

## KABIR: HANDBOOK TO LIFE ON EARTH

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### **Abstract**

*In all ages, the clash of two different sects and opposing cultures had engendered an ideological mysticism in social structure. Under the circumstances of religious intricacies among frustrated masses, the beginning of the Nirgun Sant tradition was a boon for weaving Hinduism and Islam together. This practice depended on the conviction that to find God is to have him through commitment, dedication and love. These Nirgun saints and poets used to call the ultimate power by the names of Ram, Govind, Hari, Raghunath and many more. Ram and Krishna were even adopted by many Muslim saints too in order to contribute to religious harmony. The galaxy of Muslim saints embraced these two deities unconditionally. Some important names in this context are Kabir, Jayasi, Rahimdas, Wajid Sheikh and Rahim.*

*This paper focuses on Sant Kabir, as the one who composed timeless couplets sung with equal interest in both societies. Despite his Muslim upbringing, he was a devotee of Ram. He was the one who was able to bridge Hindus and Muslims because of his mysticism and neutral attitude when he points out the differences based on religion.*

### **Keywords**

*Social reformer, philosophy, nirgun bhakti, iconoclast*

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Kabir born in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was an iconoclast of his kind. It was the time that many religions were being followed in India. It was difficult to find the true religion because they were followed in a superstitious way. The result was that people were forgetting the true spirit of brotherhood. It was as if everybody was in a race to show the superiority of his own religion. Instead of love and brotherhood, pride, ego, pomp and the show became prominent. Religion instead of becoming the gateway of personal value and spiritual welfare, led to social disintegration and away from the true path. The guiding spirit of Sant Kabirdas considered such types of religious differences and anomalies as the cause of the fall of human values and society at large. He tried to reform it from his direct criticism through his writings. He came down very heavily on those who gave too much time to rituals,

*“paahan pooje hari mile to mai pooju pahaad” aurpahin ko ka pujiye, je janam na dae jab.”*<sup>1</sup>and

*“din bhar roja rahat hai/ raat hanat hai gaye / yah to khoon hai bandagi / kaise khush khudaye.”*(Kabir Granthavali page 646)

Kabir tried to show the uselessness and meaninglessness of the strange practices of different religions. In the lifetime of Kabir, the followers of the Hindu and Islam religion had woven a web of superstition and propaganda of their own. Due to this conflict between the two, a new religious thought came to the mystic poet of the time. Kabir spread a new religion which could be called ‘Sahaj Dharm’. He was totally against the show of religion. According to him we all should grasp and follow those important customs, which are useful in life and are undertone of different religions. He considered humanity the best religion. He forced upon the values of unity when he says,

*“kahe rinalini tu kumhlani / teri naal sarover pani / me utpat jal me waas / jalme nalini tor niwaas.”*<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of this philosophy, we all find cosmic oneness. Here he beautifully presents this idea through a lotus flower, which is originated in water and is its habitat too. Kabirdas was a great prophet of religious harmony. He was against the killing of animals in the name of God and religion. He also criticizes those rituals which evoke the spirit of impurity and untouchability. Kabir can be said as an iconoclast. His theory about God is the same as that of Mirza Ghalib:

*“zahid sharab peene de masjid me baith kar / ya vo jagah bada de jahan par khuda na ho.”*

It is a direct attack on those who act immorally outside the temple or mosque feeling that there is no God to see but they fail to realize that God is everywhere and

keep a watch on each and every person's action. For him Ram, Rahim, Karim, Keshav, and Allah are not different but they are the different names of the ultimate truth. Either you say Bismillah or Vishambar, its one and the same thing. If Muslims face towards the west to perform namaz and believe in kazi, mullah, peer, paigambar, and roza then Hindus too place their deities in the east and believe in Ekadashi, Ganga snan, fasting, etc. Muslims pray in mosques and Hindus go to temples. Kabir ironically questions both, about who is there where there is no temple or mosque. He further says that both the ways of worship are incomplete. His Ram is not only in one direction. He is omnipresent. In the following lines, Kabir focuses on the unity of the Hindu and Muslim community. He puts it this way:

