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M.Phil English

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### **Going Beyond the Material: Studying Kabir's Poetry**

#### **Abstract**

Duality, doubts and uncertainties seems to control everyone's life, whether consciously or sub-consciously. When one becomes dependent on outer elements, people or happenings, soul finds the need to experience that nothing from outside can satisfy one's need for inner peace and harmony. It is the natural law prevalent in the world that all living creatures, especially humans, are always bound by the results of actions. These actions keep them bound in the materialistic world through the ways of birth, death and rebirth. As action is the law of life no one can exist without performing any type of action even for a moment. But only physical actions do not serve others, rather actions performed with body, mind, and intellect are intended to benefit others, not oneself. This research paper attempts to provide guidance to people to link the actions to their intellect, so that they can perform actions without worrying about the results. Kabir says that if one does not realize the true nature of God, everything is very difficult because in ignorance one is searching outside for a replacement. Kabir through his poetry is awakening people about the purpose of body and the senses is to realize the 'self'. While this body exists in this world, one must do worthy action to gain salvation.

**Key words:** *Karma*, Thought, Spiritual Knowledge, Realization, Absolute God

In today's materialistic world, generally people live and work to achieve high goals and personal desires mainly for the high economic status. Actions in the

world are performed with a focus on success and great achievements. Actions which are performed with enjoyment of worldly pleasures often lead to disappointment and frustration in daily life. People are blind in the sense of not being aware of oneself. If one stops and observe, then one realizes that almost all actions are done out of habits and patterns without experiencing something else inside, which creates inner confusion.

Actions are necessary to perform, but people feel tired for actions, so it becomes important to guide people at times, so that they can carry out the laws of life without any disturbance. Shri Krishna himself has set his example of work to follow by the people because human beings follow their ideals in their daily life.

Krishna said in Bhagavad Gita,

यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः।

मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः॥3.23॥

उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्यां कर्म चेदहम्।

सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः॥3.24॥

**If indeed I should not remain active (in principle) never relaxing, men in every walk of life, O, Partha, would take to my way. These worlds would fall into ruin, should I refrain from activity, and I would become the agent of evolutive confusion, killing in effect the peoples.**

It is believed that person who can carry on their work in a detached manner without thinking about material things, are considered to be wise among all men and treated as saints. Those persons do not completely stop working rather they perform their assigned duties without attaching themselves to the result of their actions. One of those saints is Kabir, who has given his teachings through his inspired poetry. Kabir has emphasized the importance of cleaning the mind of its desires and living a life of truthfulness, simplicity and self-control.

When one rises above selfish interests in his life, then he can avoid sufferings and frustrations of daily life. To action alone one should have a right and never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of actions to be the motive of one's life; nor let there be in any attachment in inaction.

### **True Actions or Illusions**

Everyone came and performs his actions but wealth follows none, as it's universally accepted through the example of Ravan, who had great wealth but still went empty-handed. One desiring the fruit of action becomes the victim of bondage in this materialistic world.

Actions of people should be dedicated to the lord as well as welfare to the world. The people, who perform their action with the spirit of dedication, become free from both attraction and repulsion and the anxieties and sorrows of life.

Kabir through his poetry has given the lesson to all people. Kabir also warned people that these three *gunas* bound people in this world, by engaging them in the actions and their results.

dje Qkal te tky ialkjkA

tl /khej eNjh xfg ekjkAA (*Sabdavali* 61)

Kabir said that by engaging people in the materialistic desires and actions, the *kaal* keeps them bound in the world. He keeps on destroying them with the results of their good and bad actions. Kabir has also favored the performance of actions acting in the detached manner, rather than actions done with materialistic desires. If there is even the least desire within the mind, then it can be the cause of great catastrophe.

Kabir said,

,d deZ gS] ckukS mitS cht cgqr ]

,d deZ gS ewtuk mn; u vadq jlwrAA (Rahul 89)

According to Kabir, the actions performed with detachment gives good results to people, which lead into a great gain in their lives, while actions with great selfish motives do not lead to any type of benefit in their lives. These types of *karmas* are just only to destroy the devotion of people to God.

