



SANT KABIR: A PROMOTER OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION OR RELIGION OF MAN

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ABSTRACT

Sant Kabir Das is considered as the most influential and most remarkable poet of the Bhakti and Sufi movement in Northern India. He is the first Indian saint who has coordinated the Hinduism and Islam by giving a universal path which could be followed by both Hindus and Muslims. He always objected the ritualistic and ascetic methods as a means of salvation. He openly criticized all sects and gave a new direction to the Indian philosophy, with his straight forward approach on various aspects of human existence. It is important to point out that Kabir was not preaching against any religion but against the hypocrisy being committed by people in the name of religion. It is for this reason that Kabir is held in high esteem all over the world.

INTRODUCTION

Sant Kabir is one of the medieval Indian saints of Bhakti and Sufi movement. Bhakti movement was started by Hindu saints while Sufi mysticism by Muslim saints in medieval India (1200-1700). Kabir immensely contributed to the Bhakti Movement and is considered a pioneer of Bhakti along with Ravidas, Farid, and Namdev. His concept of love as a path of suffering may possibly indicate, in some measure, a debt to the Sufis. These and other elements from Nath tradition, bhakti and sufism, kabir combined with his own mystical nature and produced synthesis which is the distinctive religion of Kabir.

Kabir was one of India's leading spiritual saints who lived in the northern part of India in the holy city of Benares. He is widely renowned for his pithy couplets and songs that connect life

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and spirituality in a simple yet powerful way. His genius has been in that he has inspired the poets like Rabindranath Tagore and the common masses. His words were in a universal language that, literally and figuratively, broke down barriers to experiencing the divine. In fact, even basic information on his life – for instance, when he was born, who his parents were, what his family life was like, and when he died – is shrouded in mystery.

As per the legends, he was born in 1398 AD. It is said that he was found floating on a lotus leaf in a tank in Benaras by a Muslim weaver. The weaver took the child under his care and following the traditional manner, gave him the name of 'Kabir', meaning 'the great one'. Even at a young age, Kabir displayed enormous spiritual talent. Tradition tells us that Swami Ramanand was his Guru (a teacher).

His writings include Bijak, Anurag Sagar, Sakhi Granth, Kabir Bani and Kabir Granthawali. The most sacred book of the Kabir Panth sect is the Bijak. The Bijak appeals its readers to shed their delusions, pretensions, and orthodoxies in favour of a direct experience of truth. It satirizes hypocrisy, greed, and violence, especially among the religious. The Bijak includes three main sections (called *Ramainī*, *Shabda* and *Sākhī*) and a fourth section containing miscellaneous folksongs. Most of Kabir's material has been popularized through the song form known as Shabda (or pada) and through the aphoristic two-line *sākhī* (or doha) that serves throughout north India as a vehicle for popular wisdom. In the Anurag Sagar, the story of creation is told to Dharamdas [one of Kabir Saheb's disciples].

His compositions also figure in Sikh Scripture, *The Guru Granth Sahib*. The Holy *Guru Granth Sahib* contains over 500 verses by Kabir. The Sikh community in particular and others who follow the Holy Granth, hold Kabir in the same reverence as the other ten Gurus. That is why some scholars describe him as the forerunner of Sikhism. Some have even called him the preceptor of Guru Nanak. In short, in Indian religious history, Kabir is unique, to the Hindus, he is a Vaishnav Bhakt, to the Muslim, a pir, to the sikh, a Bhagat, to the Jains, an Acharya or Muni, to the sectarian Kabir Panthis, an avatar of the Supreme Being, to modern patriots, Kabir is the champion of Hindu and Muslim unity, to the new Vedantis a promoter of the universal religion or the religion of Man.

In the popular book called '*Kabir: the Great Mystic*' the author Issac Ezekiel says,

"Kabir's songs seeks no body's approbation. They seek no sanction, ask for no approval, search for no popularity, invite no commendation, and crave no compliment. They stand independent of these considerations and they constitute the most uninhibited literature, the freest of the free writing, ever produced by a saint."



Kabir was strictly against the practice of hypocrisy and didn't like people maintaining double standards. He always preached people to be compassionate towards other living beings and practice true love. He urged the need to have company of good people that adhere to values and principles. He supported the idea of minimalist living that was advocated by the Sufis. Kabir's poetry is a reflection of his philosophy about life. His writings were mainly based on the concept of reincarnation and karma. Kabir's philosophy about life was very clear-cut. He believed in living life in a very simplistic manner. He has very beautifully expressed his values and beliefs in his writings that include dohas, poems, Ramainis, Kaharvaas and Shabads.

