

THE VOICE OF A SANT IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Eighteenth century in Indian history was an era of tremendous changes in many aspects like polity, economy, society and religion. The religious condition of eighteenth century quite change as compare to the previous centuries. Lots of sects were emerged from both school *nirguna* and *saguna* in the eighteenth century. During this century states were also played a very key role in to impose the religious norms on the society like Maharashtra and Rajasthan both states wanted to impose caste rules and religious norms strictly on the society. These states were increasingly taking steps to regulate the society in according to the principals of Brahmanical ideology, something that could not happen without the prior violation, and subversion of caste and religious norms. Garibdas (1717-1774 AD) who believes belongs to the *nirguna* school of thought was born during this century. He speaks against the Brahmanical institutions. This is the time when Vaishnavism reached its zenith and it was the tuff time for the monotheist *sant*. So in this situation what was the importance of being a monotheist *sant* which I will try to find out in coming pages?

WHO IS A SANT

First of all we look what is the meaning of *sant*. The word *sant* is used for the person who is wise, holy and helps needy people and believes in monotheism. In local dialect the word *sant* is, sometimes, understood as the synonym of devotee (bhakt), sage (sadhu), and great soul (mahatma).¹ The important features of a *sant* are their unbiased character, devotion to god and disenchantment with the life of pleasure.²

From the fourteenth century onwards, in northern and central India, those who composed religious poetry were known as *sants* or 'poet-sants'. It is very difficult to categorize the *sants* from a metaphysical or religious point of view as they included both Hindus and Muslims, though the

¹ Prasuram Chaturvedi, "Utter Bharat Ki Sant Prampara", 3rd edn., Allahabad, 1972 (originally published in 1952) .p. 3

² निरबैरी, निहका मता, साई सेंती नेह |
विषिया सू-न्यारा रहे संतनि को अंग एह ||
Kabir Granthawali, p. 50

former greatly outnumbered the latter.³ It is believed that 'sant tradition' (*sant prampara*) is essentially non-sectarian; lots of *sant* poets have, however, been considered the founders of various sects which bear their name but had actually developed in the later period even after their death. Moreover, the *sant* tradition was one such form of religious life in medieval India which had transcended the boundaries between Hindu and Muslim and succeeded, to a large extent, in furthering the processes of accommodation and acculturation.⁴ Clearly, the *nirguna* and *saguna* ideas about santhood contained entirely different social meanings. A person, who is believed to be a *sant* or *sadh* by the lower castes, could be considered a pretender by the Brahmans. It can be possible that a religious figure acquired the status of *sant* from the both high and low castes. But by and large, santhood was an issue of opposing social insights.⁵

Charlotte Vaudeville says that *sants*, coming from the lower strata of Hindu and Muslim society, mostly belonged to the *Shudra* Varna; some even belonged to the *Atishudra* (Untouchables). They were poor and uneducated and women were also included. They did not have the right to receive *Vedic* knowledge, could not study Sanskrit and only expressed themselves in the local languages. This is generally believed to have been an important factor in the emergence of *sant* movement in the medieval period.

Before the *sant* movement began in northern India, men of lower caste were not entitled to attain salvation. With the emergence of this movement, the spiritual leadership which was restricted exclusively to the Brahmans was taken up by popular poet-sants of the lower castes that composed devotional songs in regional vernacular.⁶ The *sants* expressed their thoughts and ideas orally and used common folk stories to connect with the larger audience. The *sants* were non-sectarian and their sayings had strong anti-Brahmanical feelings.⁷

The teachings of the *sants* are essentially heterodox and not similar to those of Vaishnava bhakti; yet *sants* and Vaishnava bhaktas stand close regarding their ethical ideals. When the *sants*, for instance, express their devotion to a *nirguna* deity, which is formless and beyond the familial notion of comprehension, they express it in the same manner using symbolism of love that is so characteristic of the *saguna* Vaishnava tradition. Although they rejected the symbols of Vaishnava practice like idol

