but generally one man or one family adopted only one means of earning. A family had to adopt the traditional profession of a particular kind. Tax system was also present those days. There was a particular kind tax called 'Jajia' generally imposed on Hindus. It is an historical fact. No mention of it can be found any where in 'Kabirbani'.

\(^1\) K.Gr., p. 74-28 and 2151-85, Pad 11.
\(^2\) K.Gr., p. 17/6/7
Begar was in vogue. Begar (unpaid labour) was exacted from workers by state officers. It is needless to say that Begar system exploited the workers and worsened their economic conditions.

On one hand the common workers had to live from hand to mouth and on the other he was used for begar. They had to work without any remunerations or wages. The workers who were engaged in begar, did do this with their own sweet will, but they were compelled to do so. This helpless state of workers has expression in the following lines of 'Kabir Padavali':

"Janam aneka gaya aru aaya,
Ki begari na bhara paya."¹

These words are important not only for their philosophic significance, but they also present a clear picture of the then society. As transmigration proves the helpless bondage of the soul, so Begar proves the helpless bondage of the workers. Begar² causes nothing but pain and loss.

1. K.Gr., p. 133, 110, Pad 2.
2. K.Gr., p. 186-228 Pad 10 or 303/342 Pad 6.
Economic disparity was so dominant and partial that the people of one group were overtaxed while those of other group were quite free from taxes. The rich and the nobles led prosperous and luxurious while common people were forced to live a life of pain and misery. Slavery was not only a bad system, but it also shows the extreme poverty of the people. Not only slaves but men without any means of subsistence used to sell their children who were also made slaves.

People engaged in less profitable jobs borrowed money from 'Voharas' (Money-lenders), which was very difficult to pay back on account of exorbitant rate of interest. In meeting the common requirements of the family life, the family capital was often ruined and on several occasions the borrower had to suffer from imprisoned life due to non-payment or borrowed debt.

High palatial buildings studded with jewels,

1. K.Gr., 20/1, 2.
2. K.Gr., p. 263, 80.
decorated with golden Kalas, resounding with sweet music\textsuperscript{1} and having musical band and big elephants in front\textsuperscript{2}, hints to the prosperous section of the society that rolled in wealth and luxury. But Kabir's delineation of economic disparity not only paints the picture of the affluent section, but also shows the poverty and scarcity of the weaker section. Some enjoyed sleep on comfortable beds while some were satisfied with their 'Payar'. Some fortunate fellows were costly silken clothes, while some wretched persons were forced to move about in ragged clothes\textsuperscript{3}.

Thieves\textsuperscript{4}, swindlers\textsuperscript{5}, impostors and cheats were also present then. Some men were engaged in the act of stealing and cheating. This also shows the worsened economic state of a section of the people.

This proves that the economic structure of Kabir's time was very complex and intricate which can be seen on the foregoing pages.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item K. Gr., p. 20-4.
  \item K. Gr., p. 20-9.
  \item K. Gr., p. 121-105 Pad 4-5.
  \item K. Gr., p. 206-350, Pad 3.
  \item K. Gr., p. 116, K. Gr., p. 118/15 Pad 5 and K. Gr., p. 32/6/11.
\end{enumerate}
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It has already been stated that the aim of common people was to earn bread and butter because the problem of meal of both times comes first, then comes the idea of worshipping 'Rama'. No doubt both times meal is the first consideration of man, and after that meeting all other requirements one thinks of accumulating wealth. Modern industry and commerce may be taken to be the very requirement of the age, but a proper list of industries and commercial trades mentioned in Kabir bani is sure to surprise anyone. This list should shed light either on the simplicity or on the complexity of the period. This is a question.

It is a proven fact that culturally this country had attained more glorious place than many other countries. Despite wide economic disparity industry and commerce had developed in the period of Kabir, though all industrial activities had not come into being and developed in this age. For its emergence and development we have to search all the historical records of the cultural development of the country. It is needless to
say that the occupations of 'Savarnas' were 'Rurh' profession. Many of them were still in existence, but this transitional period had its impact on them, and a trend of change was clearly visible. Mini jobs and professions were in the hands of Avernas for earning livelihood.

