CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The pre Kabir era was a period that comprised conflicts among various religions borne out of various interpretations of their individual religious philosophies. The customs and the traditions that were followed wherein the principles although are essentially same were superseded by the religious differences in the period. This conflict continued for long. It led to extremism in religion, comprising materialism and an increase in differences between the rich and the poor. The high and the low caste and the embedding of Brahmanism in the society were with the exploitation of the low caste. This was the root cause of imbalance in the society. The ethics and morality were not on the bases of principle but degraded to fulfill the selfish motive of a group of people.

Religious practices were wrongly implemented and made a tool for putting fear in the minds of the common man, so much so that it led to the degradation of economic and social life hampering growth and development. In those days it was a religious belief – not allowing people to cross the seas or not allowing foreigners to trade especially in south India. The Varna and the caste system deteriorated the society bringing about social, economic, political, cultural and religious degradation.

Vedas, and the schools of thought (Charvāka, Jain, Baudha, Sāṇkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiṣeṣīka, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta) have been a part of the Indian religious and spiritual philosophy. Since the beginning it has got deeply embedded into the Indian society and way of life. This however took another form in that religiosity and rituals took the front seat. And spirituality which was based on principles and scientific analysis, essentially the Gyānmārga took a back seat. The practices of worship and rituals took an all time importance. This led to many misinterpretations, superstitions and false
practices. This took the society away from the true spiritual leanings and rationalistic thought and turned it into a mere lip service to the real principles. This perpetuated an era of falsity, business in religion and casteism and creation of outcastes and Varnas based on birth which became the order of the day.

Sant Kabir tried through various means to take the people back to the original state of things and spread pure knowledge bring lost knowledge and a lost people back to the original thought and way of living.

According to Sant Kabir this was the very condition of the people that were lost in the outer interpretations and failed to see the real principles in their proper light. In fact they had failed to go inwards and analyse the pure thought and created an illusory perception of the real. The real principle was far removed from the original and served a purpose that was selfish, destructive to outer life forms. In those period lowly practices of animal and human sacrifices, idol and or floral worships, destroying nature and indulging blind beliefs were prevalent.

The so called religious leaders even used the Smriti and the Vedas as a foundation to further their so called concept of sin and morality for their own selfish gains. They pampered their egos while all the time still was harbouring suspicion towards the real essence of the scriptures. They were thus spreading misinformation and misled the society.

Such was the degradation that a need was felt for going back to the original meaning and interpretation of the scriptures. It was the necessity to spread the same among a simple people in a simple language to better the understanding of the masses. Need was felt to revert the society to its earlier form more pure, moralistic and devoid of unnecessary rituals and practices. This was necessary because even the intellectuals and the knowledgeable in the field had little understanding of the true meaning of liberation. The real meaning behind the term Almighty i.e. the Brahma who is the creator, has lost the true meaning of

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1 Kabir, Bijak, Dr. J. Das (Tr.), Sadguru Kabir Prakatya Dham, Varanasi, 2014, Ramaini – 30
2 ibid – 31
itself. Thus it resulted into the loss of real meaning of liberation. The pundits who continued in their Vedic rituals and practices transferred the seekers into the unending cycle of "karmakānda". Therefore there was a gap created between true knowledge and falsification.

The women, the Dalit and the Bahujan Samāja were now burdened under a large number of practices and religious do's and don'ts via various religions and cults all of which had reached a stage of extremism. This necessitated the evolvement of a separate escape route, comprising all, to remove the confusion and the unnecessary religious oppression of women, the Dalits and the Bahujan Samāja.

Perhaps it was this very need that saw the era of Bhakti movement begin during this period. Bhakti, in medieval time was characterized by two traditions-the tradition of the Ācāryas of Bhakti and that of the Saints. The Bhakti Movement was essentially a continuous development and was reinterpreted in diverse and new ways by the great Ācāryas and saints whose schools still continue as a living force. The phenomenon of medieval Bhakti can be recognized with the latter tradition that is tradition of saints. The Ācāryas prevented Bhakti from degenerating into a purely subjective emotion. They accomplished this by reinterpreting the ancient scriptures, defending theism against absolutism, and a religion of the heart against Gnosticism and extreme ritualism. They defended the conceptual framework and systematized the notions, feelings and practices involved in the Bhakti Movement. Because of this, it led to a new and popular religious and social movement. It gave the people new ideas and faith. Also they gave meaning to a deep philosophical probing into the concept and nature of Bhakti, which is predominantly found in the works of Ācāryas and Bani (verses) of the medieval saints.