Kabir said

eu dfj cSy lqjfr dj iaSMkA

tku xksfu Hkfj MkjhAA

dgr dchj lqugq jS largq]

fucgh [kSi dqekjhA (Rahul 89)

When people realize the false nature of this world and treat it as illusory, then only they want to be free from this transitory world. They need to know that by engaging themselves in these selfish motives they cannot get liberated and attain the Absolute God. The attainment of the Supreme God is possible only through the knowledge about the God. It is not that we should stop actions, rather the intention behind the action changes. Earlier, the actions performed with the anticipation of fruits and now it is without expecting fruits which may be called as desire-less actions.

Kabir believes that *Maya*, the illusion prevalent in the world, keeps people bound with *karmas*, and not let them be able to recognize the difference between desired and desire less actions. Kabir said that after realizing the true nature of actions which is possible only through spiritual knowledge, the *Maya* can be controlled and people can be free from the effects of illusions and results of their bounding *karma*.

### **Path of Life**

Kabir has linked together all the aspects of life for the attainment of the Supreme Lord. He believed that the actions must be performed with the complete

devotion to God and this unity of actions with devotion is possible only when they get the true knowledge about the Real God. So, people have to be thoughtful in performing actions with devotion to God.

When all these elements would be together then, no one can stop the person to reach to the Supreme Lord. Throughout his poetry, Kabir has given ways to combine the three aspects viz. thought, action and higher knowledge.

Kabir has believed that actions should be performed by remembering the true name of Lord and *Bhakti* is the desire less action performed after realizing the true self.

Kabir said:

vkSj deZ lc deZ] HkfDr deZ fu'deZA (Rahul 90)

According to Kabir, all other actions performed in the world are supposed to give some outcomes to people, which somehow are related to their desires and motives. He said that these are the mere actions which mean nothing for him, while the best action to be performed is *Bhakti karma*, which is performed without thinking about the result of it.

Kabir said

संतों भाई आई ग्यान की आँधी रे।  
भ्रम की टाटी सबै उडाँणी, माया रहै न बाँधी॥टेक॥  
हिति चित की द्वै थूनी गिराँनी, मोह बलिंडा तूटा।  
त्रिस्त्राँ छाँति परि घर ऊपरि, कुबधि का भाँडाँ फूटा॥  
जोग जुगति करि संतों बाँधी, निरचू चुवै न पाँणी॥  
कूड़ कपट काया का निकस्या हरि की गति जब जाँणी॥  
आँधी पीछे जो जल बूठा, प्रेम हरि जन भीनाँ।  
कहै कबीर माँन के प्रगटे उदित भया तम षीनाँ॥16॥ (Tiwari 30)

With the help of knowledge, the *Maya* has been blown away and all the false illusions of people have been removed.

Kabir has controlled his desires and sense and lead a very simple life in which only the name of God was everything. He himself has set his example as a true devotee of the God, but he had never favored the renouncement of home and life in the forests, for the attainment of God. He always criticized the ways people were following by giving tortures to their bodies and renouncing their worldly duties. Kabir knows that the people are performing such type of actions only because of ignorance and lack of true knowledge, so through his poetry, he tried to provide the spiritual knowledge to the people, about the possible ways for God's attainment.

x`g rft ds ;ksxh Hk;s ] ;ksxh ds x`g ukafgA

fcuk foods HkVdr fQjs] idfj “kCn dh NkafgA (*Bijak* 485)

Kabir wanted them to realize that God cannot be attained through these external practices, because the God lies within them. He said;

dg~;ka u mitS mitka ufg tk.kS Hkko&vHkko fcgwukA

mn; vLr tagk efr cqf+) lgt jke Y;ksa yhukAA (Tiwari 179)

### **Rising Above Material Desires**

Kabir believed that desire might satisfy at a mental level but that satisfaction does not last long. People indulge in self-created desires, which keep them away from truth. This truth has been shown by Kabir to us, so that we can realize the God and can attain the liberation from this material world.