³ Charlotte Vaudeville, *Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity*, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. "The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Traditions of India", Delhi, 1987. p. 21

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Rameshwar Prasad Bahuguna, *Beyond Theological Differences: Sant-Vaishnava Interaction in Medieval India*, p. 58

⁶ Karine Schomer, *The Sant Tradition in Perspective*, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. "The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Traditions of India", p. 1

⁷ Charlotte Vaudeville, *Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity*, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. "The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Traditions of India", p. 23

worship, temple rituals, pilgrimage etc., they shared with them the belief in the miraculous power of the divine name and the mystical benefit of keeping company with true devotees.⁸

Sant tradition is the one concerning which there are differences of opinion, both among the scholars of Indian religion in general and Indian Bhakti tradition in particular. The difficulty started with the term *sant* itself, which has several overlapping usages. The term *sant* is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat* (truth, reality) which means 'one who knows the truth' or 'one who has experienced ultimate reality', i.e. a person who has reached a stage or got the spiritual self-realization.⁹

The translation of the word *sant* as saint is not correct conceptually as well as etymologically. Though it is correct that like 'saint', '*sant*' has also acquired a more general ethical meaning of a 'good person' whose life is an example for spiritual and moral standards. Historically '*sants*' are related to two distinct, though related devotional bhakti strands. The first group was comprised of the non-sectarian Vaishnava poet-*sants* of Maharashtra who worshiped god Vitthala or Vithoba at Pandharpur between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. The second strand, called '*nirguna bhakti*', emerged during the fifteenth century in the Hindi speaking region, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Who belonged to the *sant parampara*? Regarding the bhakti tradition in Maharashtra it is quite clear. They were the first who developed into a single *panth* during the period between thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *sants* who popularized Vithoba cult were Marathi-speaking poets called *Varkari*. They were fifty in number stretching over a period of five hundred years; among them four are very popular (1) Jnaneshvar (2) Namdev (1270-1350), (3) Eknath (1548-1600) and (4) Tukaram (1598-1649).¹⁰ Certain characteristics of this tradition are also found in the *sant* tradition of north India, which is why the devotee-poets in north India are also called *sants*.¹¹ There were marked differences too between the *sants* of south India and north India, as Parsuram Chaturvedi has pointed out. He said that the basic difference between them was that the south Indian *sants* used to sing in private sphere or in front of deities, while in north India this kind of tradition was not very popular and only seen in a very limited form of *Mandli* (gathering).¹²

However, north Indian *sant* tradition provides a more fragmented picture. As compared to the Deccan, there are so many panths in north India each having its own separate history going back to a particular founding figure. Besides this, there were many *sants* who neither belonged to any panth nor founded a new panth, but they were regarded as a part of the tradition. There were neither

⁸ Ibid. pp. 21-40

⁹ Karine Schomer, the Sant Tradition in Perspective, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. "The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Traditions of India", p. 2-3.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 4 and Prasuram Chaturvedi, "Utter Bharat Ki Sant Prampara", p. 7

¹¹ Ibid. p. 7

¹² Ibid. 8-9

direct historical connections nor institutional forces binding the north Indian *sants* together but the similarity in their teachings. The major corpus of north Indian *sant* literature is comprised of anthologies compiled from the songs and utterances of different *sants*. The important feature of this genre is that it has attained the status of canonical scriptures.¹³

The first *sant* in the north Indian *sant* prampara was Ramanand, a Vaishnava reformer who lived in Banaras between the fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth century. In Vaishnava hagiography, Ramanand is said to have belonged to the direct line of descent from Ramanuja, the great teacher of Vaishnavas of the south. Having some disagreements with the sect's strict dietary restrictions and caste exclusiveness, he left the sect. Afterward, he founded the Ramanandi sect, which was liberal and worshiped Ram as its supreme deity. Out of his teachings, two different types of bhakti emerged. The first school believed in the incarnation theory and worshiped Ram as a saguna deity along with his consort Sita. The important *sant* of this school was Tulsidas, author of the *Ramcharitmanas* (c. 1575). This sect was conservative. The second school consisted of those *sants* who completely rejected orthodox practices, discarded rituals and worshiped Ram as a transcendent and formless *nirguna* God. The most famous among them was Kabir.