The work of Ācāryas forms a part of a continuous tradition going back to remote antiquity through the Alvaras, and Nayanāras, the Pancarātra Agamas, Bhagavad-Gītā etc. God, soul and emotional worship are general parameters common to all religions. Hence it is necessary to look at the philosophical conceptions of the Ācāryas to understand the distinctive nature and process of Bhakti.
Śankarācārya introduces the concept of Ignorance i.e. avidyā - that deludes the human being into seeing the multifarious world when there is none! For Ācārya Śaṅkara the highest knowledge and the karma are antithetical to one another. Whereas Rāmānujaśārya gave importance to logical consideration and tried give to satisfactory explanation for scriptural divergences in the defense of Bhakti in the light of a logically consistent ontology.

A liberal movement which was then taking place all over India launched by the Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Sufis saints arose in different parts of the country. In northern India it was launched by Rāmānanda, Sant Kabir and their followers. In the north-west, the lead was taken by Guru Nanak (AD 1469-1538), the founder of Sikhism. The same Bhakti Movement was launched in Maharashtra as early as in the thirteenth century by Jnānadeva, Nāmadeva, Ekanātha, Tukārām and Rāmadāsa. All these movements stirred the people and a new feeling of devotion, love and humanity arose. They stressed that one's religion was tested not by one's beliefs but by one's conduct. No heart which shuts out truth and love can be the abode of God. At the time when men were conscious of failure, saints appeared to renovate the spirit of religion and humanity. They tried to build a nation of self-respecting men and women, devoted to God and their leaders, filled with a sense of equality and brotherhood for all.

Sant Kabir holds a place of great importance in the religious history of India. Sant Kabir's teaching was the first important introduction of Nirgunia Bhakti in northern India, and he was the first teacher to appeal to both Hindus and Muslims. The eloquence of Sant Kabir was of such power that his "words" spread like fire across northern India from the Punjab and Rajasthan to Bihar. In the Bani of Sant Kabir there are examples of situations of our daily lives. Thus, it is more nearer to us and therefore we find it is relevant even today. His Bani is majorly used by the vernacular. The Bani of Sant Kabir helps us in both ways - the social and personal, ethical and spiritual. Following Sant Kabir means understanding one's inner self, realizing oneself. One should accept the self as it is. It is to becoming harmonious with one's surroundings. Though Sant Kabir was strongly opposed to all the outer
mechanical aspects of religion, he used several *Vaishnava* and Islamic names of God symbolically to describe the all-pervading Reality.

Thus we see here that Sant Kabir in effect stood as a reformer for both religions and thus took from both and evolved a unified rational thought and probably this was to reduce the political infighting having religious leanings. This rationalism had great influence on the people politically and socially and brought in a new wave of rational religious culture that paved the way for a new thought process.

**Sant Kabir and His Philosophy**

The philosophy of Sant Kabir addresses social as well as spiritual aspects of human life. The Bhakti is not only in the metaphysical sense of the term and the subject of speech but it is living the life with the expression of love for the Divine. The real philosophy of Sant Kabir is not only human and Divine oriented but also social and ethics oriented. Sant Kabir’s concepts of harmony, equality and devotion are significant features of his philosophy. In his philosophy the aspect of devotion is pre-dominant with connotation of Sevā. It is the way of life which embraced people of different gender, caste, class, color and race together in God.

In the philosophy of Sant Kabir the concept of reincarnation and the law of Karma are accepted and the rejection of caste system and idolatry. The basic philosophical principles he adopts are simple. According to Sant Kabir, the ultimate goal of life is not only the union of two spiritual principles i.e. personal soul (*Jīvātmā*) and God (*Paramātmā*) but also service to the needy and ethical code of conduct of the self. The way towards the salvation goes through the concept of *Sevā* and not being in isolation.