To-day all industrial activities are centralized in the hands of capitalists who aim at accumulating money and wealth, but those days industries were decentralised. Then man was not meant for industries, but industries were meant for man. Big business concerns and commercial trades that required large scale capital were organised and managed by big businessman. Taking all these things into consideration all occupations and industries of India in Kabir's time can be put in several categories. Among these one category will be of 'rurh profession'.

Rurh Occupation:

According to the prescribed duties of caste system Brahmans were intended to learn and teach the Vedas, to observe the rites of Jagyas and to give and take alms. Slowly these things changed into their prescribed
occupations. These occupations were in the hands of Brahmins even during the period of Kabir, Tulsi Das too, has hinted towards this duty of Brahmins by this line of 'Kabitawali':

'Kevati ki jati, kachhu veda na parhayon.'

The brahmans of Kabir's time had entered into other occupations, too, but their main occupation was 'rurh'. Some historical records of the period show that Brahmins of that period were engaged in agriculture, but also in lending money to others. Besides this 'Tantra-Mantra' was also a part of their occupation.

The 'rurh' duty of Kshatriyas was to defend the country and its people. Many of them were called Bhupal or Raja, and they liked to be called Raja or Rao or Rana etc. Some of them were used in the defence of the country. Most of them (Kshatriyas) were brave soldiers, but during Muslim rule in the country other castes including Muslims besides Kshatriyas were recruited in the army. In Hindu states Kshatriyas

1. K.Gr., p. 178-264 - 'Sandhya Gyatri Aru Khat Karman'.
maintained their former position, but Muslim rulers had reserved high post in the army for Mohamdens. This brought a drastic change in Kshatriyas rurh duty. So they engaged themselves in agriculture and in other occupations.

There was no change in the occupations of Vaishyas. Agriculture and business were their main occupations. They were engaged in agriculture, buying and selling, import and export and in barter. Many of them also worked as money lenders. People engaged in buying and selling or in exchange of goods were called Banias \(^1\). Those who sold goods outside the state were known as 'Banjare' (wandering sellers). Big businessman who were engaged in import and export, went by the name of 'Seth' and the title of 'Seth' or 'Shahukar' \(^2\) was ascribed to money lenders. Money lenders were also called 'Vohara' \(^3\) They were generally very rich \(^4\)

The rurh duty of occupation of Shudras was to serve high caste people. In Aryan social system every

\(^1\) K.Gr., p. 121-103.
\(^2\) K.Gr., p. 42-22 (1)
\(^3\) K.Gr., p. 122-108.
\(^4\) K.Gr., p. 119-99, Pada 3.
care has been taken to protect and feed all, but this structure gradually got slackened and their duty developed into several professions. In what period of history such change came into being is shrouded in mystery. But seeing its several types one can easily imagine the long process of development. With the settlement of foreigners in the country a revolutionary change in the respective occupations was a must, and traditional customs, too weakened Shudras occupied themselves in agriculture as well as in business. The attempt to weaken 'rurh duties' of Aryan social system started at the period of war, but foreign invasion added strength and brought success.

**Common small scale industry:**

Besides 'rurh duty' there were several other types of jobs and professions to earn livelihood. After the settlement of Muslim rule and mixing of other religions with the Aryan religion respective castes duties got slackened. This slackness was mainly caused by the complex nature of means of earning livelihood. Some lived on monasteries and temples as servants and officers lived in royal courts. The chiefs of monasteries and 'Pithas' usually brought their sovereign power into
practice. They were not in lack of means and methods of earning money. They used to get a lot besides land and other properties from religious followers. They used to get money and matter from royal houses¹. Besides this they also a lot by way of interest². Performance of religious duties were not limited to Brahmans only, but others, in the garb of Brahmans, entered the profession. Amalgamation Hindus, Buddhists, Jainas, Shaivas, Yogis etc. had lessened the importance of caste system. Yet worshippers of temples were chiefly Brahmans.

As worshippers depended on temples for their livelihood, so Mohamdns lived on Mosques, Islam being the state religion mosques used to get great help from the state. Many industrial works of Hindus had been banned by Muslim rulers. Most of the works of Shudras had been adopted by Mohamdns. Many useful and fine things were produced in these industries. These things were sold in local and foreign markets³. Things of common requirements were easily available in local village

¹. K.Gr., p. 36-6.
². K.Gr., p. 36-7.
markets. Finishing their days works Banias returned to their respective houses.