Recent scholarship on bhakti tradition does not agree with this interpretation of the origin of *sant* tradition in north India. It was rejected on several grounds. Firstly, as Schomer argues in her introductory essay to *The Sants* that, it is simply not possible for Ramanand to have had all the disciples attributed to him. Secondly, it is pointed out that in the preserved utterances of the *sants* of early period no reference is found about Ramanand or any other human guru. Instead, the *sants* belonging to the early period appear as independent figures and their spiritual awareness is sharpened from their personal mystical experience alone. But in the later tradition, a connection with Ramanand was invented in order to secure Brahmanical respectability by affiliating them with the mainstream bhakti movement; Ramanand, due to his liberal views, was a good choice for a reasonable guru for the low caste people.¹⁴

There is very little information about the earliest northern *sants* – the predecessors and contemporaries of Kabir. The information about their names (Sena, Pipa, Dhanna, Sadhana, Raidas etc.) came from the traditional list of disciples attributed to Ramanand, and *Adi Granth* which contains some of their utterances as well. Some *panthic* traditions may have been started by their followers but none could survive for too long. Kabir, however, made a lasting impact on the bhakti movement as all the tradition which emerged after him regarded him as the fountainhead of the

¹³ Karine Schomer, *The Sant Tradition in Perspective*, in Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. "The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Traditions of India", p. 4

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 5

sant movement. Though there is no evidence that he intended to found a *panth* and there is no single historical connection between him and other later *sants*, he is believed to be their spiritual master or guru.¹⁵ This process is understandable, given the fact that Kabir's influence was enormous and his sayings were in public domain throughout the northern India. After Kabir, two *sants* stand out most prominently: Nanak (1469-1539), founder of a *panth* that later became the Sikh religion and Dadu Dayal (1544-1603). Both the *panths* were tremendously influenced by Kabir's teachings. Kabir had had a strong presence in both the Dadupanthei and the Sikh tradition.

Kabir, Nanak and Dadu were the famous and major figures of the northern *sant* tradition in its initial stage during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The *panths* which were founded by them or inspired by them are the oldest surviving *sant* communities today. The *panths* which were founded by these three *sants* hold significant presence in three different regions Kabir *panth* is very popular in the region of Madhya Pradesh and eastern Uttar Pradesh, while Sikhism is popular in Punjab region and Dadu *panth* in Rajasthan. Schomer says that the time period of Kabir, Nanak and Dadu was very creative time of the northern *sant* prampara, and the tradition continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶

LEGACY OF KABIR AND NANAK IN THE IDEAS OF GARIBDAS

Kabir and Nanak were the two most important figure of bhakti in medieval India. Most of the monotheistic *sant* connect themselves with the Kabir. They feel proud to associate themselves with him. Garibdas who born in eighteenth century, more than two centuries later from Kabir also associate himself with him. In the hagiographic writings on Garibdas claims that he was the reincarnation of Kabir.¹⁷ This legacy is also resembles in the utterances of Garibdas.

Ideas of Garibdas are very similar to the Kabir's. Like Kabir he was bold in terms of his opposition to the Brahminical institutions. Garibdas called Kabir his spiritual *guru* and his utterances cover all the aspects and topics which covered by the Kabir's utterances and in the same stress and poetic forms. Garibdas, like Kabir believed in co-existence and criticised the entire orthodox minded religious figures. He saw that the Hindus and the Muslims were not enemies, but their religions created the differences between them. He criticises their customs and ritual worship also. He said:

“The Hindus and Muslims know not the true values,
They keep fasts which are without convection.
Both religions have no real faith in God,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Karine Schomer, Introduction to Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod ed. “The Sants: Studies in A Devotional Tradition of India”, p. 6

¹⁷ K C Gupta, *Sri Garib Das Haryana's Saint of Humanity*, p. xiii.