In my thesis, I have done an analytical study of Metaphysical, Social and Ethical fundamentals of Sant Kabir’s philosophy and the terminology used by Sant Kabir in his philosophy. He is well known for his critique of social norms and for his social philosophy. However a discussion of social philosophy would be incomplete without discussing the metaphysical framework from
which his social philosophy follows. Hence I have discussed the Metaphysics and then discussed the Social and Ethical philosophy of Sant Kabir.

Metaphysics deals with the very fundamental inquire like reality, existence, being etc. While considering Indian philosophy metaphysics deals with Brahman, Atma, Sat, Jiva, Jagata etc. Metaphysics gives us a platform even for epistemology, ontology, ideology, existentialism, mysticism etc.

Metaphysics is well described in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online. "Metaphysics is a broad area of philosophy marked by two types of inquiry. The first aims to be the most general investigation possible into the nature of reality: are there principles applying to everything that is real, to all that is? – if we abstract from the particular nature of existing things, that which distinguishes them from each other, what can we know about them merely in virtue of the fact that they exist? The second type of inquiry seeks to uncover what is ultimately real, frequently offering answers in sharp contrast to our everyday experience of the world. Understood in terms of these two questions, metaphysics is very closely related to ontology, which is usually taken to involve both ‘what is existence (being)?’ and ‘what (fundamentally distinct) types of things exist?’"

The word metaphysics means - that which comes after the study of nature. In the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online 'the word metaphysics is explained thus, "Aristotle called it ‘first philosophy’, sometimes also ‘the science of being’ (more-or-less what ‘ontology’ means); but at some point in antiquity his writings on the topic came to be known as the ‘Metaphysics’ – from the Greek for ‘after natural things’, that is, what comes after the study of nature."'

Indian philosophy, especially Vedāṇtsutras start with 'अपवत्त्वो ब्रह्म निव्राजसा' here Brahman means the real entity or the origin of the world from which it emanated. Further it goes into an inquiry about 'Who am I? From where have I come? Who is my mother and father?' and so on. So, we can say that the very deep and core discussions in Classical Indian philosophy are a very rich

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3 Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online as on 31st May 2011 at 1.00 am
4 ibid
source of ‘what is existence (being)?’ and ‘what (fundamentally distinct) types of things exist?’ These two basic questions constitute the full structure of Metaphysics.

In the stream of Indian classical philosophy, during the medieval period of Bhakti Movement, the saints from all religions and parts of India have given their own shade of meaning to some basic definitions of the fundamentals of philosophy which existed at that time. They have used words from traditional Indian terminology of philosophy, but with their own interpretation to them. They say that the Nām (the Nām of God) is real, and whenever I do chant the Nām, I can see color⁵, some say their tongue tastes sweet and some see light. (We even give a term ‘Mystical’ to the experiences, and must be based on something which is real, but indefinable.) Sant Kabir says if I say that is one it will be false and if I say it is two then that is also not correct (gārī).⁶ In the Bijak of Sant Kabir in Ramaini no. 28, he says, ‘the secret of that weaver, no one can know, who had made the world.’ In the 11th chapter of ‘Śākhi’ he says that within the five elements one indefinable thing (guptvastu) dwells which only a rare and true finder can know with the help of his Guru’s Šabda.⁷ To deal with all these metaphysical investigations the thesis begins with first three chapters on metaphysics and remaining chapters are on social and ethical philosophy of Sant Kabir.

The thesis starts with Introduction as the first chapter. In the second chapter I have discussed Idea of God, in third, Concept of World, the fourth chapter is on Concept of Man and Woman. Chapter fifth is on Social and Ethical Philosophy of Sant Kabir and sixth is Pathway to God Realization. The thesis ends with Conclusion as seventh chapter.

In the chapter 'Idea of God', I have discussed how the idea of God developed from pre-Vedic, Vedic, Upnissadic and in the philosophy of great Ācāryas mainly Śankarācārya and Rāmānujācārya. It was necessary to discuss about

⁵ Dr. R. D. Ranade, Pathway to God in Hindi Literature, Shri Gurudev Ranade Samadhi Trust, Nimbal R. S., 1997 p. 283
⁶ Kabir, Bijak, Śākhi – 120
⁷ ibid - 27
Islamic and Sufi concept of God as in Sant Kabir's era, Islam was fully established its roots in India.