Kabir Das is the first Indian saint who has coordinated the Hinduism and Islam by giving a universal path which could be followed by both Hindus and Muslims. He always objected the ritualistic and ascetic methods as a means of salvation.

He says,

*“Mauko kaha dhundhe bande, mein to tere paas mein
Na mei deval na mei masjid, na kabe Kailas mei
Na to kaune kriya karm mei, nahi yog bairag mei
Khoji hoi to turte miliho, pal bhar ki talaas mei
Kahe Kabir suno bhai sadho, sab svaso ki svaas mei”.*

He said that goodness's ruby has more value than the mines of ruby. According to him, one's heart with goodness includes all the prosperity of whole world. He said that the God is in your heart and ever with you, so offer inward worship to him. He opened the deep eyes of the people and taught them genuine lessons of humanity, morality and spirituality. His life history is legendary and still teaches the human beings a real humanity. His followers are known as 'Kabir Panthi'. In present days these people carry forward Kabir's thoughts of humanity and harmony to the society.

Although he was drawn deeply into spiritual life, he openly criticized all sects and gave a new direction to the Indian philosophy, with his straight forward approach on various aspects of human existence. It is important to point out that Kabir was not preaching against any religion but against the hypocrisy being committed by people in the name of religion. It is for this reason that Kabir is held in high esteem all over the world. To call Kabir a universal Guru is not an over exaggeration. Another beauty of Kabir's poetry is that he picks up situations that surround our daily lives. Thus, even today, Kabir's poetry is relevant and helpful in both social and spiritual context. Following Kabir means understanding one's inner



self, realizing oneself, accepting oneself as is, and becoming harmonious with one's surroundings.

He is unusual in that he is spiritually significant to Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike. His teachings are equally important for all religions because he preached impartially. Kabir touches the soul, the conscience, the sense of awareness and the vitality of existence in a manner that is unequalled in both simplicity and style. In one of his famous couplets he stated:

*"Kabir khade bazarme sabaki chachhe kher,
Na kisi se dosti na kisi se bair"*

(Kabir stands in the open market place and impartially wishes the welfare of all. He is neither a friend nor an enemy of anyone.)

He came to teach people 'the true religion of the heart'. He wanted to turn people away from the empty ritualism of religion, and to show them the inner path that leads one to union with divinity. In other words he taught self realization and loving devotion to the formless divine power that dwells within. Though self –realization has been taught in Advait –veda or Non-dualistic school of philosophy of India, Guru Kabir reemphasized this teaching along with loving devotion of great intensity and fervour.

He thus taught a combination of Gyan Yoga (yoga of spiritual knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (Yoga of Loving Devotion), and Karma Yoga (Yoga of Action). And all these were done in his inimitable way that stemmed from his own inner realization, and his identification with the Supreme Being. He stated:

*"Lali meri lal ki jit dekhu tit lal
Lali dekhu mei gayi meibhi ho gai lal"*

(I went in search of beautiful colour of my beloved and I saw that colour manifesting everywhere, As I have searched for it, I found that I have been coloured in the same beautiful colour.)

Again he stated:

*"tu tu karta tu bhaya, mayh mein rahi na hun
Bari pheri bali gayi, jit dekhu tit tu"*

(Uttering your name I have become you, and I have no individuality or ego left in me. My coming and going vanished, as everywhere I see only you.)

Further he said,

"Hindu kahin toh hinnahin musalman bhi nahi



Panch tatva ka putla giahi khole mahin”

(I am neither a Hindu nor a muslim but a puppet made of five elements in which mysterious being plays.)

His influence on the religious life of the people of India has been quite substantial.

He has been hailed as the father of Hindi poetry. Prior to him religious teachings were generally in Sanskrit that was not understood by people at large, but has confined to priests and scholars. He conveyed the highest spiritual teachings in spoken language of the people, so that everyone can understand them. For this reason his songs and couplets are sung often with great pleasure, by people in India and abroad.

He was the initiator of Sant Mat or keeping the company of saintly people. He stated:

“Sant Milan ko jaiye, taji man ka abhiman”

(Give up ego and humbly go to keep the company of saintly people)

Now there are several branches of Sant Mat in various parts of the world.

He was the founder of the Nirgun school of Bhakti. This is a loving devotion to a formless supreme Being. Nahha Das in his book Bhaktimal says that Bhakti arose in Dravidland and Ramanand brings it to the North and Kabir spread it to the other lands. Prior to Kabir the Bhakti movement was called Sagun Bhakti or devotion to the Supreme Being who incarnate in physical forms.

