

Kabir: Revolutionary Truth Seeker



Shruti Srivastava
Sr. Assistant Professor
Department of English
D. A-V. College,
Kanpur

Abstract

Kabir, the mystic poet of the 15th century, was unique in Indian religious history because he was the promoter of the universal religion. Kabir did not practice renunciation but while working on the loom, he was one with God. Kabir is the mystic par- excellence, who has realized in his own being the oneness of God and soul which in their pristine purity form one absolute Reality and have no distinguishing features about them.

Kabir is as relevant today, as he was five centuries ago, by his gifts of intuition and illumination. He has widened the horizons of human insight and experience. Kabir's God was not an image confined to a temple or Mosque but the supreme spirit whom the devotee could perceive and with whom he could converse by going within. Kabir's verses are to be treated as a timely reminder to get up from the state of spiritual inertia and have God.Realization face to face.

Keywords: Mystic, Renunciation, Nirgun, God Realization, Peace, Surrender, Bliss, Soul, Spiritual

Introduction

Kabir, the mystic poet of the 15th century, was unique in Indian religious history because he taught us how to cross the ocean of samsara and reach the eternal land .He was the promoter of the universal religion or the religion of man and he was accepted in his life –time both by the Hindus and the Muslims as the direct incarnation of the Supreme Being. Kabir advocated a path based on the practice of 'Shabd' which aimed at God-realization while living – a path not of ritualistic external worship, but of going within.

Review of Literature

This paper originates from an intensive study from one of my research project in which I tried to explore Mystic literature of Indian Bhakti Movement, which depicts the central theme of universal oneness of all without any difference of cast, religion or social background. With this idea I have tried to draft this paper on kabir.

Aim of the Study

The Aim of this paper is to establish the truth realized by great souls that God is one and can shower his blessings on anyone, who is ready to follow the path of purity within and realize the Truth. This will be my little contribution to the humanity which needs such revolutionary thoughts to overcome the fever and frets of the highly materialistic world.

"Kabir says, plunge into Ram! There: No Hindu, No Turk."

- Kabir

Kabir's stature was that of mighty spiritual dynamo who tried to transform hate into love, doubt into faith, disharmony into harmony, conflicts into coherence. Kabir's poetry is, indeed, a handful of divine flowers which are handed down to us in the form of his immortal 'Banis'. The mystic songs of Kabir, preaching the Immanence of God and making an appeal to everyone to commune with God, are a rich legacy of not only India but the entire world. Vinay Dharwadker's observation reveals Kabir's greatness very well:

"He is widely regarded as the first major poet in the Hindi language; as the earliest author of the Bhakti movement in Hindi literature; and as the adi Sant, the first and predominant figure, in the Sant Parampara of north India, a multifaceted tradition of philosophical, theological and social argument that began to dismantle the structures of classical Hinduism around the fifteenth century, and to replace them with a new architecture of ideas. As a fifteenth century poet concerned with God, the experience of God and the quest for an equivalent of salvation, he ranks among the foremost Asian and European mystics of the past millennium" (Dharwadker Xii.).¹

Kabir, a low cast weaver with no formal education, sets an example before us that any person can become a true devotee of God. Kabir's birth and arrival into this world is still a puzzle and a miracle. The birth, caste, and social status of a saint have little bearing on his greatness. Saints have neither a caste nor a nationality. Kabir himself used to declare: "I am neither a Hindu nor a Musalman" Kabir. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*. Print (P 75:4).² Kabir is an Arabic word meaning 'the most High'. Kabir spent most of his time chanting the name of Rama. His mother asked him to take up the family work of weaving. Kabir would weave for some time and soon forget himself in repeating the name of Rama. At that time Rama would come and complete the unfinished cloth. The cloth woven by the divine hand was excellent and gorgeous. The quest of Kabir, from the beginning, was for something higher and more real than what the make – believe worship prevalent in Banaras could offer. Kabir did not practice renunciation but while working on the loom, he was one with God. Says Kabir:

"Lord, I weave the cloth of Thy Name
The fruitless toil
Of weaving from the world
Has come to an end,
I have attained
The dazzling state of bliss –
Free from fear, free from pain,
I am the weaver, O Lord of Thy name;
I weave and reap the profit
Of inner rapport with Thee.
I am the weaver of the Lord's name" (Sethi 192).³

Kabir is the mystic par- excellence, who has realised in his own being the oneness of God and soul which in their pristine purity form one absolute Reality and have no distinguishing features about them. Nirguni bhaktas call themselves as Unitarians, believing in the presence of one god everywhere, in all things animate and inanimate. Kabir's faith is the sort known as the 'quality less' or 'formless' 'Nirguna' brand of bhakti . When Kabir speaks of Ram, it is not in 'saguna sense'. Kabir is the founder of the Nirguna school of *bhakti* in which the Sadhak attained God through 'gyan'. His Nirguni bhakti taught that the means of salvation was devotion to God alone. From Namdev and Nath sect he learned yoga. From Vaishnavites Kabir picked up the doctrine of 'ahimsa' (non-violence) and 'Prapatti' or complete surrender to God. Kabir advocated and advised all others to follow 'Sahaj Yoga'. Kabir offered the path of God – realization in which God's name was not a matter of repetition on a rosary, but an inner revelation. Kabir's beloved resides in no remote place. Kabir says:

"Having recognised the lord within, my thoughts rest, only in him.

Now wherever I cast my eyes, I see none else but Him

Since realization came, here, there, every where the lord alone I see" (Sethi 194).⁴

In this state of oneness, all distinctions between the seeker and sought, between man and God, the matter and the spirit ,soul and Divine soul

are obliterated. These declarations of kabir, Rumi, Tukaram, Whitman or Ramkrishna are extraordinary because they express an experience which speak of God and the seeker as one . In an awakened state there is just one and that alone assumes many forms :

"I am the one with the one, He becomes all,
none else is there, all are mine, I am of all"
(Srikant 53).⁵

In Kabir's poems a wide range of mystical emotion is brought into play. It is by simplest metaphors e.g. bridegroom and bride, master – disciple, pilgrim, migrant, swan, lamp, lute, oil etc. that Kabir has expressed the mystical experience in words. Kabir's poems suggest many parallels in Christian mystical literature of the late medieval and early renaissance period. The devotee burns in a feverish desire for God or suffers from 'love sickness' in God's absence. The devotee's self is allegorically 'wedded' to God who is presented as an immortal bridegroom. Here we are reminded of Emily Dickinson. Nanak and Meera who also embrace God as divine bridegroom. The soul of Kabir is a young bride whose husband is the lord .In a state of mystical joy Kabir is enjoying the feeling of togetherness with the divine bridegroom. In the following lines we get a vivid picture of a blissful conjugal life:

"I shall light the lamp of love in me
And sing the welcome song to him
I shall be with him
All night through
Basking in his bounteous love" (Das 74).⁶

The union of the soul with God has been described by the saints of the east and west both as the union of a long – separated loving wife with her husband or the beloved with her lover. On a deeper level, saints regard all souls as bride who are unable to see their husband because of *dwait bhava*. In divine love the wife can only please her husband by bedecking herself with love, faith, purity and one pointed devotion and surrender. Kabir says:

"The beautiful wife steps
Into the arena of love,
She sports with her beloved,
She lights the lamp of realization
Which consumes lust like oil" (Sethi 168).⁷

Virah, the separation of lovers, is another striking theme in Indian Bhakti poetry. In a bhakta's life the agony of separation of lovers is no less important. The bond of love becomes stronger during separation. Just as union is the blessing of the lord, longing in separation from him is also his gift and a sure means to reach Him. Longing makes love all – absorbing and intense. In spite of all the suffering, the devotee will not give up his love, nor forget the beloved even for a moment .There is no failure, sorrow or frustration in divine love. Kabir's whole life is like an epic love poem based on the theme of 'divine merger'. The following lines exhibit Kabir's sense of deprivation:

"Without you, Lord Ram
The heat of my body will not abate
It will wax in spite of a dip in water" (Das 160).⁸

Kabir's poetry illustrate nearly every aspect of mystical thought and all the fluctuations of the

mystic emotion, the ecstasy, the despair, the still beatitude, the eager self – devotion, the flashes of wide illumination and also the moments of intense love. Devotion to the name is the only treasure that is imperishable, the only treasure a devotee can carry with him to the higher spiritual regions. All efforts, even the practice of Nam or Shabd, must have at their base a burning desire to meet the Lord. Remembrance of the Divine Name generates love in the devotee's heart. Love songs, in the hands of Kabir have acquired a soul-stirring depth. Kabir taught us that permanent happiness was not to be found in the world. He further explained that not even gods and goddesses are free from misery and that the only way out is to follow the path of devotion under the guidance of a perfect 'guru' who can take us to the land of eternal bliss. Kabir emphasizes the need for a 'guru' if we want to achieve God – realization:

"Can one without feet take a ship?
Can one accomplish a long journey without a road?
So the path cannot be found without a guru"
(Srikant 103).⁹

Kabir draws our attention towards another fact that we can't lead our life according to the dictates of books. Knowledge, for Kabir, is an experience and realization of the ultimate Truth-God. Bookish knowledge is an acquisition of the mind, realization is of the soul.

Kabir is as relevant today, as he was five centuries ago, by his gifts of intuition and illumination. He has widened the horizons of human insight and experience. Kabir's God was not an image confined to a temple or Mosque but the supreme spirit whom the devotee could perceive and with whom he could converse by going within. Emerson too believes that we can have self realization not by going to church but through daily experience. 'Sakhi' literally means 'witness' – witness to the vision of God. Kabir stressed the need for internal unmediated love and adoration turned toward the Nirguni divine, which led to the end of the cycle of rebirth and brought about union with the supreme. Kabir's mission was essentially spiritual, not social. The illumination of the individual self automatically leads to the illumination of society. This new 'awakened' or 'illuminated' state has been described as being of supreme bliss. This awakened eye of saint Kabir discovers oneness of all creation, the presence of one element that permeates everywhere. In the view of all religions the ultimate goal of human life is to attain salvation or union of 'Jivatma' with 'Parmatma'. Kabir refers in his verses to that eternal land from where the Jivatama has come and must go back there on attaining salvation. To be liberated from the cycle of birth and death, to be Jivanmukta, one must become a free soul as Kabir

was. Kabir is not afraid of death or of 'Kal', the lord of death. Let us notice his bold assertion:

"The world dies, but I'll not die,
For I have met the giver
Of everlasting life" (Sethi 528).¹⁰

Saints & mystics of the east and west have alarmed us that the world is transitory, time is fleeting and death is sure to come. Human life is precious and should be utilized to attain God before death overtakes us. We squander this priceless jewel that lies within. Kabir has attained that original home; the lord's abode and become one with him. Conveying the state of total absorption or unity of the soul and the lord, Kabir has beautifully summed up his spiritual message of soul – searching leading to spiritual fulfillment:

"When I was, God was not;
Now that God is,
I am no more.
The dark shadows
Off I-ness vanished
When I came
Face to face with the Lamp" (Sethi 731).¹¹

Conclusion

On the whole, Kabir's poetry exhorts us to surrender ourselves to the master's will if we really wish to see the divine light, hear the celestial melody and taste the sweetness of the lord by remaining in the state of supreme bliss. Kabir takes his readers into his confidence by addressing them every time '**suno bhai sadho**'. Kabir's verses are to be treated as a timely reminder to get up from the state of spiritual inertia and have God – realization face to face.

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