Sant Kabir never doubted the existence of God. According to him the idea of God is not the incarnation of the deities. The realization of God is through the personal experiences, revelation and rational reasoning. According to him God dwells in our hearts. There is only One God. There are two aspects of God. One is Sagunatva and other is Nirgunatva. Again Nirgunatva has two meaning, viz., Absolute Being and Nām. Absolute Being is an independent entity. It is not the anthropomorphic concept of God in Hinduism. The other aspect i.e. Nām is the basic and fundamental concept of God in Sant Kabir's philosophy. Concept of Nām has been further developed as special term i.e. 'Śabda'. Thus change in basic concept of God automatically changed the way of worship and idea of salvation. To get on the pathway to God realization the role of Guru becomes very essential. Only with the grace of Guru one can achieve salvation i.e. the state of Jivanmukta. There are no bondages like caste, class, gender or economic or political status to achieve the Jivanmukta state in the philosophy of Sant Kabir.

In the chapter Concept of World, I have discussed the basic idea of the existence of the world according to Sant Kabir. There are two realm of existence, viz., a) Ephemeral Realm and b) Immortal Realm. Ephemeral realm is full of dualities and opposites whereas in immortal realm is without dualities and free of opposites. This duality is caused by Māyā. Māyā, in Sant Kabir's philosophy is not a separate entity. It is the creative power of God. Māyā is without beginning but it has an end. Māyā has power to decay the individual. It has power of playing beguile game. It can influence anything and anybody. Sant Kabir says there is no place left without existence of Māyā. According to Sant Kabir it is very difficult to defeat the Māyā. When a person removes the veil of Māyā he realizes Brahman.

Sant Kabir talks about basic elements with which the world is constituted, viz., water, fire, air, earth, and space and three gunas, viz., Sat, Rajas and Tama. He talks about seven regions and three worlds and fourteen abode.
Sant Kabir describes the world like a dream, a virtual image, a big ocean etc. There are three regions or three worlds, viz., sky, earth and nether regions. It is 'Triloka' or 'Tribhuvana' in Sant Kabir's terminology.

The world it is full of suffering and evil. Approaches to the question of evil and or sufferings and its implications in the historical development of any religious, philosophical and cultural thought has its major contribution to determine general terminology of its common attitudes not only religious ceremony but also most importantly code of conduct or life style of the follower. In the philosophy of Sant Kabir the evil is considered as a part of the creation of the whole universe. It is the result and not process or beginning. In case of natural evil it is a part of the process of the development and change in the nature. In case of social evil, it affects to those who are lost in blind faiths and blindly following rituals. There are reasons behind evil, viz., will with incomplete knowledge and wrong attitude and thoughtless reactions.

Suffering is 'Duhkha', 'Pida' or 'Vedanā' in Indian language. It can be divided into two classes, viz., positive and negative suffering. In its positive sense provokes the sufferer to know and develop his/her potentialities to lead a great life. Whereas suffering in negative sense looks at 'the world as an intolerable place to live in and that life is an unendurable burden.'

In the chapter Concept of Man and Woman I have discussed about various aspects of nature of man and woman. Sant Kabir talks about the body is created with five major elements and three gunas, viz., Sata, Raja, and Tama. Having a body is not enough to operate in the world but we do need four internal sense organs as well. These are Mana (mind), Buddhi (intellect), Citta (sentience) and Ahankār (self-consciousness). According to Sant Kabir it is neither easy nor do we get birth as human frequently. Therefore one should use very wisely the human life. Realizing God and using birth for search of inner Self and doing service – the 'Sevā' to needy is the ultimate supreme goal of human life.

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Man is made of (tan) body and Jiva. Jiva is a miniature of Brahman. It should not be mistaken for Brahman Himself. It has its own individuality, but since it came out of Brahman, it carries the qualities of Brahman. Jiva is immortal. The physical body decays, but Jiva continues for ever. The concept of Jiva in Sant Kabir's philosophy is the concept of drop and ocean. That is why it can be stated that the soul is Divine, that God dwells in us, and that we are created in the 'image' of God. It means that God consciousness and our consciousness are inseparable, and that we can realize this unity through purity of life and control of all desires, and practicing meditation.