The things that were bought and sold, were of three types: (i) things of daily requirements such as cloths, timber etc. (ii) things of comfort such as meat, spices, finished goods of leather, carts etc. and (iii) things of luxury such as silken cloths, wine, scent mirrors, ornaments and other things of beautification.

Like things of daily use men, animals and birds were bought and sold. Things of daily needs were available in local markets, but special kind of things and things on large scale could be had only from big markets or from store markets. Big business concerns flourished on business centres. Slaves and women were bought and sold on particular places. The system of keeping slaves and maid-slaves were present in ancient India, too, but the act of buying and selling of slaves and women came into being only after the Muslim rule in India. The owner had the full control over slaves. No more value than an ordinary thing was attached to him. His owner could sell him anywhere, any time and to anyone. The following hint of Kabir towards buying and
selling of slave is worth noticing:

"Main gulam mohi bechi gusanin,
Oni Kabira hati utara,
Soi gahak soi bechan hara."\(^{1}\)

Saint Tulsi Das has also made mention of the fashion of slavery in his 'Vinai Patrika:

"Rama ke gulam nam Ram bala raknyo Ram." \(^{2}\)

Horses, Camels, Oxen, Cows etc. were treated as commercial animals. Kabir has made mention of several animals, but he has made repeated mention of Oxen that were used to carry loads:

1. "Panva na tike pipilika logani lade bail"\(^{3}\)
2. Naika eik bani jare pancha,
   bail pachis kau sanga satha\(^{4}\)

Goats and sheep were bought and sold for meat only, but

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2. Tulsi Das Vinaya Patrica.
3. K.Gr., p. 31-7.
sheep<sup>1</sup> were also purchased for wool.

Hunters<sup>2</sup> used to go to market to sell their hunted animals and birds<sup>3</sup>. Khatikas, too, dealt in meat and flesh of animals. Among the wild lives fish was treated as commercial goods. Fisherman<sup>4</sup> caught and sold fish. Only men used to catch fish. Some times women also caught fish, but they were forbidden to do so in deep waters.

Among the living birds—parrots, maina and peasons have found special attention and mention<sup>5</sup>. 'Hansa' and 'Baguli' have been used allegorically, but their relation with commercial purposes cannot be established<sup>6</sup>.

While discussing economic affairs of Kabir's time the trade of gems and jewels can never be forgotten. The

2. K.Gr., p. 159-210 and 160-212.
trade of gems and jewels and other precious stones was in the hands and control of Jewelers only. Their markets were centralised in big cities only Gems and Jewels were bought only by the people of the richer section of the society. Perhaps it is not wrong to imagine that almost all the precious stones were in trade, though Kabir has mentioned only pearls jewels and red rubies. Divers used to take out pearls from the sea. They were called Merjeeva. Kabir has mentioned several times the difficult job of Merjeeva Kabir has established the relation of pearls with the sea and the 'Mansarovar'. In this way he also shows relation of jewels with 'Shikhar' and the sea. Kabir has mentioned jewels mainly in the context of preciousness or invalueableness. Pearls, Jewels and red rubies had struck deeper root in the mind of Kabir. Why? It is a question worth noticing. One of the probable reason may be that 'Mukta' and 'Hira' being the symbol of purity and red ruby being

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1. Same, p. 16-47 and 78-3.
2. K.Gr. p. 77-2 and 78-3
the symbol of passionate love struck deeper root in his mind, and the other reason, perhaps, may be this that they had attained respectable place in the usage in the tradition of special symbols even before Kabir.

In brief we may say that there was no scarcity of particular jobs, professions and occupations in the period of Kabir. Those industrial activities that were present before the advent of English men, were also present in the time of Kabir. Agriculture, gardening, business, keeping of pet animals, production of artistic goods, begging, catching fish, hunting, selling meat and flesh, drawing water from wells, singing and dancing, collection of pearls, trade of precious stones, spinning, weaving (cotton and woolen both), dying, jewelry, production of iron ware, making buildings, pottery, cheating and stealing, job snake charmers, toy-making, acting of actors, magic, preparation of musical instruments, usury, preparation and selling of wines, brokery, sewing, business of animals and birds, buying and selling of slaves, carpentry, washing, work of sailers, leather works and tanery etc. have been mentioned clearly in Kabir Bani.

