INTRODUCTION

The Adi Granth - holy scripture of the Sikhs - occupies a unique place in the religious literature and philosophy of medieval India. It contains poetry of the Sikh Gurus, Bhaktas and Bhattas. Among all the contributors of Adi Granth, Guru Nanak is the most prominent. He, being the founder of Sikhism, has established his own concepts of metaphysics, ethics, mysticism and morality. Other Gurus, in their writings, have followed his line of thought in explaining the nature of ultimate Reality and the goal of human life.

A large number of scholars have made a deep study of the philosophy of Sikh Religion. Scholars like Dr. Bhai Jodh Singh, Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli, Dr. Taran Singh, Dr. Jai Ram Misra and others, have tried to explain the fundamentals of Sikhism. Most of them concentrated on the study of Adi Granth as a whole or upon an individual poet. Those who have contributed in the field of history and philosophy of the Sikh Gurus, are K. Masauliffe, Khusan Singh, Sewa Ram Singh, Dr. Sher Singh, Khusbwaht Singh and Indu Bhusan Bamerjee. There are scholars like Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Scheb Singh, Principal Teja Singh, Ranmohan Singh and Dr. Gopal Singh Dardi, who have compiled dictionaries, written commentaries and prepared English translation of the Adi Granth.

Obviously these scholars have contributed considerably yet there remains an ample scope of further research. A detailed study of each one of the aspects of Guru Nanak's poetry has yet to be taken up. The present study presents one of the religio-philosophical aspects of Guru Nanak's thought, i.e. Karma and transmigration, in comparison to ancient and
medieval Indian thought.

The limitations of the work, as the title suggests, is confined only to the extent of tracing the concepts of Karma and transmigration in the poetry of Guru Nanak in the background of ancient and medieval Indian thought. It does not fall under the purview of my present study to refer to different views expressed on the subject by the modern thinkers and eminent philosophers, both Eastern and Western.

II

The word Karma as used in Indian religious-philosophical thought and literature, reflects different shades of meaning. Literally, Karma means action. It comes from Sanskrit, with the root 'kri' to act, and means action or deed. It also means operation, performance; business, office duty; religious rite; a specific actio, moral duty; performance of religious rites as opposed to speculative religion or knowledge of Brahman; labour work; product, result; fate the certain consequences of an act done in a former life. Broadly speaking, all these meanings reveal a three fold impact of Karma in our moral, social and religious life.

Firstly, Karma means the doing or actions of all beings; secondly, every action produces its effect and thirdly, it includes the concept that our present actions are the result of an act done in a former birth. The idea that all these actions are controlled by a certain law is the law of Karma.

While interpreting Sri Aurobindo, describes the law as the working of a universal energy. Fundamentally, he says, the meaning of Karma is that all existence is the working of a universal energy, a process and an action and a building of things by that action, - an unbuilding too, but as a step to further building, - that all is a continuous chain in which every one link is bound indissolubly to the past infinity of numberless links, and the whole governed by a fixed association of cause and effect, present action the result of past action as future action will be the result of present action, all cause a working of energy and all effect too a working of energy.

The word Karma occurring in the poetry of Guru Nanak, is derived from two different sources i.e. Sanskrit and Arabic. Karma with origin in Sanskrit is used in the sense of work, action or deed (both meritorious and demeritorious), fate, destiny etc; and the word Karma with origin in Arabic means mercy, grace, kindness and benevolence.

III

The present work is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the ancient Indian thought. The main scriptures and systems of religious philosophy that have been discussed, with regards to concepts of Karma and transmigration, are the Vedas, the Brāhmanas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gītā, Jainism, Buddhism and the Gītā Gītānānā.

S. Sri Aurobindo; The Problem of Rebirth, p. 36.
The second chapter relates to the medieval Indian thought. It covers the two major streams of religious philosophy, the first is of 'Vedanta' and the other is that of Islam. Shankara, Gananja, Bhaskara, Ramanuja and Vallabha are the prominent commentators and exponents of Vedanta. By their original and varied interpretation of Vedanta, they have established the different schools of thought. Their views on the concept of Karma and transmigration have been dealt with in the first part of this chapter. Islam and Sufism made their own impact in the field of religious philosophy. The main source of their teaching is the holy Quran. Although Islam does not accept the doctrine of transmigration yet there is a belief in the afterlife, the eternal soul, the Day of Judgment and Heaven and Hell. A brief discussion on the subject is made in the second part of this chapter.

In the third chapter, the concept of Karma as revealed in the poetry of Guru Nanak has been elaborated. At places, a study of Guru Nanak's thought, in comparison to Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and other religious systems has been made. Almost all the aspects relating to the law of Karma are discussed in this chapter. The main aspects are: the origin of Karma; how the law of Karma operates; importance of Karma; impact of Karma on character and personality; controller of Karma; Karma and the law of cause and effect; classification of Karma; Karma Karma, Fruited Karma; Fruited Karma; 'Trishni Karm'; 'Parashat' Karma; 'Purush Sami' Karma; and religious Karma. How Karma is annihilated is also discussed in this chapter. All the aspects of the concept has been clarified and supported by
giving original quotations from the poetry of Guru Nanak. To give support to the ideas of Guru Nanak, a few verses of other Gurus have also been referred to.

The fourth chapter contains the discussion on the concept of transmigration as is found in the poetry of Guru Nanak. Here also, Guru Nanak's viewpoint on the subject, has been compared with the prevalent thought of the major religions of the world, i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. The main aspects, mentioned and discussed in this chapter are: belief in the concept of transmigration; the theories of pre-existence, reincarnation and transmigration, life after death, heaven and hell and how transmigration ends etc.

The last chapter deals with the three important concepts of Karma i.e. Karma and Chance, Karma and Free-will and Karma, Caste and Society. It has been proved that both the Karma and the Grace of God are necessary for the improvement of the individual and his final emancipation. In the portion of Karma, Caste and Society, a brief account of human society, in relation to the concept of Karma, has been dealt with right from the Vedic period up to the time of Guru Nanak.

IV

For the English rendering of some of the verses of Guru Nanak assistance has been taken from the writings of Dr. Gopal Singh Dardi and Dr. Bal Jodh Singh.