Sant Kabir talks about various types of man. Manmukha, as a fool moodha or murakha, Gurumukha, as a seeker of the path of God, god-like person i.e. Sādhu or Aadhoot, the perfect man i.e. Jivanmukta, and Self i.e. (Nija-pada) and so on.

After discussing metaphysics I have discussed Social and Ethical Philosophy of Sant Kabir. The social world is manmade world. It is the social existence or social plane. Social plane is a conceptual based world. It is divided on the basic three concepts they are – religion, culture, social. Each of these concepts has great effect on the society. According to Sant Kabir no one is born with tag of religion on him. All are children of one God. Religion is manmade belief system. There is no place for blind faith and wrong religious practices in Sant Kabir's philosophy. The only religion is 'Humanity' according to Sant Kabir. The human relation should be on the basis of brotherhood, equality, respectful and responsible towards others. One should not treat other as threat. The social plane is plane of action and endurance as well. Our deeds decide our status in the court of Lord and not the rituals we do. The result of our karma is inevitable. One will surely have to go through all pleasures or pains as the result of their karma. But Sant Kabir says the one who understands the right path, living like a lotus in the water will be free from bondages of karma. Sant Kabir says that all men and women are equal. Animals and plants have soul. The flesh, bone and soul are same in men and animal. Sant Kabir describes special feminine qualities which all of us should have. They are

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9 Kohali S. S., The Sikh Philosophy, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1992, p. 10
Pativratā, Suhāgan, Lajjā, and Shringāra etc. which means loyalty to Lord, truthfulness, moral conduct, etc. There is discussion on moral plane as it is the way of living in the society. Moral plane is where person is ethically evolved and developed as a responsible and sensible person. One should have power of discrimination (विचेक) to deal with everybody.

This righteous path leads us to the spiritual plane and spiritual discipline. Satguru is the guide for The Pathway to God Realization. Without Satguru it is not possible to proceed on this path. The new developed meditational method came up with new platform for religious and spiritual understanding and it made was available for all. This is renowned as ‘Śabda-Surti-Yoga’ and ‘Sahaj-Yoga’. Sant Kabir was first and the most famous founder of this system of meditation. In this method two points are most considerable – they are 1) It is the method for Nirgun and Nirakar God. 2) It is open to all without any discriminations of social status, caste, class or sex. One just requires intense love and full surrender and devotion for God. Meditation in Sant Kabir’s literature and terminology is also known as ‘Lōu laganā’¹⁰ (लोू लगना) ‘Lagan laganā’ (लगन लगना) and also as ‘Surat laganā’ (सुरत लगना).

In the thesis an attempt has been made to braid the philosophy and Bani of Sant Kabir with today’s society and human life.

Sant Kabir is well known for his critique of social norms and for his social philosophy. He was instrumental through his Doha’s, Šabda, and various chapters in Bijak i.e. Ramaini, Chautisā, Kaharā, Vasant, Hindolā, Vipramatisi, Birahooli and various Angas in Kabir Granthāwali and Bāni’s Salokas, Šabda, and Gauris in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, in bringing about changes in society political, social, religious and cultural. In my thesis I have shown that there has been a definite attempt to change the attitude of the people towards religion thus bringing about changes in society in general and the way people looked at religion and Self in particular, as well as relations with nature and among human beings.

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¹⁰ Kabir, Kabir Granthāwali, Dr. Shamsundar Das (Ed.), Prakashan Parivar, Allahabad, 2009, Suksma marag ko anga – 2
Thus, Sant Kabir brought about a social revolution during the Bhakti movement and he was a fore runner in the field wherein he brought in new ideas and attitudes.

In my work I have tried to find out whether Spirituality and Social life are interrelated and interlinked? Can a householder have spiritual authority? Whether Grihasthārama and Sanyās or Śādhanā go hand in hand? Only an ethical person can be spiritually elevated. Such a spiritually elevated person dedicates his life to the service of humanity as Sant Kabir believes that the ultimate God is omnipresent and manifests through His creation, both human as well as non-human.