

**KABIR BANI (DEVOTIONAL LYRICS) IN GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND
BHAKTI RASA: EXISTENTIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS**

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Abstract

As far as the bânî of the Sufi saints are concerned, in them, the Sufi saints seek a kind of explanation about existential social concerns in bhakti rasa. They are impregnated with Indian collective consciousness which can be understood in the following ways: this consciousness percolates through Bânî which says: always remember Death which teaches us the value and merit of life, be kind and compassionate to others, non-violence is the most important virtue in life, live a life of contentment like a true darvesh, and love of God leads to highest spiritual attainment. The present paper aims at making an assessment of tenets how they help the seeker/devotee to elevate himself to a higher state, by surrendering to God. The paper categorically deals with the hymns of Kabir. Guru Arjan Dev included the hymns of important Hindu and Muslim saints. By doing this his concern was to give the path of Bhakti based on existential social concerns which are required most in the present scenario.

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Introduction

Kabir is ranked 5th as regards the volume of *bânî* contributed to Guru GranthSâhib, and from the 15 bhakts, he contributed the maximum number of hymns. His total contribution is 541 hymns set to 18 different musical measures (Ragas). Kabir has been accepted as the most revolutionary of all the saints of the Bhakti movement. He was the prominent disciple of Ramanand, and did not hesitate to strike blows at futile religious observances and formalism. He propagated this throughout his life, awakening masses from their daily slumber of ignorance and uniting them with God.

In the fifteenth century, Benaras was the seat of Brahmin orthodoxy and their learning center. Brahmins had a stronghold on all the spheres of life in this city. Thus Kabir belonging to a low caste of Julaha had to go through immense tough time of preaching his ideology. Kabir and his followers would gather at one place in the city and meditate. Brahmins ridiculed him for preaching to prostitutes and other low castes. Kabir satirically denounced Brahmins and thus won the hearts of people around him. There is no doubt that the single most famous important person from the city of Benaras today is none other than Saint Kabir.

Social Concern in Kabir Bânî Kabir through his couplets not only reformed the mindset of common villagers and low caste people but give them the self-confidence to question Brahmins. It was 100 years after him that Tulsidas broke the hegemony of Brahmins by writing *Ram Charitra Manas*, a poem of Ramayana at Benaras which went against the tradition of Brahmins. Kabir was in fact the first person to go against Brahmins and be so successful. Benaras was devastated by an attack by a Muslim invader Tamur Lang or “Tamur the lame” during his time. Kabir also denounced mullahs and their rituals of bowing towards *Kaba* five times a day. Because of open condemnation of established and popular religions, Kabir became an object of the wrath of both Hindus and Muslims in and around Benaras. Kabir traveled in and around Benaras to preach his beliefs.

Kabir believed in self-surrender and God’s bhakti. He prescribes the singing of the praises of God, prayers and a simple and pure life of devotion. He virtually suggests withdrawal from the world. He is against all ritualistic and ascetic methods as means of salvation. He recommends ceaseless singing of God’s praises in Bhakti Rasa. He says

“How can people understand You, when they are entranced by Maya? Says Kabir, give up the pleasures of corruption, or else you will surely die of them. Meditate on the Lord, O mortal being, through the Word of His *Bani*; you shall be blessed with eternal life. In this way, shall you cross over the terrifying world-ocean?”

Kabir questions God that how can people understand Him when they are engrossed in Maya. He tells them to follow the *vyabhicâri bhava* of *nirvana* by giving up the pleasure of corruption or else will surely die of corruption. He says to the *array*, *bhakt* to follow the *anubhavas* of meditation and prayers, through the word of *hisbani*. He says the *asraya* get the ultimate salvation and prayers through *anubhavas* like meditation and prayers only.

**“As it pleases Him, people embrace love for the Lord,
And doubt and delusion are dispelled from within.**

**Intuitive peace and poise well up within, and the intellect is awakened
to spiritual wisdom.**

**By Guru’s Grace, the inner being is touched by the Lord’s Love.
In this association, there is no death.**

**Recognizing the *Hukam* of His Command, you shall meet with your
Lord and Master”**

Kabir is so engrossed in Bhakti Rasa that he says to the *bhakti* to embrace God’s love, which is counted as its *alambana* and by Guru’s grace, the *anubhavas* of prayers enlighten his mind and with this, the fear of death is also removed and he becomes one with God.

Kabir further says that he was on fire and the *sthayi bhava* of love for God made him find the water of the Lord’s name, which can be counted as *alambanvibhava* and with the *sancris* bhavas of remembrance he has found that the meditation of God acted as water on his burning body and he received the *Latvia bhava* of commitment.

**“I was on fire, but now I have found the Water of the Lord’s Name.
This Water of the Lord’s Name has cooled my burning body.”**

Some go to forests to meditate, but *uddipanavibhava* is not as helpful as it should be. Kabir says that the *vyabhicari bhava* of love of God only helps to quench the thirst of *âsraya*. The fire of worldly things has taken in themselves angels and demons also. But the *uddipanavibhava* water of the lord’s name saves his *beak* from burning and immerse him in an ocean of peace. Kabir believes in meditating and vibrating upon the name of the lord, the *sthayi bhava* water is the one that relieves the burning desire of the lord’s name to enter in an ocean of peace, which is the final *anubhava*.