*“hamare Ram, Rahim, Karim Keshav, Allah Ram sati soyi / bismal meti bisambar aike, aur na dooja koi.”<sup>3</sup>*

In Kabir's times, people began to believe in birth status than karma. He decided to finish the storm of castism and unite the society. His heart cried when he saw people fighting, to overshadow their religion. He was against going to the temple or mosque. In his writings, he tried to emphasize on the truth through idealism and intellectualism. In this light we can now emphasize upon the philosophy of Kabir, that is Nirgun Bhakti. The great saints of the period were divided into two cults: Sagun Bhakti and Nirgun Bhakti. Sagun Bhakti believed God is endowed with incarnative and other qualities whereas in Nirgun Bhakti God is devoid of any form or worldly qualities. In India, God has always been meditated, contemplated and believed as all in all. Bhakti of Kabir says that He is Brahma. Plato rightly translated Him as the universal spirit or the world soul. The romantic poet Wordsworth paints this idea with so accuracy that he himself became a seer poet. Sant Kabir addresses the common worldly people and says, “*Hey bhai airgun Ram ka jap karo*”. Ram of Kabir is neither the son of Kaushalya nor Yashoda. According to Kabir, all these are for the outer world. There is no need to search him far and wide, Ram is in our hearts. Above all when Kabir talks of Ram, his purpose is to remember Nirgun Ram. According to him, there is Guna in Nirguna and Nirguna in Guna. He has adopted the unity of Dharma and Yog as it is, but has opposed the idol worship and Avtarwad. He has even wished for such a Brahma, who is beyond the definition of Sagun and Nirgun. He says,

*“sagun nirgun se pare, tahan hamaro dhyan”.*

Whose characteristics are beyond description and have no form,

*“jake muh matha nahi, naahi rup kurup / puhup baas tain patala aisa tat anoop”<sup>4</sup>*

He is not a subject of discussion but he is only experience. He has a light of hundred suns. He is all and at the same time nothing. He is power and we all are his sparks. There is one spirit prevailing in all the bodies. Kabir found the soul and Brahma in the shape of a man and a woman. It has been an old tradition in India. Even Jayasi in his Padmavat presents Padmini as Brahma and Ratan Singh as a devotee (soul). In his songs of love he says, "O Narad! I know that my lover cannot be far: when my lover wakes, I wake; when He sleeps, I sleep. He destroyed at the root who gives pain to my beloved. Where they sing his praise, there I live; when He moves, I walk before him. My heart yearns for my beloved. The infinite pilgrimage lies at his feet, a million devotees are seated there. Kabir says, the lover himself reveals the glory of true love."<sup>5</sup> Kabir has presented this cult of Nirgun Bhakti as the stream for the welfare of human beings. This has broken the old and dirty walls of customs and blew the fresh wind of a new spirit for human welfare.

In the eyes of Sant Kabir, the world also doesn't have an independent identity. It is all an illusion but only of its name and contour it seems to be real. It's the same philosophy of non-dualism where he feels that there is one spirit everywhere. He describes this idea with this beautiful metaphor of water and pot,

*"jal mai kumbh , khumbh mai jal, bhitar bahar pani / phoota kumbh jal jal hi samana, yahu tath katho gyaani"*<sup>6</sup>

Kabir believed that Maya, as the secret manifestation of that supreme power which, makes fool of all the people of the world like a worldly attractive woman. She is very cunning and symbolically has five sons Kaam(Desire), Krodh(Anger), Mad(Sense Of I), Moh(Attachment), And Matsar(Partiality). Kabir says, "*Kabir maya mohini, jaise meethi khand/ satguru ki kirpa bhai, nahi to karti bhand.*"<sup>7</sup>

Kabir's Vaishnav bhakti was influenced by Indian Advaitvad on the one side and Muslim's concept of one God on the other. The root cause of this was that he wanted to give that kind of religious way, which could be easily adopted and followed by people of all religions and casts. In the age of Kabir, there was a clear dividing line between Hindus and Muslims. Mystic Kabir was a strong force who thought about the oneness of the society. He made Herculean efforts to create calmness in the society. There are certain traits in Kabir's Nirgun Bhakti that can be summed up in the following way:

The oneness of God, this is what all his mode of worship was based upon. Muslims believe in one God but they place him on the seventh sky. Hindus have a concept of many Gods and Goddesses. They call Him by different names. Kabir declared his God different from that of Hindus and Muslims. He tried to bring the amity between the two. His efforts were for the reconciliation between Hindus and

Muslims. His god is present everywhere, he has no shape or form. For him God is omnipresent, that's why like Jain Dharma he perceives God in every leaf,

*"bhuli malini pati tode, pati pati jeev / ja murti ko pati tode, so murti nirjeev."*<sup>8</sup>

He also condemned idol worship and all rituals, which were followed by both of them. He promotes the importance of simple gestures in worshipping God:

*"chaturai na chaturbhuj paiye / jab lagi man madho na lagiye."*<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, in Kabir's religious way, the importance of the name is very evident. Though Sagun, Nirgun all devotees have more faith in the name of Parmatma than in God himself. But in Nirgun Bhakti it is a name that is all in all. They give too much importance to reciting names more and more. They find name as Brahma himself. Kabir said that when one is chanting God's name, it should come from the heart. He opposes prevention. In his words:

*"kar pakad ungli gine, man dhare chahu aur / jahi firaya hari mile, so bhaya kath kathor"*<sup>10</sup>

Kabir experiences lali of his lal everywhere,

*"laali mere laal ki, jit dekhun tit laal / laali dekhan mai gayi, mai bhi hogayi laal."*<sup>11</sup>

A great importance has been given to the guru in Kabir's worship. Guru is placed on a higher pedestal than Govind because he believes, *"hari roothe guru thor hai, guru ruthe nahi thor."* further he says,

*"satguru ki mahima anant, anant kia upkar / lochan anant ughadia, anant dikhawanhaar."*<sup>12</sup>

Kabir's guru is a medium to meet God,

*"guru govind dou khade kake lagun paye / balihari guru apne, govind dio bataye."*

Guru is a storehouse of all knowledge. He is always a benefactor of his disciple and all-forgiving. Kabir said,

*"balihari guru aapne, diyo hadi kai baar / jinni manish tai devta, karat na lagi baar."*<sup>13</sup>

Following the middle path, is also one of the main ideas of Kabir's philosophy. He never recommended worshipping God by leaving the house and household responsibilities and living in the forest, torturing the body and passing the days only in prayers and meditation. He recommended the middle way of worshipping. It is said that if the string of an instrument is tuned too tightly then it may brake and if it is left too loose then it may not sound good. In the same way, man should not follow any extreme path to worship god.

Kabir suggests that purity in behavior is only possible when a man sacrifices two things: 'kanak' and 'Kamini'. Kabir has proved these two things as a hurdle in the path to reaching God and has very aptly said, "Ek kanak aur Kamini, dou agni ki jail."<sup>14</sup> Kabirdas says that one cannot find God through shrewdness. One has to be obsessed with the idea of supreme power. Total surrender and attachment are needed. To find God devotees should follow the natural path. He says,

*"natural hari na mile, yeh batan ki baat / ek nisprehi nirdhaar ka, graham Gopinath"*<sup>15</sup>

and further says,

*"kabir yeh ghar prem ka, khala ka ghar naahi, sees utare bhui dhare, tab paithe ghar maahi."*<sup>16</sup>

Kabir says that this is the abode of God, not the house of your aunt. Only that can enter here who has relinquished all pride. Ideas like these keep him away from the two faiths prevalent in the society. He very severely denounced both Hindus and Muslims.

Kabir was such a great person who directed the way of humanity by the enlightened rays of the sun of knowledge in the dark period of religious conflict. He has presented his philosophical views in a very simple and clear language which is why it appeals to and fascinates the masses. All his ideas have a great ability to touch and affect the hearts of people. His words are really a handbook to life on earth.

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