

Saint Kabir's Couplets: Pronouncement of World Peace and Harmony

Dr. Darsha Jani

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English

Municipal Arts & U B Science College, Mehsana, North Gujarat, India

Affiliated to Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University

Patan

India

Abstract

Saint Kabir (1398 A.D – 1448 A.D), a legendary figure of Bhakti cult of fifteenth century India revered all the religions but neither favoured traditional Hindu rituals nor strict Muslim practices as he called himself “*the son of Allah and Rama.*” According to him, every life is a fusion of two spiritual principles – *Jivatma* and *Paramatma*. He disseminated the message of humanity, morality and world peace through his couplets and asserted that God resides inside the person who follows the path of righteousness and treats all human beings with veneration and dignity.

The paper aims at highlighting Kabir's pragmatic approach towards inculcating the sensitivity of communal harmony in the minds of people with a view to establishing universal brotherhood and global peace. Though Kabir's ideology emerged centuries back, yet it stands in good stead even today. His philosophy appears apposite in the present world of 21st century when people are encountering thicket of abstruse circumstances. The focus of the paper is to associate Kabir's ideology with the *manas* of the modern world and determine the impact of efficacy of love, affection and comradeship.

KEYWORDS: *Jivatma* (soul), *Paramatma* (God), *manas* (mind), *murti puja* (idol worship), *tantrism*, *Nirguna bhakti* (impersonal aspect of God), *atman* (soul), *Guru*, *moksha*, *Kazi*, *ahimsa* (non-violence), *jiva* (a living being), *puranas*. *Sahaj Path* (Simple way), *maya* (illusion), *Karma*

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1398 AD, Kabir is said to be found floating on a lotus leaf near Lahara Tara lake, adjacent to the holy city of Varanasi by childless Muslim weavers named Niru and Nimma who adopted him, reared him and gave him the name 'Kabir', meaning 'the great one'. From an early age, Kabir displayed an extraordinary spiritual talent. A weaver by profession, Kabir ranks among the greatest mystics and poets. He contributed nearly 500 verses in the Holy 'Guru Granth Sahib.' The Sikh community in particular holds Kabir in great reverence and considers him as its Guru. The hallmark of Kabir's works consists of his two line couplets, known as the '*Kabir ke Dohe*'. The couplets or *dohas* of Guru Kabir are read by people even in contemporary age with a great awe and admiration. Though Kabir hails from Northern India, yet he is held in high esteem all over the world. His philosophical and candid approach on human existence won him a lot of fame and admiration. He composed no systematic treatise but many short didactic poems in the form of *padas*, *dohas* and *Ramainis* (forms of poetry in Indian languages). His collection of poems include *Kabir Granthavali* and *Bijak* in which he explained moral and spiritual truth by citing illustrations from everyday life. His sole motive was to highlight the basic truths of life and create an atmosphere of universal brotherhood and peace.

KABIR – A FORERUNNER OF BHAKTI CULT

Kabir contributed immensely to the Bhakti movement and is considered a pioneer of Bhakti Cult; his contemporaries being Ravidas, Farid and Namdev. Through his couplets, Kabir broke the hegemony of Brahmins; he also criticized mullahs and their rituals of bowing towards Kaba five times a day. He was in fact dejected with the prevalent customs, rites, tantrism and *murti puja* (idol worship) of Hinduism. At the same time he was against the concept of imageless God of Islam. He expresses doubt about the tradition of Mullah calling Allah loudly. He says:

I wonder

Who your Lord is!

Mullah in the mosque

Calls out so loud,

Is your Lord deaf? (Mahajan 42)

He always objected the ritualistic and ascetic methods as a means of salvation. He simply advocated the oneness of God. Though his attitude invited wrath of religious leaders who

were not in favour of diminishing the grassroots political and theological boundaries between the two cultures, yet he continued to propagate the universal path that accentuated the amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim ideologies. He speaks about the seamy side of both the religions.

Mullah, why so loudly

Do you call?

Ram-Rahim vibrates in all. (Mahajan 64)

Pundit, what a lie you utter!

Only saying Ram redeems,

Is mouth sweet by saying sugar? (Mahajan 35)

He criticized orthodox people who practiced weird rites in the name of religion. To quote an example, a cult of saints remained naked and thought that refraining from clothes will lead them to God; there were others who believed that they can realize God by getting their head shaved. Kabir ridiculed this practice in the following words:

If one could find God by going naked,

Would not the deer find Him?

If one could reach heaven by

Tonsuring,

Would not the sheep be there? (Mahajan 70)

Kabir insisted on pursuing the natural course of life to achieve the blessings of God. He believed that having entangled in the glitter and glamour of the world, the human being has forgotten the very truth that he is just a pilgrim in this world; he has to ultimately return to the world of God. Kabir asks:

Where your roots lie,

O swan, and

Where are you going? (Mahajan 168)

Kabir firmly believed that God is neither found in temples nor in mosques but in the heart of every human being. Therefore he endeavoured to awaken the human mind so that he could realize the importance of God. Kabir remarked that since people are oblivious of their real self, they keep thronging at Kashi or Kaba:

How funny!

In the midst of water

A fish thirsts for water.