The Hindus bow to the East and the Muslims to the West.

Forgetting these creeds, I looked North and South,
And, for sure, I found God in all direction.”¹⁸

He was also influenced the ideas of charity by Islam and Sikhism. He adopted his theory of charity from Islam and Sikhism. In his eyes charity is far above Jap (meditation), Tapa (penance), Yajna (sacrifices) and Tirtha (pilgrimages). A Bhakta must give charity if he is a house-holder. Garibdas gives the freedom from charity to a monk. He said that charity is one of the highest virtues. He believes that he is a *kafir* who gives no charity.¹⁹ He goes further and says that in Islam and Sikhism charity means that you will get something good from the god but this, he feels is not the right way go about it. He explains that giving away charity must not entail the hope of getting something in return. The real charity he adds is that which is given away without any desire.²⁰

In the eighteenth century the proses of the formation religious identities among various communities was taking a new shape. Garibdas belonged to this century only. He was concerned about the discrimination on the bases of religion and caste, something which gets reflected in his utterances also in the same manner which is resembles in Kabir’s utterances. The greatest challenge of that time was to reconcile Hindus and Muslims. In his utterances Garibdas says that Hindus and Muslims are two children of the same God and that all these differences between these two are artificial. He was against the sectarian outlook of both the creeds.²¹

Like Kabir, he was in support of household life and was not in favour of renunciation by the yogis and sanaysis. He himself was a householder and spent his whole life to make changes in the society around him.

“Why go to the mountains?
And why give up the city dwellings?
God is the same in the forest and the cities.
For those in whose heart resides His name.
From where will a man eat if he does not work?

¹⁸“ हिन्दू तुरक कदर नही जाने, रोज़ा ग्यास करे धिगताने |
दोनु दीन यकीन न आसा, वे पूरब वे पछिम निवासा | |
दोउ दीन का लेखा, उत्तर दक्खिन में हम देखा |
गरीबदास हम निश्चय जाना, चारों कूट दसो दिस ध्याना | |”

Ratan Sagar, p. 289 and K C Gupta, Sri Garib Das Haryanas Saints for

Humanity, pp. 61-62

¹⁹ काफ़िर दान यज्ञ नही करही |

K C Gupta, Sri Garib Das, p. 66

²⁰ Ibid, p. 89

²¹ Ibid, p. 97

It does not befit a farmer that

He should go to beg at the door of others.”²²

Like Kabir and Nanak, he was also against the worship of god in temple and mosques. In his utterances he was in support of giving up the path of the Vedas and Koran. ‘God should be worshiped within the hearth, not be confined to any place’. Garibdas says that the belief of Hindus and Muslims that God can be found only in temple or mosque is wrong. Both the communities, he believed live in delusion. They are not finding the right path of God, because they have closed their eyes. Through this way of worship, they cannot reach to the God. They are paying much attention to the worship of tombs and idols and not to the Light of God.²³

He condemns idolatry in the same manner in which Kabir did. He believes that worship of an idol or image was the worship of dead matter. He was also against the caste prejudices, empty rituals and symbols. He asked that what is the use or importance of offering flowers and prayers to dead stone Gods. He said that God will not be happy by the worship of stone. The idol is made by the artisan with use help of chisel and hammer and at the time when he shapes the idol, he holds it under his feet and strikes hard on its forehead. Same thing happens with the idol of silver and gold.²⁴ In his utterances sometimes he goes bolder and heard then Kabir and Nanak.

