Q) In what ways do you think Kabir’s philosophical tenets represent the idea of ‘Syncretism’. Discuss.

Ans: Saint Kabir Das is widely regarded as the most outstanding of the saint-poets of Bhakti cult and mysticism of medieval India.He was a reformer and a versatile preacher of religious truth. He pointed out every disorder in the society as he was determined to change the society. He was strongly opposed to reliance on religious authority and revealed scriptures such as the Vedas and Quran. He was born in Varanasi and as per legend brought up by a Muslim couple who christened him Kabir,which means the great in Arabic. Saint Kabir was popular for his Dohas and Bhajanas which were in Hindi language. His writings include Bijak,Granth,Sakhi,Kabir Granthawali and Anurag Sagar which prove his universal view of spirituality.

The Dictionary meaning of syncretism defines it as an attempt to unify or reconcile differing schools of thought. Here it can definitely be said that the synthesis of different and contradictory ideologies are the base of syncretism. From this point of view Kabir tried his best to bridge the gap in between the king and the subject, the rich and the poor, the higher and lower castes and the Hindus and the Muslims in medieval India. Kabir spread his message to maintain equality, love, affection and cooperation to one and another in place of enmity, jealousy, egotism, disparity and has shown the way to the human beings to live for and with one another. Kabir's simple 'Dohe' contains the essence of the great philosophical ideas of syncretism which have immense significance in contemporary times.His ideas of syncretism are found in his book’’Bijak.’’

Syncretic ideas of Kabir:

***1)Criticized the Caste System***

Kabir strongly denounced the caste system in India. The strongest indication of Islamic influence on Indian thought is the rejection of caste system by some Indian mystics, such as Namdev, Ramananda, Nanak, Appar, Basava, and Kabir. But unlike some bhaktas, Kabir rejected the caste system for social reasons. It is in this sense that Kabir is regarded as the crusader of revolutionary ideas in medieval Indian society. Kabir simply could not tolerate the division and distinction between man and man. He urges us to forget our sense of distinctions between man and man and become humble like an ant.He says:

Jaati na pucho saadhu ki puch lijiye sab gyan,

Mol karo talwar ka padi rehan do myan .

It means we should not enquire about the caste of the saints but seek their wisdom instead. . Sharpness of a sword counts more than the metal with which it is made of. Thus this reformer and saint fearlessly preached the gospel of social equality, imparting with force and preaching by practice the gospel of his Guru, Ramanand.

Jati pati puchai na koi Hari ko bhaje so Hari ka hoi .

It means none shall inquire into thy caste. He who shall recite the name of the Lord will be claimed by Him.

***2)Raised Voice against Sati and Child Marriage:***

Kabir concerned himself not only with the matters of religion, but also with those social evils which the Hindus used to practise in the name of religion. One such superstition which obtained wide currency in the Hindu society of those days was the practice of Sati, i.e. burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Kabir rejected the idea of salvation by sati, and condemned the practice. Thus, Kabir raised his voice against the custom of Sati and child marriage, the two evils which were purely social in character.

***3)Concept of Universal Humanism/One Humanity Equality of All Men:***

Following on his view of one God, Kabir preached the principle of equality of all men. Egalitarianism is the second great principle of Islam which Kabir accepted under the influence of Sufism. When the low-caste weaver Kabir began preaching the same to men of high caste, he was reproached for his daring.

***4)Monotheism Emphasized the Unity of God:***

According to Kabir, the supreme reality is one although it has been called by different names such as Sahab, Allah, Khuda, Rama, Rahim or Brahma. Wisdom consists in getting at the basic unity underlying the multiplicity of names. After his spiritual awakening, one of the fundamental ideas which Kabir expressed in clear terms is his concept of God. It is generally held that under the influence of Sufism, Kabir denounced idolatry, image worship and polytheism, and adopted the strong monotheism of Islam. As a result, he at first taught and emphasized the unity of God.

***5)Hindus and Muslims are the Children of One God***:

The entry of Kabir into the fold of the Bhakti movement proved most fruitful in bringing about reconciliation between the Hindus and the Muslims. Kabir addressed mixed gatherings, consisting of Hindus and Muslims and made disciples from both. Kabir's idea of one God and one-humanity is truly Islamic. As a matter of fact, this is the key conception of Kabir according to which he refused to find any distinction between Hindus and Muslims .By using terms employed by both systems, Kabir tells us that it is only the difference in names. Finally, in the Upanisadic style, Kabir tells us that the Hindus and the Muslims are only different manifestations of the same substance. Therefore, they are the children of one God.