**“To subdue their minds, some go off into the forests;
But that Water is not found without the Lord God.
That fire has consumed angels and mortal beings,**

But the Water of the Lord's Name saves His humble servants from burning.

In the terrifying world-ocean, there is an ocean of peace”.

This water of lord's name never gets exhausted. Kabir says that prayer full of insights regarding the ocean and its efficacy guide one towards salvation is the ultimate destination and one should remember the name of God as the rainbird remembers the water. The water of the lord's name has quenched his thirst and then it will never go away. He again gives more examples like he is a small fish (object) in that vast ocean of water (subject) and without that water, he would perish (effect), he is a parrot (object) and God's name is his cage (subject) and therefore he is not even scared of death which is symbolized by cat and is the ultimate destination of the human body.

In *bhakti rasa* as it is said that one has to merely yearn for it with single-minded aim, and God supplies the force. In the same way, Kabir searches for God in every mundane thing.

The moral tone is quite strong in Kabir's hymns. “Kabir deck thyself with garments of love. Love them is given honor whose body and soul speak the truth.””The ruby of goodness is greater than all the mines of rubies, all the wealth of three worlds resides in the goodness of heart. When the wealth of contentment is won, all other wealth is as dust.””Where there is mercy, there is strength, where there is forgiveness there is He.” The man who is kind and practices righteousness, who remains passive in the affairs of the world, who considers creatures of the world as his own self, he attains the immortal Being; the true God is ever with him. Kabir suggests inward worship and remembrance of God. For him, true worship is only inwards. Put on the rosary inward. By counting beads, the world will be full of light. He clearly suggests moral discrimination between good and bad deeds. What can the helpless road do, when the traveler does not walk understandingly. “What can one do, if, with lamp in hand, one falls in the well”. Or goes astray with open eyes. Discern ye now between good and

Here the love for God is the *sthayi bhava*. He who loves his God does not have any obligations to anyone else. God bears the burden of the three worlds. The object being God here is the only entity on which the subject *bhakt* believes and says that He bears the burden of all three worlds which can be counted as *alambanvibhava* then why He should not cherish the bhakti also which is the visible effect, as said by Kabir. He says that in this present world, even a mother poisons her child. Without truthfulness, even a sati is not a sati, till a person is attached to worldly things he cannot reach the *bhava* of detachment which can only be achieved by the *vyabichâri bhavas* of remembrance and compassion. One has to detach himself

from worldly things called *Maya* and has to surrender his body, mind, wealth, home and even himself.

It is not surprising that Kabir's satire was brought to bear not simply on the vices and weaknesses of men but reached through and beyond them to the very system themselves. It was the authority of Vedas and Quran that more than the authority of Brahmin or Qazi which Kabir attacked. He rebelled against the pretension of resolving by the means of books or by way of authority, the mystery of human conditions and the problem of liberation (Moksha). He spent his last 40 days living in a place where it was believed that if you die you will bear as a Donkey in the next life.

Kabir is a firm advocate of ahimsa. His doctrine extends even to the non-destruction of flowers. "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." "They fast all day, and at night they slaughter the cow; here murder, their 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?" "The goat eats grass and is skinned, what will happen to those who eat (goat's) meat? "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.

Kabir composed no systematic treatise, rather his work consists of many short didactic poems, often expressed in terse vigorous language in the form of Padas, Dohas, and Ramainis (forms of poetry in Indian languages). Besides his work recorded in 1604 A.D. in Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev, Nanak V, and preserved inviolate since, two other collections exist - Kabir Granthavali, and Bijak. In his poems, he was quick to tell the illustrations of moral and spiritual truth in the incidents of everyday life, and many of his similes and metaphors are very striking.

Kabir is a transcendentalist who believes in the existence of a superpower, which cannot be searched in different materialistic things but wherever the pantheistic faith is. The *ashrya Bhakt* received the enlightenment and says that the *visyalamban* (object) God is within himself and He cannot be found in any worldly things, neither in temples nor in mosques and *uddipanavibhavas* like prayers, meditation, nature, or yoga also does not create any effect on the true faith of the seeker. It can be best described as the state of intoxication. The *Bhakt* forgets himself to be in the presence of the Lord.

He says When the body dies, where does the soul go? It is absorbed into the untouched, unstruck melody of the Word of the Shabad. The only one who knows

the Lord realizes Him. The mind is satisfied and satiated, like the mute who eats the sugar candy and just smiles, without speaking. Such is the spiritual wisdom that the Lord has imparted. He further addresses the human mind and tells him to hold his breath steady within the central channel of the awakening. Adopt such a Guru, that you shall not have to adopt another again. Dwell in such a state, that you shall never have to dwell in any other. Embrace such a meditation, that you shall never have to embrace any other. Die in such a way, that you shall never have to die again. Turn your breath away from the left channel, and away from the right channel, and unite them in the central channel of the awakening. At their confluence within your mind, take your bath there without water. To look upon all with an impartial eyelet this is your daily occupation. Contemplate this essence of reality - what else is there to contemplate? Water, fire, wind, earth and ether - adopt such a way of life and you shall be close to the Lord. He says the human being to meditate on the Immaculate Lord and to go to that home, which he shall never have to leave.

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