In the eighteenth century, Hinduism was dominated by Brahmanism. Brahmanism criticised by every *sant* who belonged to *Nirguna School*. Garibdas also criticised the dominance of the Brahmins in the society. Historians have highlighted various measures introduced by the eighteenth century Rajput and Maratha states to punish caste violations. The influence of Brahmanical Hinduism

²² पर्वत डुंगर क्यों चढो, बस्ती बस्ती तजो न गाम |
बन बस्ती में एकसा, जाके हिरदे राम ||
जा घर तो करनी नहीं, काहे खट्या खाहि |
कीरत मही किसान की, पर घर मांगन जाहि ||

G.G.S., p. 95 & 138

²³ हिन्दू हदीरे पुजही, मुसलम पूजे गोर |
दोऊ दीन धोखे पडे, पापी कठिन कटोर ||
हिन्दू तो देवल बंधे, मुसलम बंधे मसीत |
साहिब दर पोहंचे नहीं, चीनी भरम की भीत ||
सथ दल दोनू दीन की, भली बिगूती बात |
में मेरी के कारने, खाई जम की लात ||
सत दल दोनू दीन की, दरगह में नहीं साख |
बिना बंदगी भूत हैं, क्या कोड़ी धज लाख ||

G.G.S., p. 144

²⁴ कहा पाहन फूल चढावे | जड़ जुनी घंट बजावे ||
याहा जड़ पूजा नहि कीजे | जासे पारब्रह्मा नहि रीझे ||
एक घडी ठठेरा बीना | तन टंकी चीतन कीना ||
जे सोने का सालिगराम | सो क्या आवे तुम्हरे कामा ||
जे चांदी का बी होई | तेरी भूख बिडारे सोई ||
कहा पाहन पूजे पाढा | जेसे छेली गली थन काढा ||

G.G.S., p. 534

reached its zenith under the Peshwa rule in Maharashtra. A.R. Kulkarni has highlighted many cases wherein the Peshwa's state imposed rigid caste regulation with the help of various Brahmanical bodies such as Brahma Sabha, Dharma Sabha etc.²⁵

The Peshwa state was very strict with regard to the functioning of caste system. It curbed the lower castes and forced religious discipline. The worships of Vitthala at Pandharpur, which was very popular in all the section of society, were taken under control of state and the 'untouchables' were stopped to enter the main temple and if they violated the state regulations, they were punished.²⁶

Similar things were done by Jaipur state of Rajasthan in the eighteenth century as well. Sawai Raja Jai Singh (1688-1743) of Amber, one of the most powerful kings in northern India during first half of eighteenth century, attempted to revive and support the Vedic system of worship in accordance with orthodox Brahmanical system. He banned practices of various non-conformist religious communities such as Vairagis, Sanyasis and Ramanadi.²⁷ Banned the Vairagis not to carry arms and ordered both the Vairagis and Nagas not to fight against each-other.²⁸ In this scenario Garibdas also condemned the hierarchy in the society. He says:

“If you, O Barhmin, claim to be the highest in the society by birth,
Why you didn't come out by the different path.
You wear the sacred thread on your body,
You have forgotten the true path.
Every person in this world is made by the same flesh and bones,
Whether it be a Brahmin or a Sudra.”²⁹

These kinds of utterances shows that Garibdas was not afraid from the state restriction on speak against the caste system of Hinduism.

In the utterances of Garibdas, the reflection of the social life of a village is mirrored very well. He talks about the system of the organisation of the village community. Garibdas's *bani* are a good source for writing a social history of North India, especially about the organisation system of the village community. In his *bani* we find a good collection about the household life of a north Indian peasant family of eighteenth century, and especially the working style of a family wherein the work

²⁵ A.R. Kulkarni, “Social Relations in the Maratha Country in the Medieval Period”, pp. 139-49, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 32, 1970, pp. 231-268

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ V.S. Bhatnagar, *Life and Times of Sawai Jai Singh*, Impex India, 1974, pp. 337-42,

²⁸ R P Bahuguna, “Conflict and Assimilation in Medieval North India Bhakti: An Alternative Approach”, p. 36.