In some activities women helped men. Some of the
jobs were carried on by both Hindus and Mohamdans without any distinction. Except Brahmans duty Mohamdans had entered into almost all the jobs. Some Hindus and Mohamdans were also engaged in teaching in their own respective religious areas. Engaged in the some jobs both Hindus and Muslims were known by different titles, such as Hindu weavers were called 'Koli' and Mohamdans were knows a 'Julaha' similarly a Hindu vegetable seller was called 'Kacchi' and a Mohamdan was known as 'Konjara'. This distinction is also visible in other professions, too.

Malis were engaged in the bausiness of fruits and flowers. No body knows, why? 'Barhal' Sevafal, Dakh, and 'Vijaura' appealed to Kabir much.

It is not true to say that period was without corn and fruits, or Kabir was unknown to them.

The help of a broker was sought in the act of buying and selling. So some people were in the

1. Mali Awal Debi Kai Kalian Kari Pukar, K.Gr. (1).
3. K.Gr., p. 138-155, Pad (1).
profession of brokery. Toll taxes were imposed on commercial goods, and sometimes 'Agau'\(^1\) too, was exacted.

It has already been stated that small scale industry was controlled by the weaker sections. In many of such works men were helped by ladies. The act of spinning and drawing water from wells was done by ladies only.

To carry commercial goods from one place to another men, asses and oxen were used, and on water ships and boats were in general use. In loading work, oxen were in greater use.

Both the systems, barter and transaction through cash payment in vogue in trade. There two systems are still in existence. Suradas, too, has hinted at barter system by saying:

"Fatak daike hatak mangat"

Business transaction of precious stones was carried on through cash payment\(^2\).

\(^{1}\) Same, p. 174-254, and 215-383.
\(^{2}\) K.Gr., p. 78-43-3.
Distance was measured in terms of 'Yojanas'. In measuring cloth yard was in general use. Two types of weights were in use, 'Mana' and 'Sera' and 'Bek' was the standard weighing weight for gold and silver. Among coins used Kabir has mentioned mainly 'Jadish' Paisa and Tanka.

Kabir Bani, if examined historically, shows that Kabir had minutely observed the prevailing atmosphere of the social world of his period. He is the true critic of his time. Kabir aimed at reforming the social life, but he knew that it was not possible till the distinction of castes creeds was in Vogue, and this distinction must be eradicated if a reformation is to be brought about. Economic disparity, too, was a prominent cause of this distinction. Those who lived in dire necessities, had

3. Same
5. Same
6. Same
7. Same.
fallen a prey to this social evil. The people of richer section who led luxurious life were too busy in carnal pleasures to hear their groan and pitious cry. These groans and cries of the poor moved Kabir to pity, who expressed these heart-rending cries powerfully in his 'Bani' and placed it before the society. Those economic circumstances that found place in Kabir Bani, are historically proven facts, and show the impact of age on Kabir.

Kabir was a social animal. He was fully aware with the trends and happenings of social life. Kabir wanted to place the true picture of social life before the society. Kabir was not blind to the sorrows and suffering of the social life. He hated and raised his voice against all social tyrannies and harassments Kabir aimed at bringing equality in social life and eradicating wide distinction between Hindus and Muslims. So that they might live in peace with love and confidence. Those days India was not poor, yet the economic condition of the society was not good. The economic disparity of social life had its say on the economical back-ward classes. Kabir's attention was positively drawn towards this disparity of social life, because he had repeatedly mentioned this economic disparity.
Kabir was an ideal man. Both Hindus and Muslims were equal to him. Man must be filled with human qualities. Kabir had placed this holy ideal before the people. Economic disparity beget distinction in social life. The development of social life can be achieved only after the eradication of distinction lying between these two. Kabir hated aery ideal. He wanted to place before the society the true picture of social life, which he had grasped in his mind. Gandhi placed only those values and ideals before social people, which Kabir had already pleaded for manking. Will these values and ideals make Kabir immortal? This is a question to answered by the people of India.