Kabir is a firm advocate of **ahimsa**. As far as the tenets of Truth and Ahimsa are concerned, it seems that Kabir is influenced by jain poets like Acharya Jaysen, Acharya Amritchandra, and Hemchandra Suri of 11th and 12th century. Kabir’s doctrine of non-violence extends even to the non destruction of flowers. He says,

"The life of the living you strike dead and you say your slaughter makes it dedicated. It is blood haunting you and those who taught you."

Further he stated,

“din mei roza rakhat ho, rat hanat ho gay

Vo to khun na bandagi kaise khushi khuday?”

(They fast all day, and at night they slaughter the cow; here murder, there devotion; how can this please God?)



O' Kazi, by whose order doth thou use thy knife. When you declare the sacrifice of an animal as your religion, what else is sin. If you regard yourself a saint, whom will you call a butcher? He also says,

“bakari khati pat hai, jaki moti khal

Jo jan bakari khat hai, vako kaun haval”

(The goat eats grass and is skinned, what will happen to those who eat (goat's) meat?)

He strongly emphasized **vegetarianism**, so that one must not take the life of other living creatures as their life is dear to them as ours is to us. This very idea of Kabir reflects principle of Jainism, ‘Live and let Live’.

He stated:

“Jiva mat maro bapura, sab mei ek hi pran

Hatya ka ha hun chutti he koti suno puran”

(Do not kill poor jiva, murder will not be forgiven even if you hear a million Puranas)

Among the fifty commandments laid down for the followers of Kabir, vegetarianism is one of them. For Kabir, moral life involves adherence to ahimsa.

He also says:

“jaise pir apan anga jana taise sab jiv ne mana”

(As you feel pain in yourself, realize that other living beings feel pain in the same way)

It can thus be seen that Kabir’s contribution to spiritual life has been quite substantial.

Kabir loved truth so steadfastly that he preferred to describe truth as god. For him there was no difference between **Truth and God**.

He stated:

“Sanch barabar tap nahi, juth barabar paap

jako hridai sanch hai, take hridai aap”

(There is no austerity greater than truth and there is no sin greater than falsehood. In whose heart truth dwells, in that heart God dwells)



He taught fearlessness in spiritual life. He said ‘chhodo apne tan ki asha, nirbhai hoi gun gao. (Give up dependence on the physical body and be fearless and sing the glories of God.) Again he stated Kami krodhi lalachi inse Bhakti na hoi, Bhakti kare koi surma, jat varna kul khoi. (only the brave who can give up lust, anger and greed, and the pride of cast and clan can do devotion.)

He taught purity in thought , word and deed, in order to obtain God realisation He said,

*“darshan karno chahiye to darpan malte rahiye,
darpan mei lag gai kai toh daras kaha se pai.”*

(If you wish to see yourself, than you must clean the mirror again and again, if the mirror gathers dust than how can you see yourself.) It means if your heart is not pure as a clean mirror than how can you see your real self-reflected in your own being.

Kabir condemned pride and selfishness. He wanted man to give up pride, anger, enmity and ego. He taught to merge in God as a drop merges in the ocean and to lose your individual identity or ego. He said:

*“bund samana samund mein, janat hai sab koi.
Samund samana bund mein jane birla koi.”*
(When the drop merges in ocean, all understand it ;but when ocean merges in the drop, people do not understand it.)

God and the soul are ever merged one in the other and are of the same essence.

He appreciated brotherhood, which ultimately directed towards reaching the main objectives : "Love of God" and "Love of humanity".He taught universal and unconditional love for all people, and for all of God’s creation.

He said:

*“Prem prem sab koi kahe,prem ne chinhe koi,
ath prahar bhinja rahe, prem kahave soi.”*
(Everybody speaks of love, but scarcely do they understand it. If they are immersed in love 24 hours a day, then it can be said to be in love

His writings are a scathing comment on the socio-religious-ideological inconsistencies of that period, they also contain a vision for a new society. A vision of a human centered society



which remains till today, a source of inspiration not only for the people of North India but for people all over the world, who are fighting against injustice and inequality. Undoubtedly, Kabir was a product of the historical times in which he lived; but he left an indelible imprint on that history and gave it a new direction, in resonance with the aspirations of the people. He upheld that every idea must be tested in terms of the ground reality of the concrete necessities of life. The direction he showed served to transform ideas from the realm of imagination to the practical reality on the ground. This process shook the very foundations of the religious ideas that held sway over the masses at that time and began to lay the foundations of a new humanist philosophy of life, a process which continues even today.

In summing up we can say that the spiritual preaching's of Kabir uplifted the oppressed humanity and gave strength to stand up on their feet and fight against all religious, social and political inequalities, and created a new universalism and culture based on oneness of ultimate reality, brotherhood of mankind irrespective of their racial, ethnic, linguistic or cultural differences.

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