***6)Laid Stress on Religious Toleration :***

Kabir was one of the most outstanding Bhakti reformers who did his best to bring the Hindus and Muslims close to each other in all walks of life. Kabir laid stress on religious toleration and taught a lesson of brotherhood to the Hindus and Muslims. He suggested that people should speak in a palatable manner avoiding any kind of friction and disharmony.

***7)Opposed to Economic Inequalities*** :

The disparity of economic distribution was fully reflected in the utterings of the Mahatma, Kabir. The state's exploitation, the tendency of luxurious life, undue taxes, natural calamities, foreign plunderers, distinction of Varna-Dharma, lack of equal opportunities, slave system etc. can be counted as causes of economic disparity. Kabir saw these situations minutely. His aim was to reform society which was not possible without prevention of disparity. Kabir himself was poverty stricken, who listened to the pains and the sufferings of the Dalits and the exploited people and was prepared to solve it by his own utterings. Kabir points out that the humble and small man should not be disparaged because of his humble and low position; he should be given due respect, and honour as any other man. In his couplets, Kabir cautions not to oppress the weak as his sigh of sorrow is capable of causing ample harm to the oppressor elsewhere.

***8)Earning Livelihood by the Sweat of Brow :***

Kabir was not in favour of renouncing the world and going to forests or hills in search of true knowledge or salvation. But he advised his followers to earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brow and perform all the duties as householders while leading as honest, noble and dedicated life. His idea was to educate the individual and wean him away from illusion, ego, and thirst for wealth. He also does not believe in earning more money than required.

***9)Asked Hindus to Give-up Centuries Old Practices :***

Turning to the Hindus, Kabir asked them to give up what Hinduism had been practising for centuries, such as ceremonies, sacrifices, lust for magical powers, idol and temple worship, repetitions of mantras, pilgrimages, fasts, innumerable Gods and Goddesses, bathing in the holy waters, religious monopoly of the Brahmans, prejudices concerning untouchability and food, penances and yoga and sectarianism. He unequivocally condemned the doctrine of incarnation (Avatarabad). In Kabir's view it is neither rewarding to offer worship to the stone idols in the temple (instead of the God within) as do the Hindus nor to take shelter of no God for attaining salvation (as do the Muslims). He holds that God who dwells in the heart of every being is the one whose shelter has to be sought by complete self-surrender to Him.

***10)Bhakti or devotion should be emotional and unalloyed:***

According to Kabir,the ultimate reality is formless and yet master of this universe. His consort maya has distracted everybody. A loving devotion to him will bring deliverance from maya by his grace. In view of that, the basis of Bhakti can be obtained by the fusion of all the men and women of the world who are the living forms with the formless,that is God. The Bhakti or devotion should be emotional and unalloyed.

**11) Believed in service to mankind:**

Kabir believed in the purity of the soul and service to the mankind. He asks what good is our so-called eminence,if it is neither compassionate nor helpful to others. He emphasizes that we should shed our greed,selfishness and insecure tendencies and establish ourselves in such a way that we should be willing to give and share. Only then we will be blessed and become a blessing to others.

**12) Property not as an individual’s right:**

Sant Kabir’s perspective is that it is injustice to link property with individual’s rights. He also said that it is very much stupid and ignorant to keep the feeling of mine and thine with property. It is an evil to feel proud on the basis of property . It is our due right to possess property as required for our maintenance and safety. Kabir was of the view that the tendency of gathering more and more property creates obstacle in making an individual honest. Wealth is the main reason for all the evils. So man should try to acquire spiritual wealth which will bring emancipation.

Kabir is one of the greatest mystics of India. He spent much of his time in the company of ascetics, saints and Muslim Sufis. With loyal attachment to both religious communities, Kabir was free from religious prejudice against either. He rubbed shoulders with Bhakti reformers as well as the Sufi saints. Though intensely religious in outlook, he was not a slave of either Hinduism or Islam. He was a man of absolutely independent thoughts and boldly criticised the evils of both the religions. He denounced the Brahmins and the Mullas alike to be the sole custodians of their religious orders and took them to task for their orthodox and exploitative attitude. He refused to accept the sanctity of the Vedas as well as the Quran to be 'the revealed scriptures'.