The thing lies at home,

But searching for it,

In the woods, they roam. (Mahajan 62)

Just as fish lives in water and is always surrounded by it (water); in the same way, human beings are in the midst of people of the society. Both fish and human beings are unable to realize God because they try to seek Him outside and not inside their own body. Kabir propagates his ideology of love in the following way:

Pothi padhi padhi jag mua,

pandit bhaya na koi

Dhai aakhar prem ka,

padhe so pandit hoya

Read all books in the world

it will not make you wise

Only wise ones are that know

four letter that love comprise. (www.poems2remember.blotspot.com)

Kabir was against the pretension of resolving the human misery and attainment of *moksha* by means of books. He spent the last forty days of his life in a place called Magahar where it was believed that if one dies, he will born as a Donkey in next life.

Kabir believed that human beings are all equal and being with God is the ultimate aim of all individuals. He always advocated the *Nirguna bhakti* (impersonal aspect of God) and was against idol worship. He was hostile to the societal caste system prevalent in India and www.ijellh.com

called it fallacious. Although he was drawn deeply into spiritual life, he disparaged all sects and gave a new direction to the Indian philosophy with his forthright approach on various aspects of human existence. It is for this reason that Kabir holds a niche position among all the poets of the age. He lived to be 120 years old.

KABIR – STAUNCH ADVOCATOR OF AHIMSA

Kabir believed firmly in the doctrine of non-violence. He was against the ritual of sacrifice of animals as a part of religion. He propounded that if you kill a poor *jiva* (a living being), this crime will not be forgiven even if you hear a million *puranas*. Kabir was a paragon of simplicity and led a life devoid of hypocrisy.

One popular legend associated with Kabir's death is that when he died, his Hindu and Muslim devotees started fighting over his burial rites. The Muslim custom called for the burial whereas Hindus insisted on cremation. The two groups started fighting around Kabir's coffin; one claiming that Kabir was a Hindu, and the other claiming that he was a Muslim. As they argued together, Kabir appeared before them and told them to lift the coffin and look at what lay beneath. When they opened Kabir's coffin, they found in the place of the corpse a heap of flowers; half of which were buried by the Muslims at Maghar, and half carried by the Hindus to the holy city of Varanasi to be burned. The legend states that both groups – Hindus and Muslims looked upon the miracle as an act of divine intervention.

KABIR'S HUMANISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Kabir believed that life is an interplay of *Jivatma* (soul) and *Parmatma* (God). According to him, salvation is possible through the union of these two divine principles. The social and practical manifestation of Kabir's philosophy is practiced through the ages. Kabir synthesized the principle of reincarnation and *Karma* from Hinduism whereas from Islam, he adopted the practices of Sufi mysticism. He advocated the universal view of spirituality. He followed the *Sahaj Path* (Simple way) to attain God and the Guru he talked in his verses was *Satguru*.

Kabir believed in the first-hand experience and not in just uttering philosophical words.

The bookish knowledge is no learning according to Kabir as it leads the person nowhere and simply becomes a burden. History is witness to many highly educated and learned people turning bigots. There are innumerable cases of intellectuals guilty of gruesome killings. Kabir profoundly advocates that great learning emerges from true love. He proclaims:

Aisi baani boliye
Man ka aapa khoye
Auran ko seetal kare
Aapahu seetal hoye

Speak in words so sweet
that fill the heart with joy
Like a cool breeze in summer
for others and self to enjoy (www.poems2remember.blogspot.com)

Kabir asserted that priests advocate the philosophy that one can attain God by going to the temples and mosques; worshipping idols and reading Quran or other Holy Scriptures, but:

All the holy-places are just rivers,
They wash off nothing;
I have had a bath in them.
All the idols are lifeless, brother,
They feel nothing. (Mahajan 42)

Kabir insisted that one should understand the meaning of words before reciting them and must not speak simply mechanically. Citing the example of parrot, he says:

The mimic parrot chants Hari,
But knows not His fame,
Away from man in the forest,
It never recalls the name. (Mahajan 36)

Kabir pointed out that if a parrot is properly trained, it would chant the name “Hari” very clearly. But it does so without understanding the meaning of “Hari” or God. If the same parrot is left alone untrained in a jungle away from human beings, it would not know the chant “Hari.” Therefore Kabir asserted that what is important is the real learning, which comes from within. Knowledge is a powerful transforming force but the knowledge which is simply imitated is useless.

LOVE – A GREAT LIBERATING FORCE

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Kabir emphasized the fact that pure feeling of love is a great liberating force. It has nothing to do with great knowledge or expertise of something. When the modern age is encountering the incidents of brutality and callousness everywhere, the message of love propounded by Kabir is very pertinent, for it alone can bring harmony and peace in the world.

Kabir affirmed that all those who are born are bound to perish. It is only love that will live even after one's death. This love has power to bring peace in the modern world replete with jealousy, hatred, mistrust and qualm. But the overpowering greed and *maya* (illusion) in a human being thwarts him to attain enlightenment. Kabir exclaims:

Tell me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya?

.....

when I give up passion, I see that anger remains;

And when I renounce anger,

greed is with me still;

And when greed is vanquished,

pride and vainglory remain (Tagore 36)

Kabir asserted that people are going awry and mistaking untruth for the truth and therefore a transformation is needed in the *manas* of people, for only then the pursuit of establishing world peace could be ascertained.

CONCLUSION

Kabir's teachings are highly germane in the current state of affairs of the world. It is simply through mutual solidarity, brotherhood and comradeship among people that global peace could be established. The transformation in the mind-set of the individuals and the willingness to adopt the change is the true key to build a fearless, brighter and prosperous world.

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