Faith governs life of everyone in this world. Kabir himself has set his own example as the best devotee of the Supreme Lord. As he was living a life of weaver, a very low status person, but he had not only any desires to be equal to high status people of the society. He had not faced any type of hardship in his life, because of his true and deep faith in his God. Whenever he needed something, his God has always provided him with the thing. He believed that when someone has the true faith in the God, without the desires for getting any blessings from him, the person would be blessed by God himself. As it is said in verse 22 of chapter 9,

in *Bhagavad-Gita*, by Shri Krishna that God always himself worried about the necessities of his devotees, if they truly remember him all the time.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते।  
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्॥१९.२२॥

**I personally take care of both the spiritual and material welfare of those ever-steadfast devotees who always remember and worship me with single minded contemplation.**

Though, God is *Nirguna* according to Kabir, who is not to be visualized, but he believed that still people can attain Him, because the attainment of God depends on the loving devotion of the person.

The loving devotion is the only way to avoid the sufferings prevalent in the mortal world. As Kabir said, this perishable world has no joys to be enjoyed by people, but still all people are treating this world to be the real and eternal and wishes to enjoy by achieving more materialistic things. Kabir asked to people to look for the Supreme Being without any desire for these non valuable things.

Kabir said:

>wBs lq[k dks lq[k dgS] eku jgk eu eksnA

;s ldy pcSuk dky dk] dqN eq[k eSa dqN xksnAA (Tiwari 80)

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* itself, it is advised that the action should be united with the devotion and knowledge of the Supreme Lord, if someone wants to attain the Lord.

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु।  
मामेवैष्यसि युक्तवैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः॥१९.३४॥

**Fix your mind on me, be devoted to me, worship me and bow down to me. Thus uniting yourself with me by setting me as the supreme goal and the sole refuges, you shall certainly come to me.**

When the mind becomes free from all worldly desires and merges in God, then the devotee realizes God within and lives with God. When a person realizes the true nature of the Supreme Self, then he considers himself as only the medium to perform his duties. A true devotee offers all work to God, which helps him to abandon the selfish attachment of his works and become free from the bondage of his *karma*.

Kabir through his poetry has spreaded the importance of *Bhakti* for all, because mere performance of actions cannot lead one to the external entity.

Kabir said:

vcZ [kcZ ykSa nzO; gS mn; vLr ykSa jktA

HkfDr egkre uk rqyS] bZ lc dkSus dktAA (*Bijak* 437)

According to Kabir, even someone having the greatest power in the world, cannot have any worth in this mortal world, if he does not remember God. All his power and money are worthless in front of the true *Bhakti* of Supreme Lord, because the thing which the power cannot provide can be attained through the great power of *Bhakti* of the Real God.

### **Purgation of Spirit**

Kabir says that people are wasting their lives babbling about spiritual knowledge only for title and honors. In Chapter Four of *Bhagavad-Gita*, importance of the supreme knowledge is given to purify the mind and senses, which comes with time by performing various actions in the world.

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते।

तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति॥4.38॥

**In truth, there is no purifier in this world, like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being. One who becomes purified by karma-yoga discovers this knowledge within, naturally, in course of time.**



When someone realizes the importance of attaining the Supreme Lord with gaining the true knowledge then, God can forgive even the greatest sin performed by the person.

The Kabir stresses the importance of *Bhakti* for the sake of relieving the soul from the bondage of *karma*. So, one who performs actions for the benefit of others is said to be qualified for the liberation, as *Gita* focuses on the performance of unattached action for the attainment of the Supreme Lord.

It is believed that as long as the individual identifies his self or existence with the actions and roles, he played in his life, till then he cannot discover his real inner self and cannot attain the true liberation. So through *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna advises people to learn the supreme knowledge.

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया।  
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः॥४.३४॥

**Learn knowledge through humble reverence, through service. The wise seers who have perceived the truth will teach you that knowledge.**

As in *Bhagavad-Gita*, it is advised that wise seers can provide you with the true knowledge of the Supreme Lord, so is in the poetry of Kabir. Kabir has given a great importance to *satsang* and *guru*, as only the person, who has got the real knowledge is said to be the *guru* in the world. Kabir believed that only spiritual knowledge cannot guide people in the way of liberation. It is the *guru*, who can explain and teach the knowledge of scriptures to make people righteous in their lives. *Guru* is the medium for uniting the self with the Supreme Self. According to Kabir, this greatest power is lying with the words of *Guru*, a spiritual master. *Guru* shows the path and the purpose, putting the true value on life, without which life might be gone in ignorance. Only a *guru* can free us from every materialistic desire after which one starts living daily life in its true nature. Kabir says that *Satguru* struck a powerful arrow, and now everything has been crushed. One does not concerned anymore about such things like hopes, troubles, rosaries and books.