²⁹ जे तू ब्रह्मन् ब्रह्मानी जाया, तो आन बाट क्यों न आया |
ते घाल्या कंध जनेऊ, तू भूल्या बाट बटेऊ ||
हे सब हाड मांस मल गुदा, यामे को ब्राह्मण को सूदा |

G.G.S., p. 644

was divided between each member of the home. Most of the families lived in the joint family system. It was the general feature of the society before the twentieth century India. His *bani* provide the picture of marriages, which gives a picture of a bride and groom and how groom go in the ceremony on the house.³⁰ These are the very normal things but it is very important to know that how the societies were enjoying these functions and what were their traditions.

Caste system in the Indian society has always been a dominating factor. Lower castes during this period did not have the rights to perform the religious rituals. Even now after Constitutional guarantees and numerous laws passed by the parliament, the ground reality have not changed entirely. A number of movements have been launched over a period of time for the rights of the lower caste people. Bhakti movement was the first one that talks about the rights of the lower castes and made spirituality and salvation accessible to the all irrespective of the caste and class. Every nirguna sant condemned the caste system. Like Kabir, Garibdas also condemned the caste system in very aggressive terminology. He says that:

“God’s realm is a wonderful place,
It is a place for the liberated souls;
It is a congregation of the intoxicated ones,
There are no differences of caste and creed.”³¹

On the religious co-existence, Garibdas followed the path which was started by Ramananda, Guru Nanak and Kabir. All the sants, who belonged to the *nirguna* school of thought tried to build religious harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. He believes in universal hood. He says that all universes are like a family.³² Garibdas, not only condemned the religious practices of the Hindus and Muslims, he also declared them as artificial differences created by the Hindu and Muslim fanatics and he pointed out that both worshiped the same God.

“What of the Hindus and what of the Muslims,
Everybody were born in the same way,
What of the Brahmin and what of the Sudra,

³⁰ Lalchand Gupta ‘Mangal’, *Bhartiya Sahitya Ke Nirmata Garibdas*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2011 (reprint, 2014), p. 25

³¹ अजब खूब खालिक जहाँ, मुक्ति मुहला मोख |
मजलिस मतवाले महलि, जाति पांति नही दोख ||

G.G.S., p. 28

³² ब्रह्म बीज का सकल पसारा |
एके कुल, एके परिवारा ||

Lalchand Gupta ‘Mangal’, *Bhartiya Sahitya Ke Nirmata Garibdas*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2011 (reprint, 2014), p. 21

They all made of the same flesh and blood.”³³

Tobacco came to India during the reign of Mughal ruler Jahangir (1605-1627). Within a very short span of around ten years its use became very common all over India. Since it had a terrible effect on the human body, Jahangir issued a farman to ban tobacco in India. But it did not prove to be a successful effort. Other Mughal emperor like Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb too prohibited the sale and use of tobacco in India. Along with the king some other influential persons like Guru Gobind Singh declared smoking a taboo for the Sikhs. But the use of tobacco did not stop. Considering its negative impact on the general health of the society, Garibdas also wrote very strongly against the consumption of intoxicants. Garibdas says them *kafir*, which takes intoxicants and smokes tobacco.³⁴ He says that:

“The human beings who drink wine and eat meat
And commit adultery; their heads will be cut off
Seventy times in the different births,
God is my witness.”³⁵

Kabir and Guru Nanak exercised the greatest influence on the medieval sants as well as the medieval socio-religious milieu. Garibdas too highly influenced by Kabir’s thought which he acknowledges himself. Not only did they never meet, but there was also a gap of more than two hundred years between them. But Garibdas adopted Kabir as his Guru, and called him an inspiration and an ideal *avatara*. Kabir for Garibdas was not only a historical figure, but also an eternal spirit, whom he could meet for spiritual vision and from whom he could take inspiration and guidance.

INSIGHTS OF GARIBDAS NEWLY BORN IDEAS

Garibdas was not only followed the path which directed by Kabir but he went further and interpreted the new concept which were associated with the society in depth. He came-up with some new ideas which were hardly discussed by any sant before him.