With the help of *satguru* only, one becomes able to attain the perfect knowledge. Kabir says that, with his perfect knowledge, *satguru* has established God so strongly, that there remains no place for rise of any doubt again.

Kabir said:

Ikzse cku ,d lrxq: nhUgks]

Xkk<ksa rhj dekuk gksA

nkl dchj dhUg :g dgjk]

egjk ekafg lekuk gksAA ¼Bijak 262½

Through his poetry, Kabir said that various saints to understand and explain the way of God, without thinking about scriptures and spread their own views, which are misleading because of so many views prevailing in the world, people are not able to distinguish among them and feeling unable to find the right way, which can liberate them from the world.

T;ks va/kjs dks gkfFk;k] lc dkgw dks Kku]

viuh viuh dgr gSa] dkdks /kfj;s /;kuAA (Sakhi-Sangrah 15).

Lack of *satguru* and *satsang* has mislead people away from the faith of God and people got engaged in various wrong type of actions. Kabir has commented on the vices of people and advised them to follow the *mantra* provided by *Guru*.

lr laxfr gS lwi T;ksa] R;kksa QVfd vlkjA

dg dchj xq: uke yS] ijlS ukfg fodkjAA (Sakhi-Sangrah 90)

Kabir asked people to live within the limits provided by *Guru*, if they want to be liberated from this mortal world. If someone will follow the views of real *Guru*, then he can have control over his vices and can lead life free of miseries. The word provided by *Guru* is the only way to lead people to the God, because the God himself can be seen in the image of *Guru*.

lgt /;ku jgq] lgt /;ku jgqA

xq: ds opu lekbZ gksAA

eSyh l`f`V pj k fpr jk[kgq]

jgq n`f`V ykS ykbZ gksAA (*Bijak* 255)

Kabir said that people should always remember the Supreme Lord with their loving devotion. The remembrance of God can lead them to the path of liberation, along with the true knowledge of Supreme Lord. Being involved in faithful devotion and away from the desire of fruits of actions lead them directly to the attainment of the Absolute God. Kabir says that nothing can compare to remembrance- not even yoga, rituals vows or charity. There is no pilgrimage comparable to remembrance of God's name and no knowledge like the true knowledge of God. Kabir says, **"A person who aspires to get salvation without remembering the Lord, even though he may be learned, is like an animal without a tail."** God is not to be worshipped but realized. There is no need to make temples for God, but a need to learn how to look within oneself. Kabir goes on saying again and again that the body is temple which the God has already chosen as its abode.

### Conclusion

Kabir preached to the common man the love of God as the means for highest spiritual enlightenment. Kabir's words have that spiritual power which enlightens the ignorant and saving the sinner. Kabir says that life is eternal and immortal, which changes forms through migrating bodies, but the true witness always remains there which is God. According to Kabir, the thought of worldly enjoyments do not touch the sentiments of great people because they remain merged in the spiritual bliss. Kabir has suggested ways to experience this spiritual bliss though his poetry by saying that if the body is controlled and mind is absorbed in remembering the Holy Name of True Lord, then no turbulence will be created in one's life. A drop of poison can be the cause of death, in the similar way, the least desire for worldly enjoyments within the mind can become the

catastrophe for spiritual life. So, one should ask devotedly about how to do selfless action by taking shelter in the living spiritual master so that one can emerge from the swamp of actions.

Keay, a great scholar called Kabir **“a rugged prophet”** and also said that, **“like other great men, he was in many things before his age, seeing things which the world around him would take centuries to learn ...”** (Keay 49)

J.B. Gilchrist when heard of Kabir's outstanding personality and his extraordinary poetry, mentioned him in his 'Hindustanee grammar'; **“That famous Indian sage, who lived in the humble condition of a weaver, expressed sentiments and did actions which would have honored the most illustrious men”**.

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