Few medieval *sants* took interest in politics. Garibdas was among them who make distance from the state and don’t take anything from them. He believes that a *sant* must make a distance from the polity and state. If a *sant* will indulge in the politics, he will forget about his work for common masses. Politics was considered as a poison in religious life of a *sant*. To use the items given by the

³³ कैसे हिन्दू तुरक कहा, सबही एके द्वारे आया |

कैसे ब्राह्मण कैसे सूदा, एके हाड चाम तन गूदा ||

G.G.S., p. 494

³⁴ काफिर भंग भसोड़ी भरही, काफिर हुक्के कूं सर करही |

K C Gupta, *Sri Garib Das*, pp. 66-67

³⁵ सुरापान मद मांसाहारी, गमव करे भोगे पर नारी |

सत्तर जनम कटत हे सीस, साक्षी हे साहिव जगदीश ||

Rattan Sagar, p. 210

state was regarded as drinking the blood.³⁶ Throughout his life he never took patronage from the state.

In the religious debate there is always a question become important which is that “God is *nirgun* or *sagun*”. Each and every *sant* of bhakti movement talked about this question and gives so many philosophical examples to prove their theory. But Garibdas was not indulge in this debate and said another thing about the God. He says that we cannot call God as a *nirguna* (formless). If we will say it then how could we describe his virtues? But he was not ready to believe that God is *saguna*. He says that if we call him *sagun* it is also not correct. So God in his eyes is something else or something beyond the *nirguna* and *saguna* dichotomy.³⁷

He was among the fast *sant* who talks about the female infanticide and called it the work of a *Kafir*.³⁸ It was the first time when a *sant* called a person as *Kafir* who killed his daughter. The word *Kafir* was used for that persons specifically, who doesn’t believe in Islam but in the eyes of Garibdas the word *kafir* has its different sense. Garibdas belongs to Punjab (Haryana at present), the place which still echoes the trauma of female infanticide. It resembles that this illicit practise has plagued the eighteenth century eastern Punjab too, and he was amongst the first who stand against it.

Along with female infanticide, he also proposed his concern for the protection of forests and called them *kafir*, those who engulf the forest on fire.³⁹ There is no any evidence available to access as reference of forest protection mentioned in the *banis* of *sants* before Garibdas. He belongs to the agricultural community and he himself did the agricultural activity throughout his life, so he was aware of the existence and the inalienable importance of a forest in the life of a peasant which provides lots of resources for the common man livelihood.

There are enough evidences available which notify that too what extent he was concerned about the peasants. He said that a person is a *kafir*, who steals crops.⁴⁰ This reference also highlights that this practice was imbibed in the society and the peasants use to face serious problem and Garibdas from the Jat community utterly aware of the pros and cons of that peculiar practice present in that society and its vehement consequences.

³⁶ Lalchand Gupta ‘Mangal’, Bhartiya Sahitya Ke Nirmata Garibdas, p. 44

³⁷ निरगुण सर्गुण से हैं न्यारा, गगन मंडल गलतान |
निरगुण कहूँ तो गुण किन्ह कीन्हे, सरगुण कहूँ तो हान ||
निरगुण सरगुण से हैं न्यारा, शब्द अतीत अमोल |

Lalchand Gupta ‘Mangal’, Bhartiya Sahitya Ke Nirmata Garibdas, p. 32

³⁸ वे काफ़िर जो कन्या मारे |

K C Gupta, Sri Garib Das, p. 66

³⁹ काफ़िर जो वनखंड जारे |

Ibid., p. 66

⁴⁰ वे काफ़िर जो खेती चोर |

Ibid., p. 66



The above mentioned facts portray that during the eighteenth century the situation was changed as compare to the previous one. During the eighteenth century, the *sant* do not discuss only about the religion but also associate him with the issues which were of less important in previous centuries but had its strong effects in the society. This study inside or put forth the well-known fact that in the eighteenth century India became the highest agricultural commodity exporter, so the *sant* who belong to the place which is known for their agricultural productivity so his thoughts were become the influential factors concerning the issues which is related to the agricultural class.

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